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Female Academic Role Model Empowerment, Equality and Sustainability at Universities in Mediterranean Region: towards 2030 Agenda – FREE

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Executive Summary

This report provides a situation analysis on various academic environments in the in Mediterranean Region, exploring factors affecting the experiences of female academics, their career progression, and the lack of female representation at senior management levels across target universities in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. The report also produces an assessment of the academic environment within which female academicians operate and the needs for training examining the justification and importance of introduction of Gender Equality and Sustainability centres. The methodology applied in project FREE in diagnosing the situation utilized a survey administered at the project target groups. Project FREE target groups comprise academics, administrative staff, decision-makers and female students. A one-way translation from English to Arabic was performed on four questionnaires. The questionnaire distribution strategy employed a diversified approach where paper questionnaires and online questionnaires were distributed. The sample design employed nonprobability-sampling techniques. The sizes of the samples vary across target institutions. The findings of the analysis are reported across individual, group, and institutional levels, examining the project target groups. Project FREE training needs are reported highlighting the significance and importance of soft skills, leadership skills, awareness in topics in the scope of Gender Equality, and challenging mind-sets and stereotypes. The limitation of the diagnosis analysis is reported highlighting the lack of adequate technological infrastructure mainly in Syria including internet connection and technological compatibility.

Introduction

To succeed in today's new paradigm of academic learning and research environment, higher education institutions need sustainable leadership that can transcend time, place, geography, ethnicity, and above all, gender. The imperative to empower female academics is accelerating, as academic institutions, at a global level, have been increasingly relying on the significant roles played by female academics and professionals. Research affirms that there is a dire need for a more significant role for female academics in the Middle East and South Mediterranean region.

The need for developing capable female academics with technical, interpersonal, conceptual and decision-making skills, which enhance robust and sustainable academic environment, has become an increasingly important discipline in academic institutions. Challenges associated with social, cultural, economic and gender issues are evident factors that could impair female academics from taking leadership roles in academic environment. On the other hand, information overload, technological advancement, and connectivity, battle for analytical and research competencies, and increasing ethical dilemmas have been among essential factors stimulating the need for female leaders, who acquire useful competencies and that could transcend cultural, geographical, political, racial and national aspects.

Female academics can contribute to building and creating a crucial impact in their countries and the region in different aspects economically, politically, socially and, most importantly, as academic leaders initiating change in the academic arena. It is evident that deeply ingrained gender and social norms inhibit women from taking leading management roles in higher institutions and professional aspects in business in Middle Eastern and south Mediterranean regions.



Equality is one of the five values on which the European Union has based its foundation on. The EU has put significance and strategies to establish and sustain gender equality, which was positively reflected on the social, economic, political and other important aspects of European society. Gender inequality as a phenomenon under examination reflects negatively on the human, social, economic, and political aspects of a society. Establishing economic independence across both men and women has a positive impact on the economy and will result in better utilization of human capital in a given nation. The gender gap exists in different sectors where women are found to be overrepresented in lower-paid sectors and underrepresented in senior management levels and decision-making positions

In order to achieve the objectives of EU and UN sustainable development goals and agenda 2030 namely smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth, the talent pool of women needs to be used more effectively, and measurable steps need to be considered. Project FREE aims to initiate this approach, enhancing gender equality and female empowerment in higher education in Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria. This will be achieved through partnership building and promoting EU social and organizational values and practices in Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria.

Generally, the topic of gender equality is significant because the gender gap affects 50% of the total population. Moreover, gender gap influences everyone. The rationale and significance of gender equality is that if 50% of human beings are for various reasons prevented to effectively contribute to different social, economic, professional, and political aspects of life, then societies fail to achieve their full potential. The Middle East and North Africa region is no exception to this approach.

According to the Global Gender Gap Report published by World Economic Forums' Western Europe has a gender gap of 24%, leaving North America behind with a gap of 27%, and Latin America and the Caribbean with a gap of 29%. The East Asia and the Pacific region have recorded a gender gap of 32%, and 34 %; and South Asia has a gap of 34%. Most significantly, for the purpose of this project the Middle East scores a remaining gap of slightly less than 40%. Prior research indicates that economic gender equality would result in significant economic benefits (Forum, 2018), yet this is far from happening in the region. It is estimated that it would take 157 years to close the overall gender gap in the Middle East and North Africa.

The global gender gap index is measured across four dimensions: economic participation and opportunities, educational attainment, health, survival, and political empowerment. Economic participation sub-index, which is a significant indicator in the scope of this project, is defined in three main approaches: the participation gap, the remuneration gap, and the advancement gap. Also, education attainment is a sub-index indicator with a crucial significance for project FREE. Educational attainment is measured by examining the gap between the access of men and women to education through ratios of female to male in primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education, as well as female versus male literacy rates.

In recent times in Arab societies, which are viewed as being patriarchal, female education is acceptable and supported; however, education is not helping these women to capitalize on the full potential in terms of employment. Therefore, the level of education of women in SMR societies is not a useful indicator of the economic status of women. Studies indicate that, in patriarchal societies, women are structurally controlled and disadvantaged, by the predominantly male-



dominated culture. Patriarchy is typically stronger in rural areas and in peasant and tribal communities.

The prevalent organizational environment of Higher Education in the Middle-eastern region is generally considered as male-dominated paradigm which is characterized by (1) deficiency in the development of a sustainable development training programs for its human academic resources particularly in the scope of female executive leadership, (2) lack of career support and counselling centres for female academics and students subject to different forms of discrimination; (3) lack of integration of gender issues and sustainability at courses and curricula levels; (4) and lack of strategic emphasis and investment in development of scientific research centres in the scope of Gender Equality, Sustainability Issues and Female Empowerment.

The effects of this problem have led to a generation of female academics characterized by inability, and poor knowledge, and being stuck in low power dead-end jobs, who rarely get the chance to develop their full potential and gain the knowledge they need as executive managers at entry, mid and senior levels.

The situation for female academics, generally in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, is that they lack resources to seek professional support when they are subject to different forms of discrimination. On top of that, there is a severe deficiency in programs of study that tackle issues relevant to women empowerment and gender equality. There is also a lack of supporting policies to increase the number of female representations at entry, mid and senior levels.

The aim of this final report is to provide a situation analysis on academic environment across the South Mediterranean region target universities, exploring factors affecting female academics experience and career progression and lack of academic representation at senior management levels. The study aims to develop strategies related to empowering female academics, by identifying training topics in related fields for project target groups, as well as policy implications. The project target groups comprise academics, administrative staff, decision-makers, and female students, particularly postgraduates. In the next section, a description of universities profile will be provided.

1. Project FREE South Mediterranean Region Universities

FREE aims to establish capacity building in higher education, through the empowerment of female academics in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan across the target higher institutions. By improving the number of female representation at university boards, FREE aims to promote a culture of gender equality in line with UN vision and agenda of 2030 to achieve sustainable development goals focusing on the 5th goal that is gender equality.

