



REPORT

EURO-MED WOMEN'S RIGHTS CONFERENCE

FROM MINISTERIAL CONCLUSIONS
TO GENDER EQUALITY POLICY MAKING
IN THE EURO-MED REGION

28-29 November 2016 Beirut, Lebanon

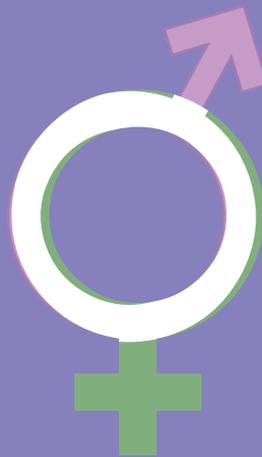


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This report is intended to reflect the discussions during the conference. The content and opinions expressed within this report are the sole responsibility of the speakers and participants and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.

ACRONYMS

BpA	Beijing Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Eradication of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
Euro-Med	Euro Mediterranean
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
GRP	Gender Regional Platform
IFE-EFI	Euromed Feminist Initiative
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NAP	National Action Plan
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UfM	Union for the Mediterranean
UN	United Nations
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
VAW	Violence Against Women
WG	Working Group
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WR	Women's Rights

1. CONFERENCE BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Euromed Feminist Initiative provides a platform for enhancing dialogue between women's rights organizations, policy makers and political leaders in order to promote women's rights and gender equality in the Euro-Med region. To this end, Euromed Feminist Initiative approaches the UfM Ministerial Process on strengthening the role of women in society as a major regional tool for sustainable improvement of women's status and lives, in one framework with international women's rights instruments, notably CEDAW, BpA, UNSCRs on women, peace and security, and SDGs.

1.1 BACKGROUND

The Euro-Med Women's Rights Conference: "From Ministerial Conclusions to gender equality policy making in the Euro-Med Region" is part of a wide process on building a Gender Regional Platform launched in 2015 by Euromed Feminist Initiative with the support of the EU in order to contextualize the implementation of the Ministerial Conclusions from the 3rd UfM Ministerial Conference on women's rights (Paris, 2013) in the on-going challenges in the region, enhance cross sector regional co-operation through policy dialogue, and exchange of best practices with existing networks and stakeholders in the Southern Neighborhood.

This process brought together over 600 representatives from women's rights CSOs, CBOs, gender experts, academics and researchers with decision-makers and legislators. It provided a platform for key stakeholders to analyze the challenges of gender equality policy making in the region in the context of the changing political landscape.

A first regional dialogue was organized in partnership with the Jordanian Ministry of Social Development in February 2016. It provided major reflections on common challenges after the Paris Ministerial Conference and, based on them, formulated common priorities. Seven national dialogues in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan enriched the work done at the regional level and formulated priorities and policy actions grounded in national realities. A second regional dialogue, held in Cairo September 2016, illustrated the strengthened and widened partnership among key stakeholders.

The process highlighted the need for a space where civil society organizations can come together with governmental representatives, legislators, and other key stakeholders to share best practice and identify common actions. This preparatory work established the foundation of the Gender Regional Platform that is sensitive to regional trends and local realities and that includes concrete proposals for policy actions, which go beyond political rhetoric. It paved the way for the Euro-Med Women's Rights Conference, which ultimately augmented and endorsed policy recommendations to the 4th UfM Ministerial Meeting planned for 2017.

Regional Dialogue – Core Objectives

- Identification of on-going challenges to the region since 2013
- Enhancement of cross-sector regional cooperation
- Diffusion and exchange of best practices
- Policy making recommendations

Core Areas of Work

- Ending discrimination against women
- Strengthening women's participation in political and economic life
- Changing educational system and gender stereotypes
- Ending violence against women, wars and occupation
- Ensuring freedom and independence of civil society
- Enhancing support for women's rights organisations

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1.2 KEY OBJECTIVES

The Conference aimed to enrich the previous dialogue achievements, and take an effective step towards supporting comprehensive gender equality policy-making in the region. Development of a gender equality framework is a major way to challenge the rise of social conservatism, religious extremism, nationalism, and populism. Strengthening formal equality in the Euro-Med region has also been seen as a necessary precondition for achieving long term political solutions to conflicts and the on-going refugee crisis.

The Conference wished to provide an important platform for women's rights advocacy towards Euro-Med governments and for follow up on key commitments and monitoring mechanisms in the whole Euro-Med region.

Finally, the Conference aimed to provide space to finalize the Gender Regional Platform with policy recommendations for the 2017 UfM Ministerial Conference on women's rights.

1.3 PARTICIPANTS

The Conference brought together key stakeholders in the region, including:

** Civil Society*

Specifically, women's rights CSOs, gender experts, human rights defenders, academia

** Decision makers and political actors:*

Female and male politicians and members of parliaments

** State actors from Euro-Med:*

- o Ministries involved in the UfM Ministerial Process,
- o European Commission and European External Action Service
- o Diplomats, representatives of Embassies

** Media representatives and journalists*

1.4 OUTCOMES

The Conference produced detailed discussions and insights into the opportunities and constraints for the development of comprehensive gender equality framework in the region. Major policy recommendations have been drawn from the plenary discussions and the conclusions of the working groups, enriching and finalizing the *Gender Regional Platform*.

