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Desk Review Report

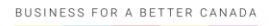
SAWI PROJECT

Support and Accelerate Women's Inclusion

CRISIS-INFORMED RECRUITMENT, RETENTION & PROMOTION POLICIES

Yasmeen Makarem; Danielle Mattar

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	3
CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS REPORT	3
Research Assistants	3
Additional Contributors	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
1. DEFINING THE CRISIS PARAMETERS.....	5
2. METHODOLOGY.....	5
3. CRISES IN THE MENA REGION	6
4. COUNTRY-LEVEL CRISES.....	8
4.1 Algeria.....	8
4.2 Bahrain.....	9
4.3 Iraq	9
4.4 Jordan	10
4.5 Lebanon	11
4.6 Libya.....	11
4.7 Morocco	12
4.8 Tunisia	12
5. IMPACT OF CRISES ON WOMEN’S RRP ACROSS THE MENA REGION	13
5.1 Algeria.....	13
5.2 Bahrain.....	14
5.3 Iraq	16
5.4 Jordan	18
5.5 Lebanon	20
5.6 Libya.....	22
5.7 Morocco	23
5.8 Tunisia	24
6. RECOMMENDED CRISES-INFORMED RRP POLICIES & PRACTICES.....	31
6.1 Recruitment	31
6.2 Retention	31
6.3 Promotion	32
6.4 Looking at Crises-informed RRP through an Intersectionality Lens	33
REFERENCES.....	34



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Crises are an inevitable part of today's world, and their impact can be devastating for individuals, organizations, communities, and society more broadly. The human impact is significant, leading to the need for multistakeholder response and mitigation, including international nongovernment organizations, governments, civil society groups, and organizations both private and not-for-profit. From natural disasters to economic downturns and pandemics, crises can disrupt operations, disrupt supply chains, and lead to significant challenges. The challenges exacerbate existing inequalities and have a greater impact on vulnerable populations, women in particular. Crises lead to greater job losses and unemployment for women, increased caregiving responsibilities and workload, and have been shown to widen the gender pay gap.

Although the specifics of the impact vary depending on socio-cultural factors and the nature and duration of the crises, efforts to address these issues must be undertaken by organizations. In such circumstances, organizations must adopt a strategic and proactive approach to manage the crisis and mitigate its impact on employees, especially on women. To this end, the human resources (HR) staff or department within any organizations plays a crucial role in managing the impact of crises on employees. Specifically, HR practices geared towards safeguarding equal opportunities, ensuring that the burden is shared, providing support systems, and implementing policies that inherently address gender inequalities in the workforce are essential at any time, but even more so in times of crises. Such policies span different areas of the employee experience, including recruitment, retention, and promotion (RRP). In times of crises, RRP policies must be flexible, proactive, and informed by the ongoing challenges facing the organization. This requires HR professionals to have a deep understanding of the impact of crises on the organization and the workforce, as well as the unique needs of individual employees facing them.

This desk review reports on the impact of crises on women's recruitment, retention, and promotion in organizations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Through this review, we seek to develop a deeper understanding of crises-informed RRP policies and practices being implemented across eight countries, including Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia. Subsequently, we offer our recommendations for organizations looking to improve their RRP's in the MENA region.

Our review will start with an overview about crises and will then discuss the specific crises that the MENA region and the eight countries have faced and are still facing. We then focus on the impact of crises on the recruitment, retention, and promotion policies of organizations across Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia. We conclude with a list of recommended crises-informed RRP policies that are proactive in nature and will allow organizational leaders and HR personnel to adopt them as part of their own structure.



1. DEFINING THE CRISIS PARAMETERS

In defining *crisis*, we draw on the work of Rosenthal et al. (2001, p. 5) who refer to it as situations that are “unwanted, unexpected, unprecedented, and almost unmanageable, causing widespread disbelief and uncertainty”. More precisely, crisis is referred to as a serious threat to the basic structure or the fundamental values and norms of a social system, which, under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances, necessitates making critical decisions (Rosenthal et al., 1989). In this context, crisis can be conceptualized as a deviation from the normal in the form of economic crises, natural disasters, and political uncertainty. In each of these conceptualizations, there are two defining features: crisis is a deviation from the normal and is considered a threat to the basic structure of a system. Additionally, crisis can be classified as minor daily disturbances, monumental one-time occurrences (i.e., low-probability high-impact events that induce immense, complex, and detrimental consequences), or processes that disrupt the normal functioning of individuals, organizations, or communities over time (Doern et al., 2019; Pearson & Claire, 1998). Thus, the impact of crisis can be felt across multiple dimensions, including economic, social, environmental, and political. Further, crisis can also be characterized by its volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, making it difficult to manage and requiring a coordinated and timely response. Thus, effective crisis management involves the ability to anticipate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from a crisis, with the goal of minimizing the negative consequences and restoring normalcy as quickly as possible.

At the organizational level, crisis management can be viewed as the company’s effective and efficient response and/or preparation to catastrophic events or incidents. Human Resources (HR) practices are essential for effective crisis management. During a crisis, HR plays a critical role in ensuring the safety and well-being of employees, as well as maintaining the productivity of the organization. HR policies and practices need to be crisis-informed, and organizations must ensure that they have the necessary HR resources and capabilities to manage a crisis effectively. This can involve the proactive development of crisis management plans and protocols, the training of HR staff and managers in crisis response and communication, and the implementation of flexible working arrangements to accommodate employees’ needs during a crisis. HR can also help to mitigate the impact of a crisis on the workforce by constantly providing support, counseling, and other employee assistance programs. Additionally, HR can play a critical role in crisis recovery by developing and implementing strategies to restore normalcy and rebuild employee morale and engagement. Overall, effective, and proactive crisis management requires a close alignment between HR practices and crisis management principles to ensure that the organization can navigate a crisis successfully and emerge stronger. This principle is the core of our desk review, as we attempt to have a more nuanced understanding of the impact of crises on women’s recruitment, retention, and promotion (RRP) practices across our target countries including: Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia.

In the next section, we provide an overview about the crises in the MENA region to highlight the complexity of the context that both organizations and women employees operate in. We then specifically provide details on the crises that each of the 8 countries are grappling with.

2. METHODOLOGY

The desk review content is based on publicly available information collected through a systematic process about the impact of crises on the RRP of women in eight countries in the MENA region (Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia). The parameters of the desk review were led by the crises-informed RRP research team at SAWI and subject-matter experts. We present next how we collected and analyzed the publicly available crises information for each of the eight countries.

First, we collected information from various academic and online sources to form a general understanding of the concept and components of crises in general. Second, we gathered information from online reports and websites displaying the various crises present in the MENA region (e.g., The World Bank, UN Women, UNDP,



ESCWA, European Training Foundation, ILO, International Finance Corporation & World Bank, International Monetary Fund, International Organization for Migration) and some websites of private companies (e.g., Batelco, Zain Bahrain, Zain Group, Y.K. ALmoayyed & Sons). Third, from these reports and websites, we extracted relevant crises-related information (i.e., crises identification, crises-related impact, crises-informed policies, and practices for a specific company) covering each of the eight countries. Additionally, national level legislations and actions taken in response to crises were mainly extracted from SAWI National Labor Policies and UNDP reports.

Publicly Available Reports and Websites

The research team extracted publicly available online information (i.e., reports, websites, articles) for the eight countries we address in this review. We applied a systematic approach in extracting information for this desk review to ensure the methodological accuracy in retrieving the relevant materials and addressing the crises across the eight countries under study in the region.

Thematic Analysis

We first categorized crises-related information within each country as crises identification (e.g., economic crises, political crises, health crises, natural disasters), crises-based impact (i.e., impact of crises on the workplace/women employment), and finally crises-informed practices and policies (i.e., taken in response to the crises). We then classified them into four levels – recruitment, retention, and promotion and national level legislations.

Limitations

Not all practices and policies may have been found online, especially since crises-informed RRP are not sufficiently addressed in the MENA region or formally institutionalized.

3. CRISES IN THE MENA REGION

The MENA region is a diverse geographical and cultural area that encompasses countries from both the Middle East and North Africa. This region is home to over 450 million people (Bjerde, 2020), making it one of the most populous in the world. The MENA region is known for its rich history and cultural heritage, as well as its strategic location at the crossroads of Europe, Africa, and Asia. It is also home to some of the world's largest oil reserves, which have played a significant role in shaping the global economy. However, the MENA region has faced numerous challenges in recent years, including political instability, economic downturns, and social unrest. As a result, the region has become a focal point for international attention, with many countries and organizations seeking to promote stability, development, and progress in the region.

Each of the MENA region's countries has its own assets, social structures, and political systems, and each has faced a variety of crises that has significantly impacted their citizens on multiple levels. We detail below these various crises:

1. **Political Instability:** The region has faced political instability with frequent conflicts, coup d'états, and civil wars. Some of the countries that have experienced political instability include Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, and Egypt.
2. **Economic Recession:** Several countries in the region have been hit by economic crises, such as inflation, currency devaluation, high unemployment, and poverty. These economic issues have resulted in social unrest and political instability, especially in Lebanon and Tunisia.
3. **Humanitarian Crisis:** The region has been dealing with a large number of refugees, migrants and displaced individuals due to conflicts and wars in neighboring countries. By the end of 2022, the Middle East and North Africa hosted 2.4 million refugees, 12.6 million internally displaced people (IDPs), 251,800 asylum seekers and 370,300 stateless persons (UNHCR, 2022).



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4. **Natural/Climate Crisis:** Whether in the form of floods, storms, droughts, extreme temperature, or earthquakes (The World Bank Group, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d, 2021e), natural crises can cause a lot of damage, serious health consequences, loss of human productivity, and sometimes loss of lives. Unfortunately, the percentage of floods and earthquakes faced in some of the MENA countries under study are extremely high. That is, according to the World Bank Group's data, such percentage reaches 78.57% of floods in Tunisia (The World Bank Group, 2021a), 50% storms in Lebanon (The World Bank Group, 2021b), 42.86% of floods in Libya (The World Bank Group, 2021c) and Iraq (The World Bank Group, 2021d), and 35.71% of floods in Jordan (The World Bank Group, 2021e).
5. **Human Rights Crisis:** Several countries in the region have been accused of violating human rights, including the suppression of free speech, freedom of the press, and political dissidence.
6. **COVID-19 Pandemic:** The global health pandemic had a major impact on the MENA region during which around 400,000 deaths were reported by January 2022 in the MENA region with significant deaths occurring in poorer countries such as Tunisia and countries that house a great deal of refugees such as Jordan and Lebanon (Hanieh & Ziadah, 2022).
 1. Notably, COVID-19 not only impacted the economy of these MENA countries and intensified the huge gaps in wealth and power, but also overlapped with the political instability crises and revolution (e.g., Lebanese revolution) (Hanieh & Ziadah, 2022).
 2. It's noteworthy to mention that the deteriorating economic situations in the MENA region date back to the late 1900s and aren't purely the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the overall economic crisis has exacerbated because of COVID-19 which had a massive negative impact on countries that depend on exports (e.g., Bahrain), and on countries that rely heavily on the tourism sector (e.g., Morocco and Lebanon) (Hanieh & Ziadah, 2022; Jones et al., 2009).
7. **Gender Inequality:** Many countries in the MENA region have deeply ingrained patriarchal attitudes and laws that discriminate against women. This has resulted in women having limited access to education, employment, and political participation.
 1. *Women unemployment rate:* As women in the MENA region remain among the most marginalized groups, their unemployment represents 20% on average (The World Bank, 2022q) along with accompanied decline in wages, social protection, overall job quality and working hours (ESCWA, 2020; ILO, 2020; ILO, 2021).
 2. Like other crises, the unemployment crisis was aggravated by COVID-19 which hit women the hardest due to the cultural patriarchal norms (e.g., believing that women must be responsible for childcare) prevalent in most of the MENA countries. To explain, women faced massive layoffs and resignations during COVID-19 due to the absence of work-life balance policies.
 3. What also exacerbated women's unemployment during COVID-19 pandemic in the MENA countries is the fact that labor regulations regarding parental policies continue to fall behind international standards, hence reinforcing the gendered power dynamics of women's childcare responsibilities and inhibiting their retention in the workforce (El Awady, 2018; Moss, 2012).
8. **"Triple F" crisis (food/fuel/finance):** According to the World Bank (2022a, 2022e), some countries in the MENA region (e.g., Algeria, Jordan) have suffered from the "Triple F" crises because of the economic recessions and inflations (Jones et al., 2009).
9. **Human-made disasters.** Such disasters include but are not limited to the Twin Bombings in Tunisia in 2019 and the Beirut Port Explosion in Lebanon in 2020.