FREE encompasses eleven higher education institutions from European and South Mediterranean universities across Spain, Lithuania, Germany, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria. The European universities comprise of four universities. Universidad Nacional De Educación A Distancia (UNED) is of project coordinator and Vilnius Gediminas Technical University (VGTU) is Dissemination work package leader. Universidad De Alicante (UA) is quality assurance work package leader. Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg (UOL) is training work package leader. As for the South Mediterranean region universities FREE comprises of



private and public universities from Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. The following subsection provides illustration on South Mediterranean Region Universities across Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

1.1 Arab International University

Arab International University (AIU) is a private Syrian university founded by a consortium of academic figures, businesspersons and professionals in the year 2005 as a privately owned university created under Presidential Decree as an institution of higher education, and an entity for boosting scientific potentials. The university comprises a number of faculties in operation: pharmacy, informatics engineering, architecture, civil engineering, fine arts, business administration, and Law. It got the approval from the Ministry of Higher Education in Nov 2016 to establish faculty of Dentistry. AIU offers Bachelor Degrees in the various disciplines available in its faculties, whose certificates, study plans and diverse systems are recognized by the Board of Higher Education at the Syrian Ministry of Higher Education. Arab International University has accreditation by the Standing Conference of the Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK) as full university and rated H+. AIU was an active partner of TEMPUS project namely MATRE, which stands for modernizing academic teaching and research environment in Syria and Lebanon. AIU has more than 30 cooperation agreements with international institutions of higher education all over the world and especially with German, French and British universities. Most important in this context is to establish specific project networks or consortia in order to share knowledge and transfer experiences. As a Private institution of higher education and academic research, Arab International University strives to be a center of excellence that conforms to international standards in education and research.

At Arab International University, Syria, female academics are adequately presented at department and faculty levels. However, female representation at the university board is very marginal. There is only one female director, at university board. The representation of women in academic leadership positions is minimal. There are no female deans at AIU. There are female vice-deans and heads of academic departments. However, the representation is not adequate. Even though if female representation improves, there still work and planning to be achieved to make their impact and existence significant.

The number of academic staff disaggregated by gender at AIU is 226 for male academics, and 140 for female academics, with a total number of 366. Female academics account for 38%, whereas male academics 62%. Consequently, a number of administrative staff disaggregated by gender at AIU is 153 for male administrative staff, and 108 for female administrative staff, with a total number of 261. Female administrative staff accounts for 41%, whereas male administrative 59%. As for the number of students disaggregated by gender at AIU, 2557 are male students, and 2274 are female students, with 4831. Female students account for 47%, whereas male students 53%.



1.2 Damascus University

Damascus University is a leading and the largest public University in Syria. It offers education and continuous learning to thousands of students via its thirty-nine faculties that cover all the areas of study. In addition, Damascus University is an important and distinguished stakeholder in the society by the relations it has with the Business Sector, the Social Societies, and the different Organizations in Syria. The cooperation with the Business Sector (Commercial and Industrial Federations, Agencies, and Corporations) guarantees a positive and crucial role for the university in the economic life. Moreover, DU provides training courses and workshops in different subjects, which make it a source for enhancing skills and competencies in the society. With more than two-hundred thousand students in different levels (Undergraduate, Graduate, Master and PhD), DU is considered the first university in Syria, and accordingly, its adopted curricula is the underline for the diffused knowledge in the country. In addition, about ten thousands staff works in DU (administrative and IT, teachers and researchers).

1.3 Lebanese University

The Lebanese University (LU) was founded at 1951 as the only public university in Lebanon. Widely recognized for the advanced level of higher education that provides to its 80,000 students (nearly 45 percent of university students in Lebanon) making it one of the largest and most important universities in the Middle East. LU comprises sixteen faculties, including faculty of Literature and Human Sciences, faculty of Law, faculty of Political and Administrative Sciences, faculty of Business Administration and Economical Sciences, faculty of Sciences, faculty of Social Sciences, faculty of Fine Arts, faculty of Pedagogy, faculty of Journalism and Documentation, faculty of Engineering, faculty of Agriculture, faculty of Public Health, faculty of Medicine, faculty of Dentistry, faculty of Pharmacy, faculty of Tourism and Hotels, the Academic Institution of Technology and 3 doctoral schools: Doctoral School of Literature, Humanities & Social Sciences, Doctoral School of Law, Political, Administrative and Economic Sciences, Doctoral School of Science and Technology. The University is also affiliated with the Institute of Applied Sciences and Economics (**CNAM-ISAE**), which operates in cooperation with CNAM in France. It has 64 branches over all the Lebanese Territory. The Lebanese university provides PhD Doctorate degrees with 57 specializations, Master degrees with 222 specializations and 161 tracks, Bachelor degrees with 86 specializations and 77 tracks.

The official administrative language adopted at LU is Arabic, however the teaching is provided in Arabic, French and English; all science subjects are taught in French, English or both.

The Lebanese University has obtained the Institutional Accreditation from the High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (Hcéres), an official institution recognized in France for the evaluation and accreditation of the various institutions of higher education in France, Europe and worldwide.



The Lebanese University is the only public institution in Lebanon carrying out the functions of the public higher education with its various majors and degrees, scientific research, and continuous training through: Dissemination of knowledge and culture; Provision of scientifically qualified human resources; Community service through studies and continuous training to meet the needs of development; Scientific presence at the national, regional and global levels; Deepening social and national integration and instilling human values in the heart of citizens (<https://www.ul.edu.lb/lu/mission.aspx>, 2019).

No strategy for the development of the Lebanese University can be separated from the comprehensive political approach that the country is supposed to adopt in terms of national education, higher education and scientific research (<https://www.ul.edu.lb/lu/strategy.aspx>, 2019). Strengthening of research and studies and intensifying the standards and methodological specifications to protect the quality of research and reinforce the academic ranks, is one of its main strategies. Furthermore, a main approach applied by the Lebanese university, is the activating of external relations and cooperating with local and international universities through the conclusion of framework agreements such as the exchange of professors, students, experts, teaching and training programs, modern technologies, and joint supervision of master's thesis and doctoral dissertations. The number of agreements is currently 340, including 150 agreements signed since 2017.

The Lebanese University cooperates with the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in Lebanon to support the doctoral school and PhD students in Literature, Humanities & Social Sciences, and with UNICEF to audit the administrative work of the Central Administration within an agreement signed on 19 December 2018. Moreover, the Lebanese University collaborates with the European Union to activate ERASMUS+, and is currently involved in more than 65 European projects.

The number of full-time academics in 2019 was 2017 including 41.65% females whereas the number of hourly-paid teaching staff was 3257 including 42.7% females. The number of full time employees was 1024 including 64.26% females.

Between 19 faculties' deans, 16 are males and 3 are females, however the number of students in (2018-2019) was 80787 including 70.7% females.

1.4 Modern University for Business & science

The Modern University for Business and Science (MUBS) mission is to provide a rich and innovative academic environment that provides students of diverse backgrounds with equal opportunities to learn, explore, and attain the knowledge and skills necessary to realize their career objectives and empower them to contribute positively and effectively to their community, country, and the world. The university's guiding vision is to lead the way in educational quality, academic integrity, and scientific research. MUBS is committed to creating conscientious world leaders who are exemplary in their moral, professional, and educational excellence. These values stem from a



sense of responsibility towards our local and broader community, and the great potential of our youth whose creativity is empowered through creative, modern pedagogical approaches that are reflective of our innovative and dynamic identity.

