

## **Overview of developments in Women's Rights and Gender Equality in the Euromed region**

*The aim of the report is to give an overview of initiatives undertaken as a result of the democratization process and governance changes in North Africa and the Middle East and to analyse the situation of women's rights and gender equality in the region.*

### **Introduction and Background**

The first **Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society** was held in Istanbul in 2006. Meanwhile, Ministers of the 43 Union for the Mediterranean Partners, meeting on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of November 2009 in Marrakesh, acknowledged the importance of **The Marrakesh Conference** held in accordance with the Barcelona Declaration and the Five Year Work Programme agreed upon during the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Euro-Mediterranean Summit held in Barcelona in 2005.

It was then stated that partners would adopt “**measures to achieve gender equality, preventing all forms of discrimination and ensuring the protection of the rights of Women**” and to respect the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of women as well as men, as defined in the international human rights instruments to which they are parties, in particular **the *UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)* and in the *Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)*, the *Beijing Platform for Action* and the *Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG)*.**

### **The role of the European Economic and Social Committee**

Over the years, the European Economic and Social Committee, through the Euromed Follow-up Committee, has been committed to enhancing the role of women in the

Euromed region. The Committee has taken several initiatives and opinions to ensure<sup>1</sup> that the role of women is mainstreamed in all areas<sup>2</sup>. Together with its partner members, over the years, the EESC has regularly presented annual reports on the situation of women in the Euromed region as a follow-up to both the Istanbul and Marrakech Ministerial Conclusions, presented and discussed at the EESC Annual Euromed Summit<sup>3</sup>

The EESC Alexandria Euromed Summit on 18 and 19 October 2009, mandated the ESC of Monaco to chair the working group on the *Follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations of the Union for the Mediterranean Conference held in Marrakech on strengthening the role of women in society*<sup>4</sup>. The report was presented, discussed and approved at the Rome Euromed Summit 10-12 November 2010

The final declaration of the EESC Euromed Summit held in Rome<sup>5</sup>, 10-12 November agreed to the setting up of a permanent working group on strengthening the role of women in society, with the aim of reporting on the situation of partner countries through the meetings of the Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions and to the UfM bodies in preparation for the follow-up to the Marrakech Ministerial meeting.

## **The Democratisation Process and Governance Changes**

The EESC has been responding to the invitation of civil society in partner countries in the southern Mediterranean and the Middle East that are going through different stages of

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<sup>1</sup> EESC Opinion on Promoting Women's Entrepreneurship in the EUROMED Region (1004/2007)

<sup>2</sup> EESC Opinion on Promoting representative civil societies in the Euromed region (CESE 1395/2011)  
EESC Resolution on the situation in the southern Mediterranean region (CESE 508/2011)

<sup>3</sup> Factors facilitating women's access to economic and social life and higher qualifications in the framework of national, regional and global development context, Euromed Summit 2008  
EESC Opinion on Freedom of Association in the Euromed Region (CESE 772/2008)  
EESC Opinion on the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (IDHR) (CESE 53/2009)  
EESC Opinion on Supporting developing countries in coping with the crisis (1954/2009)

<sup>4</sup> Assessment and evaluation of the conclusions of the Union for the Mediterranean conference in Marrakesh: The need to continue *Strengthening the role of women in society*

<sup>5</sup> Final declaration of the 2010 Euromed Summit of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions, Rome, November 2010

transition to democracy, highlighting equality for women and men as a key principle of the democratic process.

One of these initiatives was an *Exploratory visit to Tunisia by a delegation headed by the President of the REX section (12-14 April 2011)*.

Another initiative was the participation of an EESC delegation in a Seminar on *Freedom of Association and Participation : the role of civil society in the process of the democratic transition ( 8-10 July 2011), Tunisia* organised through the Euromed Regional Programme and the EU Commission.

Finally, an EESC delegation carried out an **Exploratory visit to Lebanon (6-7 October 2011)** where it also met amongst with NGOs representing women's rights

### **The Union for the Mediterranean**

One of the projects proposed and approved for the Union of the Mediterranean (UfM) of the Marrakesh Ministerial Conclusions was the setting up of a *Women's Foundation for the Mediterranean* , launched in Paris 14 June 2011 under the responsibility of France, Jordan, Lebanon and Morocco.

