



The American
University in Cairo

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School of Business

Access to Knowledge
for Development Center



WOMEN INFORMAL DIGITAL ENTREPRENEURS IN EGYPT

Skills Development and Capacity Building

Policy Brief



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1. Executive Summary

In 2023, the Access to Knowledge for Development Center (A2K4D) at the American University in Cairo's Onsi Sawiris School of Business and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Egypt released the policy brief "Women and Work in Egypt's Informal Digital Economy"¹ based on research undertaken in 2021-2022. The policy brief identified the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs engaging in informal work in the digital economy in Egypt, and proposed areas for policy action. Four main recommendations emerged from the policy brief:

- a. Formalization;
- b. Gender;
- c. Skills and capacity building;
- d. Access to technology and knowledge.

These recommendations were informed by policy-oriented empirical research, which involved conducting thirty semi-structured interviews with women engaged in micro-scale digital entrepreneurship through platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. This process also involved comprehensive desk research, including a review of relevant literature and an in-depth analysis of fieldwork insights.

Recommendations on formalization emphasized the need to simplify bureaucratic procedures related to digital social commerce. This includes making legal and tax requirements easier to understand and more accessible. Gender-related recommendations focused on initiatives such as the Ministry of International Cooperation's 'Countering Stereotypes' project, which can serve as a tool to promote online safety for women and encourage gender-sensitive engagement with vendors. Skills and capacity-building efforts suggested tailored educational programs and skills development courses for women operating online businesses, alongside the creation of mentorship and support networks. Improving access to technology and knowledge involved subsidizing digital tools and promoting the effective use of public platforms and e-commerce marketplaces.

Building on the above, A2K4D chose the theme of *skills and capacity building* for further exploration and empirical work. Research revealed that there is a gap in skills and capacity development for women in the informal sector, and this is especially

¹ Rizk, N. (2023). Women and Work in Egypt's Informal Digital Economy Policy Brief. https://egypt.fes.de/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/publication/A2K4DxFES_Policy_Brief_2023_EN.pdf

relevant when it comes to the digital economy in Egypt. There is also a notable rise in the number of governmental and non-governmental programs and initiatives aimed at developing the skills of women entrepreneurs in Egypt's digital economy. This presents an excellent opportunity for fulfilling the objectives of our action-oriented research as we bring together the different stakeholders to a) develop new capacity building programs as decided organically by the group of stakeholders around the table, and b) bridge the gap between the beneficiaries and the already available programs.

2. Key Areas for Action

After in-depth exploration of the skill gaps for women informal entrepreneurs in Egypt's digital economy, the brief highlights three areas for action in terms of skills development. These three areas for action are based on our empirical research findings.

The areas for action are:

1. Digital Skills;
2. Business Skills;
3. Soft Skills.

3. Background

a) Women and Work in Egypt

In 2024, the rate of female unemployment in Egypt stood at 18 percent,² higher than the world average rate of 5.1 percent³; female labor force participation stood at 15 percent⁴, a rate much lower than the world average rate of 49⁵. According to a survey by the Egypt Labour Market Panel Survey (ELMPS), Egypt experienced a decline in female employment rates, with rates dropping from 17 percent to 15.3 percent between 2018 and 2023.⁶ This drop in female employment is accredited to several factors including lack of affordable childcare support,

²“Unemployment, female (% of female labor force) (modeled ILO estimate) - Egypt, Arab Rep.” World Bank, 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.FE.ZS?locations=EG>

³“Unemployment, female (% of female labor force) (modeled ILO estimate) - World.” World Bank, 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.FE.ZS?locations=IW>

⁴ “Labor force participation rate, female (% of female populations ages 15+) (modeled ILO estimate) - Egypt, Arab Rep.,” World Bank, 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLFC.ACT.FE.ZS?locations=EG-IW>

⁵ “Labor force participation rate, female (% of female populations ages 15+) (modeled ILO estimate) - World.,” World Bank, 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLFC.ACT.FE.ZS?locations=IW>

⁶ Assaad, R., & Mahmoud, E. (2024). Evolution of the Structure and Quality of Employment in Egypt.

limited private sector opportunities, a drop in agricultural jobs, and shrinking public sector employment⁷. Additionally, Egypt's public sector employment dropped from 30 percent in 2012 to 21 percent in 2023⁸, causing a drop in female labor force participation rates, especially among educated women⁹. Other underlying factors, such as unsafe commuting, harassment in the workplace, lack of legal protection in the private sector, and existing cultural norms, also play a role in the low female unemployment rate in Egypt¹⁰

Employment in the private sector does not always serve as an ideal

7 World Bank Group. (2025, March 12). Breaking Barriers: Boosting Women's Labor Force Participation in Egypt. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2025/03/12/breaking-barriers-boosting-women-s-labor-force-participation-in-egypt>

8 Assaad, R., & Mahmoud, E. (2024). Employment Conditions in Egypt Are Improving, But Only for Some: Findings from the 2023 Wave of the Egypt Labor Market Panel Survey.