All in all, the countries in the MENA region have encountered a variety of crises. These crises include but are not limited to natural disasters (e.g., floods, earthquakes, storms, and droughts), in addition to economic and financial crises reflected through high levels of inflation, increased unemployment, loss of the currencies' worth and declined GDPs. Moreover, MENA countries continue to suffer from the aftermath of the global health crises (e.g., COVID-19) and human-made crises (Bousquet et al., 2014; Kirch et al., 2017). In the next section, we provide an overview about the crises unfolding in each of the target countries, particularly over the last 3 to 5 years.



4. COUNTRY-LEVEL CRISES

4.1 Algeria

Algeria is a country with vast reserves of valuable resources, including hydrocarbon, iron, zinc, phosphates, uranium, and mercury. With such resources, Algeria could potentially be one of the most prosperous countries in Africa. However, despite this potential, Algeria has experienced numerous crises over the years. The economic crisis in Algeria was initially triggered by the fall in oil prices in 2014. This was particularly problematic as 97% of Algeria's income (USDA Foreign Agricultural Service, 2017) and 93% of its GDP is generated through oil trading (Nte, 2021; The World Bank, 2022a; Zoubir, 2020).

In addition to the economic crises previously discussed, Algeria also faces natural disasters, such as annual floods, which occur at a rate of 55.26%, and earthquakes, which occur at a rate of 18.42% (The World Bank Group, 2021f). For example, in March 2021, a strong earthquake with a magnitude of 6.0 hit Algeria, resulting in significant residential damage (IRFC, 2022; UNOCHA, 2022). Further, one of the most significant recent crises has been the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic had a severe impact on Algeria's economy, leading to a contraction of GDP in 2020, a decrease in exchange rates, and an increase in food prices. These factors particularly affected vulnerable populations, causing socio-economic problems (Fabiani, 2021). Additionally, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war has negatively impacted Algeria's exports and budget revenues (The World Bank, 2022a).

On the political front, Algeria has been engaged in a hidden war since its independence in 1962, causing uncertainty and insecurity for organizations (Mellahi & Wood, 2003). The Arab Spring Uprisings (ASU) and anti-government demonstrations began in Tunisia and spread to other MENA countries, including Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Bahrain. Poverty, unemployment, and poor living conditions, along with overall corruption and food inflation, pushed Algerians to revolt and fight for their freedom, including



political freedom and freedom of speech (Spencer, 2011). Algeria also witnessed the "Revolution of Smiles" protest in 2019, which aimed to remove the Algerian President from office and was a collective action by Algerian citizens (Ouaissa, 2021). Generally, most protests were peaceful and focused on vocalizing Algerian concerns and inducing change within the political, social, and economic systems (Nte, 2021).

Algeria has also faced high levels of unemployment, as seen in other MENA countries. The low economic participation of Algerian women is a significant issue that poses a risk to the country's economy. Female participation in the labor force in Algeria remains among the lowest in the MENA region (Barry & Dandachli, 2020). Women's employment is crucial to boosting the country's overall economy, especially during the recession and GDP contraction (Barry & Dandachli, 2020). However, traditional cultural gender roles, barriers imposed by traditional Algerian beliefs, and the lack of road safety are all factors contributing to low female participation in the labor force.

4.2 Bahrain

Bahrain is a prominent member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) known for its oil reserves and production. Despite not being a major oil exporter like Saudi Arabia, Bahrain's economy still relies heavily on oil revenues. In 2014, a decline in oil prices caused significant economic concerns for the country, even though it has a growing, diversified economy. The COVID-19 pandemic has also impacted Bahrain's economy, causing a 4.9% contraction in GDP in 2020 (Oxford Business Group, 2022). However, Bahrain's proactive measures in combatting the pandemic have been effective, and its policies have prevented a full lockdown, benefiting its education and overall economic sectors. While other countries have enforced strict lockdowns and experienced massive terminations, Bahrain has managed to decrease the impact of the pandemic on its economy.

Further, Bahrain's heavy reliance on expatriate employees has caused an employment imbalance and contributed to low rates of employment among Bahraini youth (Gulf Daily News, 2020). The problem has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to an increase in social isolation and inequalities. That is, the labor force participation rate for females aged between 15 and 24 was 26.08% in 2022 as compared to 50.75% in males (ESCWA, 2023). Similarly, based on modeled ILO estimates, the female labor participation is 26.14% in 2023 (UN Women, 2023). The unemployment rates are also consistently high in Bahraini women, especially due to high numbers of expatriate employees. Based on the report issued by the General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions, unemployment rates among Bahraini women are not less than 65%, and 82% of the annually generated jobs are occupied by expatriates (Al Mosawi, 2021).

4.3 Iraq

The Iraqi economy heavily relies on its oil exportation, causing a major economic concern when global oil prices started declining in 2014 (Al Nasrawi et al., 2020). This reliance on oil has led to macroeconomic volatility, as evidenced by the fact that Iraq's oil revenues account for over 99% of its exports and 42% of its GDP (The World Bank, 2020). The economic downturn was exacerbated in 2020 with an 11.3% contraction in GDP and currency devaluation (The World Bank, 2020). Similar to Algeria, geopolitical tension resulting from the Russia-Ukraine war has impacted Iraq's economy, leading to increased poverty rates and food prices (The World Bank, 2022c). The function of Russian oil companies in Iraq has also been impacted by international sanctions imposed on Russia, further complicating Iraq's economic situation.

Iraq also faces significant political crises, including protests, militarization, and the after-math of multiple wars including the Iraq-Iran war, and the US invasions (Al Nasrawi et al., 2020; Alsikoty, 2022; Bobseine, 2022; Crisis Group, 2023; USIP, 2020). Further, the political landscape went through tremendous changes during the Saddam and post Saddam era. Political corruption, which involves using public power



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for personal gain, is highly prevalent in Iraq and linked to financial corruption and other illegal activities such as money laundering, drug trafficking, and counterfeit money (Alsikoty, 2022). Unfortunately, these crises continue to affect the country and its citizens who are categorized and separated based on their religious and sectarian affiliations (Alsikoty, 2022; The World Bank, 2020b).

All the previously mentioned crises and their impact on Iraq have only been worsened by the natural crises (e.g., floods, dust storms) faced in Iraq (Al-Shamsi, 2019). Although few natural crises have recently happened, Iraq has not implemented a proactive approach to reduce disaster risks (Al-Shamsi, 2019). That is, the ongoing wars, conflicts, political tensions, and the overall insecurity have paralyzed Iraq's system, affecting the country's infrastructure, awareness, and preparedness for combatting emergency situations such as in natural disasters (Al-Shamsi, 2019).

Furthermore, like many MENA countries, Iraq has faced detrimental unemployment consequences, especially due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the World Bank (2020), Iraq's unemployment rate increased by 10% compared to pre-pandemic levels. In addition, Iraq has one of the widest gender gaps in the world, according to a recent report by the World Bank (2022d). For instance, Iraqi women's labor force participation was around 11% compared to 70% for men in 2022 (The World Bank Group, 2023a; 2023b). Women's participation in the labor force has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving high numbers of unemployed women, including those who were displaced or working informally (The World Bank, 2020).

4.4 Jordan

Jordan is currently experiencing an intense economic recession (i.e., with a 38% rise in poverty rates among Jordanians after the COVID-19 pandemic) (Balderrama, 2022), resulting in slow growth and a lack of employment opportunities for Jordanians, particularly youth (The World Bank, 2022e, 2022f, 2022p). This recession is characterized by declining GDP levels, high levels of poverty, and external debt, all of which contribute to high turnover rates (The World Bank, 2022e, 2022f). In addition to these crises, Jordan is facing challenges related to the scarcity of natural resources, including water shortages and the impact of climate change, which further reduce productivity (The World Bank, 2022e).

The economic crisis in Jordan has been exacerbated by various external shocks, including regional conflicts. However, a major contributor to the crisis is the massive influx of over a million Syrian refugees, who represent approximately 13% of the total Jordanian population (World Bank, 2022e). This economic crisis further exacerbated the unemployment crisis in Jordan, as employers favored hiring non-local citizens to cut down on costs. It is important to note that Jordan's unemployment and refugee crises date back to 1948 when not only Syrians but also Palestinians and Iraqis fled to Jordan (Oxfam International, 2023).

Further, according to the World Bank (2022e, 2022p), labor force participation, specifically for youth and women, remains among the lowest regionally and especially following the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the presence of highly qualified and educated Jordanian women who might be even more qualified than men, Jordan still has the one of the lowest female economic participation rates (i.e., 15% compared to 67% in men (Robbin, 2022), 25% unemployment rate for women in 2022 (The World Bank Group, 2023c)). This gender employment gap has further widened and exacerbated as a consequence of COVID-19 where about a third of the employed women lost their jobs or suffered severe pay-cuts (Al Farah et al., 2022). The nature of the existing unemployment crisis and gender disparities can be linked to social constraints (e.g., stereotypes, prejudices) and legal constraints (e.g., ambiguous legislation, injustice, lack of protective legislations), in addition to women's inadequate financial inclusion and their limited access to resources and safe transport (Majcher- Teleon, 2009; Oxfam International, 2023; The World Bank, 2022e).



