

BACKGROUND NOTE



A beneficiary of the Role of Women in Economic Life project in Lebanon

Photo: Vinnie Volkerijk © ENPI Info Centre/EU

Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation in Enhancing the Role of Women

A concerted effort to achieve gender equality

Strengthening the role of women in society is one of the key issues addressed by the Euro-Med partnership, with a pledge to take measures to achieve gender equality, preventing all forms of discrimination and ensuring the protection of the rights of women. In the last years, a concerted effort has been underway towards this end, underlined by the [final declaration](#) adopted by Ministers of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in Marseille on 4 November 2008.

The cornerstone of the policy was set in November 2006, at the first Euro-Med Ministerial Conference on **'Strengthening the Role of Women in Society'** in Istanbul. Concrete decisions on actions, among which *"to strengthen women's role in the political, civil, social, economic and cultural spheres, as well as to fight against discrimination"*, were taken. The Ministers also came up with [conclusions](#), showing the way forward with a five-year work plan and a [follow-up mechanism](#).

A second Ministerial Conference takes

place in **Morocco in November 2009**. In view of this Conference, EU Foreign Ministers approved guidelines at their General Affairs and External Relations Council in September. The Council [conclusions](#) said the guidelines gave an overview of EU policy on gender equality, the external dimension of the EU's 2006-2010 roadmap for gender equality, and bilateral actions, as well as the regional Euro-Med context. They also outline ideas for the subjects to be dealt with at the meeting, including an action plan.

The EU & Women

“Gender equality is essential for growth and poverty reduction, and it is key to reaching the Millennium Development Goals. However, gender inequalities are still entrenched in many cultural, social and political systems. In the developing world women suffer disproportionately from poverty and its related ills, such as malnutrition, poor health and illiteracy” - [EuropeAid](#) website

An EU-funded Programme on Gender Equality and Civil Society, worth €16 million over the period 2007-2010, is being financed under the [ENPI](#) (European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument) Regional Programme for the Euro-Mediterranean region, as outlined in the European Commission’s [Regional Strategy Paper \(2007-2013\)](#) and [Regional Indicative Programme \(2007-2010\) for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership](#).

The Strategy Paper underlines the importance of the regional approach in the promotion of gender equality, saying, “*regional support networks among the Mediterranean partner countries provide a source of external policy leverage that is not necessarily perceived as pressure from another culture.*”

The funding follows policy priorities set out in the [Five-year work plan](#) adopted at the 10-year celebratory Barcelona Summit in November 2005. This attested to the com-



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mitment of partner countries to increase the participation of women in decision-making in political, social, cultural and economic positions.

Enhancing Equality Programme

Specifically for the Euro-Med area, since 2008 the Regional Programme has been funding ‘**Enhancing Equality between Men and Women in the Euromed region**’, through the [ENPI](#). The 3-year €4.5 million programme has three main objectives: the full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women ([CEDAW](#)), the strengthening of strategies on fighting gender-based violence against women, and support to the follow-up of the 2006 Istanbul Ministerial Conference.

It seeks to build on the achievements of an earlier project, ‘[Role of Women in Economic Life](#)’, which ended in January 2009. That 3-year, €5 million programme, aimed to expand opportunities for women’s economic participation.

Projects in Partner Countries

The EU also funds a number of women’s projects implemented directly in the Partner Countries. Some examples of these projects are:

Maghreb Crossroads - Promotes investments, enterprise partnerships and the development of female entrepreneurship in the Maghreb countries, thus contributing to economic development. It seeks to increase the volume and quality of investment flows and business and support Maghreb Women Entrepreneurs networks to implement initiatives contributing to the Mediterranean’s economic development.

Countries: Morocco, Egypt, Jordan

Website: <http://www.invest-in-med.eu/en/agenda/fiche-initiative-maghreb-crossroads-31.html>

MED-FRANCHISE – An initiative to develop the participation of businesswomen organizations from the Mediterranean countries in the process of exchange of partnership initiatives, by using the franchise model for international cooperation. It is aimed at women entrepreneurs and, young entrepreneurs, members of the diaspora and start up businesses.

