



*European Economic and Social Committee*

**REX/370**  
**Situation of women in the**  
**Euromed region**

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**REPORT**

on

**The economic and social situation of women in the Euromed region: Follow-up to the commitments set out in the UfM's Marrakech Ministerial Declaration of 2009**

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Rapporteur: **An Le Nouail Marlière**

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To the members of the study group on **The economic and social situation of women in the Euromed region: Follow-up to the commitments set out in the UfM's Marrakech Ministerial Declaration of 2009** of the Section for External Relations

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**Study group** on  
The economic and social  
situation of women in the  
Euromed region

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List:

## 1. **Conclusions and summary**

- All the various sources, whether from academia, organisations working on the ground or the social, economic and governmental sectors, concur that socio-spatial disparities – between northern and southern Europe, the eastern and western Mediterranean, urban and rural areas and different social milieus – have led to diverging situations and that the economic crisis in the North and the political crisis in the South are impacting in different ways on the pace and urgency with which women's rights are being addressed.
- Nevertheless, one constant all around the Mediterranean, both in Europe and the partner countries, is that although women's rights are, theoretically, defended and upheld, in practice they are being ignored or even violated.
- Albeit to varying degrees, in terms of their social, cultural, economic and political roles, there is an overall tendency for women to be restricted as much as possible to the private sphere. In the Mediterranean, women continue to be the lynchpin of the family, and the family as the foundation of a patriarchal society. This is reflected in the patrilineal access to and transmission of property, which do little to boost women's independence or autonomy, and in the disproportionate burden of labour that falls on women as a result of their multiple roles, which is still largely unquestioned despite the consensus that giving women a greater political and economic role in the public sphere could aid the recovery and boost economic development.
- Whilst women's social rights need to be addressed in close connection with those of other workers, they also need to be seen in the context of flagrant inequalities in pay and job quality, which include insecure employment, enforced part-time work and casual, unskilled labour.
- Active steps need to be taken to close the gap and update and harmonise theoretical databases. Steps must also be taken to introduce gender responsive budgeting, demonstrating that, in coming years, both the legislator and the executive will not only take account of the need to redress inequalities but also make available the requisite public and private funding to do so. Education and training also need to be mobilised proactively.
- Although everyone agrees that the key problem is not the lack of gender equality legislation but the failure to implement it, there are also widespread concerns about the potential for a rapid reversal, both of women's rights and of women's situation overall, in the region.
- Though without unduly exploiting or interfering with exchanges of information, the ESCs should continue to work actively to support them, since they are not only necessary but may also be useful for all rights that combat discrimination and advance equality for women and girls, both in the interest of future generations and to ensure the social, environmental, political, cultural and economic well-being of current generations.

## 2. **Background**

The Euromed Summit of Economic and Social Councils held in Rome in 2010 mandated the setting up of a Permanent Group to follow the development of the Approved Declarations of the **Istanbul, November 2006, and Marrakech, November 2009, Ministerial Conferences on the Role of Women in Society in the Euromed Region.**

The Summit held in Istanbul from 16-18 November 2011 mandated the Euromed network of Economic and Social Councils and similar institutions to report back on the current situation at the Summit in 2012 (Point 58 (c) of the Final Declaration).

At its meeting on 13 September, the study group discussed the working document that had served as a draft report. This document was based on, and included in its appendices<sup>1</sup>, all the national ESC contributions received over the past few months, so that it could serve as a shared resource for investigating the short-, medium- and long-term outlook. It also took account of the conclusions of the seminars conducted as part of the TresMed project<sup>2</sup>. Lastly, the work was also based on a broad spectrum of the available studies, including studies reporting on European, international and governmental programmes and studies produced by civil society organisations. In addition, mention should also be made of the support given by the Euromed Trade Union Forum and the International Trade Union Confederation for the creation of a new Arab Democratic Trade Union Forum and the launch of the Arab Trade Union Women's Network by the International Trade Union Confederation in October 2011, in parallel to the work of its own Women's Committee, whose declarations and working programme also help to build up a picture of women's economic and social position in the region<sup>3</sup>.