“ The Gender Regional Platform responds to the urgent need to work together in order to fill the gap between fundamental citizenship rights and the reality of women's lives. ”

(Ms. Lilian Halls-French)

The Conference strengthened the structured dialogue between the women's rights organizations and decision makers to follow up on the implementation of the ministerial conclusions. The contribution of academics and gender experts provided data for evidence-based policy making.

2. CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS DAY ONE

2.1 OPENING SESSION: COMMITMENT TO INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL MECHANISMS THAT PROMOTE AND PROTECT THE UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN: CHANGING CONTEXTS AFTER PARIS 2013

The UfM Ministerial Process on strengthening the role of women in society has been reaffirmed as a major regional tool for promoting women's rights and strengthening gender equality policies in the Euro-Med region. However, despite recent achievements across the region, the highly volatile geo-political context and its evolution since the last Ministerial Conference pose significant and on-going challenges to the full implementation of women's rights. Growing concern about security has contributed to sidelining gender equality as a policy priority.

“ Women are increasingly carrying the burden of political instability. ”

(Mr. Wajeeh Azayzeh)

This first panel set out the main objectives of the conference, and raised challenges for the development of gender equality policies in line with international women's rights instruments, such as CEDAW, BpA and the UN Women, Peace and Security Agenda, as set out by UNSCR 1325.

Ms. Lilian Halls French, Co-President of Euromed Feminist Initiative, pointed out the main objectives of the conference, highlighting in particular the key role of CSOs in drafting and preparing recommendations for the next UfM Ministerial Conference.

H.E. Eng. Wajeeh Azayzeh, Minister of Social Development, Jordan, drew attention to the relationship between legal and economic empowerment and called for commitment to “full” empowerment, particularly given the increase of gender based violence across the region. He expressed his concern that violence and extremism affect women the most because it also forced many to return home and abandon their workplaces. Mr. Azayzeh underlined the need to have strong cooperation between government and civil society in addressing these issues.

H.E. Ms. Alice Chaptini, Minister for Displaced Persons, Lebanon, welcomed the conference timing and reminded the delegates the commitments set out at the Paris Ministerial Conference. She called in particular for improvements in women's representation and participation in politics and the protection of women refugees.

H.E. Ms. Neziha Labidi, Minister of Women's Affairs, Family and Children, Republic of Tunisia, highlighted (via video) lessons learned from the Tunisian experience, such as the importance of inscribing parity and equality between women and men in Constitution and issuing law that concretize the State obligation to eradicate violence against women. She emphasized the positive role of the civil society played in Tunisia in this regard.

Mr. Jose-Luis Vinuesa-Santamaria, Head of Sustainable Development Section, EU Delegation, Lebanon, outlined the importance of the partnership between the EU and civil society through the ENP, underlining the necessity of cooperation between the civil society organizations and institutions, as the platforms are complementary and can be mutually supportive.

Finally, Ms. Véronique Aulagnon, Director of the French Institute in Lebanon, reminded the audience that twenty years after the Beijing summit, collective actions in favour of women's rights remain more important than ever in order to counteract the increasing trend of regression. She called for social solidarity towards improvement of women's living conditions and the adoption of strong institutional mechanisms for gender equality.

Opening Session: Summary

Past achievements in the field of women's rights threatened by increased social conservatism

Gender equality laws are necessary to set norms and address discrimination

Women position in the family is core area for women's rights: Reform of personal status laws is difficult but necessary

There is a persistent gap between progressive laws and their implementation

Lifting reservations from CEDAW and developing NAPs for implementation of UNSCR1325 contribute to curbing legal discrimination and building peace and democracy

All stakeholders must work together to consolidate past achievements and avoid retrenchment

Both women and men benefit from implementation of gender equality

Annuling legal discrimination is a key first step to ensure justice, empowerment and freedom for women

Institutions, judiciary most often reproduce gender based discrimination

Broad training and awareness raising programs needed to adhere to core principles of international WR framework (CEDAW, UNSCR1325, BpA, SDGs)



2.2 SESSION ONE: CURBING GENDER BASED DISCRIMINATION, VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND EXCLUSION FROM THE PUBLIC SPHERE THROUGH LEGISLATION

This session reflected on the shrinking space for large-scale reforms of political systems and laws. Socially conservative and populist movements are coming together with religious fundamentalist forces and are posing a serious challenge to progressive actors seeking to expand the rights of women and ensure their full access to citizenship. What is clear from the contributions to this session is that achieving democracy requires making equality between women and men a top priority. Drawing on a range of experiences from across the Euro-Med, this session looked at ways to tackle gender based discrimination through the prism of law.

“ Men will have more rights and safer environment if women's rights are better protected. ”

(Ms. Vesna Pusic)

H.E. Ms. Vesna Pusic, Member of Parliament, Former First Deputy Prime Minister, Former Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Croatia, opened the session. Drawing on her experience, she warned against the dangers of rising populist movement for the advancement of women's rights. Specifically, she identified social conservatism, fundamentalism, and religious isolationism as the main threats to the future development of gender equality and called on all stakeholders to work together to preserve the achievements of the last twenty years. Ms. Pusic established links between the treatment of minority groups and women's rights. The interconnected nature of fundamental rights means that the whole society benefits from advancement in the area of gender equality. The only way to ensure that these rights are preserved in the context of growing pushback is to strive to ensure that all social, ethnic and economic groups are protected. Legislation is one of the most effective ways to mobilise grassroots movements, however, what is needed is better education as well as access to health care and jobs. Supporting a transnational movement of resistance against global misogyny is a fight against growing incidence of brutality and violence against women. Men need to become allies in this struggle, as they are needed as part of the solution.