Therefore, MUBS aims at providing high quality of education (SDG4) and promoting wellness in communities especially in rural areas. MUBS works on promoting wellness among its students through adopting leadership programs and empowering girls to have an effective role in their communities (SDG5). MUBS builds partnerships with many stakeholders including European and American institutions, NGOs, municipalities, and local communities (SDG17). MUBS has received many grants from the European Commission and the British council to work on projects related to youth engagement and women empowerment. In addition, MUBS is a partner in the FREE project that reflects its mission in promoting gender equity and capacity building among its employees, students and faculty members.

There are four faculties at MUBS that include bachelor and master programs; School of Health Sciences, International School of Business, School of Education and Social Work, and School of Computer and Applied Sciences. There are 3576 (59% are females) university students enrolled at MUBS (MUBS Website, 2019).

1.5 American University of Beirut

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut (AUB), is a private, not-for-profit, coeducational, independent, non-sectarian institution of higher learning operating under a charter from the State of New York and accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. AUB is committed to the ideals of critical thinking, open debate, and diversity. The university's faculty serves over 8,665 students in more than 130 Ph.D., Master's, and Bachelor's degree programs in a variety of disciplines and fields including Engineering and Architecture; Agricultural and Food Sciences; Health Sciences; Medicine, and Business. The university's beautiful 60.9 acre campus overlooking the Mediterranean Sea contains 64 buildings, including a Medical Center (420 beds), four libraries, three museums, the Charles W. Hostler Student Center (athletics), two art galleries, seven dormitories, athletic fields, and numerous gardens. AUB has more than 64,000 alumni residing in more than 120 countries worldwide. Additional information is available at www.aub.edu.lb.

The University is governed by an autonomous Board of Trustees and since its founding, AUB has set standards in higher education worldwide. The University provides a rigorous curriculum in the American style liberal arts and the language of instruction is English. The University stresses high academic standards and is committed to the ideals of critical thinking, open debate, and diversity. AUB is a coeducational institution that is open to all qualified students without regard to race, religion, economic status, or political affiliation. The University places a high premium on developing a student's appreciation of, and responsibility to, his/her respective society and culture. The primary region served by the American University of Beirut is the Arabic-speaking world, although a fair number of international students usually enroll at the University.



1.6 University of Petra

Located in the West of Amman, the University of Petra's friendly campus houses 7304 undergraduate and graduate students in the faculties of: Arts & Sciences, Administrative & Financial Sciences, Pharmacy & Medical Sciences, Information Technology, Architecture & Design, Law, Mass Communication, and Faculty of Engineering. The **University of Petra** in Jordan was established in 1991 and led by the President of the University Prof. Marwan El-Muwalla. University is a hub for creating knowledge through research, developing skills, applying knowledge to new technologies, and technology transfer. Therefore, UOP utilizes its friendly-to-use campus to unleash the minds of men and women towards new horizons of thought, philosophy and logic. It provides an intriguing environment of freedom of thought, inquiry, interactive and blended learning, and R&D facilities. The University is aggressive in developing an outreach program for community development and engaging in regional and international sciences for bridging with other scientists, journals, and symposia to reach solutions to social problems, open new opportunities of employment and eradicate poverty.

In its endeavour to achieve this, UOP has achieved the ISO 9001 of Management for supporting higher education certificate and the certificate of Quality Assurance of the Higher Education Accreditation Commission; In addition, the University is 1st runner-up on the QS ranking of private universities. UOP works toward quality, relevance and alignment in terms of teaching and research, as well as bridging with industry, public and private sectors and with the community at large.

With the development of e learning, e-library and high-speed communication facilities, UOP has transformed itself into a smart campus where students and faculty interact with knowledge to develop their state-of-the-art skills with an aim towards enhancing entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity. The University of Petra currently has 728 staff members. These include academic, administrative, and Part-time staff members. The number of female employees across various disciplines and levels is 273 (37.5%), while 455 (62.5%) are male. Female students, at the University, outnumber their male counterparts, as they reached 4117 compared to 3187 male students in the academic year 2018/2019. In relation to administrative staff members, UOP has 151 female employees and 262 male employees. The total number of teaching staff at the university currently stands at 288 out of which 107 are females and 181 are males. In terms of women's participation in leadership positions, the data shows that 21 women are in senior positions (Head of academic departments 10, deans 3 and directors 8).

1.7 Princess Sumaya University for Technology

Princess Sumaya University for Technology (PSUT) is founded on 1991, and is the only private and non-profit university in Jordan. It is owned by the Royal Scientific Society (RSS), the foremost-applied research center in Jordan. Like RSS, PSUT is part of El Hassan Science City located in Amman, Jordan. PSUT's main mission is to educate students and qualify them to pursue careers in the fields of information and communications technology (ICT), electronics, computer engineering, communication engineering, and business. PSUT offers Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) degrees in Computer Science, Software Engineering, Computer Graphics and Animation, Networks And



Information Security Engineering, Computer Engineering, Electronics Engineering, Communications Engineering, Power & Energy Engineering, MIS, Business Administration, E-marketing & Social Media, Accounting, Business Information Technology. In addition, Masters of Science (M.Sc) degrees are conferred in Computer Science, Information System Security & Digital Criminology, Electrical Engineering, Data Science, Enterprise System Engineering, as well as Global Master of Business Administration (MBA) in collaboration with Lancaster University in the United Kingdom. PSUT offers also (PhD) degree in Computer Science.

Being part of El Hassan Science City, PSUT strives to create a culture of entrepreneurship among its students. PSUT is licensed and the Jordanian Higher Education Accreditation Commission accredits all its programs.

PSUT strives to be the leader in building the ICT and electronics sectors in Jordan and a research platform for Jordanian industry. Simply put, our goal is to have PSUT be "the University of the Future" where highly qualified and talented students are educated and ready to join competitive markets in the 21st century and beyond. We at PSUT promote excellence, scholarship, commitment, innovation and entrepreneurship that drive the private sector.

In less than twenty years, PSUT has become the leading university for the study of information and communication technology, electronics and computer engineering, and a center of educational excellence in both Jordan and the surrounding region. Graduates are in high demand and often receive job offers before they complete their degrees. Moreover, PSUT research activities are focused in the key areas of interest to EL Hassan Science City to help with Jordan's economic drive.

PSUT encourages creativity and innovation in all areas of life. Versatility, curiosity, an appetite for continual personal growth and enrichment, and the ability to look outside one's own discipline are the keys to success in the wider world, and, beyond that, to leadership and the possibility of making a unique contribution to the community. Rigorous academic work at PSUT is complemented outside the classroom by an offering of extra-curricular activities.

2. Higher Education Environment at South Mediterranean Region

2.1 Higher Education Environment in Syria

Universities at Syria definitely need the knowledge and expertise of social and technical innovation skills to create a sustainable future for Syria. Before 2011, Higher Education sector was expanding as the introduction of private universities in Syria through a legislation, which was applied in 2001, allowed the operation of Syrian private HEIs. Before the devastating war in Syria and between 2001 and 2010 private universities in Syria were growing gradually and were competing to win and recruit students primarily undergraduates. At 2011, a long-term crisis has torn Syria over the past eight years, which has created a devastating situation on social, economic, environmental and political levels including both private and public sectors. Higher education is still operating; however, it has gone through significant declination and worsening through the past eight years of struggle and devastation. Many people in Syria either lost their jobs, their assets and properties or in the worst cases their lives. The devastating situation drove many individuals including students and academics to leave Syria seeking safer and better living conditions. Currently and after 8 years of war, destruction and devastation on human, social, economic and environmental levels the subject of equality and sustainable development is even more vital than previously, considering the economic background and context which characterizes Syria, particularly reflecting on the social



and economic environment. Before 2011 Syrian Higher Education was going through a development phase, characterised by modernising teaching and research environments and knowledge transfer, accreditation with international and mainly EU partners. After 2011 and during the past eight years Syrian Higher Education is characterised with different challenges associated with its infrastructure, operational, human, technical, intellectual and social levels (Dalati & Alchach, 2018).