The project is aimed at creating the necessary coordination for all key organizations to work to support women's rights and equality in the Euro-Mediterranean region, by sharing and producing information and knowledge concerning issues pertaining to women and gender via its Euro-Mediterranean Observatory for gender equality and acting effectively and coherently with field projects thanks to its current archived proposals. It also aims at the creation of a Master network, which gathers networks of States, local authorities, Associations, businesses, academics and researchers (the Euro-Mediterranean Academic and Scientific Network on gender and women).

### **Conference on Advancements, challenges and priorities for women's rights and gender equality in the Euromed region" 5 May 2011**

Another initiative carried out was the joint Conference by the EU Commission - Euromed Gender Equality programme (EGEP) and Women and Work (WOW) project - European Training Foundation (ETF) on *“Advancements, challenges and priorities for women's rights and gender equality in the Euromed region” (5 May 2011)*

The aim of the Conference was to look at the *Situation in Southern Mediterranean countries in implementing the Istanbul and Marrakech Ministerial Conclusions on Strengthening the role of women in society and the follow up of the process in the Euro-Mediterranean region.*

The country situation analysis focused on:

- The legal framework for women's rights and gender equality, including the status of international connections and platforms of action (Beijing, etc) at the national levels
- Policies mechanisms and strategies (including public budgets) to enhance gender equality and women's rights
- Women's role and participation in decision-making at all levels, in both private and public spheres
- Gender-based violence
- CEDAW and Istanbul Conclusions Implementation

The Conference presented a wide range of research studies<sup>6</sup> covering the following areas:

1. Women's civil and political rights in the southern and eastern Mediterranean region: CEDAW, legal reform, violence against women and women's participation - European Gender Equality Programme (EGEP)
2. Women's economic and social rights in southern Mediterranean countries: Women's access to education, training and employment – Working together learning for life (ETF)

**European Parliament Workshop on *The Role of Women in the Democratisation Process and Governance Changes in North Africa and the Middle East Societies (20 June 2011)***

The workshop was organised by the EU Parliamentary Committee of Women's Rights and Gender Equality, the Committee on Foreign Affairs in association with DMAG

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<sup>6</sup> [www.etf.europa.eu](http://www.etf.europa.eu)

Committee on Development and the Sub committee on Human Rights. The aim of the workshop was to highlight the importance of giving visibility to the actors of the Arab democratic awakening, women in particular.

***First Theme : The Arab democratic awakening: Factors that led to the democratisation process included :***

**Structural factors :** the Demographic change – 50% of the population under 22 years;

**Cultural change** – a highly educated young generation – a high percentage of university graduates eg: 56%+ in medicine in Tunisia and Egypt Technology, Satellite Chains – dissemination and access to information. He also spoke about the

**Economic Factors:** A series of revolts resulting from the dysfunctioning economic systems led by the older generation;

**Repressive regimes** – dictatorial and the reduction of democracy; Lack of any steering from political factions .

**Future direction:** Women were key players demonstrating shoulder to shoulder with men. , There is the need to address problems of the transition period: Risks to the process of democratization and addressing the needs of young people.

**Second Theme: State of Play on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in North Africa and the Middle East** included the following priorities:

***Addressing women's issues in the private and public sphere***

The need for the state parties to be involved to improve the situation and to address the root causes.: No democratic transition without women full rights and participation

**Third Theme: Enhancing Women's political participation: a key condition for a successful institutional reform and democratisation**

Women emerged as key players in the Arab Spring. They were at the forefront of the popular movement. And are participating in the management of the transition to ensure in the context of new constitutions full participation and representation of women at all levels of political positions

**Halima Jouini, member of the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women**

**(Association Tunisienne des Femmes Democrates,** spoke about women's resistance before the revolutionary process started, much earlier in the mining factories, textile

factories and in coordination with academia. The Tunisian Social Forum was the backdrop to the protests; students were condemned to prison; however young bloggers and young lawyers kept the momentum. During the protests women were insulted as prostitutes