Similarly, **Ms. Neila Chaabane**, President of Tunisian Association of Constitutional Law, Former State Secretary of Women's Affairs, outlined the importance of women's participation in social movements and their position in the family as core areas of work for advancing women's rights in the region. She underlined the importance of the recent legislative changes aiming at promoting equality in the field of family and inheritance which contributed to raising women's awareness and their access to the political sphere. However, women still remain underrepresented in the areas of decision making. Women's position in the family and domestic violence remains one of the fundamental areas of feminist jurisprudence.

Ms. Zita Hernandez, Judge, Founding Member of the Association of Spanish Women Judges, Spain, reminded us as well that adopting a comprehensive approach to domestic violence is a first step towards tackling one of the root causes of inequality. Spain has adopted a frame law on violence against women. However, the fact that this offence is not given an increased penalty highlights the difficulty in understanding the gendered nature of this form of violence. Shortcomings in knowledge on the issue and lack of training of the judiciary itself as well as deeply rooted gender hierarchies remain some of the most significant obstacles in seeking to counteract violence against women in the family.

Mr. Ameer Alkinani, Legal Advisor of President of Iraq, reminded the delegates that even if the challenges for women's rights advocates are many, it is also important to recognise the significant changes achieved by many countries in the region, particularly at the constitutional level. Drawing on the Iraqi experience, he elaborated on the role played by National Action Plans for implementation of UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security in annulling discrimination for women in legislation. The Cross Sector Task Force on the implementation of the NAP 1325 in Iraq has now put forward a draft legal text suggesting amendments to discriminative articles in the penal code and personal status law. However, the proposals are expected to face opposition in Parliament.

Session One: Main Points of Discussion

Past achievements in the field of women's rights are threatened by increasing social conservatism

Gender equality laws are necessary to set norms and address discrimination

Women position in the family is a core area for women's rights

There is a persistent gap between progressive laws and their implementation

Lifting reservations from CEDAW and developing NAPs for implementation of UNSCR1325 contribute to curbing legal discrimination and building peace and democracy

All stakeholders must work together to consolidate past achievements and avoid retrenchment

Both women and men benefit from implementation of gender equality

Annuling legal discrimination is a first step to ensure justice and freedom for women

Institutions, judiciary most often reproduce gender based discrimination

National legislation is harmonized with international women's rights instruments (CEDAW, UNSCR1325, BpA, SDGs)



2.3 PANEL DISCUSSION WITH STAKEHOLDERS: CROSS PERSPECTIVES ON THE 4TH UFM MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

The 2013 UfM Ministerial Conference in Paris “highlighted the important role of civil society as a valuable partner in the irreversible process started in Istanbul”. This institutional panel set out plans for ensuring the Ministerial Process can be a platform for women’s rights advocacy and for the development of a partnership between independent CSOs and governments in the region. Both actors are necessary for the development of an equality agenda for the Euro-Med.

“Women’s fight should not be separated from society’s development, especially with what is going on right now in our area.”

(Mr. Musa Maaytah)

Ms. Boriانا Jönsson, Executive Director of the Euromed Feminist Initiative, led the conversation with the institutional actors, emphasizing that the conference wishes to contribute to translating the Ministerial Conclusions into policy actions and concrete measures using lessons learned and sharing of best practices in the region.

Calling on delegates to remember the human side of the negotiations, **H.E. Ms Delphine Borione**, Senior Deputy Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean, stressed that for UfM, complementary practices are key. Specifically civil society and governments need to collaborate and work in parallel. Calling on delegates to remember the human side of the negotiations, she focused on the impact of culture and values on achieving gender equality. Moreover, the 2013 economic crisis, and the rise of extremism and migration, pose additional challenges to achieving this objective. Ms. Borione agreed that there is still a huge gap in implementing local and international laws and affirmed “We need to tackle all subjects related to women in a horizontal manner.”

Building on these points, **H.E. Mr. Musa Maaytah**, Minister of Political and Parliamentary Affairs and Minister of State, Jordan, touched on the social barriers that hinder women’s progress. He insisted on the fact that women’s issues are social issues, and emphasized the necessity to link the women’s rights movements with the democratic movement; to work simultaneously on women’s rights, development and democracy as well as fighting terrorism, in order to allow women to play their role in society.

Acknowledging that countries in the south of the Mediterranean have gone through difficult transition, **H.E. Ambassador Wafaa Bassim**, Member of Foreign Affairs Committee, National Council for Women, Egypt, highlighted the importance of economic emancipation and independence. The Ministerial Conclusions can provide a useful long term action plan, as it is unlikely that the objectives set out in this document can be achieved in the short term. Ambassador Bassim called for establishing indicators identifying areas that have made the greatest progress as well as those facing the greatest obstacles.