2.2 Higher Education in Lebanon

The social demand for higher education in Lebanon has been growing over the past twenty-five years. The higher education system is expanding with student enrolment increasing from 115,000 in 1995 to 205,000 in 2018. This expansion was actually one of the reasons, which led to tremendous growth in the private provision of higher education in Lebanon over the same period. During the 1996-2000 period only, 23 institutions were licensed and established to accommodate the growing demand for higher education in Lebanon. Currently, the Lebanese higher education system has 51 licensed higher education institutions (four of these haven't started operation yet) with the oldest being the American University of Beirut established in 1866, and only one public institution, the Lebanese University (Kaissi, 2019).

The representation of women has improved in schools and universities in both public and private Lebanese education sectors. More than 53 % of females reach at least secondary education (UNDP, 2016). However, their representation in the higher administrative positions is limited to 8.5% in compared to 91.5% of males who have managerial positions (WEF, 2016). The civil and religious regulatory frameworks discriminate between men and women. For example, the Lebanese Constitution of 1926, Article 9 declares that “all Lebanese are equal before the law. They equally enjoy civil and political rights without any distinction as to sex or religion”. Yet, Article 9 regarding nationality contradicts this declaration. The Convention grants women equal rights with men to pass their nationality to their children, while the Lebanese law prohibits women to pass their nationality to her husband or her children. Lebanon has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); however, articles 487 and 488 convict women who have committed disloyalty much more severely than men. The penalty for the same crime is much rigid with women who commit adultery than men. Another example clearly appears in article 405 that allows the abuse of women by her husband without any legal consequences. Lebanon follows an overall religious framework in personal status laws (marriage, divorce, etc.), laws regarding girl's inheritance vary between Muslims and Christians, and even among different sects of the Muslim religion.

Many public policies are considered inadequate due to gaps in addressing discrimination among women at all aspects. Although the Government of 2008 reiterated its commitment to Beijing declaration recommendations, there is still no significant implementation of these recommendations. The National Strategy for Women in Lebanon (2011- 2021) is an initiative that was a result of the joint effort between the National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW), government ministries, and feminist organizations, under the fund of UNFPA. They set a Ten-Year Strategy for Women based on international conventions to support women in all aspects of life. This strategy includes drafting of new policies and reinforcing others that have been ratified.



Based on the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Lebanon is following gender mainstreaming that appears clearly in the collection and analysis of gender indicators. Lebanon is considered progressive in terms of the absence of restrictions on women engaging in income-generating activities in comparison with the Arab world. However, the gender Global Gender Gap index presents a worsening picture for women in Lebanon due to the lack of political empowerment (WEF, 2016). This is due to the weakness of the State in reinforcing the implementation of policies and laws, making reaching gender equity as an elusive objective (USAID, 2012; World Bank, 2015). Religious authorities are playing a key role in limiting the ratification of many policy briefs. Many religious authorities advance a gender role perspective vis-à-vis women noting distinct roles for women versus men in family and professional aspects. This leads to some taken-for-granted assumptions as to what women could do, or not do; this arguably impacts women ascension to senior levels positions in academia.

2.3 Higher Education in Jordan

The sector of higher education in Jordan plays a remarkable key role in the process of comprehensive development at various levels and areas. That is, during the last ten years (in the reign of His Majesty King Abdullah II), higher education in Jordan witnessed significant progress in terms of the diversity of study programs, patterns of teaching and learning that control both the quality and quantity and expansion of higher education institutions.

In spite of the limited financial and human resources in the kingdom, higher education lies within the priorities of the State as of the role it plays in promoting the economic, social and knowledge level of the Jordanian citizen.

Higher education in Jordan commenced by the establishment of Teachers House 'Dar Al-Mu'lemeen' in 1958, with the level of two years aiming at preparing qualified teachers to work at the schools which belong to the Ministry of Higher Education. Afterward, establishment of teachers houses has succeeded and became known as 'Teachers Institute' which have been developed for 'Community Colleges' in the seventies. As for university education, it commenced by the establishment of the University of Jordan in 1962, followed by the establishment of Al-Ahliyya Amman University in 1989 as the first private university in Jordan.

His Majesty King Abdullah II has paid a special attention to the higher education as he steered his successive governments to shed more light on higher education and its development. Thus, During his Majesty's reign, many public and private universities were established, this is in addition to the foreign universities operating in Jordan, the programs emanated from cooperation agreements between Jordan and foreign universities and the programs of the Jordanian universities in various universities of neighboring Arab countries.

During the last two decades, the sector of higher education in Jordan witnessed a prominent development as well as progress evidenced by the increasing number of institutions of higher education, enrolled students, faculty members, administrative and academic members; size of expenditures and the financial government support to this significant educational sector.

The number of public universities as a result has reached (10), besides (17) universities that are private, and (51) community colleges, this is in addition to the World Islamic Sciences and Education University. This progress in numbers of universities accompanied by significant



increase in number of students enrolled to study in these universities, where the number of enrolled students in both public and private universities is estimated at nearly (236) thousand; (28) thousand out of the total are from Arab or foreign nationalities. Thus, the pride created by this development as well as progress puts us face-to-face with various challenges, the thing which leads us to pay more efforts in order to overcome the difficulties and obstacles stand before us, to realize a balance between the spread of higher education and its establishment from one side, and its level and quality from the other.

As a result of the development that occurred in this sector and in order to maintain the quality of higher education, the next phase required a reconsideration of the law that governs public and private universities as well as the higher education. Therefore, by the issuance of the new "Law of Higher Education No. (23), for the year 2009" and "The Jordanian Universities Law No. (20), for the year 2009", the Jordanian universities have become more independent in managing the administrative as well as financial matters, and by virtue of the new law, the following units agreed to be developed within the ministry's organizational structure:

The Policy Analysis and Planning Unit which assumes, by virtue of the new law, the responsibilities of collecting data and information on higher education sector; conducting studies in order to support the work of Higher Education Council and many other tasks stated in the law.

The Unified Admission Coordination Unit, which assumes the responsibility of students' admission into public universities according to the principles approved by the Council of Higher Education.

The ministry has paid a special attention to higher education in order to have it at the top of our national priorities. Attention, herein, has been mostly focused on monitoring and evaluation of the strategy of higher education and scientific research for the years (2007-2012) to maintain a shiny image of higher education and scientific research, its outputs, competitive capabilities; and to admit the largest possible number of our young people into our Jordanian universities according to goals system that is in line with our national goals. We can say that, despite the big challenges that higher education faced, Jordan was capable to realize quantitative and qualitative achievements in this sector. That is, appropriate procedures aiming at improving its role were developed in order to achieve a quantum leap with a high quality and to catch up with recent developments applied by the Jordanian institutions of higher education. All that was due to the various initiatives that worked on limiting the power of these challenges, weakening and processing them for the sake of realizing a comprehensive national strategy for the sector of higher education in Jordan.