9 Krafft, C., Assaad, R., & McKillip, Z. (2024, November). The Evolution of Labor Supply in Egypt through 2023. In Economic Research Forum Working Paper Series (No. 1749).

10 World Bank Group. (2025, March 12). Breaking Barriers: Boosting Women's Labor Force Participation in Egypt. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2025/03/12/breaking-barriers-boosting-women-s-labor-force-participation-in-egypt>

11 World Bank Group. (2021, March 30). Gender Equity Seal: A Key to Strengthening Egypt's Private Sector. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2021/03/30/gender-equity-seal-a-key-to-strengthening-egypt-s-private-sector>

alternative, with women struggling to find opportunities due to recruitment policies that favor men over women¹¹, who are perceived as temporary employees that will end their employment early when deciding to get married¹². Women also face challenges within private sector workplaces that discourage them from continuing to work including limited childcare support options, lack of flexibility and remote work arrangements¹³, gendered wage gaps, and discrimination and harassment at work¹⁴.

12 Assaad, R., & Mahmoud, E. (2024). Employment Conditions in Egypt Are Improving, But Only for Some: Findings from the 2023 Wave of the Egypt Labor Market Panel Survey.

13 World Bank Group. (2021, March 30). Gender Equity Seal: A Key to Strengthening Egypt's Private Sector. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2021/03/30/gender-equity-seal-a-key-to-strengthening-egypt-s-private-sector>

14 Constant, L., Edochie, I., Glick, P., Martini, J., & Garber, C. (2020). Barriers to employment that women face in Egypt: Policy challenges and considerations. California, United States: RAND.



Other challenges affecting women's labour force participation include expensive childcare and the burden of unpaid care work¹⁵. Women's responsibilities to both their jobs and families create the "double-shift" phenomenon, where women work two shifts; one in the market, and one at home¹⁶. In 2017, the average total working hours (including paid and unpaid work) for working women was estimated to be 68.68 hours per week, with working men only working for 53.60 hours¹⁷.

15 Wahish, N. (2024, November 28). A gender dilemma sidelining Egypt's women workforce. *Ahram Online*. <https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/535991.aspx>

16 Elantary, S. (2017, May 10). *Feminist Economics in Egypt*. New Women Foundation. <https://nwrcegypt.org/en/feminist-economics-in-egypt/>

17 Elantary, S. (2017, May 10). *Feminist Economics in Egypt*. New Women Foundation. <https://nwrcegypt.org/en/feminist-economics-in-egypt/>

Due to these challenges, many women have resorted to self-employment in recent years to balance their unpaid care work responsibilities with more flexible work opportunities¹⁸. These opportunities are mostly within the informal sector. Thus the skills development for women informal digital entrepreneurs in Egypt is of paramount importance.

b) Women and Informality

In low and lower-middle income countries, there is a high prevalence of female informal employment¹⁹, which is associated with vulnerable and precarious working conditions²⁰. In Egypt, the rate of informal employment for women in 2020 was 49 percent, and 74 percent for young women²¹.

18 Assaad, R., & Mahmoud, E. (2024). *Employment Conditions in Egypt Are Improving, But Only for Some: Findings from the 2023 Wave of the Egypt Labor Market Panel Survey*.

19 Ortiz-Ospina, E., Tzvetkova, S., & Roser, M. (2023). *Working women: Key facts and trends in female labor force participation*. Our world in data.

20 International Labour Office. (2018). *Women and men in the informal economy: a statistical picture (third edition)*. ILO. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/Women_men_informal_economy_statistical_picture.pdf

21 OECD/ILO/UNDP (2024), *Informality and Structural Transformation in Egypt, Iraq and Jordan: A Framework for Assessing Policy Responses in the MENA Region*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/efb16d0b-en>.



The decline in public sector employment, which has historically been relied on by women for work opportunities, has been attributed to this increase in female informality²².

Egypt's informal economy represents a significant share of the country's total gross domestic product (GDP) and is estimated to be one of the largest in the MENA region²³. While calculating the size of the informal sector is challenging, due to its invisibility by nature, Egypt's informal sector is estimated to account for 29.3-50 percent of Egypt's GDP²⁴.

22 Assaad, R., & Mahmoud, E. (2024). Employment Conditions in Egypt Are Improving, But Only for Some: Findings from the 2023 Wave of the Egypt Labor Market Panel Survey

23 OECD/ILO/UNDP (2024), Informality and Structural Transformation in Egypt, Iraq and Jordan: A Framework for Assessing Policy Responses in the MENA Region, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/efb16d0b-en>.