Finally, **Ms. Imen Kalai**, Director of Women’s Affairs, Ministry of Women, Family and Children, Tunisia, called for working hard to minimize the effects of violence against women. In order to help find solutions, she urged representatives to make “comprehensive and deep studies to determine why the numbers are increasing”. In discussing the advocacy strategy towards adopting a law against violence against women in Tunisia, developed in cooperation with civil society, she highlighted the importance of institutionalizing an inter-sectorial process in order to strengthen the transversal approach and therefore its efficiency in addressing violence against women.

Panel Discussion: Main Points of Discussion

Resistance against progress in the area of women's rights is cultural and institutional

Establishing a gender equality legal framework is important but not sufficient

Socio-cultural change is required: violence against women still not a priority for most governments

Range of obstacles for data collection and monitoring of key indicators on VAW

Importance of comprehensive approach to gender equality, involving all stakeholders

Governments and civil society must raise public awareness to change social attitudes

Coordination and cooperation between governments and civil society are keys to long-term success

Crucial role of civil society in monitoring progress through concrete indicators



2.4 SESSION 2: INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS AND REGIONAL DOCUMENTS AS UNIQUE, COMMON FRAME OF REFERENCE FOR NATIONAL CONSTITUTIONS AND LEGISLATION, SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND SECURITY

This session discussed the importance of applying international women's rights treaties and activating regional and national mechanisms for gender equality. Referring to the challenges identified so far, the discussions reaffirmed that the international women's rights instruments, specifically CEDAW, BpA, UNSCR 1325 and related resolutions (1820, 1888, 1889), and SDGs, are needed tools in promoting change at the national level. They set out international norms, and seek to counter gender based discrimination on the ground of culture, religion or traditions. The session also examined the link between the implementation of the international and regional women's rights documents and the building of peace and democracy.

H.E. Ms. Majida Masri, Head of Palestinian Federation of Women, Action Committees and former Minister of Social Development, Palestine, reminded the audience that the 3rd UfM Ministerial Conclusions reaffirmed the commitments of the governments in Euro-Med region to apply these essential references and highlighted the need to address the gap between ratification and compliance by mobilizing the CSOs to hold the governments accountable for their international commitments. She emphasized the importance of applying UNSCR 1325 according to the local context, giving as an example the Palestinian experience of developing a NAP for implementation of UNSCR1325, even if UNSCR 1325 does not address the needs of women under occupation.

Col. Elie Al Asmar, Head of ISF Division Research and Studies, Lebanon, reminded conference attendees of the core values of the international women's rights treaties and their inter-relatedness. He explained how women's rights organizations bring home these values through raising awareness of the rights recognized by the treaties, by training the judiciaries, police, and other institutions, and by lobbying for change of discriminatory laws. He underlined the importance of involving men in advocating for women's rights.

Ms. Lilian Halls French, Co-President of Euromed Feminist Initiative, underlined that international treaties offer normative leverage to national civil society organizations and that they strengthen domestic mobilization to monitor State obligations. She emphasized that all international women's rights treaties are the result of global feminist mobilization and thus support counter-action against the growing cultural relativism.

Session Two: Main Points of Discussion

International WR treaties counter discrimination on the ground of culture, religion or traditions

The 3rd UfM Ministerial Conclusions reaffirmed the commitments of the governments in Euro-Med region to apply these references at national level

International treaties help CSOs to hold governments accountable for their international commitments to women's rights norms and values

Commitment to and implementation of international WR norms and standards enhances democracy and peace

Implementation of the UfM Ministerial Conclusions is an obligation of the governments; a key role of civil society is to promote policies and monitor progress

Women's rights CSOs promote these values in their countries by coordinated action towards raising awareness, advocacy and education on women's rights

3. CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS DAY TWO

The high quality and level of debate made the second day equally productive. The morning session focused on education and reform, after which four working groups discussed policy recommendations in four major areas identified in the preparatory draft of the Gender Regional Platform. They presented their analyses and conclusions in a plenary session. The last session opened a lively debate on mechanisms needed to be set up to ensure efficient implementation of gender equality on the national and regional level, followed by final remarks and closing of the conference.

3.1 SESSION 3: REFORMING THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM, CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES AND SOCIAL DISCOURSE

In order to reach cultural changes required for achieving gender equality, it is important to analyze the values that are being reproduced by the media and the education systems. Reforming the education system requires understanding that gender is itself both a structure and a hierarchy of power. It is for this reason that engendering school curricula and education systems remain, for women's rights defenders, a priority since the first Ministerial Conference (Istanbul 2006). This session examined the impact and limitations of different interventions and methods in achieving behavioral change and greater equality outcomes.

“The best laws may be inefficient if political will and a strategy to change reactionary mindset and traditional vision of masculinity are missing. ”

(Ms. Zineb Oubouchou)

Ms. Zineb Oubouchou, Journalist at El Watan, Algeria, reminded attendees that violence against women is linked to the unequal gender power structures that favor male power over women and reproduce violent masculinity. She emphasized that stereotypes and mindsets are driving backwards women's rights and stated that instrumentalization of religion by conservative forces has led to assimilation of the action of women's rights CSOs to a break with cultural values, or even to heresy.