The key performance indicators of the strategy of higher education appear clearly through: percentages of (1) males and female's enrollment into regular admission programs and parallel programs; (2) the steady increase in faculty members; (3) financial government support for institutions of higher education; (4) turnout for expansion of private universities (private sector) that aims to participate in shouldering the burden and responsibilities of education with the public sector; (5) the Higher Education Accreditation Commission that supervises on quality assurance at both public and private institutions of higher education to be consistent with the international standards; (6) updating libraries of universities and linking all institutions of higher education to the electronic periodicals and universities networks; (7) the Scientific Research Support Fund that finances projects with national priorities, offering grants for outstanding graduates, granting the outstanding research prize, the outstanding researcher prize and the outstanding student prize; (8) and finally accrediting the TOEFL certificate as an admission certificate for joining master and PhD programs.



Moreover, the ministry worked on bridging the gap between higher education output and labor market in order to respond to the present and future needs of qualified and specialized cadres in various areas of knowledge; and to compensate for the lack of natural resources in the region by creating a qualified human resource fortified by knowledge and efficiency.

All of these achievements mentioned hereinabove helped in moving the process of comprehensive development forward via providing an academic, psychological and social environment supportive for creativity, excellence, innovation and talent development in order for Jordan to assume a prominent position that is consistent with its status and strategic location, if compared with its capabilities and limited financial resources.

In the region as a whole, Jordan's educational role has become so effective as of what has been known about the high quality of its educational system, the thing which makes it the focus of attention and admiration in the region, and this is clearly reflected in the number of foreign students study at the Jordanian universities which is close to 28.000 students from around the world.

3. Methodology

The methodology section encompasses the sampling design and questionnaire design. The following sections clarify factors related to sampling design, strategy and size, and data collection.

3.1 Sampling design

Project FREE Questionnaire is designed taking into consideration the project target groups, which is comprised of four target groups. The sample unit of analysis comprises of academic staff, administrative, decision-makers, and female students. An operational definition is provided for each of the following target groups. Project FREE sampling approach employed different strategies taking into consideration the variety of types of higher education institutions under examination across Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. Therefore, the sampling approach followed a non-probability sampling strategy. For example, in some institutions (AIU, DU) a quota sampling was applied to improve representativeness (Cooper, D. and Schindler, 2014). A proposed quota sampling strategy has divided the sample into different subgroups indicating the faculties and units operating at the seven South Mediterranean region institutions across Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon.



3.2 Questionnaire Design

Project FREE encompasses four target groups, which are under examination, namely academics, administrative staff, decision-makers, and female students. Based on units of analysis, four versions of the questionnaire were utilized. The first was for academics. Questions were customized taking into consideration fields of expertise, research, and teaching, as well as training needs for this category. The questionnaire addressed various levels of interest, individual, professional, group, and institutional characteristics, as well as the training needs of this target group.

The second questionnaire was for administrative staff. Questions are customized taking into consideration the characteristics of this target group. The third type of questionnaire was for decision-makers. Questions were customized taking into consideration fields of expertise, knowledge and strategic scope of this target group, as well as training needs for this category. The fourth and final version targeted female students. Questions focused on individual characteristics and training needs.

In the process of designing FREE questionnaires, four main task-oriented groups were assembled for the purpose of questionnaire development. Each group was assigned to develop a questionnaire based on the draft sent by the work package leader. Consequently, four questionnaires were designed to collect primary data targeting project target groups. The questionnaire design was based on the development of mainly close-ended questions employing nominal, ordinal and interval scales. The response types employed in project FREE questionnaires comprise of rating, ranking, and categorization scales. The four versions were designed taking into consideration the appropriate type of scale required to perform the analysis, type of response strategy required, type of communication approach required, and questionnaire layout. The questionnaire design examined classification questions (demographic), administrative questions, and topic questions.

4. Analysis and Findings

4.1 Findings for Academics

4.1.1 Curriculum and Research

The results disclose that across the target higher education institutions in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, courses that address gender issues, are at the minimum levels. The subject of gender equality and equity is not addressed adequately, with limited exceptions, across the SMR institutions within the scope of FREE. The results confirm that little awareness exists on the subject of gender equality. Moreover, the results reveal minimal levels of gender research being performed in this scope across all target institutions.

4.1.2 Networking for and Gender Equality centers

At the interpersonal level, the results reflect on the lack of gender equality and sustainability centers at the majority of the SMR partner institutions of project FREE. In addition, at an interpersonal level, the results indicate mentoring support schemes are needed, as well as the opportunity to acquire network professional training.



4.1.3 Gender Equality and Institutional HR practices

At the institutional level, results indicate that the introduction of gender quota based on merit would not be considered as a good policy to boost female representation at various domains in higher education across the partner institutions in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. With the exception of AIU (59% are in favor of imposing a gender quota), the majority of partner institutions' results indicate moderate to high unfavourable attitudes towards the introduction of gender quota (47%, DU, 50%, UOP, 57% LU, 80% PSUT and 83% for MUBS).

The examination of sexual harassment at the workplace for academics does not reveal a significant concern for this phenomenon. Results across SMR institutions indicates that the majority of academics neither experienced nor observed sexual harassment behaviours at the workplace, including teasing or sexual remarks, request for sexual favours, or sexual assault. As the discussion of this topic is sensitive, it is suspected that the results do not fully reflect the state of sexual harassment in higher education. For the future, the alternative methodology would bring deeper insights on the topic, including focus groups or individual in-depth interviews.

4.1.4 Project FREE training Areas

The investigation of training areas for academics discloses a set of digital, soft and decision-making skills. The examination of training areas reveals critical importance for training and education in the scope of digital skills, presentation skills, and online research. In addition, management and leadership skills are identified including skills related to communication, time management, decision making, creativity and innovation, team leadership and teamwork. The results also indicate that democratic and participative leadership behaviours are positively rated among academics. This indicates that leadership training is significant in the scope of personality traits, behaviours and relationships. Moreover, the results show that training in the scope of self-empowerment and Gender Equality are very significant and crucial for this target group.

4.2. Findings for Administrative Staff

4.2.1 Dimensions of Gender Equality

The results of the study for administrative staff also show that the subject of gender equality is not integrated sufficiently at SMR HEIs across Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, ranging from average to below-average levels. Moreover, the results indicate lack of awareness in the subject. These results are consistent with findings from academics' sample. The subject of Gender Equality is not established sufficiently at institutional levels across the SMR partner institutions in project FREE, except one partner namely American University of Beirut. The results indicate the lack of existence of multidisciplinary centers dedicated to Gender Equality and Sustainability issues, again with the exception of AUB. Project FREE will play a major role in establishing gender equality at the SMR target institutions.

The results illustrate that Gender equality is largely not adequately reflected at SMR target university strategies, missions, and vision statements. The integration of gender equality, within AIU mission and strategic planning is considered as an area of development for the target SMR partner universities. The results also indicate high levels of motivation of administrative staff to take part in implementation of sustainable development goals and gender equality policies at institutional levels.



The results for sexual harassment do not reveal a significant concern, although the discussion of this topic is sensitive and has cultural and social implications. As mentioned earlier, a better methodology, which would investigate this issue more effectively, would be the utilization of focus groups and individual in-depth interviews with relevant participants.