24 OECD/ILO/UNDP (2024), Informality and Structural Transformation in Egypt, Iraq and Jordan: A Framework for Assessing Policy Responses in the MENA Region, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/efb16d0b-en>.

c) Skills and Capacity Building

Women working in the informal economy, who are often unable to access formal education and training opportunities, acquire their skills and expertise through “learning by doing”²⁵ and develop their knowledge through first hand experience within their “workplace, community, and homes”²⁶. While hands-on exposure may provide women with some skills and experience, gendered skills disparities persist, especially skills pertaining to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields.

25 International Labour Office. (2018). Women and men in the informal economy: a statistical picture (third edition). ILO. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/Women_men_informal_economy_statistical_picture.pdf

26 International Labour Office. (2018). Women and men in the informal economy: a statistical picture (third edition). ILO. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/Women_men_informal_economy_statistical_picture.pdf

27 El Din, M. G. N. (2024). The Feminization of Deteriorated Labor Force Participation in EGYPT: 1990–2024 (Master's thesis, The American University in Cairo (Egypt)).



Factors that contribute to the gap in women's participation in STEM education and training include women's low self-efficacy regarding STEM education and possible career opportunities (despite performing better than their male counterparts), curriculums that are not gender-neutral, biased teachers that reinforce stereotypes, and a lack of female role models in the field and classroom²⁸.

A variety of skills are needed for workers to contribute to both the formal and informal sector, and in an economy experiencing a rapid digital shift, digital skills are essential. Other skills needed by entrepreneurs include soft skills and business skills such as product and service development, human resource management, financial management, and marketing²⁹. Skills development and capacity building programs equip women with the necessary skills and expertise needed to start, operate, and improve their businesses.

28 Evagorou, M., Puig, B., Bayram, D. D., & Janeckova, H. (2024). Addressing the gender gap in STEM education across educational levels.

29 Sousa, M. J., Almeida, M. D. R., Mastorakis, N. E., Pardalos, P. M., & Katehakis, M. N. (2014). Entrepreneurial skills development. *Recent Advances in Applied Economics*, 135-139.

The programs promote women's economic empowerment, encourage women to fully participate and contribute to the economy, and enhance women's self-confidence and independence³⁰.

While training and skills development programs offer an opportunity for women to enhance their skills and professional prospects³¹, a number of socio-economic and practical obstacles limit the accessibility of programs to women³². Women often face the challenge of balancing educational programs with other responsibilities such as household chores, child care, and at times, a full-time job.

30 Elneel, F. A., & Almulhim, A. F. (2024). Socio-Economic Factors and Women's Empowerment: The Mediation Role of Training/Skill Development. *WSEAS Transactions on Business and Economics*, 27, 192-201

31 International Labor Organization. (2024, September 19). Skills for Gender Equality. ILO. <https://www.ilo.org/skills-gender-equality>

32 International Labor Organization. (2020, August). Policy Brief - The gender divide in skills development: Progress, challenges and policy options for empowering women. ILO. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcms_p5/groups/public/%40ed_emp/%40ifp_skill/documents/publication/wcms_244380.pdf

Women in rural areas also must tend to farming and agricultural duties, and face constraints in accessing training opportunities due to geographical location and transportation difficulties³³. Informality serves as a further barrier contributing to the inability of women to access education and training opportunities, compounding the already existing educational disadvantages faced by women³⁴. Literacy levels and previous access to education also play a role in the effectiveness of training programs³⁵.

d) Capacity building and gender-mainstreaming

In order for training programs to target women effectively, gender-sensitive approaches are needed to address the challenges faced by women when enrolling in programs.

33 International Labor Organization. (2020, August). Policy Brief - The gender divide in skills development: Progress, challenges and policy options for empowering women. ILO.

https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed_emp/%40ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_244380.pdf

34 International Labor Organization. (2020, August). Policy Brief - The gender divide in skills development: Progress, challenges and policy options for empowering women. ILO.

https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed_emp/%40ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_244380.pdf

35 Elneel, F. A., & Almulhim, A. F. (2024). Socio-Economic Factors and Women's Empowerment: The Mediation Role of Training/Skill Development. WSEAS Transactions on Business and Economics, 21, 192-201.