Ms. Vedrana Frasto, from CURE Foundation, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), outlined the challenge of reforming school curricula and the national education system in BiH, where political change did not affect social trends. In order to understand how gender influences school curricula it is essential to look at the narratives that underpin the national education system. For instance, gender sensitive language is not applied in the writing of textbooks and women are mostly kept out of History.

Ms. Karima Kamal, independent journalist and political activist from Egypt, made a link between the under-representation of women in decision-making and the way education reproduces gender stereotypes and the dominant gender power order. Additionally, women's invisibility or absence from the top media outlets crystallises gender hierarchies. Despite the promise of the revolution, education and media have actually served to further marginalise women's issues. The dominant assumption is that these are second order issues compared to “political priorities” that the government needs to concentrate on. Even if attempts were made to increase women's representation in parliament, the political environment has not favoured challenging gender stereotypes.

Session Three: Main Points of Discussion

Women's rights concerns are too often relegated to second order status	▶	Change will only be achieved if gender equality becomes a political priority
Political change and social change do not always go hand in hand	▶	Women's invisibility in media outlets contributes to silencing women's voices
Present political environment is not favorable to changing gender stereotypical representation of women	▶	Absence of women from top level media compounds contributes to women's marginal position in political sphere
Despite cultural differences, gender stereotypes cross national borders	▶	Networking with and among women journalists supports and promotes change

3.2 WORKING GROUPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The delegates were asked to join the working groups and discuss the policy recommendations in the areas identified by the process:

- * Ending discrimination against women and strengthening women's participation
- * Changing education system and challenging gender stereotypes and attitudes
- * Ending violence against women, wars and occupation
- * Ensuring freedom of civil society and support to women's rights CSOs

Each group was tasked with distilling the recommendations into a maximum of five to be used in the development of the formal recommendations and the Gender Regional Platform to be presented at the next ministerial conference.

3.2.1 WORKING GROUP 1:

ENDING DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN AND STRENGTHENING OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

The discussion of working group one was introduced by the presentations of Ms. Arabya Kousri-Labidi, Member of the National Board of the Party Ettakatol, Founding member of party's commission of women, Tunisia, Mr. Elie Kayrouz, Member of Parliament, lawyer and women's rights advocate, Lebanon, and Ms. Diana Culi, President of Independent Forum for Albanian Woman, Albania. The discussion concentrated on the tension between legal and substantive equality. Legislation is a necessary first step as it provides a normative framework for tackling inequalities and enables women's access to decision making and labor market. However, it does not by itself challenge and change public attitudes and gender stereotypes. Additionally, achieving equality requires recognition of the value of the social function of care and unpaid work more generally. Finally, States need to commit to the full implementation of international women's rights covenants.



RECOMMENDATIONS WORKING GROUP ONE

Ending discrimination against women and strengthening women's participation and role in political and economic life

- * Introduce laws and policies on equality and equal opportunities between women and men with special regard to minority groups and allocated financial means for their implementation.
- * Introduce monitoring indicators, mechanisms and women's rights agencies to supervise the implementation of gender equality laws and policies.
- * Provide the judiciary with adequate training programs on gender equality and ensure that they are sensitive to women's systemic discrimination when applying the law.
- * Enforce gender parity in electoral ballots, public bodies, governing bodies of political parties and private company boards with special regard to minority groups' representation.
- * Increase employment opportunities for women through, among others, enforcing policies to share parental leaves between women and men, equal pay for equal work, valuing the unpaid work in the private sector, and encouraging men's involvement in caring tasks.
- * UfM and international institutions must encourage the States to ratify and enforce international women's rights treaties. Create a Mediterranean inter-parliamentarian commission to monitor the protection and implementation of women's rights and gender equality in the area.

3.2.2. WORKING GROUP 2:

REFORMING EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND CHALLENGING GENDER STEREOTYPES AND ATTITUDES

Working group two focused on the issue of gender stereotypes, as reinforced by school curricula and the media. The discussion was introduced by Ms. Mounira Hammami, Gender Expert AFTURD Tunisia, Ms. Nadia Ait Zai, Gender Expert, CIDDEF Algeria, Ms. Sanja Cesar, from Center for Education, Counseling, and Research, Croatia. Necessary preconditions for challenging gender stereotypes are a change in the way State narratives are incorporated in school textbooks, and the quality of the overall learning environment. Educational reform therefore needs to be strategic, structural and holistic. It needs to acknowledge that gender hierarchies shape the syllabus and help to propagate social and economic unequal gender power structures.

Media also play a key role in challenging or reproducing gender stereotypes. The way women are represented in media outlets provides important insights into women's position in society. Networks of women journalists can influence the nature and spectrum of gender's representation in the media and be a supportive mechanism, in particular when the number of women active in the public sphere facing threats is increasing.