Some of the proposed actions to reduce the imbalances and inequalities and measures to promote gender equality should be included among the different aspects of the law, policy or programme. We may suggest the following measures for the following:

- promoting the access of women in HEIs where they are under-represented;
- promoting the access of women to decision-making;
- promoting the co-responsibility of public administration at the HEIs
- promoting the use of gender statistics and studies;
- preventing gender-based violence;
- promoting proactive actions to eradicate gender-based violence;
- eliminating gender stereotypes and roles

4.3 Decision Makers

4.3.1 Dimensions of Gender Equality

At an institutional level, the results disclose that gender equality is largely not adequately integrated at the university strategy, its mission and its vision. This is also consistent across project target groups including academics and administrative staff. Actions for gender equality are not being not measured at all the SMR HEIs under examination in the scope of FREE. The results indicate that there are no equality plans established. Gender equality is not reflected at the target universities' strategic planning.

One exception is the American University of Beirut where the President has tasked formed a dedicated task force for exploring gender equity issues at the university. The Task Force approached the issue of improving the lives and careers of women faculty. The task force issued its report outlining areas that are comforting in some respects and other areas of concern that require follow-up. The leadership of the university has prioritized women's issues aiming at improving the well-being of female academics and staff at the university. The President of the university has emphasizes that AUB has already made genuine strides in instituting changes to improve gender equity among faculty. It has offered leadership positions to women, including one VP, three female Associate Provosts, two female academic Deans, several female Unit Directors and Associate Deans, and many female Department Chairs.

4.3.2 Project FREE training Areas

The results disclose that among leadership behaviours examined democratic, participative, supportive, and directive leadership are the dimensions with the highest ranks. This indicates the need for executive leadership training for decision-makers and senior levels in the scope of contemporary leadership dimensions reflecting on current and modern dimensions of executive



leadership training. These findings bring a crucial area for further applied research investigation into the future.

4.4 Female Students

4.4.1 Motivation and Education

The examination of female students discloses that motivation among female students to pursue a career in academia is evident. The results also reveal that the subject of gender is not currently integrated at faculty curriculum across target universities in the South Mediterranean region. Thus, there is lack of knowledge and awareness for this topic. The results also reveal that female students show interest in studying gender-related topics including social justice, gender equality and empowerment training. The findings indicate the need for female role modelling, where academic expertise is critical factor associated with a female role model.

4.4.2 Project FREE training Areas

The results indicate that there is a need for a set of training offerings to be provided for female students at Arab International University. Soft skills, technical skills, and leadership skills are identified as a set of training which female students need. Self-empowerment is critical training for female students. Networking skills are also identified as a training need for female students.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this project is to enhance the role of female academics in Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria through increasing the number of women present in decision-making and senior management level. FREE aims to contribute to improving operations management of HEIs in LB, JR & SY by promoting a culture of gender egalitarianism, female leadership, role modelling, and empowerment. The project aims to contribute to democratization of higher education by empowering female academics and students. Project FREE aims at empowering female academics and professionals in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan target HEIs through series of training programs. FREE aims at improving the management and operation of higher education through introduction of equality and sustainability centers and services in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan and development of research and innovation through network of research in Gender Issues at the project target universities.

The project identified four target groups outlined as academics, administrative staff, decision-makers, and female students. A diagnosis was performed in the process of examining the status quo of female academics' environment at the South Mediterranean region exploring factors affecting female academics' experience, career progression, and addressing the lack of female representation at senior management levels and university board. Table 1 Illustrates discussion summary outlining results at individual, group, and institutional levels across the project target groups.



Table 1 Discussion Summary Matrix

Multi – Level Analysis	Academics	Administrative Staff	Decision Makers	Female Students
Individual Level and Group Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gender equality and equity require adequate examination • Integration of gender equality in faculty course is minimal and to a minimum extent • Little awareness about gender issues exists at SMR HEIs • Lack of research developed in the scope of gender issues. • Lack of gender equality and sustainability centers at SMR HEIs • Mentoring support schemes are needed • opportunity to acquire network professional training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Motivation levels for progression in Career path • High Motivation levels to take part in implementation of SDGs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career Satisfaction across Gender • Career Ambition across Gender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate motivation to pursue a career in HE sector • Interest in studying gender-oriented courses • Gender is not integrated in faculty curriculum
Institutional Levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of Gender Quota is not positively endorsed • Sexual Harassment at institution • Positive Academics perception of female academic role model. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The integration of gender equality in university strategy • Lack of awareness in the subject of Gender Equality • Lack of Centre for Gender Equality • Integration of gender equality within HEI mission and strategic planning • Sexual Harassment at institution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of awareness of gender equality • Lack of integration of gender equality into university strategy • Gender equality as a framework to report sustainability impacts • Measurement of actions for gender equality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual Harassment at institution • Institutional Support • Stereotypes and social expectations



6. Project FREE Conceptual Map

The aim of project FREE conceptual map is to develop theoretical model to design training courses based on identifying needs of the project target groups namely academics, administrators and managers and students. This conceptual map is developed based on the earlier diagnosis, which identified a set of training needs and skills to be acquired through project FREE life cycle. Based on the diagnoses analysis project FREE identifies a set of core and primary training needs which comprise the priority of training for all target groups including academics, administrative, decision-makers and female students.

The core training needs are identified based on the project results. The core training needs provide training and capacity building in the scope of Gender Equality and Equity, sustainability in higher education and sustainable development goals and 2030 agenda. Based on the results, there exists little awareness about gender issues across SMR at most of the target HEIs, as well as lack of scientific research in this scope. FREE will provide an opportunity for project target groups to get the training needed in the scope of Gender Equality, equity, and Sustainability.

The female-oriented training needs comprise of soft and digital skills. Training needs include digital and soft skills, presentation skills, and online research skills, across the project target groups. Table 2 illustrates project FREE training needs matrix.

Project FREE conceptual map identifies two types of training activities, namely the online courses and face – to – face training as workshops. The online courses are structured as FREE core courses, which are directed to all project target groups; and female-oriented courses. The core mandatory courses comprise of three courses. The elective courses which are female groups oriented comprise two courses.