4.5 Lebanon

Despite being a small country, Lebanon has endured a substantial number of crises. Lebanon has been severely impacted on the individual, familial, organizational and community level due to a combination of severe crises. The Lebanese crises included insecurity problems (i.e., wars, armed conflicts, political instability, political gridlock, political corruption), natural disasters (e.g., earthquakes, floods), economic crises (e.g., financial collapse, poverty, country indebtedness, loss of jobs, rising unemployment, brain drain), social crises (e.g., inequality, social injustice, increase in domestic violence) and health crises (i.e., COVID-19 pandemic). On top of all the previously mentioned crises, Lebanon was further affected after the huge Beirut Port blast in 2020, and the October 17 revolution, which included the clashing of demonstrators with security forces and many more (Barroso, 2020; Bosqui, 2020; WHO, 2020).

The situation in Lebanon has been reported as one of the worst worldwide and described as a deliberate depression led by the political and financial crises (Bosqui, 2020; Chebaro, 2023; The World Bank, 2022g). What made the overall situation worse was the Beirut Port blast in 2020, as it was one of the world's biggest nuclear explosions which killed hundreds, displaced thousands and traumatized millions of Lebanese citizens due to the improper and illegitimate storage of over 2700 tons of ammonium nitrate at Beirut port (Amos & Rincon, 2020; Bosqui, 2020). The port explosion added to the existing long-term structural problems and limitations, such as water shortages, improper waste (i.e., solid and water waste) management, dysfunctional energy and electricity sectors, and poor-quality infrastructure (World Bank, 2022g, 2022h). The overall situation was further exacerbated when the Lebanese currency lost a huge, unstable and constantly rising percentage of its worth. This has led multiple businesses to shut down while others significantly downsized, leaving the vast majority of the Lebanese population unemployed or employed with unfair wages. That is, business owners were unable to pay rent and employee salaries, especially with the decline in the number of tourists in Lebanon, hence leaving more than half of the country's population below the poverty line (Bosqui, 2020; Stevenson et al., 2022; The World Bank, 2022g).

Besides all the overlapping crises, Lebanese women face gender-based violence (GBV) as an additional burden exclusive to them. The GBV that women face can take on multiple forms including but not limited to emotional, physical, sexual, economic or psychological forms of violence (Nashabe, 2018). Even the Lebanese police officers who must combat the present violence are subjected to different forms of GBV if they were women officers, although only few, as they are harassed and abused because of their gender (Nashabe, 2018). The GBV in Lebanon and the gender employment gaps is not limited to the Lebanese Security Forces sector (e.g., Internal Security Forces, General Security, Army). In other words, gender employment gaps extend to all sectors in Lebanon and as reported, women's labor force participation stopped at 21% in 2021, hence representing a huge decline from that in 2018 (Hamadi & Antinios, 2023). However, women only had 29.3% of the economic workforce participation compared to 70.4% in men (CAS, 2011; Hariri, 2023).

4.6 Libya

Over the past few years, Libya has encountered a surplus of crises ranging from COVID-19, political divisions and instability, armed conflicts and civil wars, extremely high unemployment rates and gender inequalities (The World Bank, 2022i). In addition to the damage caused by the internal crises, Libya has also suffered consequences of the Russia-Ukraine war. When it comes to the political crises, Libya is known for its political divisions and security tensions (The World Bank, 2022k). To explain, Muammar Gaddafi ruled Libya for 42 years, during which the regime restrained the civil society, considering it part of the foreign West that should not be integrated into the Libyan culture (Basir et al., 2022). The regime oppressions were eventually followed by protests, a civil war, and further political conflicts (Basir et al., 2022). The ongoing armed conflicts caused severe pressure on the vulnerable health sector, specifically. That is, the World Health Organization, reported that about 20% of the existing healthcare facilities in Libya were dysfunctional and inaccessible due to conflict, physical damage, or invasion by other parties (World Health Organization, 2018). The ongoing political tension has also affected the economic sector



in Libya where the war has caused a loss of about \$580 billion since 2011 along with a significantly reduced growth and increased market volatility (ESCWA, 2021a). Unfortunately, more crises and miseries continue to face the country. Libya has been affected by the recent Russia-Ukraine war where food insecurity has exacerbated. Additionally, prices have increased, household welfare is deteriorating and about a third of Libyans are earning below the basic minimum wage needed to afford the “Minimum Expenditure Basket” (The World Bank, 2022k; The World Bank, 2022j).

Further, the COVID-19 pandemic was detrimental to the Libyan healthcare sector which was not prepared especially considering the weak institutions and limited budgets. In addition, Libyan healthcare workers were in dire need for additional trainings and resources (e.g., personnel, safety equipment, medications) to be able to efficiently combat the sudden health crisis (Elhadi et al., 2021; ESCWA, 2021a). Unfortunately, this pandemic started after preexisting years of crises and conflicts, hence imposing further economic and social disturbance on the country (IRC, 2020; The World Bank, 2021).

On top of the above, there is an ongoing gender disparity, discrimination, and lack of equal employment opportunities among men and women in Libya. While women constitute approximately 50% of the Libyan population, their unemployment rate was 26.67% in 2022, with an unemployment rate among young women reaching as high as 70.1% in 2022 (Bugaignis and Tantoush, 2017; The World Bank Group, 2023d; The World Bank Group, 2023e). Therefore, these under-represented women who are faced with mere employment opportunities have been demanding justice, equality and a chance to partake in important roles within the workforce (ESCWA, 2021c). Notably, these women are not only facing employment issues but are also subject to high levels of violence by men (ESCWA, 2021a).

4.7 Morocco

Morocco faced the most drastic health, economic and social crises since its independence in 1956 (Enaji, 2021). Additionally, an ongoing internal conflict continues to take place between the Polisario Front and the Kingdom of Morocco over the territory of Western Sahara (BBC, 2023). COVID-19 has also further contributed to the severely high levels of economic, political, and social deterioration. Further, as an importer of food and energy resources, Morocco struggled with a huge increase in prices because of the Russia-Ukraine war (The World Bank, 2022m), which caused more food insecurity at a time where the global food market was already being challenged due to the war (The World Bank, 2022l). Also, as an effect of the drought, Morocco remains at a high risk of having severe water shortages (The World Bank, 2022l, 2022m).

Moroccan women’s economic contribution is among the lowest in the world, with 22% in 2018 in comparison to a global mean of 48% (UNDP, 2020a). Unfortunately, women’s participation in the Moroccan workforce has been declining and got even worse during the COVID-19 pandemic (UNDP, 2020b). And just like in other MENA countries, many women in Morocco lost their jobs and spent more time at home due to COVID. During that same period, the percentages of gender-based violence and especially domestic violence among Moroccan women have skyrocketed. That is, around 52% of women in Morocco experienced domestic violence (UN Women, 2020a). So, when isolation or quarantine measures are implemented during COVID-19, just like during previous pandemics as Ebola, the percentage of violence among women escalates, hence making women among the most vulnerable and affected groups (UN Women, 2020a).

4.8 Tunisia

From an economic level, Tunisia has been facing a high public external debt which increased from 66.9% to 79.3 % of GDP between 2017 and 2022 (The World Bank, 2022n). This was accompanied with one of the highest inflations faced by the country since 1991, along with economic recessions (i.e., a currency value loss) and high migration rates (ESCWA, 2020; UNECA, 2019; Teyeb, 2021; The World Bank, 2022n, 2022o). Besides the critical economic crises, Tunisians started their revolution in 2011 fighting



against the prevalent corruption and political instability in the country (Eurostat, 2020). In addition to the revolution which massively decelerated the economical advancements, an attack on Bardo Museum in March 2015 caused the death of 22 people and the closure of over 20 hotels, hence further contributing to an overall instability and deterioration (e.g., reduced tourism, job terminations, strikes and protests, sequestrations, blockage of streets, disruption of public order) (Ben Mlouka & Hefaihedh, 2019; Lageman, 2015; The World Bank, 2022n).

Further, women's minimal employment, gender disparities are still common in Tunisia, with approximately 27% of women in 2019 being part of the workforce in comparison to 68% of men (Viertel et al., 2020). Even though the majority of women are educated, the statistics show women's low workforce contribution (Viertel et al., 2020). However, unemployment has not only affected women but also men in Tunisia. That is mainly due to the low productivity of the Tunisian economy, as manifested in the inadequate and low number and quality of jobs in the market (The World Bank, 2014). Here, the global COVID-19 pandemic also came to impact employment, with a 23.6% unemployment rate among women (The World Bank Group, 2023f), and 39.9% among female youth in 2022 (The World Bank Group, 2023g). Unfortunately, these crises and what has accompanied them of circumstances have further exacerbated the poverty and inequality faced in Tunisia (Marouani et al., 2022).

After presenting an overview of the specific country-level crises, we zoom into the impact of these crises on women's RRP across the eight MENA countries.

5. IMPACT OF CRISES ON WOMEN'S RRP ACROSS THE MENA REGION

5.1 Algeria

Considering the ongoing economic and political crises, Algeria's labor market is among the worst in spite of the country's richness in gas and oil resources (Ramdani et al., 2016). While women's employment can be crucial in boosting the overall economic growth of the country, Algeria still lurks behind, ranking among the lowest in women's labor force participation (i.e., below 15%) (Barry & Dandachli, 2020). Similarly, organizations can also have a critical role in adjusting HRM policies to deal with the crises and improve the economy, yet the private sector is still too small and limited to take in all those not employed in the public sector (Ramdani et al. 2016). Within this limited sector and due to the ongoing crises, HR managers take weak and mostly ineffective HRM practices, explaining this by their lack of knowledge and skills to develop the necessary policies (Ramdani et al. 2016). However, despite suffering from extremely poor and ineffective HRM practices, some organizations still showed a shift in their HR functions and practices to address the various crises Algeria faced. Next, we discuss the HRM steps taken by organizations in Algeria to support each of women's recruitment, retention, and promotion in response to crises.

Recruitment

The organizations' recruitment process in Algeria has been highly affected and shaped by the political instability and civil wars faced by the country (Mellahi & Wood, 2003). That is, organizations in the private sector limited and narrowed their targets of recruitment based on personal networks (Mellahi & Wood, 2003). In other words, companies wanted to ensure protection and security, within all the civil conflicts and political crises, by changing the nature of HRM practices such that they based selection and recruitment processes on *trust rather than skills*. More specifically, women were employed based on family and kinship relationships (Mellahi & Wood, 2003). While most companies have adopted this recruitment pattern, multinational and some local companies have recently started taking more progressive steps in terms of women's fair recruitment. Thus, in response to the economic crises and in an aim to improve women's employment as part of the overall economic growth, some companies have tried to reduce the gender gap and recruit more female managers, especially in non-traditional roles such as program directors or factory managers (Barry & Dandachli, 2020). Additionally, these companies provided training for women before recruitment, adapted more flexible working hours to attract female



applicants, and excluded previous experience from the list of job requirements (Barry & Dandachli, 2020). Such companies also applied policies that force employers to choose at least one female out of the candidates while recruiting (Barry & Dandachli, 2020).