RECOMMENDATIONS WORKING GROUP TWO

Reforming the educational system and using media to change gender stereotypes and attitudes towards gender equality

Ministries of education commit to reform education systems by applying a holistic approach that combines:

- * Normative framework based on international human rights and gender equality standards
- * Outcomes from nation-based action research of the needs on the ground
- * Measures to enhance a gender equality friendly learning environment at school
- * Binding outcomes and indicators
- * Allocated financial resources for implementation

Establish a Commission to design curricula based on the following principles:

- * Academic freedom and independence
- * Gender sensitive language and content
- * Gender sensitive civic education
- * Sex education
- * Gender equality and universality of women's human rights
- * Contemporary learning tools and activities
- * Lifelong learning

Develop a manual of best practices that seeks to:

- * Disseminate the concepts and values of gender equality, citizenship and democracy in schools
- * Support critical thinking
- * Adopt experiential learning pedagogy
- * Develop a "roadmap" to enable building of ownership and sustain reform and modernization in the learning environment

Set up and support networking of female journalists in the Euro-Med area in order to:

- * Create a platform for strengthening the female voices in media
- * Create a venue for solidarity and collaboration to counter sexist stereotypes, narratives and discourse
- * Expose and curb violations of women's rights and feminist journalists
- * Provide professional gender-sensitive training on contemporary media topics, tools and activities
- * Create linkages between media and gender equality policy
- * Establish female media coaching and mentorship

Establish a media observatory to shoulder the following responsibilities:

- * Gender mainstream media platforms and narrative
- * Gender sensitize media narrative and topics
- * Track violations of women's rights and build accountability
- * Expose and shame sexist media
- * Exchange best practices of gender sensitive media

3.2.3. WORKING GROUP 3:

ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, WARS AND OCCUPATION

This session focused on mechanisms for the implementation of the core principles of women's peace and security agenda across the region. Ms. Suzan Aref, Coordinator Task Force 1325 Iraq, Ms. Maya Al Rahabi, General Coordinator Coalition of Syrian Women for Democracy, Ms. Lavinia Spennati, Gender Equality & Women's Rights Program Officer, EuroMed Rights, Copenhagen, Denmark, opened the session by outlining the complex nature of VAW and key challenges facing women's rights advocates in addressing violence against women. Understanding violence against women in its continuum is key to understanding how and why it is used in armed conflict. The connection was made for example between legal systems that fail to protect the rights of women before the onset of armed conflict, and the exacerbation of violence against women during the conflict and in the post-conflict transition. In the whole region, increasing conservative and traditional trends together with religious fundamentalist movements are hindering women from fully exercising their citizenship rights and to live a life free of violence. In the MENA countries many governments have reservations about CEDAW, which contributes to sustaining violence against women in the public and private sphere –family, marriage, inheritance and property.

Armed conflict and Israeli occupation perpetuate the circle of violence against women in the region with hundreds of thousands being displaced. They have also brought about the reappearance of horrific forms of collective violence against women such as sexual enslavement, killing, exploitation, collective sexual assault, kidnapping, and human trafficking. Providing a safe environment free from gender-based violence that supports equality policies is thus the principal gateway to ensuring human security and creating safe spaces for women.

The participants recognized that women's meaningful participation and role is a request to instigating transformative change in society and a better environment to curb VAW. International agreements expect signatory States to lift barriers against women's participation in politics, in political transitions and peace-making; to protect women's rights advocates, and work towards ending violence against women globally. A full commitment to developing action plans for implementation of UNSCR1325 and the implementation of the Istanbul Convention are essential to improve equal citizenship and women's rights and lives across the region. It was underlined that ending occupation and solving conflicts through political solutions is the only way to achieve sustainable and inclusive peace.



RECOMMENDATIONS WORKING GROUP THREE

Ending violence against women, wars and occupation

Violence against women in public and private

- * Criminalize all forms of violence against women with binding legal measures
- * Annul discriminatory laws that withhold women's rights and bring about violence against women
- * Reinforce implementation of law in order to close the gap between formal rights and substantial rights
- * Strengthen public awareness of the violations of women's right to live out of fear at all moments of their lives
- * Enforce the discourse on the link between structural VAW and human security

Protection of women during armed conflicts

- * Secure the access of female refugees to essential humanitarian services
- * Enforce ratified international agreements so that they are mandatory, especially the 1951 Refugee Convention
- * Protect women's rights defenders and facilitate their movement and work
- * Criminalize all types of violence against women during armed conflicts; develop laws and mechanisms to put an end to impunity of perpetrators

Women, peace and security

- * Enable women and women's rights defenders to have meaningful participation and roles in all peace processes
- * Adopt national action plans for the implementation of UNSCRs 1325, 1820, 1888, and 1889, incorporating measures addressing the situation of female refugees
- * Establish a system to monitor, document and investigate acts of violence against women during armed conflicts
- * Urgently initiate a peace process towards ending Israeli occupation, through dismantling the settlements on occupied territories, and enabling the establishment of an independent Palestinian state within the 1967 borders and the return of the refugees to their homes according to the 194 Resolution

3.2.4. WORKING GROUP 4:

ENSURING FREEDOM AND INDEPENDENT ACTION OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND SUPPORT TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS CSOS

This working group focused on one of the most pressing issues in relation to women's rights advocacy. Dr. Fatma Khafaji, Alliance for Arab Women, Egypt, Ms. Edmé Domínguez, Associate Professor Latin American Studies, School of Global Studies University of Gothenburg Sweden, Gender and Development in Practice, and Ms. Fatima Aarach, Member of the National Council for Human Rights, Morocco, provided an introduction to the working group's discussion and helped to frame the recommendations. Specifically, this working group addressed the increasing threats to the independent action, space and freedoms of civil society and noted that these freedoms and the rights of civil society have decreased significantly in recent years.