It has been proposed that this contribution be extended and transformed into an information report for the 2013 Summit, which could then be sent to the European institutions and national governments with a view to meeting the three objectives of:

- guiding the work of the ESCs' Permanent Group on promoting effective rights encouraging gender equality in the Euro-Mediterranean region;
- reporting annually on the progress made by the partners towards achieving gender equality in the region on the basis of rights and moves to eliminate discrimination;
- fostering cooperation in the Mediterranean region, since, although most of the countries along the southern shore of the Mediterranean have specific ministries devoted to the situation of women or equality, there is no regional cooperation as such in this domain.

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1 List: Bulgaria, Spain, Italy, Lebanon, Morocco and Monaco.

2 Conclusions of the TRESMED 4 seminars held in Luxembourg on 26 and 27 March 2012 and in Algiers on 28 and 29 May 2012.

3 <http://www.ituc-csi.org/arab-women.html>.

The situation in the countries along the northern shore is different, in that various forms of cooperation exist in the EU27. In the framework of the Women's Rights Agenda, several major European organisations have adopted a coordinated approach and programmes for achieving equality.

This situation accentuates the asymmetry in relations between the Mediterranean countries. In 2013, an evaluation of the situation in the EU-27 is to be conducted by the European Commission, which will have to report back to the European Parliament and the Council on the transposition and implementation of the Equality Directive 2006/54/EC.

The 2013 report will also provide an opportunity to take account of the gender equality dimension of the European Training Foundation's project on the social partners and continuing vocational training and to include a detailed country-by-country analysis of developments in all the areas related to combating discrimination and achieving equality.

An examination of population statistics shows that in 2010, of a population of approximately 169 million in the Arabic-speaking countries of North Africa that border the Mediterranean, 49.8% were women, and in the same year, in the eastern half of the Mediterranean (Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Palestinian territories, Jordan) this figure was 49.9% of a total population of 116 million<sup>4</sup>. It is worth noting that whilst it is not too difficult to find general statistics on women's share in the general population, very little or no detailed information exists reflecting the specific circumstances that women are facing in each country.

The lack of comparable, aggregated data on the political, economic and social situation of women for the geographical zone points to a general lack of interest (on the part of economists, statisticians, users and institutions) in establishing relevant indicators beyond GDP and in measuring and taking simultaneous account of growth, development and equality. This lack of consideration and analysis has a detrimental effect on the consistency of the results and the efficacy of the measures introduced. The UN, for example, provides indicators for Europe and Central Asia. The EU covers the 27 Member States and - under European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which is now the framework for its neighbourhood policy towards the countries bordering the Mediterranean – has adopted an asymmetric, bilateral, country-by-country approach. The UfM does not produce its own data, whilst the OECD covers the area partially, as does the Council of the Europe and the OSCE.

None of these political or administrative entities are starting from a shared framework of compatible or comparable indicators. This has resulted in a proliferation of reports justifying policies whose relative efficacy or inefficacy cannot be assessed. This may also be the case for other policies besides those dealing with women, women's rights and equality but it is having a particularly deleterious effect on half the population on both sides of the Mediterranean.

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FAO figures.

Despite the European Commission's praiseworthy (diplomatic and financial) efforts to take effective action over the last programming period<sup>5</sup>, it is regrettable, whatever the reasons, that a number of programmes have been interrupted and that the web pages showing the results of the programmes have also abruptly disappeared, despite the fact that they are part of the *acquis* of the 2007-2012 financial programming period.

Over recent months, the social, economic and political situations in the countries around the Mediterranean have been very diverse. In the south, three countries in the region have experienced the overthrow of dictatorships whilst another has experienced a bloody repression (as have other Arab countries over the same period) which has led to a situation of quasi civil war between the regime and its people.