Retention

Considering the various crises and to retain more women, some companies in Algeria have provided further flexibility around maternity leave policies (Barry & Dandachli, 2020). These policies differ between companies, but they all require maternity leave to start one-week preceding birth (Barry & Dandachli, 2020). Some employers provide three months of paid leave for mothers, while others offer four months in case of birth complications (Barry & Dandachli, 2020). Also, some employers provide the flexibility of remote or part-time work for a certain period after birth, and others offer the option of taking paid leave prior to giving birth (Barry & Dandachli, 2020). This minimizes women's risk of losing their jobs, helps in their retention and grants them the right to balance between their work and childcare commitments.

Promotion

Companies have given more value to promotion to combat the given economic crises, however, they have based their promotion *decisions not only on merit, but also on seniority and personal relationships* (Ramdani et al., 2016). Unfortunately, this slightly positive view of promotion did not compensate for companies' devaluation of women's recruitment, retention, and promotion. That is, women have reported unmet promotions as promised by their employers, in addition to salary deductions and the lack of bonuses and trainings (Barry & Dandachli, 2020).

National Level Legislations

The Algerian government has taken some measures to support employees amid the economic, political and health crises. Among these were gender-sensitive measures focusing specifically on women and female employees (ESCWA, 2022). In response to the crises and to support the care economy, the Algerian government adopted a social insurance measure, where companies were required to provide paid leave for pregnant women and women with children (i.e., children caregiving leave of one year), in addition to people with chronic and long-term health conditions (ESCWA, 2022; SAWI, 2021). This is notable as Algeria was among the countries that provided the highest number of days for maternity leave (i.e., 98 days) based on the ILO "Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) (SAWI, 2021). Additionally, Algeria offers nurseries for the employees' children and provides two breastfeeding hours for women working in the public sector (SAWI, 2021). The labor law in Algeria also protects female employees from sexual harassment, discrimination and termination of employment due to family duties (SAWI, 2021). Also, in response to the economic crises and COVID-19, and in recognition of health workers' efforts (i.e., long shifts, managing between work and home, risking their own lives), Algeria was one of the countries that offered salary top-ups to compensate for their challenges and efforts (UNDP, 2022; UN Women & UNDP, 2022). Such measures have improved the overall economy and supported employees in general, and female employees in specific.

5.2 Bahrain

In general, Bahrain has shown remarkable progress in gender equality, mainly through integrating women in business ownership. More specifically, Bahrain has the highest percentage of female-founded and owned start-ups, reaching up to 18 percent as compared to 15 percent (Al-Ansari, 2020). With COVID-19 pandemic and the economic recession accompanying it, Bahrain has been exerting more efforts to keep the economic and social progress they have reached so far, to support the female employees and women in the whole community, and to reduce the negative consequences of the crises (Al-Ansari, 2020). Therefore, the different ways adopted by companies have shifted the typical employment conditions. While this shift (e.g., remote work) might be thought of as a negative implication of the crises, it has been shown to affect companies in the private sector positively, allowing for further flexibility and productivity, and allowing for less rental costs and spaces for small and medium enterprises in Bahrain (UNDP, 2020c).



Amid the overall crises, especially COVID-19 and its irregular circumstances, the HRM sector has had an essential role in the adaptation and performance of organizations, including employers and employees. A study done on the e-HRM in Bahrain has pointed out to the challenges facing enterprises in adopting the digital transformation (e.g., working from home, supervising employees remotely, e-recruitment, flexible workplace, skill development through technological innovations) (Al-Alawi et al., 2022). The study has shown that IT infrastructure and funding were positively associated with the adoption of digital transformation both in public and private Bahraini sectors (Al-Alawi et al., 2022). However, the role of the HR does not stop at initial steps, such as shifting to remote work, as employees still need further policies to organize their work and protect their rights even within the measures (e.g., to be contacted only during working hours) taken in response to crises. Therefore, we next explore the HRM practices adopted by some Bahraini companies responding to the COVID-19 crises at the private sector level to support women's employment in terms of recruitment, retention, and promotion. Then, we review the policies and laws issued by the government to support female employees in Bahrain.

Recruitment

Companies in the Bahraini private sector have taken some actions to reduce the crises' negative impact and support women's fair recruitment. For instance, **Zain Bahrain** (i.e., a leading telecommunications provider in Bahrain, and part of Zain Group) has started its support for women's recruitment even before COVID-19 through training programs and internships for possible recruits (Arabian Business Community, 2019; Zain Bahrain, 2022). In response to COVID-19 in specific, Zain Bahrain continued its commitment to fair recruitment and progression through online interviewing (Zain Group, 2021). Similarly, the banking sector in Bahrain responded to COVID-19 through new HRM practices that integrate digital transformation (i.e., technological practices) in the recruitment and selection processes (Ayari, 2021).

Retention

In addition to recruitment, women's retention has also been among the strategies supported by Bahraini companies amid the crises. For example, **Y.K. Almoayyed & Sons** (i.e., a group of businesses for trading, contracting, and telecommunication services, with a female managing director who was ranked by Forbes among the most impactful and powerful women in the Arab world) has kept its commitment for employee support and women's empowerment (BMMI, 2015). Even before COVID-19, Y.K. Almoayyed's internal decision in initiating part-time work has been impactful on the national level, pushing the Ministry of Labor to consider this kind of work and recognize part-time workers (BMMI, 2015). After COVID-19, the company's HR implemented virtual showrooms, and stayed committed in satisfying its employees, protecting their health and safety, and keeping a healthy work environment (Y.K. ALmoayyed & Sons, 2023).

Similarly, **Zain Bahrain**, as part of Zain Group, responded to COVID-19 pandemic through implementing measures that help in supporting employees, especially women, and helping with their retention in the workplace. More specifically, the company advised employees to work remotely (i.e., provided with necessary resources and encouraged to use Microsoft Teams for more efficiency), guided their employees with respect to travel (e.g., minimize travel to keep families united), did not deduct the quarantine period from the employees' leave or salary, provided sterilizing and cleaning products for disinfection and safety, and made sure to have consistent communication with employees for guidance and support (Zain Group, 2021). Zain Bahrain also made sure to engage the employees, to reward their efforts, and to support their wellbeing and development (e.g., weekly virtual activities to reward accomplishments, weekly sessions to encourage employees to take care of their mental and physical health) (Zain Bahrain, 2020). Just like Zain Bahrain, **Batelco** also continued its commitment to equity and diversity, along with fair parental leave and health and safety measures, hence allowing the company to maintain a high retention rate at 92% in 2021 despite COVID-19 circumstances (Batelco, 2021). All the previously mentioned HR policies and practices that have been adopted amid the COVID-19 pandemic helped support women's retention in the workplace.



Promotion

In general, the practices adopted to support promotion were minimal. However, it is important to mention that companies like **Zain Bahrain** have done virtual conferences and workshops to provide trainings and improve their employees' knowledge and skills despite the digital transformation after COVID-19 (Zain Bahrain, 2020). Similarly, the **banking sector** in Bahrain has implemented technological practices in the training and development of their employees (Ayari, 2021). Such practices contribute to the improvement and eventually the promotion of employees within companies.

National Level Legislations

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Bahrain has devised remarkable policies to support female employees (e.g., optional remote work granted for spouses of women in the frontline duties, remote work for mothers working in the public sector, first hour of operation at stores and supermarkets for elderly and pregnant women), to provide virtual psychological counseling, and to waive women's debts (Al-Ansari, 2020). Moreover, Bahrain supported many affected private companies and their employees by paying 50 percent of the salaries for additional three months (Arab News, 2020). Above all, the government mandated that all companies, whether in the private or public sectors, have their employees, especially women, work remotely (UNDP, 2020c). Even better, children of women working on the frontline were supported through distance learning (e.g., academic experts, smart tablets, laptops), while Tamkeen ensured women's economic security (e.g., paying salaries of kindergarten and nursery employees) (UNDP, 2022). Further, Bahrain offers 60 days of maternity leave, two breastfeeding hours per day, one day of paternity leave, unpaid caregiving leave after the maternity leave (SAWI, 2021). The law in Bahrain also protects female employees from termination of employment in cases of marriage and maternity, sexual harassment, and discrimination, yet it still allows night work and equal pay (SAWI, 2021). All this has helped working women manage amid the circumstances of the crises, especially with the work-family balance.

5.3 Iraq

With Iraq having one of the widest gender gaps worldwide, some companies started implementing gender-sensitive measures (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2022d). Also, amid the ongoing conflicts, economic crises, natural crises (i.e., floods, earthquake, dust storms) and COVID-19 pandemic, boosting women's employment would aid in the reduction of crises' consequences and the improvement of the overall economy in Iraq (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2022d). Therefore, Iraqi companies have specifically worked on supporting women's recruitment, retention, and promotion as ways to increase productivity and benefit both the employers and employees (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2022d). Next, we explore the specific actions taken by organizations and companies in the Iraqi private sector to support women's inclusivity and needs in terms of recruitment, retention and promotion.

Recruitment

Considering the Iraqi crises, companies in Iraq have adopted HR practices to support women's fair recruitment. For instance, **Nafith**, a company for logistic services, responded to the economic crises as accompanied with pandemic and conflicts, by implementing policies that would contribute to the economic growth (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2022d). The company follows the Gender Equity Development Model to ensure that gender diversity and equity policies are applied by employees in their daily work (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2022d). Based on this model, Nafith has adopted the Gender Diverse Recruitment Policy where equal opportunities are provided for women and men who apply for jobs at Nafith. That is, the recruitment committee includes female supervisors, all HR members undergo a gender diversity training, and all possible gender biased terms or duties are eliminated from job descriptions (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2022d). Additionally, Nafith has also adopted the Equal Opportunity Employer Policy which protects and supports the rights of marginalized groups (e.g., women) in this non-traditional logistic sector.



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Similarly, **Ashur Bank** also implemented a policy to ensure women's fair recruitment in the banking sector, especially amid the gender inequalities, overall conflicts, pandemic, and economic contractions happening in Iraq. Ashur Bank's recruitment policy necessitates gender equity between managers of branches and their successors (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2022e). For example, there is a man assigned for deputy for each woman managing a branch or department (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2022e).

Retention

The crises in Iraq also necessitated that Iraqi companies (e.g., Nafith, Ashur Bank, Zain Iraq) support women's retention in the workplace. In response to social stigma, COVID-19, and the economic crises, **Nafith** used a community awareness strategy, where Nafith Organizational Ambassadors would encourage women in Iraq to join the non-traditional jobs in the logistics sector through sharing their own personal and real-life experiences with the community (e.g., family members, colleagues) (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2022d). In addition to that, Nafith takes into consideration the family-oriented culture in Iraq and applies the Family Friendly Engagements policy, such that one family member is allowed to join each female applicant in job interviews to ensure the woman's safety at the company (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2022d). Also, Nafith provides coverage of daily transportation for family members who accompany women to work (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2022d).

Ashur Bank and **Zain Iraq** (i.e., the leading telecommunications company in Iraq) have also responded to the economic crises by adopting family friendly policies at the workplace to support women's employment, retention and hence the economic growth (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2022e). More specifically, the bank has implemented maternity leave policies, where mothers are offered 98 days of leave and have the option to take one year of unpaid leave if she guarantees to return to her work after that period (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2022e). While in other banks, mothers are usually provided with two to three months of unpaid leave (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2022e). On the other hand, Zain Iraq offers mothers 70 maternity and 50 child-care fully paid days, while it uniquely provides fathers with two paid days of paternity leave (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2022f).

