



GENDER-SMART BUSINESS SOLUTIONS

METRO MARKETS CREATES JOBS AND CAREERS FOR WOMEN



IFC

**International
Finance Corporation**
WORLD BANK GROUP

Creating Markets, Creating Opportunities

CASE STUDY: METRO MARKETS, EGYPT

Creating Jobs and Careers for Women

Project Overview

About 50 percent of university graduates in Egypt are women, yet only 23 percent¹ of women work in the formal labor force compared with 76 percent² of men. Despite this large pool of educated women, on an average, less than 10 percent³ of employees in Egypt's firms are women. Given that Egyptian firms—especially in the competitive food retail sector—can't find and retain employees with the right skills, the data suggest that there exist opportunities for more women to join the country's workforce.

Metro Markets is Egypt's largest food retailer. The supermarket chain has over 5,000 employees, who are mostly young and work in its 100 branches across Egypt. Only about 300 of its employees are women. Metro Markets partnered with IFC to assess its workforce to close gaps between men and women and address some of its business challenges. The workforce assessment kicked off a longer-term initiative to increase the share of women in the company's workforce.

Challenges

Metro Markets faces workforce challenges, such as high staff turnover, that are common in the retail industry, disrupting businesses and raising costs. Metro Markets invests heavily in training its workers at the entry level, but often is unable to retain them. IFC's assessment found:

- High staff turnover of 35% annual, which is costly. Replacing a lost worker costs Metro Markets \$19 for every new worker it hired.
- High staff absenteeism, costing Metro Markets \$542,000 annually.
- Low return on investment in training. Lack of training beyond job entry might contribute to low staff retention.
- Low share of women in the company's workforce, at 7 percent, and high concentration of women among the most junior staff. Although staff turnover is higher among women than men, absenteeism is lower among women.

- While women receive more training than men, they have fewer senior roles and higher turnover rates.

Employees typically leave the job or don't progress because of:

- Limited training geared toward promotion and career progression.
- High work load and challenging working hours.
- Difficulty in managing family responsibilities: female employees often rely on their own skills or personal support networks to manage home and work schedules, provide care for children, and commute to work.
- Labor intensive, low-tech work practices, such as physically lifting heavy boxes rather than using forklifts, that make it difficult for women to perform better-paying jobs.



1 <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS>

2 [*https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.MA.ZS](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.MA.ZS)

3 <http://www.enterprisesurveys.org/data/exploretopics/gender>

Project Objectives

The long-term goal of the partnership between IFC and Metro Markets is to increase recruitment and retention of female workers. This will result in the creation of more jobs and careers for women. At the same time, it will help stabilize Metro Markets' workforce, improve the performance—by reducing absenteeism, for example—and strengthen the overall customer experience. This is especially the case for female shoppers, who are likely to feel more comfortable with female staff and potentially benefit from their insights about household products.

The short-term goal of the workforce assessment is for Metro Markets to gain insights about its gender composition across all levels and locations and understand the barriers that prevent women from joining Metro Markets, progress in their careers, and stay in its workforce.

The assessment also aimed to identify opportunities for addressing these barriers, recruiting and retaining more women, and putting them on a career path that includes nontraditional, more technical jobs (i.e. butchers) as well as senior jobs, including store managers.

Gender-Smart Solutions

IFC and Metro Markets started this initiative with a workforce gender assessment to identify and quantify the challenges the company faced. Over several months, IFC and Metro Market worked together and:

- Collected and analyzed the company's sex-disaggregated human resources data.
- Examined correlations between sex-disaggregated HR data and some of the firm's business key performance indicators.
- Conducted interviews with company leadership, HR managers, department heads, and branch and brand managers.
- Led focus groups with male and female workers from Metro Markets.

In a second step, IFC and Metro Markets leadership developed an action plan aimed at creating a career path for women from joining to retiring. It also aims to improve the work environment for women in Metro Markets to raise their share in the company's workforce from 7 percent. The plan will be implemented over a period of at least three years and includes introducing workplace practices such as the introduction of diversity key performance indicators and merit-based appointments of women into store manager roles. These steps aim to create a company culture and mindset that empower women. Metro Markets is still at the early stages of the initiative, but the company has already put in place bold measures:

- Created a Gender Diversity Committee to oversee all gender activities in the company, including diversity KPIs for all operations employees and managers.

- Set diversity KPIs for all operations employees and managers.
- Held an event to award top-performing female staff at Metro Markets.
- Appointed the first female store manager.
- Produced a special edition of Metro Markets internal newsletter, discussing the importance of diversity for the company and celebrating female role models.

The Business Case for Metro Markets

The findings of the assessment established a strong business rationale for Metro Markets to recruit women and retain them by creating a family-friendly and women-friendly workplace. The business rationale is clear:

- >60 percent of Metro Markets staff are at family-building age. A family-friendly workplace is good for all and can curb staff turnover.
- The pool of workers from which food retailers hire is limited, so targeting women widens the recruitment pool for the company.
- Mid-career training could be a tool for staff retention.
- Working mothers have demonstrated strong organizational and multi-tasking skills—these workers can provide a competitive edge for Metro Markets.

"A store with gender diverse staff enhances the image and standard of the store."

Saeed Shaaban

Senior Area Manager, Metro Markets

"It is my dream that one day we will have a female operations manager."

Tamer Gouda

Managing Director, Metro Markets

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