These societal conflicts bear witness to the violence of the repression being carried out by regimes that are refusing to learn the lessons from their lack of openness and democratic governance. Without social rights and the right to association, democracy is illusory. Women living in these situations have had to confront a variety of outcomes and concerns, even as they have contributed to the overthrow of dictators through the power of their mobilisation as citizens.

In the north, meanwhile, Europe is experiencing its worst economic and political crisis since that of 1929, which was followed by the Second World War. Countries both inside and outside the euro zone have had to defend their currencies, after the banking system was re-financed using public funds, resulting in a considerable rise in public debt with no corresponding refinancing of the real economy. The amount of money estimated to be circulating in tax havens has risen from USD 14 000 billion in 2009 to 21 000 billion in 2011, whilst the decision to adopt stringent austerity measures is leading to growing difficulties.

Over this period, rather than strong public policies providing vital support for economic recovery, the situation has deteriorated to the point that several countries in southern Europe are experiencing serious problems. It is here that the inadequacy of all the various policies conducted to achieve equality becomes apparent. In these challenging times, it may be extremely tempting to turn back the clock, treat women of working age as an adjustment variable to address the downturn in the labour market and ignore the considerable contribution they could make to recovery and growth whereas, on the contrary, we need to create the conditions that will prevent the axing of existing jobs and mobilise the economic, financial, budgetary and human resources to create new ones.

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COM(2011) 200 of 8.3.2011, and the Information Report CESE 8497-2012 on The role of civil society in the implementation of the partnership for democracy and shared prosperity in the Euromed region.

**Consequently, the EESC is committed to putting forward a number of Guidelines on the Role of Women in Society in the Euromed Region, in the framework of the**

***Follow up to the Istanbul, November 2006, and Marrakech, November 2009, Ministerial Conferences on the Role of Women in Society in the Euromed Region.***

In accordance with the ministerial declarations, the following steps are to be taken:

- Each partner country is to present policies and implement strategies for ensuring the equal and full enjoyment of all economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights by women.
- Adoption and implementation of national action plans
- Strengthening of institutional mechanisms
- Promotion of gender mainstreaming and positive actions
- Gender budgeting
- Capacity building and awareness-raising
- The contributions of national machineries to gender equality
- The role of social partners, business, and civil society organisations in contributing towards the Euro-Mediterranean Common Framework of Action 2006-2011 and the measures taken within this framework in the following areas (the undertakings appear as ordinary text and the evaluations and recommendations as boxed text):

**A. Review of developments regarding commitment to promote *de jure* and *de facto* equality between women and men 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**

These include in particular the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and 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 recommendation could be to repeal all legislative provisions that discriminate against women, particularly in relation to the family, i.e. provisions on marriage, divorce, guardianship, custody of children, inheritance, the transmission of nationality to spouses and children, and legal capacity and to adopt CEDAW without reservations.

- B. Contribution towards **the attainment of a common area of peace, stability and shared prosperity in the Euro-Mediterranean region**, through democracy, respect for human rights and sustainable development.

**Regional cooperation - recommendations:**

- Deepening opportunities for cooperation and exchange of experiences between the Economic and Social Councils of the Mediterranean region so that they can play an active and effective role in promoting equality in their respective societies, in particular through social and civil dialogue.
- The EU must adhere to the principles it has set out in its European Neighbourhood Policy and ensure that its programmes in the Euromed region effectively advance gender equality. Relevant programmes should focus on promoting cooperation between the public sector, employers, the private sector, trade unions and NGOs working in the field of gender equality.
- More and better information on how to access EU financial and technical assistance programmes is needed, in particular on: support for the democratic process, development of social dialogue, development aid policies and relevant European Neighbourhood policies for civil society.

