



# Meeting of the Pool of Experts on Women Rights in the Southern Mediterranean

## Working Group

Strasbourg, France

# REPORT

4-5 April 2018

Organised by:



With the financial support of:



# 1. SUMMARY

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The North-South Centre gathered in the Council of Europe headquarters on the 4 and 5 April 2018. Nine civil society female experts from Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine\*, Syria and Tunisia, were invited to participate in a working group and form the North-South Centre's pool of experts on women rights in the Southern Mediterranean. Exchanges were also held between experts and representatives of seven different Council of Europe departments addressing gender equality and/or cooperation with Southern Mediterranean countries.

## 1.2 CONTEXTE AND OBJECTIVES

Following the [conclusions](#) of the Workshop "Strengthening Capacities of Women Organisations" organised on the 25 October 2017 in Amman, Jordan, the activity comes within the framework of the new North-South Centre's project: [North-South Process for the Empowerment of Women](#) 2018-2019 (NSPEW III). The project is oriented towards strengthening the role of civil society and women organisations and the promotion of multilateral and multilevel cooperation of relevant stakeholders in Europe and the Southern Mediterranean region. Thus, at the core of the project, the participatory approach and capacity building of women organisations have resulted in the creation and monitoring of a pool of experts on gender equality and women rights in the Southern Mediterranean region.

The North-South Centre intends to reinforce the cooperation and coordination in the protection of women's rights through the mobilisation of *quadrilogue* key actors of the Euro-Mediterranean region in biannual workshops and the development of guidelines by the pool of experts. The project also includes a conference on one of the priorities identified by the experts and the North-South Centre's partners: "migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls in the Euro-Mediterranean region" which will be held in Athens in July 2018.

More specifically, the project NSPEW 2018-2019 aims to achieve the following objectives:

- ◆ Reinforcing the support to civil society organisations and their participation through the promotion of their expertise and experience;
- ◆ Promoting Council of Europe norms and standards on human rights, gender equality and combating violence against women;
- ◆ Encouraging North-South and South-South cooperation.

On the one hand, the working group, which meets the objectives noted above, has enhanced experts' knowledge about Council of Europe standards, methodologies and tools, and on the other hand, allowed the development of a working strategy to implement the participatory and bottom-up approaches of the North-South Centre's project.



## 2. ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

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### 2.1 FORMAT AND PROGRAMME

Structured around discussion sessions with Council of Europe representatives and three working sessions for to the implementation of project NSPEW III, the programme was dedicated to:

- ◆ Presentation on standards, tools and work of the Council of Europe on women rights in Europe and/or in the Southern Mediterranean followed by questions & answers' sessions;
- ◆ Reflection about the guidelines of the pool of experts work and calendar;
- ◆ Exchanges/debate on the theme of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women in order to prepare the upcoming activity of the North-South Centre.

### 2.2 PARTICIPANTS



#### Participants

- ◆ Ms Nadia AIT-ZAI, President, CIDDEF Foundation for equality, Algeria
- ◆ Ms Rida AL TUBULY, Director, organisation Together we Build it (TWBI), Libya
- ◆ Ms Fatemah KHAFAGY, President, Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU), Egypt
- ◆ Ms Nuha MUHREIZ, President, Women Helping Women network (WHW), Jordan
- ◆ Ms Fatima OUTALEB, President, Union of Women's Action (UAF), Morocco
- ◆ Ms Zoya ROUHANA, Director, KAFA (Enough) Violence and Exploitation, Lebanon
- ◆ Ms Malak SWED, President, TAMAS-Syrian Civil Coalition (MADANI organisation), Syria
- ◆ Ms Victoria SHUKRI, Community Centre for training and development, Palestine\*
- ◆ Ms Mawaheb ZOUBEIR, Director, Day Unit of BEITY – President, Medias Development and Human Rights Observatory (OMDDH), Tunisia
- ◆ *Moderator* : Ms Fifi BENABOUD, Consultant, International relations and women rights
- ◆ *Rapporteur* : Ms Mathilde BOISSE-DESPIAUX

#### Council of Europe speakers

- ◆ Ms Narimen BENEDDINE, Empowerment of Women Programme Manager, North-South Centre
- ◆ Ms Carolina LASÉN DIAZ, Head of the Gender Equality Unit, Council of Europe Equality Division
- ◆ Mr Emmanuel BARON, Southern Neighbourhood Cooperation projects officer, Human Dignity and Gender Equality Department
- ◆ Ms Bridget T. O'LOUGHLIN, Head of Violence against Women Division, Executive Secretary of the monitoring mechanism of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence
- ◆ Ms Sonia SIRTORI-MILNER, Head, Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
- ◆ Ms Muriel GRIMMEISSEN, Co-Secretary to the Current Affairs Committee, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

