



# SECO's approach to Gender Equality

## Gender Equality is smart economy

**Over the last two decades, women's lives have improved in an unprecedented way. Women gained access to rights, education, services and the labor market. However, many women all over the world still do not enjoy equal participation in economic, social and political life. Not only is this unjust – it is also a tremendous economic and social loss. SECO therefore sets Gender Equality high on its agenda.**

The Swiss International Cooperation recognizes Gender Equality as a universal right and a prerequisite to effectively fighting poverty and promoting sustainable inclusive growth. Thus, Gender Equality has been a so-called cross-cutting issue since 2013. This means that every project has to be systematically analysed for its potential to advancing Gender Equality. Despite the fact that more women than men are facing discrimination, it is important to recognize that gender equality is not solely a women's issue. In some sectors, men and boys are at a higher risk and need special attention (e.g. the mining sector). SECO thus understands **Gender Equality as a key development issue**. It is not only the right thing to do – it is also the smart thing to do.

### In which areas can SECO contribute to more Gender Equality?

The opportunities for SECO's Economic Cooperation and Development Division to advance Gender Equality through its programs and projects are manifold. Within its **trade promotion** programs, for instance, SECO seeks to increase productivity and participation of women in global value chains, e.g. in the textile industry (see example 1, below). Within SECO's **private sector promotion** there is identified need to promote female entrepreneurship and access to finance (see example 2, below). In the area of **infrastructure** women need to be systematically included in the needs analysis as they might have different needs and priorities. Safe, reliable and affordable infrastructure can dramatically reduce the burden of unpaid domestic work such as fetching water or fuel, which is over-proportionally shouldered by women. Some of them make use of the extra hours available by developing own income generating activities. Moreover, within its **macro-economic support**, SECO seeks to address more systematically the gender dimension during **policy dialogue** with partner countries, for example in the frame of a budget support.

#### 1) Better Work, Indonesia, Vietnam, Bangladesh



- **Objectives:** Better Work improves compliance with core labour standards and national labour law in the textile industry. Women make up the vast majority of the workforce in the global garment industry and represent 79% of workers in Better Work factories. Gender equality is a key component and the program recognizes women as significant actors in the textile industry.
- **Beneficiaries:** Better Work garment factories and their workforce
- **Project partners:** International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC)
- **Time period:** Phase III 2017 – 2021
- **Budget:** SECO contribution CHF 12 million (total budget USD 75 million)

#### Results in promoting Gender Equality

The results of the independent impact assessment conducted by Tufts University showed that **Better Work empowers women by**

- Decreasing the gender pay gap by 17%
- Reducing sexual harassment concerns by 18%
- Increasing women's access to prenatal care by 26%
- Training female supervisors leads to 22% higher productivity, making the business case for investments in skills development for women.

## 2) Women in Finance, Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ <b>Objectives:</b> The Women in Finance program aims at increasing access to financial services for women and women entrepreneurs through the provision of advisory services to financial institutions (banks and microfinance institutions). The program will create a better environment for micro, small and medium enterprises in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region.</li><li>■ <b>Beneficiaries:</b> women and women entrepreneurs in the MENA. Women banking champions will be established in Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco.</li><li>■ <b>Project partner:</b> International Finance Corporation (IFC)</li><li>■ <b>Time period:</b> 2017- 2021</li><li>■ <b>Budget:</b> SECO contribution USD 5 million (total budget USD 12 million)</li></ul>	<b>Results in promoting Gender Equality</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The Lebanese BLC Bank since employed more female personnel and established a division developing new financial products especially designed for the needs of female customers. Medium business loans disbursed to women since increased by 92% (from \$11 to 21 million).</li><li>■ Training for women entrepreneurs in corporate governance, business plan preparation, business skills etc. is provided. Workshops for female entrepreneurs aim at fostering entrepreneurial skills and promoting financial literacy among women.</li><li>■ The program is based on a successful pilot project with the BLC bank in Lebanon. This bank has become a leader for women banking in the region.</li></ul>
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### How does SECO concretely apply its approach to more Gender Equality?

In order to guide its program managers and implementing partners, SECO has developed a **comprehensive gender guideline** to help identify gender gaps, risks, but also innovation and opportunities within SECO's priority themes and business lines. It is crucial to be informed about the legal, social and cultural context of the partner country with regard to women and girls, boys and men.

As women tend to work in specific sectors, have different needs, are confronted with unequal distribution of unpaid home and care work and often do not enjoy the same access to education, information, assets - such as land titles - or services, gender sensitive programming is very important for SECO's economic development projects. **Awareness raising** within the institution and among partners is a crucial and logical first step. Through a systematic analysis of gender specific risks, gaps, but also opportunities along the project cycle, with the help of gender-disaggregated indicators and more gender sensitive reporting, SECO aims at making the relevance of the gender dimension more comprehensive and visible. At the same time, it is **improving its accountability** in the area of Gender Equality. Lastly, a thorough gender analysis does not only make our projects more just and equal, it also opens the path for **new ideas and innovation**.

SECO also advances the availability of **reliable data** on gender disparities and their effects on the economy, for example by its support to the World Bank's handbook "Women, business and the law", collecting legal and other differentiations on the basis of gender in 173 economies.

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