- C. **The impact of the economic and financial crisis:** persistent inequalities between women and men on the labour market that hinder women from reaching economic independence and that increase the risk for women of falling into poverty and social exclusion. This includes:

- gender equality in employment (including equal pay and decent work),
- social protection and the fight against poverty,
- guaranteeing equal access and promotion in employment and on the labour market,
- promoting women's entrepreneurship by improving inter alia women's equal access to and ownership of land and enterprises, finance, markets, information, training and networking and encouraging financial institutions to tailor products to women's needs, in particular by providing micro-credit,
- promoting modules to improve economic and financial management skills for women entrepreneurs,
- investing in women's economic participation as "smart economies",
- securing women's right to control their property, income and available resources.



### **Women's participation in the labour market**

At 24%, women's workforce participation in the region is the lowest in the world. Women are over-represented in the informal economy, agriculture, the textile industry and low-skilled, low-paid jobs. Labour markets are extremely segmented, with women concentrated in a few specific sectors and in subordinate positions. Women work mainly in the informal economy, where there are no formal rights. The proportion of the ILO conventions on gender (Conventions 100, 111, 156, and 183) that has been ratified remains low and even where these conventions have been ratified, they are often not implemented. There is a glaring lack of mechanisms for ensuring that the legislation is applied in practice. Affirmative action schemes could be introduced in the areas of employment and promotion policies.

The issue of sexual harassment at work is still taboo and labour laws (in the few countries where such legislation exists) are inadequate. Generally speaking, labour laws do not provide for sanctions or enable women to keep their jobs.

In most countries in the region (with the exception of the Maghreb) responsibility for maternity pay lies with employers, which discourages female employment and participation in non-traditional sectors.

In practice, women are the victims of stereotypes suggesting that they are not suited for positions of responsibility.

Between 28 and 70% of women in the region are illiterate, with significant differences both between and within countries, particularly between rural and urban areas. (Two thirds of those who are illiterate are women). If their role in society and the economy is to increase, women's literacy levels need to be raised.

### **Education and the labour market**

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) draws attention to the importance of women as a valuable human resource in a fast changing global scenario and to the economic and social contributions which women make to the competitiveness of the southern and eastern Mediterranean. It will continue to work with its Euromed partners in its firm commitment to improve the situation of women in the region.

The lack of comparative gender-based data is a major obstacle that needs to be addressed. Accurate indicators are needed that can be used to design measures that tackle the social, economic and political obstacles which hinder the advancement of women in the Mediterranean region.

Where framework legislation on national economic and social councils exists – as well as in cases where it is still to be introduced – such legislation should compel social partner and civil society organisations nominating their representatives to ESCs to guarantee an equitable representation of women in their delegations, and, furthermore, ESCs must ensure that women are fairly represented in decision-making posts. The mismatch between education establishments and the labour market needs to be urgently addressed: this requires policies and programmes for vocational and technical learning and for higher education for women that match labour market needs and contribute to eliminating female unemployment and gender segregation in the labour market.

An additional key requirement are national action plans on lifelong learning programmes, for women and men of all ages, which, amongst other things, should address the high unemployment rate among young people, or other workers, who have been left out of the labour market or who have attained low levels of education, allowing them to acquire the necessary qualifications and skills for employment, including those relevant to the information society (IT)

Gender responsive budgets: gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but should also be addressed as a social and economic growth factor. Visibility needs to be given to women's contribution to the economy.

There is a need to invest in setting up affordable childcare facilities for working parents, in particular for children aged between 0-3 years. These centres can also offer women and men employment opportunities following adequate training.

D. **The under-representation of women** in the political, public and economic decision-making processes.

The Arab Spring has not led to an increase in the number of women involved in political decision-making. The most worrying case is undoubtedly that of Egypt, where women now represent only 2% of the Parliament, compared with 12% in the Mubarak era. The risk of a deterioration in women's rights is a very real one (as demonstrated, amongst other things, in the proposal to replace references to equality between women and men with a description of women as "complementary" to men in the Tunisian constitution, the proposal to lower the marriage age to 10 in Egypt and the proposal to reintroduce polygamy in Libya), although there has been an improvement in Algeria, where women now make up 30% of the new legislative assembly, compared with the previous 7%.

