

North-South Centre's Pool of experts on Women's Rights in Southern Mediterranean Working Group

4-5 April 2018, Strasbourg, France

Concept note

CONTEXT

In line with the [Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023 draft](#), and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, in particular [goal 5](#): gender equality and [goal 16](#): peace and justice, the North-South Centre aims at raising awareness and building capacities to achieve gender equality and women's rights through the empowerment of women civil society organisations and the reinforcement of multilateral cooperation and coordinated action in Europe and the Southern Mediterranean.

At the core of the North-South Centre's "[North-South Process for the Empowerment of Women](#)" project, the participatory approach and strengthening capacities of women organisations are implemented by the creation of a pool of experts on gender equality and women's rights in the Southern Mediterranean region. Through the mobilisation of key *quadrilogue* actors from the Euro-Mediterranean region and development of a guide, the pool of experts will contribute to the promotion of cooperation and coordination between relevant stakeholders in women's rights protection.

The experts' work such as context analyses, identification of priorities and strategies will be based on Council of Europe's tools related to gender equality and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

In this regard, the North-South Centre will gather the experts to reflect about guidelines on the implementation of a coordinated approach in protecting women's rights in the Southern Mediterranean, and on the sharing of best practices and expertise between the Council of Europe and Southern Mediterranean countries.

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

Composed of nine civil society experts from Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine*, Syria and Tunisia, the pool of experts will meet for two days in the Council of Europe headquarters in Strasbourg, to:

- consolidate knowledge on Council of Europe standards, methodologies and tools related to gender equality and;
- develop a working strategy to implement a participatory and bottom-up approach;

Divided into three stages, the programme will cover: i) presentation on standards and tools of the Council of Europe, ii) reflection about the guidelines of the pool of experts work and calendar, and iii) exchanges/debate on women's rights issues in the Southern Mediterranean region.

Expected outputs

- A minimum of nine experts from Southern Mediterranean countries are introduced to the main Council of Europe conventions, namely:
 - Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005);
 - Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention, 2007);
 - Convention on Combating and Preventing Violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention, 2011).

And tools/methodologies such as:

- Gender mainstreaming;
- Equal access to justice;
- Victim-centred and human rights based approaches;
- Civil participation in decision making processes.
- The main conclusions on the state of play of women's rights in the Southern Mediterranean region and specific challenges at national and local levels are shared by the pool of experts to the representatives of Council of Europe departments and their project as a network whose actions are monitored by the North-South Centre.

Targeted outcomes

- Synergies and means of cooperation are envisaged or reinforced between the North-South Centre's pool of experts and other Council of Europe departments;
- Council of Europe standards support the implementation of a pool of experts' guide as guidance tools;
- The pool of experts is reinforced as a network through the acquisition of new tools and relevant contacts, as well as the development of a work plan.

Target groups

The working group is open to nine civil society experts from Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine*, Syria and Tunisia (one per country) who have participated in the [North-South Centre training of experts](#) in Tunis (July 2017) and/or the [first meeting of experts](#) in Amman (October 2017). During the exchanges/debate session, Council of Europe Secretariats are invited to designate a representative to attend the session.

Programme

DAY 1 – 4th APRIL	
9:30	Arrival of the experts – Reception desk
10:00 - 10:15	North-South Centre – Presentation of the NSPEW III project – <i>Narimen Beneddine, Programme Manager</i>
10:15 - 10:30	Moderator – Introduction to the activity – <i>Fifi Benaboud, Expert Consultant on International Relations and Women Rights</i>
10:30 - 11:00	Gender Equality Unit – Presentation of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023 – <i>Carolina Lasén Diaz, Head of Unit</i>
11:00 - 11:30	Congress of Local and regional Authorities – Presentation of the South-Med Partnership – <i>Muriel Grimmeissen, Co-Secretary to the Current Affairs Committee of the Congress and Laura Esselin, Co-operation and External Relations Department</i>
11:30 - 11:50	<i>Coffee break</i>
11:50 - 12:30	Conference of IONG – Presentation of the Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process – <i>Anna Rurka, President</i>
12:30 - 13:00	Violence against Women Division
13:00 - 14:00	<i>Lunch break – Restaurant Bleu</i>
14:00 - 16:00	First working session: exchange of views, reporting on national state of play, presentation of projects carried out by the participants' organisations, and reflection on coordination with the "quadrilogue".