Training programs need to be designed to address the existing barriers faced by women, such as high fees, language and literacy barriers, course timing, and the need for childcare facilities³⁶. Programs must also allow for flexibility and consider the multiple responsibilities juggled by women in the informal economy³⁸. Skills development policies and strategies that aim to meet national skills demands must include a gender lens, and must address the barriers preventing equal access and enrollment for men and women³⁸. Additionally, such policies must include and recognize the challenges faced by those facing compound vulnerabilities,

36 International Labor Organization. (2024, September 19). Skills for Gender Equality. ILO. <https://www.ilo.org/skills-gender-equality>

37 International Labor Organization. (2024, September 19). Skills for Gender Equality. ILO. <https://www.ilo.org/skills-gender-equality>

38 International Labor Organization. (2020, August). Policy Brief - The gender divide in skills development: Progress, challenges and policy options for empowering women. ILO.

https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed_emp/%40ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_244380.pdf



including migrant women, women with disabilities, and women living in remote rural areas³⁹.

e) Existing capacity building programs for women in Egypt

Several nationwide initiatives exist that aim to bolster women's capacities and promote their economic empowerment. These include government-led programs such as 'Heya Raeda Program' created by the Technology Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center and Qodwa-Tech, an initiative created by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT). Other initiatives led by multi-stakeholders include Rabeha, which is a United Nations Industrial Development (UNIDO)

39 International Labor Organization. (2020, August). Policy Brief - The gender divide in skills development: Progress, challenges and policy options for empowering women. ILO.

https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed_emp/%40ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_244380.pdf

and UN Women Joint Programme in partnership with the National Council for Women (NCW), the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MoTI) and the Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises Development Agency (MSMEDA), with the support of Global Affairs Canada (GAC). The "She is for a Digital Future" training program is another example of a multi-stakeholder approach, launched by the National Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development (NIGSD) in cooperation with CISCO and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). There are also other local women-led initiatives, such as Carerha, a women-focused tech education technology platform. More information on these programs can be found in Annex 1.

4. Fieldwork Findings: Skills Gaps, Challenges, and Areas for Policy Action

Fieldwork undertaken aimed to further explore the theme of skills and capacity building by engaging with key stakeholders in order to identify skills gaps among women entrepreneurs, as well as identifying challenges and ways forward. The fieldwork consisted of two focus groups, the first for women entrepreneurs and the second for relevant stakeholders.



Focus Group 1- Women Entrepreneurs: Held on 3 November 2024, the first focus group brought together 24 women entrepreneurs representing the [I Make This](#) Facebook page and [Qodwa Tech](#), an initiative by MCIT that aims to facilitate the active participation of Egyptian women in the economy by equipping women with the necessary skills to navigate the rapid digital transformation of Egyptian society. The entrepreneurs were given the opportunity to share their specific needs for skills and capacity development. This served as a mutual learning exercise to better inform the best implementation process for the policy recommendations.

Focus Group 2- Held on 24 November 2024, the second focus group consisted of 16 relevant stakeholders. Participants included skills and capacity building platform developers and owners, policymakers, civil society representatives, as well as two entrepreneurs that attended the first focus group. The purpose was to develop an agenda and plan for action to address the skill development needs of women informal entrepreneurs in the digital economy. The second focus group served as an opportunity to connect different stakeholders and entice them to develop skill and capacity building activities for women

informal entrepreneurs in the digital economy, as well as inform already existing skills development programs.

4.1 Focus Group 1 - Women Informal Digital Entrepreneurs

Based on participants' input, the skill development needs discussed during the first focus group were clustered into three main skill categories:

1. Digital skills;
2. Soft skills;
3. Business skills.

Below is an explanation of these skill development needs as voiced by the participants.

4.1.1 Digital Skills

Digital skills were frequently identified as areas in need of skill development by the entrepreneurs. Digital skills refer to “the ability to find, evaluate, use, share, and create content using digital devices, such as computers and smartphones.”

‘40 What are digital skills?’ (August 2022)
<https://digitalskills.unlv.edu/digital-marketing/what-are-digital-skills/>



This also includes digital marketing, cybersecurity, Artificial Intelligence, brand promotion, and digital communication via platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, etc.

- Participants highlighted the need for **digital and social media marketing skills** to establish and strengthen the online presence of women's businesses. They noted that the evolving nature of social media algorithms adds a layer of complexity to the effective use of social media tools, pointing to a persistent skills gap.

COVID-19 was mentioned as one contributing factor to the increase in online presence for businesses. Before the pandemic, women business owners specializing in handmade products thought that the most important skills were related to the actual process of craft making, such as finding the best workshops, sourcing quality materials, selecting skilled craftsmen, gems, metals, and leather. They later realized, during and after COVID-19, that understanding how to use social media to market their products is of paramount importance. Now, while these women entrepreneurs are designing and creating quality products, they are struggling with marketing and selling their products.

They expressed their desire to gain more digital and social media marketing skills and to learn how to utilize algorithms to expand their customer base.

- Participants also voiced their interest in developing their **market research skills** to help scale their businesses while adapting to changing consumer behaviors and market trends. These skills apply to both local and international markets and would enable entrepreneurs to innovate and thrive in competitive environments.
- Online security training is another digital skill that women identified as essential for learning how to protect their online business and mitigate the risks associated with social media use. With the increased reliance on digital platforms, digital safety and online security training have become essential for business sustainability.