Restriction in funding and increasing interference of governmental and international agencies limit the scope of CSOs, which hinders their involvement in the field of women's rights and gender equality. Terrorism and political violence are now being used to justify curtailing civil liberties and freedom of assembly and speech. Such measures as well as restrictive emergency laws limit women's access to the public sphere, which

contradicts governments' stated commitment to increase women's political participation. It is therefore all the more important that CSOs continue to work in a unified and collective way and develop structural cooperation with political parties and stakeholders. However, CSOs are committed to working with decision makers, parties, unions, and members of parliament.

The group reaffirmed the important role of independent and feminist civil society, which holds the values of equality and women's human rights as the foundation for sustainable development. Finally, the group expressed the need for governmental recognition of independent civil society, as part of their commitment to democratic governance.



RECOMMENDATIONS WORKING GROUP FOUR

Ensuring freedom and independent action of the civil society and support to women's rights organizations

- * Guarantee the right of civil society organizations and activists to organize independently, the right to assembly and the freedom of expression and movement. To this end, review the NGO laws to safeguard these freedoms and to allow provision of international and national financial support.
- * Engage women's rights CSOs as partners in developing, implementing and monitoring national gender equality policies.
- * Recognize and safeguard the independent role and expertise of the women's rights CSOs and encourage structural dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders.
- * Guarantee the participation of the women's rights CSOs in all negotiations that include cooperation between the EU and southern-Mediterranean countries in the frame of partnership agreements.
- * Engage feminist civil society organisations as represented by the network of the Euromed Feminist Initiative in the national follow up and monitoring of the implementation of the UfM Ministerial Conclusions on women's rights.

3.4. SUMMARY WORKING GROUPS DISCUSSIONS

The discussion revealed a number of common issues, ranging from budgeting to representation in political and economic structures. Women’s participation in the public sphere either through CSOs, employment or formal politics is seen as key to promoting women’s rights and challenging gender stereotyping across the region.

The complex relationship between socio-economic structures on the one hand and, women’s individual and collective agency on the other, was also the subject of detailed discussion, which is reflected in all the working groups’ recommendations. In particular, the working groups recognized the importance of promoting women’s agency by shifting policy discourse that addresses women as agents of social and political transformation and that favors women’s rights and gender equality.