**Salwa Fawzia El-Deghadi, Member of the National Transitional Council of Libya (Libya), spoke about The role of Women in Libya** and the situation before the start of the democratisation process. The speaker referred to the existence of a law against the creation of political parties, punishable by death. The demand for constitutional change represented the Libyan People as a whole. Initially people protested peacefully but with the militarization confrontation they organised themselves as they wanted to have a role in the creation of a new society. Mothers, doctors, nurses were offering services to hundreds of people. Women have been included in the national transition council, even though they did not receive enough media attention

**Gameela Ismael, journalist, founder Member of the El-Gad Party (Egypt)** spoke about the fact that the revolution in Egypt dates back to 2004, when women had taken the front in society as a whole, without a political stand. Women are not acting as feminists, but as citizens calling for a political change. Their objectives are to move societies to see how to deal with all the different groups – Muslim brotherhood, Islamists amongst others and asking for the immediate stop of military trials. Women spearheaded the revolution on how the political machine should work, insisting on a proper Constitution before elections

**Salwa Fawzia El-Deghali, Member of the National Transitional Council of Libya (Libya), a lawyer by profession and member of the Legal Affairs Committee in the post revolution National Transitional Council.**who stated that the Committee is addressing problems such as war crimes and collecting evidence on mercenaries. The Human Rights Watch are assisting in identifying actions against human rights. The Committee is also drafting the Constitutional Change ( Charter) for the transition period. It is also collecting evidence of rape and sexual violence as war crimes. This is very difficult as women in particular are afraid of speaking

**Fourth Theme: Advancing Women's economic status as a key factor in Arab human development and governance changes. Women and Work: Access, limitations and**

**potential in Tourism and ICT.**<sup>7</sup> Author Outi Karkkainen, European Training Foundation (ETF) spoke about the results of a study on women's presence in labour markets and the impact of education on women's employment in southern and eastern Mediterranean countries, with an analysis of the specific contexts of Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia (November 2010)

## **National Situation Analysis Report**

### **Background**

The programme “*Enhancing Equality between Men and Women in the Euromed Region*” (EGEP)<sup>8</sup> for the period 15 May 2008 – 15 May 2011 has been funded through the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and implemented in the nine countries of the southern part of the EU neighbouring area: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), Syria and Tunisia.. The overall objective of this national report is to conduct a situation analysis of women's human rights and gender equality, with an emphasis on legal reforms, women's participation in decision-making in public and private life and gender-based violence. The specific objective of this report is to provide an inventory of national efforts towards the realization of women's equal rights in the context of the Istanbul Conclusions and CEDAW

## **Regional Situation Analysis: Jordan, Algeria, Israel, Morocco, Lebanon, Syria, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Tunisia**

### **Jordan**

There is a consensus that there is a political will for the advancement of women, but this also depends on tradition, culture and religious interpretations.

## **National Priorities and Perspectives for future action**

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<sup>7</sup> See website ETF - European Training Foundation , Publications

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.euromedgenderequality.org/>

To **strengthen the implementation of CEDAW**, in line with the Istanbul Ministerial Conclusions:

- **Strengthen women's political rights** such as nationality and participation in public and political life;
- **Combat violence against women** by adopting legal procedures and providing adequate services;
- **Conduct family guidance and awareness-raising activities on the Law of Personal Status;**
- **Activate the role of the judiciary bodies** in the implementation of international conventions at the national level, among others, through training of judicial personnel;
- **Work with the media to sensitize decision-makers and the general public** on human and women's rights issues;
- Adopt **gender-sensitive budgeting and gender mainstreaming;**
- Review Jordan's reservations to international agreements, particularly CEDAW.

## **Algeria**

Progress can be seen in the status of women in Algeria, thanks to the effort of women and the existence of a political will to improve their condition and position within society. Although women have achieved a higher level of education and are more visible in the public sphere, the process has not resulted in changes in political representation and a change in mentalities

## **National Priorities and Perspectives for future action**

**Women and the law: The reform and harmonisation of the legislative system must be continued**

**Women and education: Monitoring the education system** so that the continued revision of programmes can be followed-up. **Greater knowledge of the sources at the origin of girls' illiteracy and ceasing schooling**, in particular in rural areas.