4.1.2. Business Skills

The following are business skills voiced by the women during our focus group on business growth and development. Business skills include supply chain management, time management, the ability to attract, pitch, and negotiate with investors, pricing strategy, and entrepreneurial and innovative thinking.



- Participants want to **learn how to pitch and negotiate with investors** to scale and grow their businesses.
- Participants require skills for **managing roles and time** to bridge the gap between having a craftsmanship mindset and an entrepreneurial mindset.
- Participants lack knowledge of **enterprise resource planning (ERP) and inventory management**, which are needed to effectively manage inputs and outputs, to monitor costs, sales, and profits, and determine proper pricing.

4.1.3. Soft Skills

Alongside digital and business skills, the entrepreneurs expressed an interest in further developing their soft skills. Soft skills can contribute to meeting business needs by driving entrepreneurial success. **Language** skills, particularly in tracking page analytics within the digital economy, were identified as one of the soft skills that needs improvement. Some entrepreneurs are unable to track their Facebook page insights because data analytics are only offered in English.

As a result, they struggle to detect trends and refine their target audiences and marketing strategies. For those who are not fluent in English, the freely available online courses on the Internet are not useful. The importance of addressing the specific needs of women entrepreneurs, especially concerning English/Arabic language competency, is an issue that warrants attention.

4.2. Focus Group 2 - Skills and capacity-building platform representatives, policy makers, civil society representatives, and others

The second focus group brought together a diverse group of stakeholders. Participants included: three representatives from the School of Continuing Education and the Center for Learning and Teaching at The American University in Cairo, one former Microsoft Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) representative, two Vodafone Egypt Foundation representatives, one Amazon representative, one Capgemini representative, two skills and capacity building platform developers and owners, two representatives from IT-Blocks, Dell Technologies, and Internet Masr, one member of parliament, one independent educator, as well as two women entrepreneurs.

The following themes and challenges were highlighted by participants in the second focus group:



4.2.1. Expand connectivity as a prerequisite in the digital era

In order to access online skills development and capacity-building programs, a stable internet connection is a prerequisite. However, this remains a challenge for some in Egypt due to ongoing connectivity and infrastructure issues. These challenges are even more prevalent in rural areas where internet penetration rates are lower compared to urban areas⁴¹. The digital gap in Egypt is a consequence of a significant urban-rural divide, alongside other factors including wealth, education level, and gender⁴². The gender digital divide is often attributed to limited digital literacy, limited access and ownership of digital tools (laptops, computers, etc.), cultural norms, and concerns over security⁴³.

41 Badran, M. F. (2014). Young people and the digital divide in Egypt: An empirical study. *Eurasian Economic Review*, 4, 223-250.

42 PwC Middle East. Bridging the Digital Gap: The state of digital inclusion in the MENA region. (2022). PwC Middle East. <https://www.pwc.com/m1/en/publications/documents/bridging-digital-gap-state-digital-inclusion-mena-region.pdf>

43 Mohieldin, M. S., & Ramadan, R. (2022, May). Would Closing the Gender Digital Divide Close the Economic Gender Gap in Emerging Markets and Developing Economies?: An Empirical Assessment. *Economic Research Forum (ERF)*.

4.2.2 Develop tailored and sector-specific training

Although sector-specific training targets a smaller audience, its effectiveness is enhanced by the relevance and specificity of the subject matter. Trainers must possess expertise in the specific sectors where women are employed when providing educational programs. Courses should also be customized, which requires close collaboration between educators and entrepreneurs. For example, when creating an IT course for women operating in the handmade crafts sector, there needs to be collaboration between an IT instructor/educator and an entrepreneur within the handmade crafts sector. This will ensure that the service delivery by the trainer fits the skills gap identified by the entrepreneur in their specific sector.

4.2.3. Utilize training opportunities effectively

Conducting a needs assessment is necessary to ensure that training and skills development courses are utilized effectively. This needs assessment will ensure that women enroll in training programs that address the gaps in their skills, rather than opting for all freely available opportunities, often at the expense of their time.



There needs to be an increased awareness of skills that women already possess, and other areas where improvement is needed.

Commitment from entrepreneurs is also important when enrolled in virtual, self-taught programs. Programs usually provide a plan for how long the training will take and how many hours of study are required every day. It is imperative that women cultivate the necessary skills, such as time management and self-organization, in order to fully benefit from the programs available online.

Post-training follow-ups with program graduates are necessary to monitor each program's results and outcomes. For example, if a woman enrolls in a course related to exporting products, it is critical to find out if she succeeded in exporting her products after leaving the program. This will provide feedback on the effectiveness of the training program and help identify any improvements that need to be made.