The ESCs should acknowledge that equality between women and men is an indispensable part of strengthening democracy and call for gender equality and the prohibition of gender discrimination to be enshrined in the new constitutions.

One key recommendation would be to increase the number of women in the decision-making structures of trade unions and employers' organisations.

Other recommendations are to:

- guarantee women's access to all political posts;
- adopt laws and policies requiring gender parity or, at a minimum, quotas of at least 30% of women in all political decision-making bodies and elected assemblies;
- ensure the effective participation of women in all stages of elections, including within the body overseeing elections;
- adopt measures aimed at increasing the representation of women in the judiciary.

**E. Reconciliation of work and family life**

The fact that women living alone with their children make up a significant part of the population is not recognised either in labour law or in the services provided by institutions. The current division of labour is based on an increasingly obsolescent traditional model of the man going out to work and the woman staying at home.

**Female entrepreneurship and the empowerment of women**

At a time of financial crisis in Europe and unrest in the Mediterranean countries there is an urgent need to reinforce employment measures in the region. Developing female entrepreneurship in urban and rural areas through the support of regional and EU technical financial institutions is a useful way of increasing the participation rate of women in the labour market and economic growth in the region.

Women need to have the confidence to manage their own lives, to have the courage to continue their studies, to be economically independent, even if they have family responsibilities, and to seek self-employment and become entrepreneurs, including in new areas such as green jobs and information technology.

However, it should be pointed out that in practice women entrepreneurs are at least equally as liable to encounter corruption as their male counterparts<sup>6</sup>.

**F. The persistent phenomenon of violence against women**, in all its forms and manifestations, including domestic violence and violence in the workplace and, in particular, women victims of armed conflicts and situations of foreign occupation. Combating all forms of violence against women, through the adoption and implementation of legislative and policy measures to prevent violence against women, protect and support victims and prosecute perpetrators of violence against women in order to ensure the full enjoyment of fundamental human rights by women.

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<sup>6</sup> EESC opinion 8972-2012 of September 2012 on The role of civil society in combating corruption in the southern Mediterranean countries.

### **Domestic violence and the role of men in gender equality<sup>7</sup>**

Programmes should be introduced that are specifically designed to involve men in gender equality: in the home, at the workplace, in society, through a better understanding of male stereotypes as construed over the years by society. The aim of these programmes must be to promote changes in mentalities and practice and, in particular, to eradicate violence against women in both the private and public spheres.

There is a need for all partner countries to sign and ratify the 2011 Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women and to make sure that implementation measures are put in place<sup>8</sup>.

### **Recommendations on domestic violence<sup>9</sup>:**

- adopt laws prohibiting all forms of violence against women, including domestic and sexual violence and sexual harassment;
- put in place adequate shelters and medical and psychological support services for women victims of violence;
- fight impunity of all perpetrators of violence against women, by ensuring effective investigations, prosecution and punishment of these crimes;
- ensure that women have full access to justice, including the provision of free legal services and establishing appropriate complaint mechanisms;
- ensure that all staff in frontline public services (the police, justice system, administration and employment services) receive adequate training on laws protecting women from violence, the treatment of victims of such crimes and their rights and dignity;
- adopt preventive measures, including information and education campaigns, to eliminate violence against women.

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<sup>7</sup> A study on "The Role of Men in Gender Equality", funded by the European Commission currently underway.

<sup>8</sup> The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women, adopted on 7 April 2011 [CM\(2011\)49](#) final E.

<sup>9</sup> Recommendations of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH).

- G. New concrete measures **to mainstream a gender perspective in all policy areas**, acknowledging the diversity of the region.

**Legislation and the political scenario**

Considering that military confrontation and religious extremism create barriers to the achievement of equal opportunities and sustainable economic and social development, governments should translate their obligations under international and regional conventions with regard to women's rights and equality into their national constitutional and legislative systems and ensure that effective implementation measures are in place. This is an important prerequisite for good governance and transparency and the sharing of good practice to eliminate discrimination at the workplace.