Also, aiming to increase women's employment, combatting the economic crises, and contributing to the economic growth, Zain Iraq and Ashur Bank have taken further actions. Zain Iraq founded a nursery at the company headquarters in Baghdad, offering employees the option to keep their children at a close and safe nursery with nominal fees (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2022f). This has also helped ensure safety for staff members and their families amid the overall insecurity faced by the country. Another step taken by Ashur Bank to reduce the effects of the conflicts and economic crises was the implementation of anti-harassment policies (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2022e). Victims of sexual harassment are protected and encouraged to report to the management, while wrongdoers undergo penalties and contract termination (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2022e).

In response to the COVID-19 crises, Ashur Bank and Zain Iraq have additionally offered flexible working hours and remote work especially for female employees with school-aged children (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2022e). Zain Iraq managers also give employees the option of starting their shifts at 8:00 or 9:00 am, and provide women with a seven-hour shift including a lunch break for two years after they have returned from their maternity leave (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2022f). Furthermore, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Zain Iraq and Ashur Bank have provided healthcare insurance for employees and their family members (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2022e; International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2022f).



Promotion

While companies in Iraq have showed significant policy improvement in terms of women's retention, limited efforts have been exerted to support women's promotion. However, **Ashur Bank** has focused its commitment and dedication on the advancement of women in leadership (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2022e). The bank's approach has played a role in supporting women's promotions, hence being a step forward in facing economic hardships and supporting the country's growth.

National Level Legislations

Iraq is among the countries that provide the highest number of days for maternity leave (90 days and 62 days in Kurdistan region), with the option of extending in cases of birth complications (SAWI, 2021). Iraq also provides one hour of breastfeeding per day, daycare and nursery facilities for children of females employees, and a caregiving unpaid leave of one year (SAWI, 2021). Additionally, the law in Iraq protects female employees from discrimination and sexual harassment at the workplace, while it prohibits night shifts for women (SAWI, 2021).

5.4 Jordan

Facing a variety of crises, from floods to COVID-19 pandemic and economic problems, Jordan has suffered from extremely high unemployment rates especially among youth and women (El-Swais, 2016; The World Bank, 2022f). This has necessitated actions and policies that would protect and support employees in the private sectors. Therefore, Jordan was among the five Arab countries that have implemented gender-sensitive measures that specifically focus on the rights of women and female employees (ESCWA, 2022). While there have been some legislations regarding women's employment in the public sector, there was still a high level of job insecurity in the private sector as manifested in unequal job opportunities, dominance of male employees, and increased gender discrimination (i.e., lower salaries and shorter contracts for women) (International Monetary Fund, 2022). Next, we explore the necessary actions taken in response to the crises by some companies at the private sector level to support each of women's recruitment, retention, and promotion, and then we review some legislations enacted by the government on the level of public sector.

Recruitment

Amid Jordan's economic crises and job insecurity, **Estarta Solutions** (i.e., a leading global network engineering and ICT company for technical support, training, and customer service) has tried to combat the gender discrimination and high female unemployment through adopting a new recruitment approach (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2021a). Estarta has supported women's recruitment in non-traditional roles and hence started a gender diversity plan. The company has partnered with universities in Jordan, aiming to raise awareness among female students and their families and encourage them to consider possible jobs in non-traditional roles (e.g., network engineering) while assuring families about the safety measures taken to protect their working women. More importantly, through its outreach program, Estarta makes sure to provide the necessary trainings and orientation days for interested candidates to equip them with the necessary skills and show them the daily tasks, while ensuring the presence of female trainers who would represent role models for the candidates (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2021a). Here, it is essential to mention that Estarta has also implemented a non-discriminatory policy in recruitment, such that the company gives equal recruitment opportunities even for pregnant women (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2021a).

Retention

With the overall crises, job insecurity, high unemployment rates, economic instability and COVID-19 pandemic faced in Jordan, some companies have responded through a set of policies supporting the retention of women in the workplace. For instance, **Amin Kawar and Sons** (AKS) (i.e., shipping and



international transportation company in Jordan) responded to the economic instability and COVID-19 crises by implementing family-friendly policies (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2021b). That is, AKS has provided employees with flexible start and finish times and the option to take up to nine hours of personal leave (i.e., without providing a reason), in addition to their annual leave. The company's policies also necessitate the flexibility of taking individuals' needs into consideration, while focusing on employees' productivity rather than worked hours (i.e., performance management system) (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2021b). Also, considering COVID-19 pandemic, AKS has implemented a formal policy allowing employees, especially caregivers, to work remotely, while setting certain eligibility criteria for remote work (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2021b). Additionally, AKS has supported and guided female employees in balancing between their work and family commitments through a set of trainings, and it has given employees with children discounted fees in close kindergartens and nurseries, besides maternity and paternity leave for parents according to the national law (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2021b). This has helped retain working mothers especially amid the instability and crises in Jordan, like COVID-19.

Similarly, *Umniah* (i.e., a telecommunications company in Jordan) has adopted additional policies to retain women's employment, specifically in response to the economic instability and COVID-19 happening in Jordan. Umniah implemented a clear anti-harassment policy (i.e., Diversity policy) which was explained to all new recruits in a training session (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2021c). Moreover, especially considering COVID-19, Umniah provided remote opportunities, security at the workplace especially in parking spaces, flexible start and end working hours, no requirement to work after 8 p.m. for female employees, and the option to be accompanied on work travelling trips (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2021c).

In response to the economic, employment and COVID-19 instabilities, **Estarta** also applied policies to retain women through providing a friendly and safe environment. Estarta ensures its commitment to diversity through its non-discrimination policy. The company supports female employees, especially working parents, through giving 90 fully paid days as maternity leave and three days of paternity leave, in addition to an optional unpaid year of leave to take care of their children (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2021a). Estarta also offers monthly childcare allowance, flexible and remote working opportunities, and security for women working overnight shifts (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2021a). These policies have granted women, especially working mothers, further flexibility in balancing between their family and work responsibilities, in facing the instabilities associated with the ongoing crises, and in retaining their work.

Promotion

Unlike policies supporting women's retention, there were limited HRM practices taken to support women's promotion. However, facing the economic instability and job insecurity in Jordan, **Estarta's** dedication to apply gender diversity in providing female employees with more advanced leadership and technical skills helped not only in the retention but also in the promotion of women in the workplace (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2021a). That is, these opportunities have allowed women to advance in their careers to leadership roles and possible jobs abroad, such that a great number of managerial positions became occupied by women at Estarta (International Finance Corporation & World Bank, 2021a).

National Level Legislations

At the national level, there were many steps taken by the Jordanian government and ministries to decrease the consequences of the crises and support women's RRP. First, it is important to mention that Jordan offers only 10 weeks for maternity leave, yet provides nurseries for female employees' children, caregiving leave of one unpaid year, 3-day paternity leave and one breastfeeding hour for women working in the public sector (SAWI, 2021). The labor law in Jordan also protects female employees from sexual harassment, discrimination and termination of employment during pregnancy and maternal leave (SAWI, 2021). In response to the COVID-19 crises, the government provided cash support



especially for female-headed households, and to decrease discrimination, the Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship offered subsidies for fresh graduates, especially females as a way to support their inclusion in the workplace (UNDP, 2022). Also, in response to COVID-19, Jordan enacted a law that provides working mothers with childcare allowances and flexible working arrangements (UN Women & UNDP, 2022). Additionally, the Ministry of Labor has coordinated with other ministries for the inclusion of women in the labor market (Majcher-Teleon, 2009), and the Jordanian Civil Service System, including the Ministry of Health, followed an approach supporting better recruitment and retention policies. Moreover, in response to the economic instability and the increased unemployment, Jordan issued the “National HR for Health Strategy Plan” to improve human resources for health (Faouri, 2018). Lastly, while taking into consideration that Jordanian cultural values affect and shape HRM practices, there are still a lot of unresolved gaps in the designation and implementation of HRM policies in the Jordanian public and private sectors (Adisa & Mordi, 2022).

5.5 Lebanon

With the various crises (e.g., economic, Beirut Port Blast, COVID-19) facing Lebanon, crucial challenges have been imposed on managers and HRM practitioners in organizations. Many organizations have been trying to deal with the circumstances with the least losses possible. Women in Lebanon, being part of the vulnerable populations, struggle with worse challenges and hence need additional support at the organizational level especially in terms of their recruitment, retention, and promotion. In this section, we explore the policies and practices taken by organizations during the various crises for the recruitment, retention, and promotion of women.

Recruitment

Although Lebanon has one of the lowest rates of women participation in the labor force (El-Swais, 2016), organizations have not taken progressive steps to support women’s recruitment in response to crises. No notable crises-informed recruitment policies were taken on the private sector level, but some practices were done on the level of the public sector by the Lebanese Government (The World Bank, 2022p). On the private sector level, the **Holdal Abou Adal Group**, a distribution, and manufacturing company, has implanted a culture of diversity as one of its core values, although not directly related to yet still affecting its recruitment practices (The World Bank Group, 2022a). Similarly, being a supportive employer of women, **Malia Group** (i.e., a manufacturing, real estate, and solutions company) followed an approach (e.g., equality policies, hiring a female as a manufacturing supervisor for the first time in thirty-five years) which encouraged more women to apply to vacancies at the company, especially at male dominated departments (The World Bank Group, 2022b). Also, for instance, **Information Technology Group** (ITG) (i.e., a Holding company) has also shown efforts in supporting and recruiting more women at the company (The World Bank Group, 2022c).

Retention

As retention reflects positively both on organizations and employees, companies in Lebanon have tried further ways to satisfy and retain women, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic and the Beirut Port Blast. Companies have mainly focused on creating more responsive environments for women at the workplace through developing anti-sexual harassment and family-friendly policies (The World Bank Group, 2022a). For example, the **Holdal Abou Adal Group** responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crises by adopting an anti-harassment policy, obligatory anti-harassment training for employees, confidential procedures, a Grievance policy, Code of Business Conduct, and Whistle Blow Policy (The World Bank Group, 2022a). Through such policies, the company aimed to boost the economy by retaining employees, especially women, through improving the work environment and fostering the employees’ morale.