**Women and the economy:** Create a short- and medium-term action programme with specific measures to promote equal employment



**Women and violence:** Procedures and reforms must be implemented at the institutional, political and legal levels in order to criminalise domestic violence, protect witnesses and create care, security and protection services

**Domestic and public work:** Further progress is required so that women's work outside the home becomes part of social and professional reality for both men and women.

**Ownership of the Concept of Equality:** Women need to be informed and trained in equality, with support measures to implement laws enhancing equality.

## **Israel**

International rankings of women's equality rank Israel well among the countries in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Women are increasingly represented across all levels of civil society, spanning the political, legislative and judicial systems, government corporations, the general labour market and the military. However, there are limitations to the advancement of women's rights, imposed by policy, practice or tradition.

## **National Priorities and Perspectives for future action**

- **Strengthen enforcement of existing legislation,**
- **Adopt gender mainstreaming and Gender Responsive Budget (GRB)**
- **Reform the judicial system** so that women have the choice to utilize either the civil or religious system in personal status matters,
- **Implement policy that would place Israel in full compliance with Trafficking Victim Protection Act (TVPA) standards,**
- **Implement educational/vocational training programmes for the Bedouin population to improve their socio-economic status and combat polygamy.**

## **Morocco**

The democratic evolution launched in the early 1990s has led to greater recognition of the issue of gender equality and the introduction by the government of a proactive policy of promoting women's affairs for better equality between the sexes. Since the drafting of the National Strategy for Equity and Equality, new programmes have been launched and new

policies adopted.

### **National Priorities and Perspectives for future action**

- **Revision of the Constitution.** Integrate across all rights not only the principle of gender equality but also **the supremacy of international standards over internal standards**, which requires the appropriate alignment therewith of Moroccan law.
- Measures for **better application of the Family Code**
- Accelerate the establishment of the *familial mutual assistance fund*
- **Enact a Morocco-EU agreement on conflict of laws** and the procedure for exequatur of family law
- Create the *Observatory for gender equality*
- Strengthen women's political participation by **institutionalising affirmative action measures**
- Support implementation of the **Communal Charter and involve the media in promoting the culture of equality**
- **Target migrant and refugee women** for programmes combating gender-based violence
- **Involve men in the sharing of domestic responsibilities**

### **Lebanon**

The situation of Lebanese women has always been highly two-edged: on the one hand, a wide emancipation of women, schooling on a footing with men, active participation in the various fields of social, economic and cultural life and on the other hand, a great discrimination in the family codes and a striking backwardness in political participation. The Constitution provide for the autonomy of religious groups in managing the personal status of their congregations and have thus put provisions on the family code into the hands of each religious community.

### **National Priorities and Perspectives for future action**

The country analysis of Lebanon highlights the following three aspects that require particular attention as a support strategy:

- The **development of strategic considerations** to which the public institutions concerned and the Lebanese non-governmental organisations and associations should adhere, **with the technical support of bilateral and multilateral agencies,**
- The **development of a network of actions** promoting the active participation of women in decision-making in public life and a network of pressure groups combating violence against women
- The need for action concerning **the woman's right to give her nationality to her children born of a marriage with a foreigner,** and **the revision on the legislation governing personal status.**

## **Syria**

Before and after ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women,(CEDAW) many efforts have been made in Syria to improve the situation of women at all levels of public and private life. Yet, legal discriminations and gender stereotypes are obstacles for women to be able to effectively exercise their rights

### **National Priorities and Perspectives for future action**

To address the obstacles, gaps and remaining challenges in promoting women's rights, the main priorities and strategic interventions cluster around:

- **Legal reform: lift the reservations to CEDAW** and adopt a new **Personal Status Law** that is favourable women's rights and equality;
- **Policy measures: ratify the Women Protection against Violence Plan** and adopt an 11<sup>th</sup> 5 Year Plan which dedicates a special chapter to women's empowerment, focusing on women in decision making positions and GBV;
- **Enhance capacity of governmental institutions** that provide services to women in areas of education, health, legislations and economic empowerment;
- **Deepen knowledge through research and studies** and set up a women study centre within an existing Study and Research Centre;

- **Women and employment:** adopt plans to increase the number of women in the labour force.