Countries: Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, France, Slovenia, Italy, Spain

Website: <http://www.invest-in-med.eu/en/agenda/fiche-initia->

[tive-med-franchise-26.html](http://www.invest-in-med.eu/en/agenda/fiche-initiative-med-franchise-26.html)

Gender Equality media supplement and television series – Funded under the ENPI Info & Communication Programme, publication of a monthly press and online supplement on gender equality in Morocco, and production of “**Houria**”, a 30-episode television serial, also to be adapted as a radio serial and photo novella.

Country: Morocco

Website: <http://www.delmar.ec.europa.eu/> **Info:** delegation-morocco@ec.europa.eu

MASARAT project - “**When I Became a Girl**” funded under the ENPI Info & Communication Programme to produce four documentaries on gender issues in West Bank and Gaza Strip. It aims at promoting awareness of the resiliency and strength of Palestinian women and encouraging public debate on their lives. It has three components, productions, screenings\discussion and broadcasts.

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More information on gender projects funded by the EU in Mediterranean Partner Countries can be found on the ENPI Info Centre website: http://www.enpi-info.eu/list_type_med.php?id_type=1&newstype=3&subject=12

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Arab Israeli women entrepreneurs benefitting from the Role of Women in Economic Life project Photo: Edward Kapov © ENPI Info Centre/EU

Gender equality: find out more

Useful links

EuropeAid and Gender [webpage](#)
http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/gender/index_en.htm
DG RELEX – Euro-Med and Women [webpage](#)
http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/euromed/women/index_en.htm
EU and Gender Equality [webpage](#)
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=418&langId=en>
Enhancing Equality between Men and Women in the Euromed region [fiche](#)
http://www.enpi-info.eu/mainmed.php?id=241&id_type=10
ENPI Info Centre – Gender [webpage](#)
<http://www.enpi-info.eu/thememed.php?subject=12>
Gender Drawing Competition (EC-2009)
http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/gender/drawing-competition_en.htm
ENPI Info Centre - [Photos](#) on gender
http://www.enpi-info.eu/list_galleries_med.php?subject=12
EuropeAid Regional Information and Communication Programme
http://www.enpi-info.eu/mainmed.php?id=247&id_type=10

Documents

EU Foreign Ministers – Conclusions (Sept. 2009)
http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/gena/110113.pdf
RELEX Istanbul Conference follow up webpage

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/euromed/women/gender_followup_en.htm
EU Toolkit on Mainstreaming Gender in development cooperation
<http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sp/gender-toolkit/index.htm>
Culture and Communication, Key Factors for Changing Mentalities & Societies - Study by the Anna Lindh Foundation for the 2006 Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on 'Equality of Opportunities'
http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/euromed/women/docs/alf_0406_en.pdf
Women as Full Participants in the Euro-Mediterranean Community of Democratic States - EuroMeSCo Report - April 2006
<http://www.euromesco.net/images/02.pdf>
Women and Economic Development in the Mediterranean - Institut de la Méditerranée, France
http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/euromed/women/docs/women_0406_en.pdf
Euromed Women's Conference Barcelona + 10 (Nov. 2005)
http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/euromed/women/docs/article_en.pdf

Press contacts

DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities - Press officers
http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/about/contact_us/ec_spokespersons/employ_en.htm
Press and Information officers at EU Delegations in Partner countries http://www.enpi-info.eu/mainmed.php?id=487&id_type=2

EUROJAR INTERVIEW WITH JUDITH NEISSE

Analyzing women's situation in the Partner Countries

"Each government holds legal and political responsibility towards the principle of equality between all citizens: human rights are women's rights too", says **Judith Neisse** director of the EU-funded programme "[Enhancing Equality between Men and Women in the Euromed Region](#)". In an interview with **Eurojar**, a media project funded by the EU, she says they are currently working with many Mediterranean Partner Countries "to analyze the situation of women in each of them and to lead studies about gender-based violence." Later on, she says, action plans will be drawn up.

Eurojar: To whom falls the task of fighting for gender equality? Man or woman? What responsibility each of them is called to assume?

Judith Neisse: In everyday life, equality begins in the private sphere. Equitable sharing of responsibilities is defined within the couple and the family, with a line of conduct on the basis of equal rights and equal obligations beyond individual differences. However, love and mutual respect are not sufficient. Sometimes the influences of the past and traditions have repercussion on mentalities. It is thus the role of public institutions and civil society to carry on. Each government holds legal and political responsibility towards the principle of equality between all citizens: human rights are women's rights too.