For retention purposes, companies in Lebanon also adopted other ways in response to the various crises. Following the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crises in Lebanon, **Malia Group** and **Information Technology Group** (ITG), for instance, promoted family-friendly policies (The World Bank Group,



2022b). Both companies support personal leaves and specifically parental leaves, giving ten paid weeks for mothers based on the Lebanese Labour Law (The World Bank Group, 2022b; The World Bank Group, 2022c). However, while the Malia Group grants one paid day as paternity leave (The World Bank Group, 2022b), the ITG Holding provides three working days for fathers (The World Bank Group, 2022c). Additionally, both companies offer a better working system for employees, especially working mothers, through flexible working hours, such as starting at 9:00 am instead of 8:00 am (The World Bank Group, 2022b) or finishing at 3:00 pm instead of 5:00 pm (The World Bank Group, 2022c). In addition to that, the Malia Group has promoted a policy that allows employees to work from home, if possible for their job nature (The World Bank Group, 2022b), and the ITG Holding adopted a summer schedule with seven hours of work instead of nine (The World Bank Group, 2022c). Both policies enable employees, especially working mothers, to balance their work-life commitments and spend more time with their families, hence boosting satisfaction, flexibility, and productivity among them. Furthermore, both companies provide lactation rooms for breastfeeding mothers to pump milk while working on site, in addition to financial support (i.e., for nursery, kindergarten and academic fees) for employees who have children (The World Bank Group, 2022b; The World Bank Group, 2022c). All these adopted practices play a major role in women's retention at the workplace and eventually in the overall economic growth of the country, hence combating the unfortunate aftermath of the COVID-19 and economic crises.

Promotion

Beyond efforts around retention, organizations in Lebanon have tried to support women's promotion in the workplace. Although there was no specific policy for promotion, **ITG** Holding has encouraged women leaders through continuous trainings to improve their skills (The World Bank Group, 2022c). The company also ensured non-discriminatory promotions and facilitations based on employees' skills and attitudes, while having high percentages of promotions for women (i.e., 35% vertical promotions and 38% horizontal promotions in 2021). Such practices aid as catalysts for the Lebanese economy especially considering the ongoing economic crises.

Other Measures

In response to crises, organizations adopted different HRM approaches. While some organizations adopted the "soft" HRM approach (i.e., providing support and motivation for employees), others have used the "hard" HRM approaches (Edvardsson & Durst, 2021). For example, **Lebanese banks** used the downsizing technique to reduce their costs (Houssari, 2021). Although new protocols have been issued to compensate for the laid-off employees (Houssari, 2021), this approach still exacerbated employees' and specifically women's challenges. Therefore, it remains necessary and urgent to adopt more policies in Lebanon to support women's recruitment, retention, and promotion.

National Level Legislations

Some practices were done on the level of the public sector by the Lebanese Government (The World Bank, 2022p). For instance, the Lebanese government developed an action plan aimed at increasing women's labor force participation rate by 5% and hence contributing to women's economic empowerment (The World Bank, 2022p). Additionally, in response to the crises, the government of Lebanon implemented the National Poverty Targeting Program (NPTP) and The Emergency Crisis and COVID-19-Response Social Safety Net to help (e.g., through monthly cash assistance and social services) vulnerable groups including female-headed households, especially those headed by widowed, divorced or separated women (UNDP, 2022). In response to COVID-19, the government of Lebanon has forced employers to provide paid sick leave to medical employees (e.g., nurses) and to hold responsibility for work-related injuries and emergencies (e.g., compensation) (UNDP, 2022). In general, Lebanon offers only 10 weeks for maternity leave and protects female employees from sexual harassment, discrimination and termination of employment during pregnancy and maternal leave (SAWI, 2021). While the overall crises and the Lebanese sectarian political system continue to hinder and restrict any feminist gender-inclusive work done (e.g., work by the National Commission for Lebanese Women), there are still many



scholar-activists working alongside feminist activists, NGOs and employers to promote gender inclusive policies in Lebanon (Geha & Karam, 2021).

5.6 Libya

Although Libya has the biggest oil reserve in Africa (Nawi et al., 2019), the ongoing crises (i.e., civil conflicts, political tensions and insecurity, COVID-19 pandemic, floods, dust storms, and the effects of the Russia-Ukraine war) have disrupted the overall system and level of human development in the country (ESCWA, 2021a; The World Bank, 2022). That is, the crises have caused more food insecurity (i.e., price increase and food shortage), worse quality of life, in addition to poor education level and income, and they have also overwhelmed the health system (e.g., shortage in medical professionals) (ESCWA, 2021a). Unfortunately, such conditions were accompanied with very high unemployment rates, especially among youth and women (ESCWA, 2021a; The World Bank, 2016).

As reported by The World Bank Group (2023e), Libya's unemployment rate reached as high as 70.1% in 2022 among young women. Many companies usually refer these high unemployment rates to the difficulty in finding qualified candidates (The World Bank, 2016). However, it is important to understand the overall situation which has impacted women's participation in the economy. Being among the most vulnerable groups, women in Libya have been highly affected by the circumstances of conflicts, insecurity, and economic deterioration, lacking proper educational, health, economic and job opportunities (ESCWA, 2021b). Among these women, some face even worse circumstances (e.g., being the only providers for the family, being internally displaced or having very low income), and hence do not have the choice to modify or stop their work (e.g., lockdown during COVID-19) as they need daily access to income (Khalifa, 2020). While there were some women empowerment movements aiming to reduce gender inequality (ESCWA, 2021b), women's lived experiences and vulnerabilities have not been taken into consideration in governmental policies such as COVID-19 lockdown measures (Khalifa, 2020).

The public sector, in addition to oil and banking sectors, continues to dominate Libya's economy (World Bank Group, 2015), and constitutes around 97 percent of all working women in Libya (ESCWA, 2021b). Although employment was based on seniority, in-group relationships, political connections and personal contacts, employees of both sectors (i.e., banking and oil sectors) showed high job dissatisfaction (Iles et al., 2012). In a country where the private sector is ineffective and where HRM policies are shaped by the socio-political familial and religious factors, there is an urgent need for stable organizations and more gender inclusive jobs to improve the private sector (The World Bank, 2016). Despite the very limited HRM practices taken on the private sector level to support women's recruitment and promotion, we cover next the retention actions taken to support women's employment. We then discuss some relevant national level legislations.

Retention

In response to COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations, and institutions (e.g., private healthcare centers) have started implementing advanced telehealth technologies (e.g., video, audio), offering services for individuals while physically distant from the healthcare provider (Elhadi et al., 2021). This has helped healthcare employees by reducing the risk and stress of patient interaction (Elhadi et al., 2021), hence supporting women in their jobs and contributing to their overall retention. Also, considering the COVID-19 pandemic, few large companies implemented policies offering health insurance to employees, yet only a limited number of Libyans could benefit from these policies (Elhadi et al., 2021). Additionally, local companies in Libya aimed to protect the women amid the insecurities and limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Accordingly, fourteen organizations issued and signed a letter asking the presidential council to address gender-sensitive suggestions in their action plan responding to COVID-19 pandemic (Khalifa, 2020).

Other Measures



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Unfortunately, most Libyan businesses have not supported employment in general and women's employment in particular to respond to the economic crises and pandemic. Instead, many managers affected by COVID-19 pandemic reported a need to lay off employees (International Organization for Migration, 2021). Similarly, the presidential council responded to the conflicts and pandemic by reducing salaries (Khalifa, 2020). The severely high unemployment rates and the overall deteriorated economy in Libya necessitates the presence of more considerate and gender inclusive HRM policies, accompanied by further support for the private sector.

National Level Legislations

To face the ongoing socio-political and economic crises happening in Libya, some legislations were focused on increasing women's retention and employment to improve the country's economy. For instance, Libya issued the Labor Relations Law in 2010 stating that there should not be any gender biases or discrimination in terms of employment or wages (ESCWA, 2021b). Similarly, Libya's public national agenda integrated a gender perspective to institutionalize women's participation (ESCWA, 2021b). Also, the Libyan labor law demands that employers in the public and private sectors provide formal contracts to employees, offer a variety of contract types (e.g., part-time, closed-ended, or open-ended) and offer in-house trainings for nationals (World Bank Group, 2015). The Libyan Labor law also requires employers to offer 14 paid weeks of maternity leave, yet there was no law demanding paternity leave (Global Expansion, 2022). Another issued article (26) necessitates those employers provide women who have children safe places for children's custody (Libyan Investment, 2018). While a study done among the employees of Waha Oil Company (i.e., the main state-owned oil and gas company in Libya) has shown that HR practices have significant positive effect on employees' performance (Nawi et al., 2019), these HR practices and laws still were very limited in action and still ignore a lot of women's needs. Despite the gap in the laws and actions taken by Libya, they tried to ensure employees and specifically female employees' rights and safety in a secure job environment, hence contributing to retention. Further, Libya is among the countries that offer the highest number of days as maternity leave (98 days), while also providing one hour per day for breastfeeding, daycare or nursery facilities for children of female employees. Libya also protects female employees from any dismissal due to family or delivery issues, from discrimination, and from sexual harassment (SAWI, 2021).

5.7 Morocco

Morocco has been among the MENA countries that experienced a series of crises, including economic contraction, earthquakes, and COVID-19 pandemic (The World Bank, 2022l, 2022m). What makes the overall economy worse is that the crises were accompanied with high unemployment rates and a gender gap in the overall labor force participation, especially considering women's additional challenges (e.g., traditional attitudes towards women, presence of other inactive women in the household) (Lopez-Acevedo et al., 2021). Morocco is among the few countries in the MENA region where women's participation in the labor market has been declining, especially after the COVID-19 outbreak (The World Bank Group, 2021f). Therefore, Morocco has started implementing some gender-sensitive measures focusing on women's equal rights in employment (ESCWA, 2022). Next, we review the HR practices taken at the private sector level to support women's employment through recruitment, retention, and promotion in response to the Moroccan crises. Finally, we explore the governmental policies and laws enacted in Morocco to further improve women's conditions and employment amid the crises.

Recruitment

A study done on 74 Moroccan companies from different sectors showed a positive effect of digitalization (e.g., implementing e-work and e-recruitment), in response to the COVID-19 crisis, on recruitment management, such as companies' efforts to attract qualified candidates (Habachi et al., 2022). This has shown the effectiveness of and the urgent need for such HRM techniques in combatting the crises' circumstances and supporting women's recruitment and employment.

Retention



Despite the hazardous effects of economic contraction and COVID-19 pandemic on women's overall employment and working conditions (e.g., increased risk of job loss, hindered female participation in employment and decision-making positions, more risk of violence, domestic work and care load, additional challenges on single mothers and widows, exacerbated gender inequalities in employment and working conditions), companies' retention actions are still lacking in Morocco (Ennaji, 2021). That is, there are no policies facilitating women's working conditions such as childcare facilities and nurseries, flexible working hours, maternity leave, or private breastfeeding rooms. The only remote and flexible working opportunities in response to COVID-19 (e.g., flexible working hours) were mainly granted to managers and executives, hence being too limited to reach, benefit, and support employees in lower positions, mostly occupied by women (Ennaji, 2021). Also, employees reported that most companies do not address mental health and do not show any effort (e.g., events) in supporting their employees (i.e., through recognition, flexibility, communication, or support) (Michael Page, 2021). Just as it is the case with recruitment, women's support and retention have also been shown to be highly and positively affected by digitalization (Habachi et al., 2022), hence highlighting the urge for companies to accommodate and support their employees amid all the crises in Morocco.

Promotion

Although employees' training has been treated as a priority in firms, it has not been done based on skills assessment, nor in a way that serves career development and promotion of employees (Hassi, 2016). Alternatively, training has been limited to technical issues and mainly done for managerial and supervisory staff (Hassi, 2016). Further efforts and HR policies to support employees' and women's promotion in the workplace have been nonexistent, hence calling for urgent action.