4.2.4. Foster support and collaboration networks

It is key to cultivate spaces to support and encourage women on their entrepreneurial journeys. This can be done by creating networks for

collaboration and mutual growth in an environment where women help each other depending on their strengths. For example, older entrepreneurs who might lack digital literacy but possess strong craftsmanship skills can collaborate with younger, more tech-savvy entrepreneurs to perform marketing tasks.

4.2.5 Further language and digital skills development

Both language and digital skills can open doors to other skills and capabilities for women entrepreneurs. Improved command of the English language will enable the entrepreneurs to understand and interpret social media insights in a way that benefits their businesses. It is important for entrepreneurs to be familiar with business terminology in English. As for digital skills, the more advanced they are, the higher the chances that the entrepreneurs will be able to utilize online platforms for both personal skills development and business development.

4.2.6. Focus on financial literacy and pricing as key skills

Financial illiteracy is a problem facing many women informal entrepreneurs. Financial literacy courses are important since many women entrepreneurs are unfamiliar with pricing strategies, forecasting growth, and tracking progress.



4.2.7. Address informality as a barrier to accessing training opportunities

When donors and banks are involved, informality becomes a significant barrier, as these entities usually prefer working with legitimized businesses. As a result, informal businesses receive limited, small-scale, and informal opportunities, which restrict their potential for accessing support and mentorship. Nevertheless, offering rewarding training programs to formal businesses may incentivize informal women entrepreneurs to formalize their businesses in order to benefit from such programs. Other possible solutions include creating initiatives that do not require formality.

5. Recommendations

The following recommendations are tangible suggestions aimed at addressing each of the three gaps in skills identified by women informal digital entrepreneurs in Egypt during our fieldwork.

5.1. Customized digital skills pilot and program (for digital skills)

Description

This recommended program entails the creation and piloting of a customized fundamental digital skills program for women entrepreneurs, taught and led by trainers that have background knowledge on the

specific sector at hand (eg. handmade goods, homemade food, etc.)

One of the challenges highlighted by the participants in the first focus group was that often, trainers provide general programs that lack individual needs of entrepreneurs operating in different sectors. The pilot program will take into account the women's level of digital skills, as well as the sector they operate in. In order to do so, there needs to be collaboration between educators and entrepreneurs. A needs assessment will be needed to ensure that the women enrolled are at the specific skill level the program is targeting. Follow-ups will also need to be conducted in order to prove that the program has tangible outcome.

5.2. Trial Shark Tank (for business skills)

Description

This recommended program entails the creation of a trial "shark tank", where women will learn how to sell, pitch and negotiate with investors through theatre and roleplaying. "Shark tank" is a popular television series, where business owners have the opportunity to present their ideas to angel investors. Similar to the existing "shark tank" show, judges would provide feedback on the ideas and business models presented by the women entrepreneurs, and offer