DAY 2 – 5th APRIL	
10:00 - 10:30	Presentation of Co-operation with South Mediterranean Countries – <i>Emmanuel Baron, Cooperation projects officer</i>
10:30 - 11:30	Second working session: reflection on the elaboration of a guide related to the coordinated approach for protecting and promoting women's rights.
11:30 - 11:50	<i>Coffee break</i>
11:50 - 13:00	Third working session: preparation of the Conference on Migrant, Refugee and Asylum Seeking Women and Girls in the Euro-Mediterranean Region
13:00 - 14:00	<i>Lunch break – Restaurant Bleu</i>
14:00 - 14:30	Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe – <i>Sonia Sirtori, Head of Secretariat</i>
14:30 - 15:15	Venice Commission – <i>Simona Granata-Menghini, Deputy Secretary</i>
15:15 - 16:00	Definition of the next steps in the work, evaluation and conclusion

Information on the Council of Europe departments

Gender Equality Unit

The Council of Europe includes four principal departments which specifically work on gender equality issues: the Gender Equality Unit which is the Council's internal team and focuses in particular on the integrated approach to gender equality; the [Gender Equality Commission](#) which is composed of members appointed by member states; the network of [National Focal Points](#) in each member state; and the [Gender equality rapporteurs](#) within the steering committees and other intergovernmental structures of the Council of Europe.

The Gender Equality Unit is behind the [Council of Europe's Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023](#), which was published on the last 8th March. The new Gender Equality Strategy is similar to the previous one, [that of 2014-2017](#), in several ways – among other things, the five following goals and strategic objectives: combating Gender Stereotypes and Sexism; preventing and combating Violence against Women; guaranteeing Equal Access of Women to Justice; achieving Balanced Participation of Women and Men in Political and Public Decision-Making; achieving Gender Mainstreaming in all policies and measures.

The new gender equality strategy however includes a new objective on protecting the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls. Next April, the Gender Equality Commission will gather in order to establish its work plan for the next two years, as well as determine the activities which will be carried out under the new strategic objective. The Gender Equality Unit will also dwell upon the theme of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls in its upcoming work and publications.

Additional information:

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/gender-equality-programme>

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (Congress)

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is an institution of the Council of Europe is responsible for strengthening local and regional democracy in its 47 member states. As the voice of Europe's municipalities and regions, it works to foster consultation and political dialogue between national governments and local and regional authorities. It is made of 324 representatives and 324 substitutes, who represent over 200,000 local and regional authorities in the Council of Europe's 47 member states.

The Congress is involved in the Council of Europe's policy towards its immediate neighbourhood given that in 2017 it adopted a co-operation programme for southern Mediterranean countries, entitled [South-Med Partnership](#), to meet the objectives of the neighbourhood policy (among others, enhancing political dialogue between European elected representatives and their counterparts from the South, providing legislative assistance and expertise).

Regarding women's issues, the Congress is undertaking work on women participation in public life, equality between men and women, as well as on women's rights, for example by introducing quotas in its national delegations, adopting resolutions and recommendations on gender equality, and contributing to actions fighting violence against women.

Additional information: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/overview>

Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs)

More than 320 INGOs enjoy participatory status. Since 2005, they make up the Conference of INGOs which constitutes civil society's pillar in the Council of Europe "quadrilogue" along with the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. Through this status, the Council of Europe includes INGOs in intergovernmental activities and encourages dialogue of members of parliament and local and regional authorities with associations on challenges facing society. Also, the Conference of INGOs drafted a [Code of Good Practice on Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process](#), whose principal objective is to define a set of European principles and guidelines for NGO participation in decision-making processes which are to be implemented at local and national level in Council of Europe member States.