National Level Legislations

Being among the countries that offer the highest number of maternity leave days (98 days), Morocco was the only one among the 8 countries that has ratified the ILO "Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) (SAWI, 2021). Morocco also provides female employees one hour of breastfeeding per day, caregiving leave of one unpaid year, and a 3-day paid paternity leave (SAWI, 2021). With the ratification of the convention, Morocco protects its female employees from employment termination during pregnancy or maternity leave, discrimination and sexual harassment (SAWI, 2021). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to support healthcare, the Moroccan government has launched a project of social security providing health coverage for treatment and hospitalization (Oulfakir, 2021). To elevate the economy amid the economic crises, Morocco also enacted the new labor code in 2004, encouraging employee's training (e.g., literacy training) (Hassi, 2016). More importantly, Morocco was the first country in the MENA region to make women's participation in managerial positions an obligation, and this was a remarkable step in terms of reducing the gender gap (Mouline et al., 2022). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UN Women also worked on motivating men and boys to help women with their domestic and childcare responsibilities (Louahabi et al., 2020). Additionally, the Moroccan government has taken a set of policies targeting workers from the formal sector. Such actions included postponing loan repayments, dropping late payment penalties, and supporting the unemployed in their job search (i.e., through a job placement program) (Moroccan Employment Lab, 2020). Finally, Morocco has started a guarantee mechanism focused on financing resources for enterprises (i.e., mainly very small, small and medium enterprises) especially those managed by women (UNDP, 2022).

5.8 Tunisia

Like other countries in the MENA region, Tunisia has been seriously influenced by a variety of crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, floods, economic problems and political instability (ESCWA, 2020). Such crises came with drastic economic circumstances, like an increase in debt, inflation, currency devaluation, and unemployment (Teyeb, 2021). Tunisia's management of the crises has been highly threatened by these socio-economic challenges, above which comes the high unemployment rates and decrease in wage, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic (UNDP, 2021). Women and youth, being among the most vulnerable population, continue to suffer the most from such circumstances (Barsoum &



Majbouri, 2021). Despite the remarkable improvement in gender equality (e.g., economic participation, political participation, addressing violence and discrimination against women), Tunisian women's unemployment rate is still as twice as that of men, especially considering the additional hardships facing women (e.g., marriage and motherhood, sociocultural and especially rural constraints, wage gaps, unpaid housework) (ESCWA, 2020; Verheijen, 2020).

Recruitment

In terms of recruitment, employers usually base their selection of employees on word-of-mouth in informal networks (Iles et al., 2012). However, very few companies have adopted recruitment strategies. For instance, **FMC Group** (i.e., full service consulting company) has implemented new recruitment practices through formal job descriptions, job advertisements, personality and skills assessment and contract negotiations as part of the recruitment and selection phase (Hamdi, 2021). Unfortunately, it has been shown that companies in the private sector, especially those in the ICT industries, are more inclined towards the selection and recruitment of men, hence highlighting the huge gender gap and inequality in the recruitment process at Tunisian organizations (Karkkainen, 2011).

Retention

As for retention, Tunisia has been known for having the lowest paid annual leave in the region (World Bank Group, 2015). In general, skilled Tunisian women prefer working in the public sector due to the working conditions, rights and protective policies that are still lacking in the private sector (Robinson & Craig, 2020). While employees and women in the public sector receive stable income, flexible working hours and fair treatment, women in the private sector suffer from longer working hours, unstable poor income, and very weak support or benefits (Robinson & Craig, 2020). For example, women working in the private sector might be irregularly required to travel for several days regardless of their family's or children's need to have them close (Robinson & Craig, 2020). Similarly, women working in the public sector are granted 60 paid days for maternity leave and an optional extended leave with partial salary, yet women working in the private sector can only get 30 partially paid days of maternity leave with no optional extension (Robinson & Craig, 2020). Even worse and amid COVID-19, working women who are healthcare professionals, were not provided any support in terms of childcare (e.g., nurseries and kindergartens, elderly homes), hence being bombarded with additional responsibilities that force them to quit work in some cases (UN Women, 2020b). All this has only shown the instabilities and gaps in the private sector, which have only exacerbated amid the crises.

Promotion

Private companies in Tunisia have ignored crises-informed policies in terms of promotion just as they did in terms of recruitment. In the ICT sector in particular, companies considered women's limited mobility the reason preventing them from getting recruited and promoted at their jobs (Karkkainen, 2011). Unfortunately, Tunisia stays in dire need for work-based training programmes, specifically targeting women and those having non-traditional jobs (Karkkainen, 2011).

Other Measures

Due to the high unemployment rate, informal employment is usually viewed as a transition way to be employed in the formal sector, such that informal employees would benefit from the job search assistance, trainings and subsidies offered through the governmental policies (Dridi, 2023). As women mostly work in the informal sector, this has represented an employment crisis on its own. That is, the informal sector does not grant any policies or rights to support employees in terms of recruitment, retention, or promotion (Dridi, 2023). Unfortunately, Tunisian employers did not respond to the Tunisian crises by supporting employees and women's employment. Instead, some have reduced wages and working hours, especially due to COVID-19 circumstances (ILO & ADWA, 2021). Others have responded by laying off employees, hence contributing to the high unemployment rates (Dowaihy, 2022). That is, despite the high informal employment and the crises happening in Tunisia, the informal sector and the private sector still had no consideration of employees' and especially women's challenges. Women



continue to face harsh working conditions, along with poor income and no protection (i.e., no granted rights in terms of work safety and health policies) (Dridi, 2023). To explain, such women work very long working hours, yet they are not provided with their basic rights of sick leave, maternity leave or vacation (Dridi, 2023). All these actions have further exacerbated the overall Tunisian economy especially amid the ongoing crises.

National Level Legislations

Tunisia provides the least number of days for maternity leave (30 days) yet offers one day of paid paternity leave and 2 days for civil servants (SAWI, 2021). However, it offers one hour per day for breastfeeding employees and paid nursery fees, while forcing companies with more than 50 employees to have a breastfeeding room (SAWI, 2021). The law in Tunisia also prohibits women’s employment termination during pregnancy, discrimination, violence, and harassment (SAWI, 2021).

To support employees in general and working women in specific, Tunisia took measures to support health providers especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (ESCWA, 2022). Additionally, Tunisia has protected employees, amid the economic crises, from sudden job firing by imposing rigid rules on firms when they give open-ended contracts, yet this regulation backfired as firms abused the flexibility of fixed-term contracts (World Bank Group, 2014). This further fed into the promotion of job insecurity and informality. To be able to further support employees in labor market rules and institutions, Tunisia agreed on the Social Pact in 2013, aiming to give more flexibility to firms and encourage them to grant employees more rights and policies (e.g., social insurance) (World Bank Group, 2014).

In response to COVID-19, Tunisia issued laws protecting women’s rights in institutions. Some Tunisian ministries, the employers’ union and other unions drafted a new employment strategy (European Training Foundation, 2021). Amid the economic and health crises, Tunisia also had its active labour market policies, supporting trainings, subsidies, smooth transitions for employees and entrepreneurship support (European Training Foundation, 2021). Within this framework of policies, a new decree was implemented with programs focused on employment improvement and support, with a special focus on entrepreneurship promotion, job seekers, training, and retaining (European Training Foundation, 2021). Other labor laws issued by Tunisia and aiming for further flexibility were focused on recruitment (e.g., employers can choose employees directly rather than through agencies), layoffs (i.e., flexible layoffs if guilty and strict lengthy processes when dismissed without serious misconduct) and working hours, hence supporting women’s working conditions and social protection (European Training Foundation, 2014). Finally, UN Women has also contributed in implementing laws favoring more gender-responsive laws and gender-inclusive development (UN Women, 2021).

In the last section of this desk review, we will be presenting a suggested list of crises-informed RRP policies that could be leveraged across different industries in various countries facing crises.

In Table 1, below, we summarize the RRP practices and policies that the various organizations adopted in response to crises across the eight countries.

Table 1: HR Practices and Policies to Support Women’s RRP in Times of Crises



Country	Recruitment	Retention	Promotion
Algeria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Basing recruitment on trust, family, and kinship relationships rather than skills. - Recruiting more female managers, especially in non-traditional roles only in some local and multinational companies (e.g., policy to choose at least one female candidate). - Providing training for women before recruitment, adopting more flexible working hours to attract female applicants, and excluding previous experience from the list of job requirements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing flexibility around maternity leave policies (require maternity leave to start one-week preceding birth, 3 to 4 months of maternity leave depending on company and birth complications). - Providing flexibility for remote or part-time work for a certain period after birth, while other companies offer the option of taking paid leave prior to giving birth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Basing promotion decisions not only on merit, but also on seniority and personal relationships (in some cases there has been a documentation of unmet promotions as promised by employers, in addition to salary deductions and the lack of bonuses and trainings).
Bahrain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offering training programs and internships for potential hires. - Engaging in fair recruitment, and progression through online interviewing (<i>Zain Bahrain-Telecommunications</i>). - Integrating digital transformation (i.e., technological practices) in the recruitment and selection processes (<i>Banking sector</i>). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Before COVID-19</i>: initiating part-time work, <i>After COVID-19</i>: implementing virtual showrooms, and staying committed to satisfying employees, protecting their health and safety, and keeping a healthy work environment (<i>Y.K. Almoayyed & Sons-Trading & contracting</i>). - Implementing remote work, providing necessary resources, minimizing employees' travel, preventing the deduction of the quarantine period from the employees' leave or salary, providing sterilizing and cleaning products for disinfection and safety, having consistent communication with employees for guidance and support, engaging employees, rewarding their efforts, supporting their wellbeing and development (e.g., weekly virtual activities to reward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offering virtual conferences and workshops to provide trainings and improve the employees' knowledge and skills (<i>Zain Bahrain-Telecommunications</i>). - Implementing technological practices in the training and development of their employees (<i>Banking sector</i>).



		<p>accomplishments, weekly sessions to encourage employees to take care of their mental and physical health), and ensuring equity and diversity along with fair parental leave and health and safety measures (<i>Zain Bahrain- Telecommunications</i>).</p>	
Iraq	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adopting the Gender Diverse Recruitment Policy where equal opportunities are provided (e.g recruitment committee includes female supervisors, gender diversity training for HR members, and all possible gender biased terms or duties are eliminated from job descriptions) (<i>Nafith-Logistic services</i>). - Adopting the Equal Opportunity Employer Policy which protects and supports the rights of marginalized groups (<i>Nafith-Logistic services</i>). - Adopting a recruitment policy necessitating gender equity between managers of branches and their successors (<i>Ashur Bank</i>). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engaging in a community awareness strategy and encouraging women to join non-traditional jobs (<i>Nafith-Logistic services</i>). -Implementing Family Friendly Engagements policy, such that one family member is allowed to join each female applicant in job interviews, covering daily transportation for family members who accompany women to work (<i>Nafith-Logistic services</i>). - Adopting family friendly policies, maternity leave policies offering 98 days of leave and an optional one year of unpaid leave, and implementing anti-harassment policies (<i>Ashur Bank</i>). - Offering 70 maternity and 50 child-care fully paid days + two paid days of paternity leave, founded a nursery at the company headquarters in Baghdad (<i>Zain Iraq-Telecommunications</i>). - Providing flexible working hours and remote work especially for female employees with school-aged children and offering healthcare insurance for employees and their family members (<i>Ashur Bank & Zain Iraq</i>). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working on the advancement of women in leadership (<i>Ashur Bank</i>).