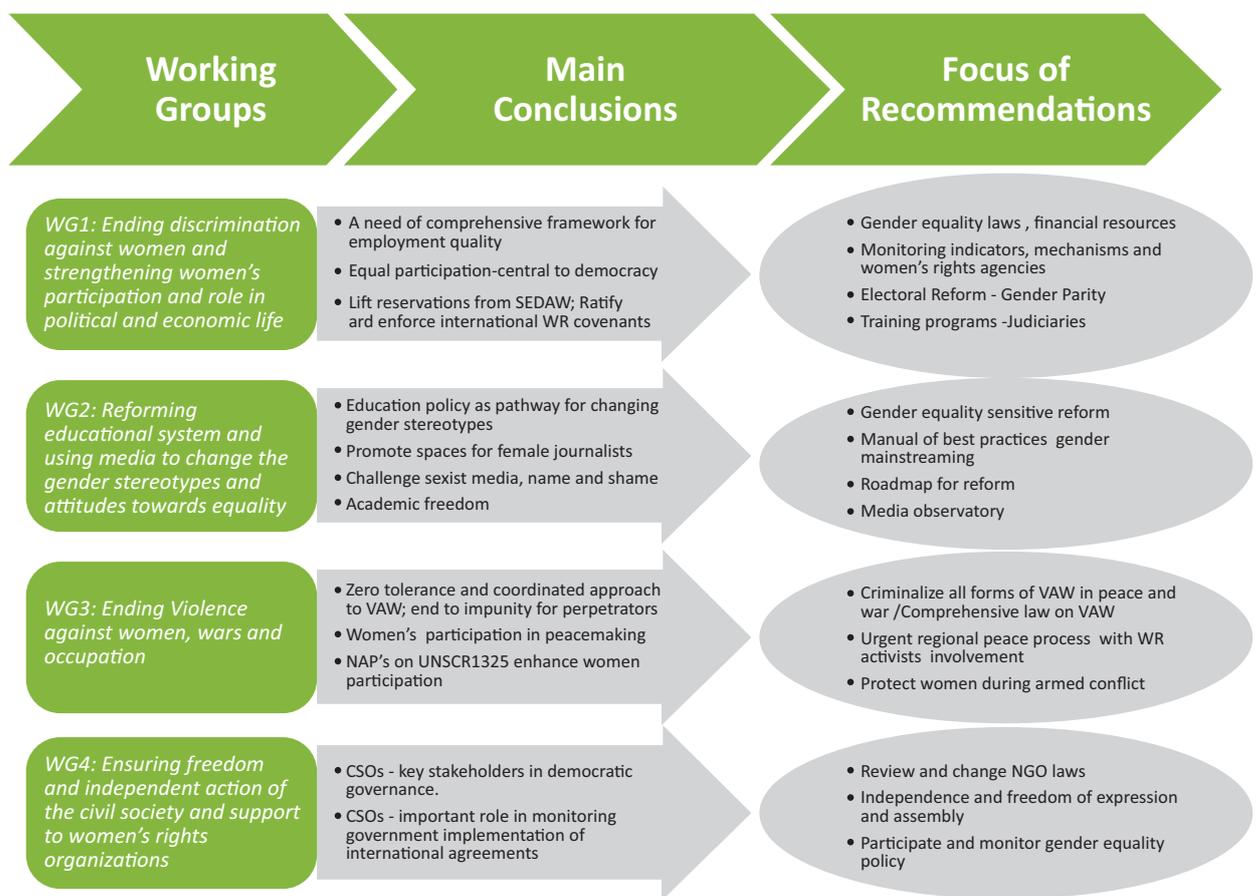


Figure 2 - Working Groups Conclusions and Recommendations

3.4 SESSION 5: MECHANISMS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GENDER EQUALITY

This final session was introduced by Ms. Wafa Bani Mustapha, Member of Parliament, Jordan, Chairperson of the network of women MPs from Arab countries to combat VAW, Mr. Abdelouahed Elatir, Head of Mission, Inter-ministerial Delegation for Human Rights, Morocco, and Dr. Magdy Belal, President, Egyptian Association for Community Participation Enhancement. Each of the speakers sought to address the overarching issue of determining what mechanisms need to be established in order to enforce effective implementation of gender equality policies.

“Women’s issues are always at the bottom of the agenda. We are working hard as a female block in Parliament to push women’s issues forward. ”

(Ms. Wafaa Bani Mustafa)

Ms. Wafaa Bani Mustafa underlined the importance of institutionalizing gender equality provisions in Constitutions and enumerated several discriminative laws that need to be amended. In order to pressure decision makers to make gender equality a priority on their agendas, she emphasized the importance of networking and mutual support among female MPs and the establishment of parliamentary committees across political parties’ lines on both the national and regional level. She also underlined the need of stronger cooperation among the female politicians and MPs with the women’s rights CSOs, and building of strong coalitions in order to “amend or address the many controversial issues and laws”.

Mr. Abdelouahed Elatir summarized the needed mechanisms for a concrete and effective implementation of gender equality policies, underlining the importance of applying already existing international human rights law mechanisms, civil society reporting as well as establishing monitoring and evaluation centers to document all forms of discrimination against women. The use of reporting mechanisms will help experts and practitioners monitor and evaluate governmental action plans and the implementation of policies. He emphasized the importance of structural collaboration between governments and civil society, as well as the need to provide funding to the CSOs in order to effectively support women’s rights.

Dr. Magdy Belal, discussed a number of challenges that hinder women’s progress and empowerment in the region and underlined the need to fully engage WR CSOs in cross-sector dialogue nationally, particularly now when a strong process has taken place on both the national and regional level and in a context when rights and freedoms are increasingly threatened. He pointed out that to this goal, the partnerships among CSOs themselves should be strengthening on the national as well as on the regional level.

Session Five: Main Points of Discussion	
Women’s rights are not a priority on national political, economic, social, and developmental agendas	▶ Establish women’s rights committees across political parties’ lines in national parliaments and on Euro-Med level
Move beyond conclusions and recommendations to concrete mechanisms for implementation	▶ Institutionalize the process on national level, fully engaging national WR CSOs in cross-sector dialogue
First time countries are asked to report on implementation of the UfM Ministerial Conclusions	▶ UfM strengthens reporting mechanism with outcomes indicators
Under pretext of terrorism, the freedoms of independent civil society have been curtailed	▶ Review NGO laws and challenge measures curtailing freedoms of CSOs.

4. CLOSING SESSION

The dialogue process and the conference, as a part of it, have emphasized the need to move beyond recommendations into developing concrete policy measures and implementation mechanisms. The fact that UfM asked for the first time governments to send comprehensive reports following up on implementation of the Ministerial Conclusions and that the relevant ministries have responded in a positive way, according to their statement commitments, is an asset.

A commitment to the full implementation of the international instruments, including the Istanbul Convention on Violence against Women, is a basic request to improve equal citizenship and women's rights and lives across the region. Utilizing the follow-up mechanisms for the implementation of CEDAW and other international instruments are therefore a key to the success of this process.

Violence against women, identified as "...one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position." (Vienna Declaration, 1993) is a massive, structural and universal obstacle to achieving gender equality. It affects the lives of women both in peacetime and armed conflict. Due to its pervasive nature, its many dimensions and types of abuse, the response to violence against women must be a multipronged approach and have measures in a wide variety of policy areas. Therefore, coordination is required to ensure that all agencies and actors are working towards the same goals.

At a time when the space for freedom is shrinking across the whole Euro-Med region, it is essential that civil society, and in particular women's rights CSOs, are recognized as formal interlocutors by the governments in the process of gender equality policy making and in policy implementation and monitoring.

Euromed Feminist Initiative will continue to follow up on the Ministerial Process. All participants, relevant ministries in the Euro-Med region as well as the UfM Secretariat will receive the Gender Regional Platform with the finalized policy recommendations. A second round of national dialogues will take place in order to discuss the policy recommendations in the preparation for the 4th UfM Ministerial Conference. The dialogues will enhance the knowledge and awareness of the development of the process on the ground and will create the supportive environment needed for an effective implementation of the governmental commitments to gender equality.