Additional information:

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/functioning> / <https://rm.coe.int/16806ecbd2>

Violence Against Women (VAW) Division

The Violence Against Women Division is the department which coordinates the activities of the Council of Europe which are related to the topic of violence against women and domestic violence, as well as the activities which are linked to the [Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#) (Istanbul Convention). The VAW Division is for instance coordinating the [Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence](#) (GREVIO), which monitors the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in states which are party to it, as well as the publications related to the GREVIO's activities. The VAW Division also launched an [online course](#) for legal professionals whose aim is to improve the quality of the judicial response in VAW cases and support the access to justice for survivors while prosecuting perpetrators. It covers in an interactive way the key concepts, the international and European legal framework and the European case law governing the prevention and protection of women and girls from violence, focusing in particular on the Istanbul Convention.

Additional information: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/home?desktop=false>

Gender Equality Cooperation Projects with South Mediterranean Countries

The programme aims at promoting dialogue and co-operation with Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan, to facilitate democratic political transition and good governance through the protection and promotion of human rights and the rule of law on the basis of a demand-driven process and in line with national reform priorities. Gender Equality and Violence against Women being recognised as priority areas for co-

operation, the Council of Europe relevant standards, mechanisms and innovative practices will be made available in setting-up and running institutions and structures, assessing and developing new legislation, raising awareness and transferring knowledge and skills and establishing formal and informal networks.

Additional information: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/co-operation-projects>

Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination - Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) gathers four times a year in Strasbourg. The 324 representatives and 324 substitutes are appointed by national parliaments from among their members. Each country, depending on its population, has between two and eighteen representatives, who provide a balanced reflection of the political forces represented in the national parliament. The Assembly's work is prepared by nine committees and a Bureau headed by the President of the Assembly. Among the nine committees, the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination is made of 81 members whom are appointed by the national delegations to the Assembly and belong to one of the six political groups in the Assembly. The committee comprises two sub-committees: Sub-committee on the Rights of Minorities, and the Sub-Committee on Disability, Multiple and Intersectional Discrimination.

The Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination focuses on the topic of gender equality in several respects. For instance, it is currently elaborating a report entitled “Migration from a gender perspective: empowering women as key actors for integration” as well as a publication on promoting diversity and equality in politics.

Additional information:

http://website-pace.net/en_GB/web/apce/functioning

http://website-pace.net/en_GB/web/as-ega/main

European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission)

The Venice Commission is the Council of Europe's advisory body on constitutional matters. Its role is to provide legal advice to its member states and, in particular, to help states wishing to bring their legal and institutional structures into line with European standards and international experience in the fields of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The Commission comprises 61 member states: the 47 Council of Europe member states, as well as 14 other countries (Algeria, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Israel, Kazakhstan, the Republic of Korea, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, Mexico, Peru, Tunisia and the United States).

Besides legal advice, the Venice Commission coordinates cooperation activities with several Southern Mediterranean countries as well as regional cooperation activities. For instance, since 2015, it organises the UniDem (University for Democracy) Campus for the Southern Mediterranean countries. This programme provides legal capacity-building seminars – in areas related to good governance, the rule of law and fundamental rights – for high-level civil servants of the MENA region. Through this means, the Venice Commission raises awareness on gender equality issues among those high-level civil servants. Indeed, the overarching theme of the November 2017 UniDem edition was “Women and the labour market” and in March 2017, the seminar “Performance, merit and equality in the civil service” dwelt upon the topic of the role of women in civil services.

Additional information:

http://www.venice.coe.int/WebForms/pages/default.aspx?p=03_03_NCPActivities&lang=en

<http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/events/?id=2477>

<http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/events/default.aspx?id=2375&lang=en>