## **Occupied Palestinian Territory**

The Basic Law of Palestine makes no difference between men and women. **The country's Personal Status Laws however, based on religious laws** inherited from Jordan (applicable in the West Bank) and Egypt (applicable in Gaza), contain discriminatory provisions in the areas of marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance. Moreover, **the non-state status of the OPT** implies that it does not have the capacity to undertake binding international legal obligations.

## **National Priorities and Perspectives for future action**

Based on the analysis, challenges and opportunities, national actors have agreed on the following common set of priorities:

- **Disseminate the international framework on women's rights and gender equality**, particularly the less known Istanbul Ministerial Conclusions;
- **Align laws with international human rights standards** with an emphasis on the reform of the Family Code and the Penal Code;
- **Combat violence against women and killing of women in the name of the honour** through legal reform, policy measures and services, training and awareness raising of women;
- Increase the number of **women participating in political parties and holding leadership positions**;
- Enhance **female education and economic empowerment** and mainstream gender in national economic strategies and policies, including gender research;
- **Combat stereotypes in school curriculum and in the media**;
- **Bring an end to the Israeli military occupation of the OPT**;

## **Tunisia**

Tunisia's achievements in promoting equality are reflected in terms of laws, mechanisms, policies and programmes and commitments aiming to implement the Conventions

notably CEDAW and the Conclusions of the Istanbul Ministerial Conference. However, there are still obstacles and resistance that limit women's full enjoyment of their equal rights

### **National Priorities and Perspectives for future action**

**CEDAW.** The reservations to CEDAW must be lifted and certain provisions of the convention must be implemented "effectively".

The recommendations of the **Euromed Human Rights Network (EMHRN)** must be taken into consideration regarding the implementation and monitoring of the Istanbul Conclusions

**Gender based Violence** The stakeholder partners must be trained in the implementation of the national strategy for combating GBV

**Gender Equality:** It is necessary to: create networking between "gender" focal points; work to **improve the visibility of gender in the media** to stimulate reflection on the gender issue in various areas of life (work, school, university, private life); and create skills for the integration of gender.

It is necessary to promote Euro-Mediterranean coordination at the UfM level and at the level of the neighbourhood policy, involving NGOs.

#### **Women and international crises (economic and cultural)**

It is necessary to **study the impact of the financial crisis on the status of women**

It is also necessary to face up to **the threat of religious extremism**, which presents a serious threat to the advances gained by women and their emancipation.

### **General Comments and Conclusions**

The report, which covers the years 2008-2011 reveals several similarities and differences at various levels of the selected Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries (9 countries) at local and regional level, covering also international obligations

- **The role of women, as leaders in the development of women's rights** stands out clearly as civil society actors as well as public figures, although in the case of the latter, with limitations due to the low participation rate of women in decision-making positions, both economic and political

- In a number of areas, in particular reconciling work and family laws, **the impact of education on employment, stereotyping, especially through the media, lack of information about women's rights for women themselves and the general public** are common in almost all countries.
- One of **the most serious issues raised is gender-based violence at home and in public**; there is the need for a comprehensive approach to this issue as its consequences are not only a threat to democracy, but an obstacle to economic and social development
- All Euromed partners from the north and south of the Mediterranean are encouraged to access the full reports, of which this report comprises only a limited view, to gauge their positions through **a comparative analysis, to be in a better position to share good practices, to identify new opportunities for all of us to network, to be proactive in taking concrete action to build on what has been achieved so far in gender equality and in other areas that so far have not been addressed**
- The full reports will also serve **as a basis for the Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions of Euromed as well as NGOs and Platforms in partner countries in their preparatory work for the country reports for the Marrakech Follow-up Ministerial Conference (2012)**
- To conclude, as the events of the transition to democracy and governance unfold from one day to another, both in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries, although at different levels, there is **the need for further studies and assessments and action to be taken, not least at global level to take into consideration the impact of these events on the rights of women and gender equality in the Euromed region**

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