Recognising the crucial role of women before and during the process to democracy, including during the transition periods, reforms of national constitutions should ensure that women's social, economic and political rights do not suffer setbacks, but are safeguarded and implemented in line with international conventions.

- H. Progress on the **important role of civil society and the importance of independent national human rights institutions**, established in conformity with the Paris Principles, and non-governmental organisations, in particular, those working for women's full enjoyment of their human rights and gender equality.
- I. The establishment of a **dialogue between governmental entities and these civil society organisations** and the exchange of best practice in the field of strengthening the role of women in society and the empowerment of women, among the civil society players in the Euro-Mediterranean area.
- J. The **promotion of dialogue within the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, in particular the Committee on Women's Rights, Economic and Social Committees and similar institutions as well as youth, trade unions, business and professional associations**, in accordance with national legislation, as appropriate, and cooperation between national, regional and local administrations. All these organisations should be further involved in the implementation of the Common Framework of Action.
- K. **The added value of working together among the 43 Union for the Mediterranean partners** in order to achieve equality between women and men and learning from each others' experiences and best practices, while taking into account the specific characteristics of each country. In this respect, encouraging regional and sub-regional activities.

Attention must be drawn to the data gaps and the UfM should be urged to clarify its policy objectives.

- L. **Cultural and social rights:**
- a. combating all forms of gender stereotyping;
  - b. ensuring equal access to education and vocational training, including new information technologies;
  - c. recognising women's specific health needs and securing equal access to health care;
  - d. promoting a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women and men in the media; and also acknowledging and promoting women's participation in dialogue between cultures and cultural exchanges;
  - e. the integration of the gender dimension in education and training as well as in health policies is of primary importance for the success of the Millennium Development Goals, one of which concerns eliminating gender inequalities at all levels between now and 2011.
- M. The development of Mediterranean plans aiming at **integrating migrant women into the development process**, and at doing this in accordance with the regional and international instruments to which the countries are party. The positive role played by migrant women in the development of their host societies must be recognised.

Mention should be made of the abuse, violence, rape, torture and rights violations that migrant women employed as domestic workers have been subjected to in some countries. In the face of the widespread violations of the rights of migrant women workers, it is important to support ILO Convention 189 and encourage all the EU Member States and the partner states around the Mediterranean to ratify it, since through their undertakings to transpose its provisions into national law, it aims to address these instances of offences against human dignity and violations of women's right to protection and respect.

- N. Effective measures to secure women's **protection from discrimination and xenophobia and the enforcement of their human rights** including gender and culture-sensitive counselling, services and education are important tools for promoting the integration of migrant women in the societies in which they live.
- O. Efforts to **pay particular attention to refugee women** and their specific needs, and to ensure their rights, in accordance with human rights principles, international humanitarian law and international standards and resolutions relating to refugees from a gender perspective.
- P. The importance of paying **particular attention to the situation of women in rural areas** to ensure that women in rural areas have equal access to training and education, health care facilities, credits and loans, marketing facilities and appropriate technology, and that they benefit equally from social security programmes.
- Q. Promoting **Corporate Social Responsibility**, with a view to effectively enhancing gender equality in access to the labour market and in the work place.

- R. **Cooperation with international organisations**, in particular the UN.
- S. **Promoting projects** (as stated in the Marrakech Recommendations) that involve various stakeholders (States, local authorities, private companies and civil society) drawing on past experiences and making use of available tools and means to promote and support women's positive role in development.

Report on the development of the following projects:

- The Foundation of Women for the Mediterranean (France, Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco)
- Educational and training project for vulnerable girls and women (Jordan)
- Women's safety project for vulnerable girls and women (Jordan)
- Women Empowerment and Protection Media Network (Jordan)
- ICT for Poverty Reduction (Egypt) (see appendix)
- Centre for the Political Empowerment of Women (Egypt) (see appendix).

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