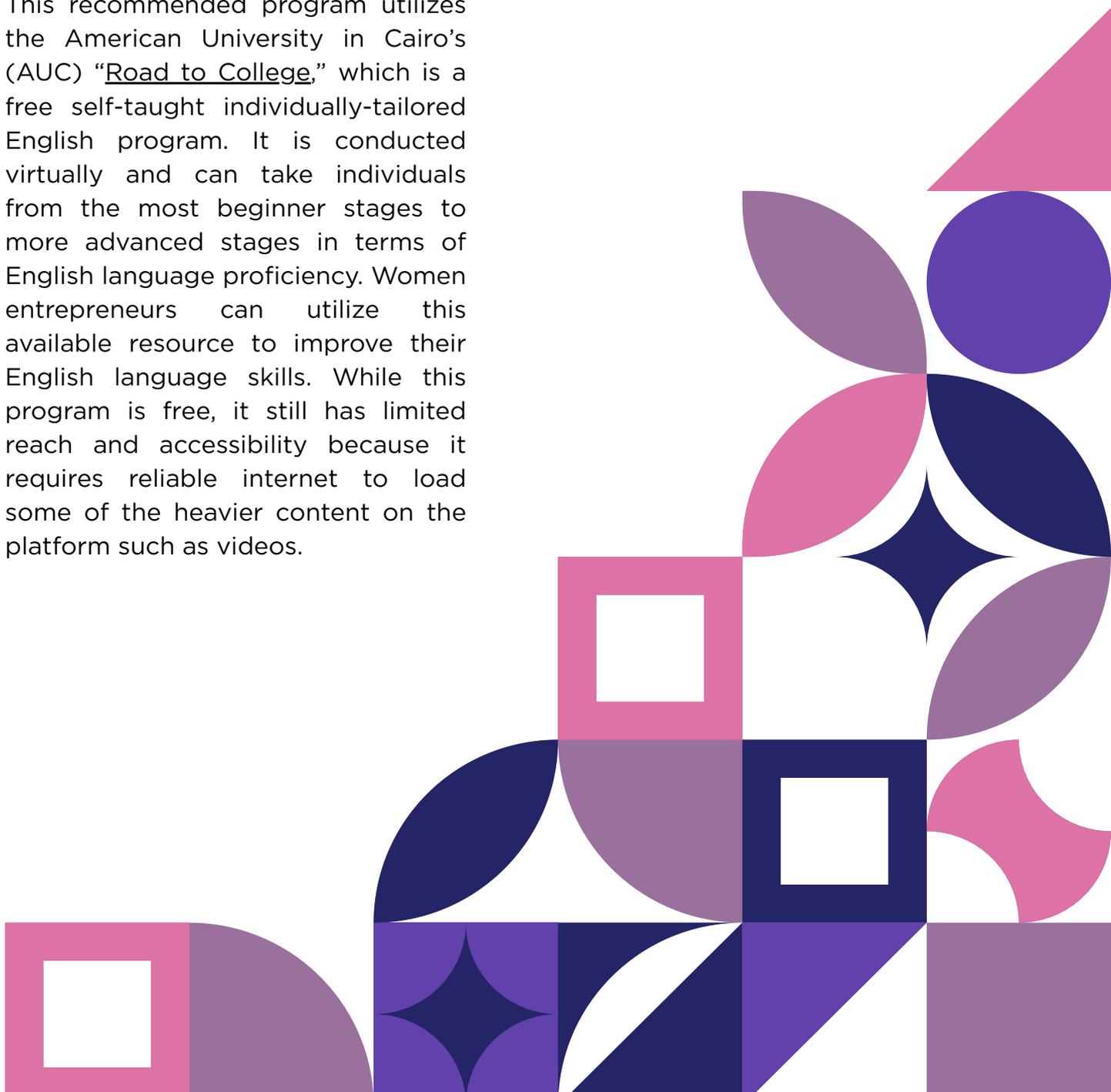


guidance on how to improve their business models moving forward. The program will equip women with the needed business skills such as negotiation and storytelling, as well as the chance for mentorship by the judges.

5.3. English language skills (for soft skills)

Description:

This recommended program utilizes the American University in Cairo's (AUC) "Road to College," which is a free self-taught individually-tailored English program. It is conducted virtually and can take individuals from the most beginner stages to more advanced stages in terms of English language proficiency. Women entrepreneurs can utilize this available resource to improve their English language skills. While this program is free, it still has limited reach and accessibility because it requires reliable internet to load some of the heavier content on the platform such as videos.



Annex 1: Existing Capacity Building Programs for Women in Egypt

Heya Raeda

The ‘Heya Raeda Program’, created by the Technology Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center, is an annual program tailored for women entrepreneurs that employ technology in their business operations with the purpose of equipping women with the necessary tools to develop and grow their businesses in Egypt⁴⁴. The program is composed of 15 cycles with each cycle spanning 6 days, and provides women with personalized mentorship with women mentors and coaches, and online sessions that tackle the importance of utilizing technology and innovation, and the basics of financing and marketing⁴⁵. A lesson learned from Heya Raeda is that “women are more comfortable participating in a fully female environment.”⁴⁶

Qodwa-Tech

Qodwa-Tech, an initiative created by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) under the Digital Transformation for Sustainable Development in Egypt (DT4SDE) project, aims to empower women and women entrepreneurs through seminars and advisory sessions addressing topics such as “freelancing and entrepreneurship, pricing, packaging, photography, Fintech opportunities, and AI.”⁴⁷ The training programs provided also aim to promote digital literacy among women in remote and rural areas⁴⁸.

44 The International Network for Small and Medium Enterprises (INSME). The Egyptian Heya Raeda Programme. <https://www.insme.org/the-egyptian-heya-raeda-programme/>

45 Technology Innovation & Entrepreneurship Center (TIEC). Heya Raeda. <https://tiec.gov.eg/English/Programs/She-program/Pages/default.aspx>

46 The International Network for Small and Medium Enterprises (INSME). The Egyptian Heya Raeda Programme. <https://www.insme.org/the-egyptian-heya-raeda-programme/>

47 Ministry of Communications and Information Technology. Qodwa-Tech for Women’s Empowerment. https://mcit.gov.eg/en/Digital_Citizenship/Digital_Transformation_for_Sustainable_Development_in_Egypt/Qodwa_Tech_Initiative

48 Ministry of Communications and Information Technology. Qodwa-Tech: Empowering Women through Tech Training, Digital Skills in Beni Suef. (2024, July 15). https://mcit.gov.eg/en/Media_Center/Latest_News/News/67797