Do Southern Mediterranean women show reluctance or apprehension regarding projects carried out to improve their situation?

Just like some men, some women are affected by the mentality prevailing in their country. Others express a desire for improving their conditions and obtaining entire emancipation, in spite of their social background. They all have the right to equality. This is why the adoption of international rules and universal values of equality is an essential issue. Citizenship education and governments' volunteer approach will help destroying psychological fences.

What type of activities is being implemented in Southern Mediterranean countries within the framework of the Euromed Gender Equality programme?

Can you give us an example of a project that reached, in your opinion, the heart of the problem and contributed to its resolution?

The programme has an atypical approach. It is addressed to state actors in charge of equality policies. It offers an accompaniment in the form of expertise services, studies, training sessions and capacities reinforcement so that they can be able to improve the situation in their country and then in their region, as they know it better. The program does not allocate grants for short-term projects, like other initiatives do. We work on social changes, and this takes time. Currently, we are collaborating with many countries to analyze the situation of women in each of them and to lead studies about gender-based violence, according to common criteria and methodologies. Later on, action plans will be drawn up at a national and a regional level.

Are differences in perception between women from the two shores of the Mediterranean a hindrance to cultural exchanges in the framework of the Euromed programme?

Dissimilarities and diversities are never a hindrance but challenges and opportunities for mutual learning and co-development. Division no longer exists between the "North" and the "South", but between Mediterranean countries that adhere to international norms and values, and those who are still resisting the advantages of equality.

We are interested in the Euromed initiative, but it seems difficult to take part in it. How is it possible, for example, to an-

swer the needs of Moroccan NGOs, especially those working to promote women's rights?

Our programme works with public entities. However, there is another Euromed regional program (Investing in People – Euromed Gender Equality) that allocates grants to civil society actors for the same purposes.

In spite of the numerous initiatives launched by Human rights associations and the projects carried out by the EU, rates of violence against women are continually increasing in the Arab world. Are the reasons behind this situation cultural, social or religious?

Gender-based violence is an international and a global phenomenon. On one hand, it is related to historical factors (tradition and culture). On another hand, only a legal and an economic autonomy could help women escape violence. With education and better legislation, their struggle will be facilitated.

Do you think that gender equality is still relevant today?

The world equality infers that equal treatment is essential before the law. It also leads to a mutual respect. Such perception excludes privileges and discriminations towards one group or another.



PROJECT FICHE

Enhancing Equality between Men and Women in the Euromed Region

Supports gender equality and the full implementation of 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

Budget: €4.5 million

Timeframe: 2008-2011

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 the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW) and related instruments; contribution to increased knowledge of gender-based violence and support to actions addressing its occurrence and its root causes; backs the follow-up of the conclusions and the action framework of the Istanbul Ministerial conference on "[Strengthening the Role of Women in Society](#)".

It follows on from the [Role of Women in Economic Life](#) programme (2006 – 2008), also funded by EuropeAid. Feature stories highlighting the activities carried out on the ground under the RWEL programme, prepared by the EuroMed Info Centre (the predecessor to the ENPI Info Centre) can be found [here](#).

What does it do?

It analyses women's situation identifying needs, priorities and best practices and opens a space for discussions between partners to ensure implementation of CEDAW. It also seeks to build consensus on the definitions of the concept of "violence against women" and develop appropriate action plans which could circumvent this violation of human rights and fundamental obstacle to development.

The programme facilitates networking and the exchange of experience between the EU and Mediterranean countries and among the southern countries themselves, builds the capacity of key actors to promote gender equality and combat violence against women and promotes evidence-based advocacy so that policymakers adopt actions for change at the institutional and behavioral levels. The programme aims to work with the media so that positive images of the role of women in society are promoted and practices to fight violence against women are supported.

Website: <http://www.euromedgenderequality.org/>

Actions in brief

- Analyses the situation of women and builds on existing achievements.
- Facilitates networking to promote exchanges of experience and knowledge.
- Supports the capacity-building of key actors in order to promote gender equality and to combat violence against women.
- Promotes evidence-based advocacy.
- Works with the media, promoting positive images on the role of women in society.