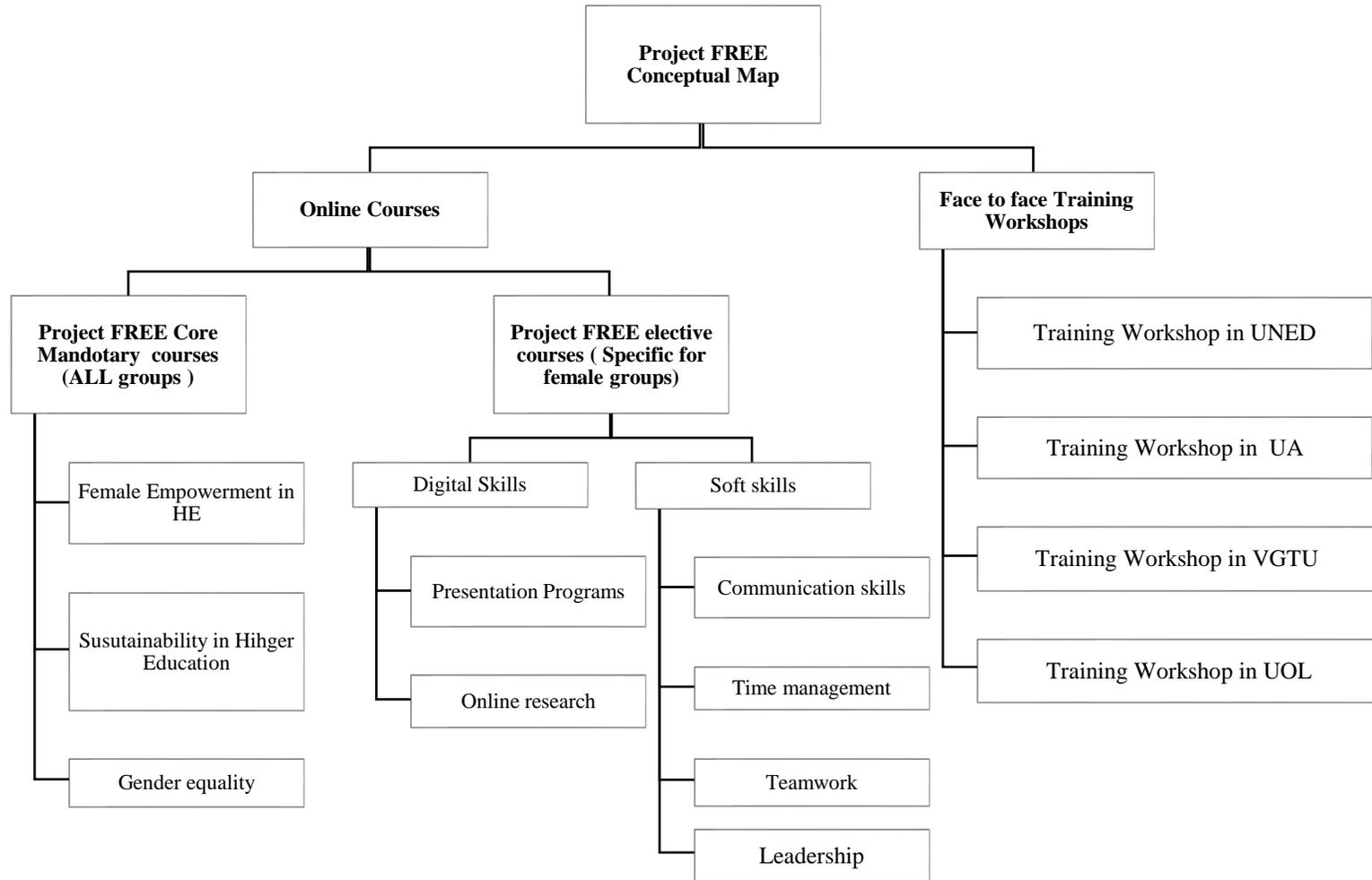
Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

Table 2 Project FREE Training Needs Matrix

Training Topics	Academics	Administrative Staff	Decision Makers	Female Students
1. Digital Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation skills • Online research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation skills • Online research 	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation skills • Online research
2. Soft Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication skills • Time management • Team Dynamics • Negotiation • Big Five Personality traits • Sustainable leadership • Contemporary Approaches to leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication skills • Time management • Team Dynamics • Negotiation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Big Five Personality traits • Sustainable leadership • Contemporary Approaches to leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soft Skills • Networking skills • Teambuilding • Leadership skills
3. Gender Equality and Equity		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender equality 		
4. Sustainability in Higher Education		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SDGs Agenda 2030 • Sustainability in Higher Education 		
5. Female Empowerment in Workplace		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Empowerment • Female Empowerment in HE • Decision making competencies • Critical and structured thinking 		



Figure 1 Project FREE Conceptual Map





6.1 Project FREE Core Mandatory Courses (ALL groups)

The first course is in the scope of Female Empowerment in Higher Education. This course includes topics related to self-empowerment (which is specifically designed for female participants), female empowerment in higher education, as well as further topics to be updated further. The second course is in the scope of Gender Equality and Equity. This course examines a variety of topics related to equality, equity, non-discrimination practices, women's right and fairness. The third course is in the scope of sustainability in higher education. This course includes topics related to the different dimensions of sustainability including social, environmental and economic sustainability. Also understanding sustainable development goals and the 2030 Agenda is crucial component in this course.

Figure 2 Female Empowerment in Higher Education

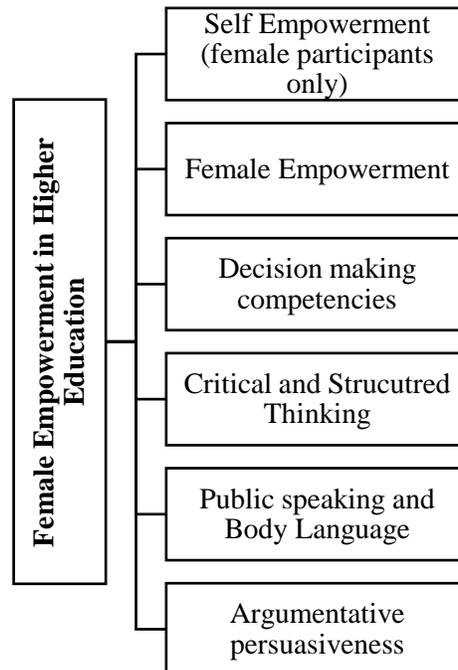




Figure 3 Gender Equality

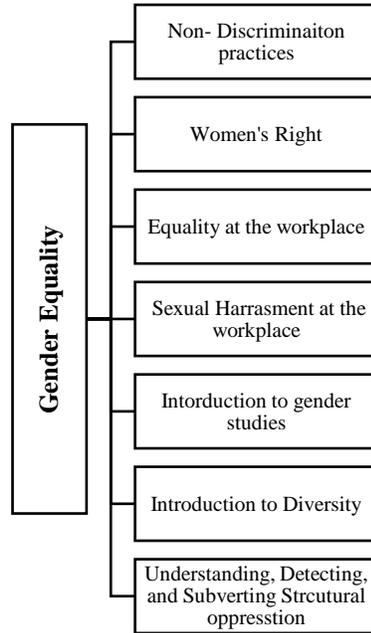
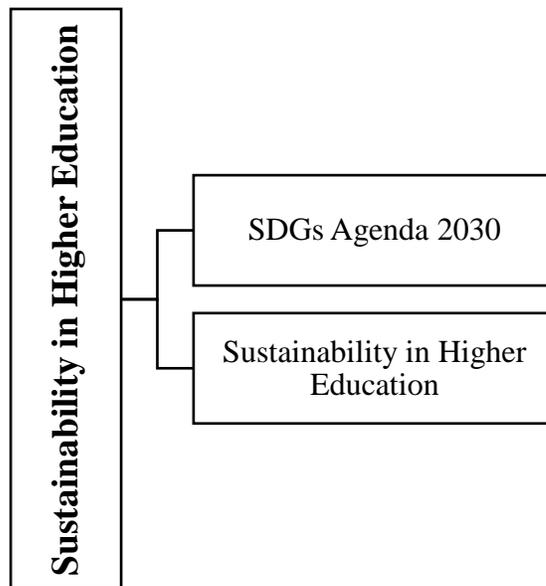


Figure 4 Sustainability in Higher Education



6.2 Project FREE Elective Courses (Specific for female target groups)

The first course is in the scope of soft skills. This course comprises of interesting topics related to training in the scope of communication in the workplace, leadership traits, and behaviours, as well as team dynamics. The course also contains further topics, which will be discussed further during project implementation. The second course is in the scope of digital skills. This course comprises of a variety of topics including presentation programs and online research as well as further topics to be updated during project implementation.