Rabeha

Rabeha, a United Nations Industrial Development (UNIDO) and UN Women Joint Programme in partnership with the National Council for Women (NCW), the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MoTI) and the Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises Development Agency (MSMEDA), with the support of Global Affairs Canada (GAC), is an initiative that provides women with the skills and confidence to find work, as well as addressing the root causes limiting women's economic participation⁴⁹. The initiative aims to empower 6,300 women in 7 targeted governorates: Cairo, Alexandria, Beheira, Beni Suef, Giza, Fayoum, and Minya. It also specifically targets the dates, handicrafts, and medicinal and aromatic plants value chains⁵⁰. The initiative lists several goals including capacity building and improving women-led businesses' ability to expand, increasing the number of new businesses founded by women entrepreneurs, increasing women entrepreneurs' access to financial and nonfinancial services, as well as advocating for gender-sensitive public policies⁵¹.

While participating in the training sessions, women gain key skills including “communications, personal branding, teamwork, time and stress management, problem-solving, email etiquette, conflict management, negotiating skills, CV-writing, and interview skills.”⁵² The program adopts a three-tier training approach:

- Tier 1: Awareness-building sessions that educate women on key topics related to establishing and running a business. Topics include ideation, marketing, financing, legal and tax requirements, and business ethics⁵³.

49 United Nations Egypt. (2023, May 15). Rabeha Programme Empowers Egyptian Women on their Journey to Employment. <https://egypt.un.org/en/231564-rabeha-programme-empowers-egyptian-women-their-journey-employment>

50 UN Women. (2023). Women's Economic Empowerment for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth in Egypt – “Rabeha”. https://egypt.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/EN%20-women%20empowerment%209-8-2022Web_0.pdf

51 UN Women. (2023). Women's Economic Empowerment for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth in Egypt – “Rabeha”. https://egypt.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/EN%20-women%20empowerment%209-8-2022Web_0.pdf

52 United Nations Egypt. (2023, May 15). Rabeha Programme Empowers Egyptian Women on their Journey to Employment. <https://egypt.un.org/en/231564-rabeha-programme-empowers-egyptian-women-their-journey-employment>

53 UN Women. (2023). Women's Economic Empowerment for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth in Egypt – “Rabeha”. https://egypt.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/EN%20-women%20empowerment%209-8-2022Web_0.pdf

Tier 2: Technical training sessions targeting high potential women entrepreneurs and early-stage businesses established by women. The women entrepreneurs are provided with sector-specific technical skills training, as well as coaching on creating business plans and models.

She is for a Digital Future

The "She is for a Digital Future" training program, launched by the National Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development (NIGSD) in cooperation with CISCO and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), aims to bridge the digital divide by developing and strengthening the technological capabilities of women in Egypt⁵⁶. In the preliminary phase, the initiative aims to train 2,000 women through courses related to general and advanced computer skills, cybersecurity, the adoption of sustainable development goals in daily life, gender equality and financial inclusion⁵⁷. The program targets female candidates from Egyptian universities and the women governmental employees as part of the state's goal of providing equal opportunities to women and enhancing the role of women in Egypt's digital transformation⁵⁸.

Carerha

Carerha was originally founded with the mission of connecting women with companies that offer flexible job opportunities that align with their personal and professional needs. As the platform grew, a core issue was identified, which was that several women with career gaps possess outdated skills, making it difficult for them to compete in the labor market.

54 UN Women. (2023). Women's Economic Empowerment for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth in Egypt – "Rabeha". https://egypt.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/EN%20-women%20empowerment%209-8-2022Web_0.pdf

55 UN Women. (2023). Women's Economic Empowerment for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth in Egypt – "Rabeha". https://egypt.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/EN%20-women%20empowerment%209-8-2022Web_0.pdf

56 Ministry of Planning and Economic Development. (2021). Egypt's NIGSD launches the "She is for a Digital Future" training program to train 2,000 women as a first stage. <https://mped.gov.eg/singlenews?id=818&lang=en>

57 Ministry of Planning and Economic Development. (2021). Egypt's NIGSD launches the "She is for a Digital Future" training program to train 2,000 women as a first stage. <https://mped.gov.eg/singlenews?id=818&lang=en>

58 Ministry of Planning and Economic Development. (2021). Egypt's NIGSD launches the "She is for a Digital Future" training program to train 2,000 women as a first stage. <https://mped.gov.eg/singlenews?id=818&lang=en>

In addition, few women started their own businesses with prior experience in running a business⁵⁹. To address this, the platform evolved into a women-focused tech educational technology (EdTech) platform, empowering women ranging from fresh graduates to career returners⁶⁰.

59 Carerha. (2024). About Us. <https://apps.carerha.com/learning/about-us>

60 Carerha. (2024). About Us. <https://apps.carerha.com/learning/about-us>

