

Combating discrimination and violence against women

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Gender equality and stopping violence against women are at the focus of EU-funded “Enhancing Equality between Men and Women” programme (EGEP) that is assessing the situation in 9 Mediterranean partner countries. Stopping violence against women is a priority, team leader Judith Neisse said, adding another key issue is women’s representation. A general report and 9 country reports are being produced by the project, with an aim to establish priorities and carry out needs-based regional activities.

Text by **ENPI Info Centre/ANSA**

Photos by **Cawtar/ EPEG/ Euromed Heritage II**

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BRUSSELS - “Family law often does not allow charging husbands who commit violent acts. It is said they are family disputes, tensions, there is a certain trivialisation of the phenomenon,” Neisse explains. EGEP will support the conducting of a national study in Jordan and Lebanon.

Another key issue is the role of women in the decision-making process, in public and private spheres. “In several countries, women have a lower status because legislation, private law and family law is still based on religion. In several cases, the approach is archaic, especially for marriage or divorce,” Neisse says. Making family law lay is one of the aims. EGEP wants to create subgroups of EU Partner Countries at regional level to work on training at sub-regional level. “After gathering data and the priorities,” Neisse concluded, “we will organise regional trainings on a series of priorities for groups of countries, between 2010-2011.”

ENPI Info Centre – Feature no. 18

This is a series of features on projects funded by the EU’s Regional Programme, prepared by journalists and photographers on the ground or the ENPI Info Centre. ENPI Info Centre/EU 2010©

■ Judith Neisse
EGEP programme team leader

“Family law often does not allow the charging of husbands who commit violent acts. It is said they are family disputes, tensions”

Judith Neisse



■ Ghada Jabbour,
NGO "Kafa (Enough) violence and exploitation", Lebanon

“Women in Lebanon face twofold discrimination, first by religious law and then in numerous ways according to which of the 18 communities they belong”

Ghada Jabbour

The situation in the Mediterranean countries was discussed at a meeting in Brussels (March 2010), where ANSA news agency spoke to some of the participants.

Lebanese women face double discrimination

Women in Lebanon face twofold discrimination, first by religious law and then in numerous ways according to which of the 18 communities they belong. Ghada Jabbour, from the local NGO "Kafa (Enough) violence and exploitation" says "women in Lebanon are subordinate at home, thus they cannot take a lead role in society. The current system, reflected in the penal code, is still patriarchal." Jabbour says "women's associations are trying to reform the female status within the single communities, or else ask for a civil code that it is equal for all denominations."

Violence, especially domestic, "is fortunately no longer taboo," she says, "and a draft law developed by us is at the Cabinet Office." A little known issue, she adds, is "that of some 200,000 female immigrant domestic workers that are discriminated against and exploited for sexual reasons." Women are also trafficked for the sex industry.

Religious courts in Israel

One of the top priorities for women in Israel is to challenge existing restrictions on marriage and divorce still handled in religious courts, said researcher at the Adva Center in Tel Aviv, Yael Slater. "Jews cannot marry non-Jews, for example, and the three religions are very strict on the issue of divorce, always favouring men."

Divorces have to be filed in religious courts. Janet Shalom, of the government equal rights commission, believes divorce is the main issue for the three religions. Slater said. Israeli women are also faced with a weak enforcement of employment regulations, a general deterioration of employment conditions, restrictions to their numbers in the army, abortion restrictions and a small number of female politicians.



“A top priority for women in Israel is to challenge existing restrictions on marriage and divorce still handled in religious courts”

Yael Slater

■ Yael Slater
researcher at the
Adva Center, Israel

■ Hanan Abu Goush, Women's Centre for legal aid and counselling, Occupied Palestinian Territory



Palestinian culture discriminates

The culture prevalent within Palestinian society discriminates against women and legitimises violence against them within families. According to Hanan Abu Goush, of the Women's Centre for legal aid and counselling in Ramallah, although the fundamental law recognises equality, the situation is actually very different and the family law and the penal code must be modified if discrimination is to cease. "There are honour crimes, which basically lets men who kill women in their own family go unpunished," she said.

In order to marry, Goush continues, "a woman must ask for permission from the male head of the family, otherwise she has to appeal to the judge. The only exception is if she is divorced and over eighteen." "Divorce and custody of children always favours the husband," she says, adding another discrimination is inheritance which Sharia provides for though the law is never enforced.

"Although fundamental Palestinian law recognises equality, the situation is actually very different and the family law and the penal code must be modified"

Hanan Abu Goush

Enhancing Equality between Men and Women in the Euromed Region

<http://www.euromedgenderequality.org/index.php>

Supports gender equality and the full implementation of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), increases knowledge on gender-based violence and backs the follow up to the Istanbul Ministerial Conference on Gender

Participating countries

Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria, Tunisia

Timeframe

2008-2011

Budget

€4.5 million

Objectives

Aims at promoting three main priorities: support to the current dynamics that favour gender equality and promote women's rights, and to the full implementation of CEDAW and related instruments; contribution to increased knowledge of gender-based violence; backs the follow-up of the conclusions and the action framework of the Istanbul Ministerial conference on "Strengthening the Role of Women in Society".

Find out more

EGEP fiche http://www.enpi-info.eu/mainmed.php?id=241&id_type=10

ENPI Info Centre Gender Press Pack

http://www.enpi-info.eu/mainmed.php?id=66&id_type=3&lang_id=450

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