Figure 5 Digital Skills

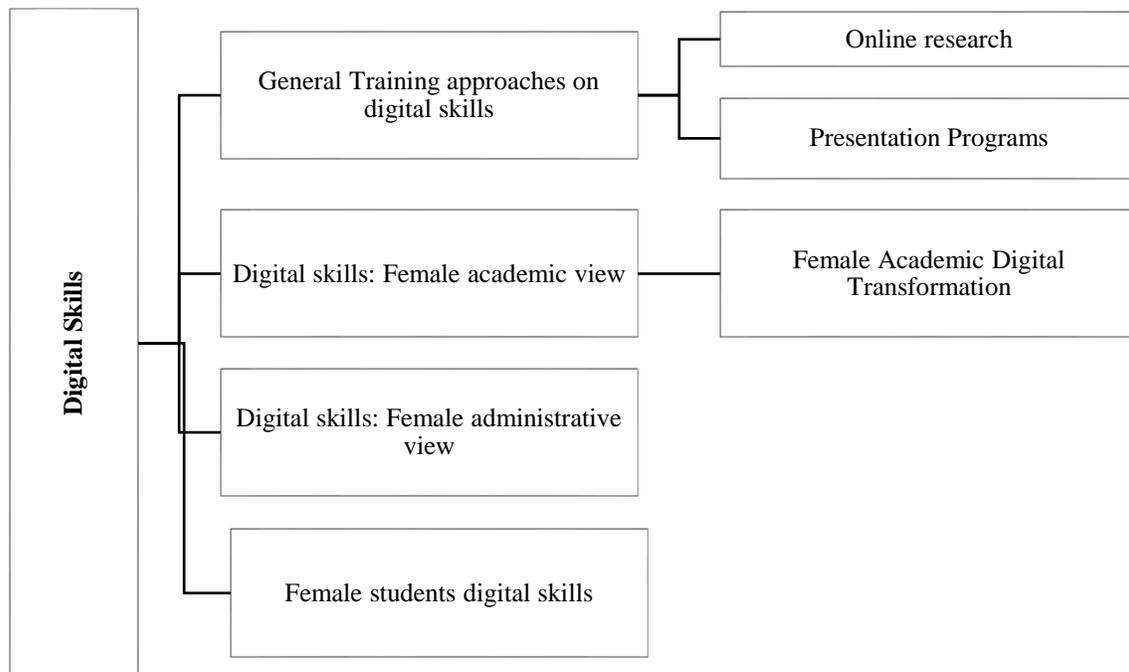
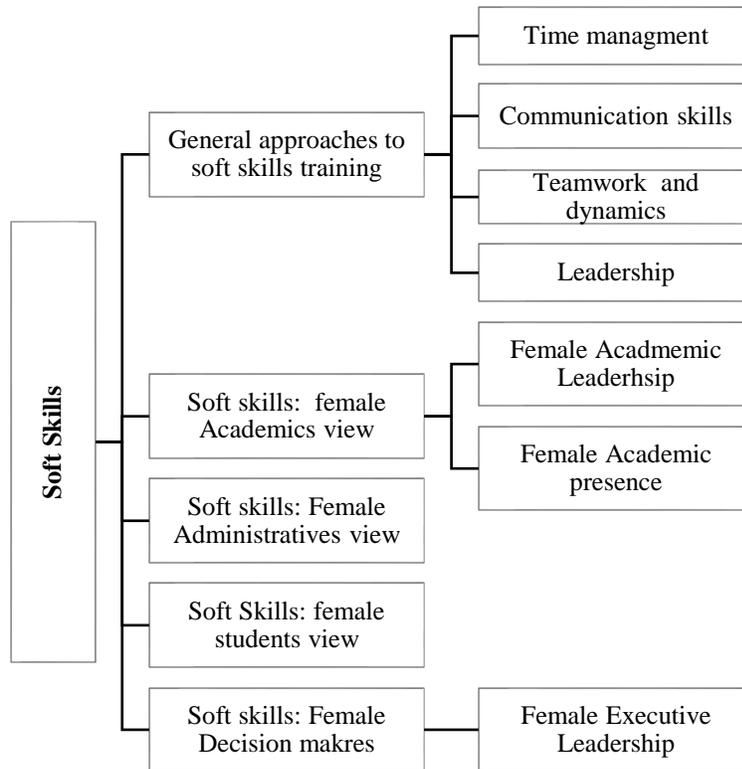




Figure 6 Soft Skills





7. Limitation of the Diagnosis

The main limitation is due to the technological infrastructure, which is a characteristic tendency in Syria. With regard to data collection methods, Google Online survey was the main tool for collecting data for project FREE. The lack of technical capacity in Syria due to years of war, has led to the deterioration of the technical infrastructure in Syria. The lack of strong internet connection in Syria, on occasions the lack of electrical power, and in some cases the lack of compatible computer systems, created barriers for respondents to complete online questionnaires via Google. Alternatively, a paper questionnaire approach was employed for data collection. This diversified approach in data collection (online + paper) was a practical solution to secure data collection. However, it created additional effort and tasks to be accomplished in the diagnosis's analysis. Respondents lack of awareness of the term Gender, or gender equality is to be considered as challenge to project FREE, creating additional effort to be performed to introduce the term to respondents.

Conclusion

This report provided a diagnostic analysis examining the subject and scope of female academic role model empowerment, equality, and sustainability at universities in Mediterranean region, addressing challenges towards 2030 agenda. The report examines four categories for examination and distributed at different levels of examination. The findings for academics disclose that motivation for performing research in the scope of gender is a critical need and area of development for SMR universities in the scope of FREE. The topic of gender requires examination and development. Sexual harassment was not found to be a significant problem, although it remains a future area of investigation requiring a combination of quantitative and qualitative research approaches. The topic of female role models is another crucial area of investigation and discloses positive perceptions and attitudes of academics towards female role models.

The findings for administrative staff reflect high levels of motivation to ascend along a clear career path, as well as high motivation levels taking part in the implementation of sustainable development goals at SMR universities. The integration of gender equality at university strategy is crucial, which requires development. Lack of awareness of the topic of gender equality and equity reflects a significant area of development. Managing social and organizational resistance is critical, which raises awareness in regards to gender equality at Arab International University. The social and organizational environment are considered as major threats for project FREE.

The findings for decision-makers disclose that career satisfaction is an area of critical development, specifically for female decision makers, which disclose lower levels of career satisfaction. Gender equality is not currently integrated into the university strategy. Strategic planning for gender equality, as well as developing gender equality as a framework to report sustainability impacts, and measurement of actions for gender equality are considered as critical areas of development and investigation.

The findings for female students disclose adequate levels of motivation to pursue a career in academia, as well as interest in studying gender-oriented courses. Gender issues are not currently



integrated at the faculty course offerings and curriculum. Policies related to institutional support are areas of investigation. The findings disclose that stereotypes and social expectations exist as challenges that require examination.

The findings present interesting results, which are associated with capacity building, raising awareness, and community engagement the scope of project FREE.

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