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<p>Jordan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Starting a gender diversity plan, supporting women in non-traditional jobs (<i>Estarta Solutions- Engineering and ICT</i>). - Partnering with universities on awareness sessions for students and parents, providing trainings and orientation days for interested candidates (<i>Estarta Solutions- Engineering and ICT</i>). - Implementing a non-discriminatory policy in recruitment (<i>Estarta Solutions- Engineering and ICT</i>). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implementing family-friendly policies (e.g. flexible start and finish times, annual leave and additional personal leave, performance management system) (<i>Amin Kawar and Sons (AKS)- Shipping and international transportation</i>). - Offering remote work, trainings on work-life balance (<i>Amin Kawar and Sons (AKS)- Shipping and international transportation</i>). - Offering discounted fees in close kindergartens and nurseries, and maternity and paternity leave (<i>Amin Kawar and Sons (AKS)- Shipping and international transportation</i>). - Implementing a clear anti-harassment policy, and offering remote work, security in parking spaces, flexible hours, and optional company on work travelling trips (<i>Umniah- Telecommunications</i>). - Providing a friendly and safe environment, implementing non-discrimination policy (<i>Estarta Solutions- engineering and ICT</i>). - Offering 90 fully paid days as maternity leave and three days of paternity leave, optional unpaid year of caregiving leave, monthly childcare allowance (<i>Estarta Solutions- engineering and ICT</i>). - Offering flexible and remote working opportunities, and security for women working overnight shifts (<i>Estarta Solutions- engineering and ICT</i>). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advancing leadership and technical skills for female employees (<i>Estarta Solutions- engineering and ICT</i>).
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<p>Lebanon</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building a culture of diversity (<i>Holdal Abou Adal Group- distribution, and manufacturing</i>). - Implementing equality policies and hiring female supervisors (<i>Malia Group- manufacturing, real estate, and solutions</i>). - Supporting and recruiting more women (<i>Information Technology Group (ITG)- Holding company</i>). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implementing anti-harassment policy, obligatory anti-harassment training for employees, confidential procedures, a Grievance policy, Code of Business Conduct, and Whistle Blow Policy (<i>Malia Group & Information Technology Group (ITG)</i>). - Implementing family-friendly policies (e.g. personal leaves and parental leaves, 10 paid for maternity, 1 and 3 days for paternity respectively), and providing flexible working hours, lactation rooms, and childcare financial support (nurseries, schools...) (<i>Malia Group & Information Technology Group (ITG)</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing continuous trainings, non-discriminatory promotions and facilitations based on employees' skills and attitudes (<i>Information Technology Group (ITG)</i>).
<p>Libya</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implementing advanced telehealth technologies to protect medical staff employees from Covid-19 virus (Private healthcare centers). - Implementing policies offering health insurance (not for all employees) (Few large companies). 	
<p>Morocco</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implementing e-recruitment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limiting remote and flexible working opportunities; granting only to managers and executives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limiting trainings to technical issues and offering them mainly for managerial and supervisory staff.
<p>Tunisia</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Basing recruitment mostly on word-of-mouth. - Using formal job descriptions, job advertisements, personality and skills assessment and contract negotiations (<i>FMC Group- Consulting</i>). 		



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6. RECOMMENDED CRISES-INFORMED RRP POLICIES & PRACTICES

6.1 Recruitment

Crises, as we have discussed throughout this report, can have a significant impact on women and organizations and their recruitment policies. In response, organizations can develop crises-informed recruitment policies to better address the challenges posed by these events. By doing so, organizations can better prepare to address the crises and ensure that they have the necessary personnel to maintain their operations. Furthermore, crises-informed recruitment policies can help organizations remain proactive and resilient in the face of uncertainty, while also helping to attract and retain a diverse and talented workforce. In this context, crises-informed recruitment policies are an essential tool for organizations to navigate through turbulent times and emerge stronger and more adaptable. Some examples include:

- Hybrid Recruitment:
 - In addition to in person interviews, offer online interviews, and assessments to mitigate around a particular crisis (e.g. Covid-19).
- Accelerated Hiring Process:
 - Streamline the hiring process to expedite the recruitment process to fill vacancies quickly, especially in high demand positions to respond to a crisis.
- Adapting the Job Descriptions:
 - Adjust job descriptions to include skills and experiences that are relevant to address and manage the current crisis.
- Flexibility in Work Arrangements:
 - Offer flexible work arrangements, such as remote work or flexible schedules, to better attract a more diverse group of candidates.

6.2 Retention

Crises can have a profound impact on employee retention, especially during times of economic uncertainty or organizational instability. As a result, organizations are increasingly recognizing the need to develop and implement crises-informed retention policies that can help mitigate the impact of these crises on their workforce. Such policies take into account the unique challenges posed by crises and provide proactive measures to support employees during times of uncertainty. By doing so, organizations can help reduce turnover, maintain employee engagement, and foster a sense of loyalty and commitment among their workforce. Moreover, crises-informed retention policies can help organizations weather the storm and emerge more resilient and adaptable. In this context, crises-informed retention policies are an essential component of an effective crisis management strategy, helping organizations to maintain their human capital and navigate through turbulent times. Some examples include:

- Offering hybrid and remote work arrangements
 - Provide allowances to support remote work and establish home offices.
 - Provide accommodations for individuals who may have been displaced or otherwise affected by a crisis, such as allowing remote work or flexible scheduling, reduced work hours, or job-sharing.
- Focusing on employee health and safety concerns
 - Implement health and safety measures to protect employees' physical health and well-being during the crisis. This includes providing personal protective equipment, implementing social distancing protocols, and offering vaccinations.
- Prioritizing employee well-being and burnout



- Allow employees to choose their preferred benefits to increase employee satisfaction.
 - Support employee well-being by providing access to mental health resources such as counseling services, employee assistance programs, or mental health days.
 - Offer counseling or other support services to employees who may be experiencing trauma-related symptoms such as anxiety, depression, or PTSD.
 - Offer paid time off or other benefits to employees who may need to take time off work to deal with the aftermath of a crisis.
 - Foster employee engagement by promoting communication, collaboration, and social connection through virtual team-building activities, regular check-ins, or company-wide events.
 - Offer training programs, professional development opportunities, or mentorship to help employees acquire new skills and advance their careers. These opportunities can help employees feel valued and invested in the organization.
 - Conduct sensitivity training for managers and other employees to help them better understand the impact of crises on individuals and how to provide appropriate support.
- Ensure employee financial wellness
 - Prioritize financial well-being by offering financial education and assistance programs.
 - Strike a balance between short-term and long-term financial incentives.
 - Prioritize pay-for-performance and offer bonuses or other forms of monetary compensation for exceptional performance.
 - Offer financial support such as emergency loans, paid time off, or access to financial planning resources to help employees manage their finances.
 - Reassure employees by communicating transparently about the company's financial situation and future plans.
 - Offer competitive compensation packages and benefits such as health insurance, retirement plans, or paid time off.
 - Develop employee 'Recognition Programs'
 - Show appreciation for the employees' hard work by recognizing their contributions and offering rewards such as bonuses or extra time off.
 - Engage in transparent communication:
 - Keep employees informed and provide regular updates on how the organization is managing the situation. Employers can communicate transparently, addressing employee concerns, and sharing relevant information about the crisis and its impact on the organization.

6.3 Promotion

Crises can create unique challenges for organizations when it comes to promotion policies. In the face of uncertainty and economic instability, it may be tempting for organizations to put promotions and career advancement on hold. However, crises can also create opportunities for growth and development, and it is essential for organizations to have crises-informed promotion policies in place to navigate these opportunities. By doing so, organizations can ensure that they continue to foster a culture of growth and development, while also taking into account the unique challenges posed by the crises. Moreover, crises-informed promotion policies can help organizations retain top talent, increase employee engagement, and promote a sense of organizational resilience. Some examples include:

- Provide Career Development support:
 - Provide upskilling and reskilling programs to enhance employee skills and competencies.
 - Offer career advancement opportunities to support employee growth and retention.
 - Implement a mentoring program to provide guidance and support to employees.



- Encourage cross-functional training and job rotation to broaden employees' skills and knowledge and protect them from attrition.
- Identify Transferable Skills:
 - Identify transferable skills that employees may have developed during the crisis, such as adaptability, problem-solving, and resilience. These skills can be used to promote employees to different positions or roles within the organization.
- Professional Development Opportunities:
 - Provide professional development opportunities for employees to learn new skills and knowledge relevant to the current crisis. This can prepare them for new roles and responsibilities within the organization.
- Review Current Promotion Policies:
 - HR can review the organization's promotion policies to ensure they are flexible and adaptive to the changing needs of the organization during the crisis. This can help ensure that employees are promoted based on their contributions and potential, rather than rigid policies that may not account for the unique challenges of the crisis.

6.4 Looking at Crises-informed RRP through an Intersectionality Lens

The intersectionality of RRP practices during crises is a critical consideration for organizations. From a feminist perspective, we recognize that individuals experience crises differently, depending on their various social identities and lived experiences. Intersectionality exposes the stark reality that individuals often face multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage simultaneously (Woods, Benschop, & van den Brink, 2021), amplifying their challenges during times of crisis. HR practices need to acknowledge and address these intersecting identities to ensure equitable support and opportunities for all employees. This includes considering factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, disability, age, and socioeconomic background when developing crisis response strategies, recruitment and retention policies, training programs, and promotion opportunities (Woods et al., 2021).

Furthermore, an intersectional approach to RRP practices during crises acknowledges that certain groups are disproportionately affected, amplifying existing injustices. Women of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, persons with disabilities, migrants, and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, for instance, face unique barriers and vulnerabilities during times of crisis. It is the responsibility of organizations to actively recognize and address these inequities through tailored support and resources that are specifically designed to uplift these marginalized groups. Moreover, an intersectional lens empowers organizations to identify and confront systemic inequities that may exacerbate the impact of crises on marginalized communities. Through comprehensive equity audits and the analysis of data through an intersectional framework, HR departments can uncover disparities in representation, promotion rates, pay gaps, and access to development opportunities. Armed with this knowledge, organizations can implement targeted interventions and RRP policies to rectify these injustices and ensure that all employees have an equal chance to thrive and contribute during times of crisis.

In conclusion, adopting an intersectional approach to RRP practices during crises is crucial for promoting equity, inclusivity, and resilience within organizations. By recognizing and addressing the unique challenges faced by individuals with intersecting identities, organizations can create a supportive and empowering work environment that harnesses the full potential of their diverse workforce, ultimately leading to better outcomes for both employees and the organization as a whole.



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