- ◆ Ms Laura ESSELIN, Co-operation and External Relations Department, Secretariat of the Congress of local and Regional Authorities
- ◆ Ms Simona GRANATA-MENGHINI, Deputy Secretary, Venice Commission

## 2.3 PROFILE OF PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

### ALGERIA

#### CIDDEF – Foundation For equality

CIDDEF is an information and documentation centre on children and women's rights created the 9 May 2002 in Algeria. This space became the focal point for human rights activists as well as for professionals (students and researchers) on children and women's issues. Since 2015, it was integrated into the Foundation for Equality. The organisation has a database of more than 6000 documents on feminine condition and children's rights available on the CIDDEF website. To achieve its objectives, namely, to inform, popularise and raise awareness, study-sessions are organised and psychological and juridical service support was set up. CIDDEF aspires to build bridge between civil society and public institutions. Among its numerous activities (such as training for professionals, researchers, local authorities, raising awareness for public and associative sectors, research, studies and policy developments, etc.), the organisation seeks an institutional reinforcement through the implementation of inter-sectoral partnerships and networks consolidation in Algeria and the region.



### EGYPT

#### Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU)

The organisation is an umbrella of national non-governmental organisations which includes 250 local non-governmental organisations from Egypt aiming at raising awareness on women's human rights and achieving gender equality. EFU, on behalf of its member NGOs, undertakes the role of speaker and observer of women's rights. EFU has created a database including all associations, organisations and volunteers working on women's rights and affairs and conducted researches and studies about women's issues. The organisation coordinates the work of associations and civil society organisations and provides technical support and capacity building to workers and volunteers about women's issues. EFU also leads activities to raise the society's awareness about human and women rights and seeks various funding sources to improve and increase programs and services for women.



### JORDAN

#### Women Helping Women Network

Women Helping Women Network was founded by a group of experienced women in the field of women and development committed to an effective participation of women in the decision making process, to build a democratic society governed by the principles of justice and equal opportunities. The network's mission is to raise awareness, build capacity, mobilise and support to enhance women's participation in decision making.



### LEBANON

#### KAFA (Enough) Violence and Exploitation

KAFA is a women's rights organisation which works directly with victims of violence. It is a feminist, secular, non-profit, non-governmental civil society organisation seeking to create a society that is free of social, economic and legal patriarchal structures that discriminate women. KAFA offers legal advice and social counselling. It also pushes for legal reforms to protect women from their abusers. Over 300 cases a year come through KAFA's door. KAFA has been aiming to eliminate all forms of exploitation and violence against women since its establishment in 2005. It seeks to realise substantive gender equality.



## LIBYA

### Together We Build It organization (TWBI)

Together We Build It is a non-profit organisation which was founded in 2011 to support a peaceful democratic transition in Libya through empowering women and youth to participate in the political and public sphere, and emphasising the relevant role of women and youth in the peace-building process. One of TWBI's major projects is the 1325 Network in Libya: a network of civil society organisations and independent activists from all over Libya advocating for the implementation of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325. The organisation also developed the Libyan Women Database, a professional network for women, which aims to connect Libyan women from different spheres of society, determine a focal point for Libyan women, as well as to facilitate access to the government and the national and international community.



## MOROCCO

### Union of Women Action

Union of Women action is a non-profit human rights organisation founded in 1987. The organisation is a social actor which plays a key role in developing strategies to combat violence against women. The launch of the Annajda network contributed to raise awareness on gender-based violence and change gradually harmful behaviors and practices. By setting a shelter for women and mothers with children victims of domestic violence, the organisation provides social, legal, economical and psychological support, and also plays a mediator role. Regularly, the organisation launches campaigns to increase citizens and stakeholders' awareness on the magnitude of the violence against women phenomena.



## PALESTINE\*

### Youth Education Development Forum Association (YEDF-NGO Forum)

Youth Education Development Forum Association was established in Bethlehem in 2010 by the main stakeholders of the youth education non-governmental organisations, institutions, individual experts and youth from West Bank and Gaza. The objective of the Forum is to establish links between youth, youth institutions and private and public sectors, as well as training institutes. Member of the Forum, the Community Centre for Training and Development provides trainings for young women and men from marginalised areas on human rights, citizenship and combating violence against women. The Centre raises awareness on reproductive and sexual health for instance by contributing to national strategies and additional protocols drafts related to survivors of gender-based violence.



## SYRIA

### Madani - Syrian Civil Coalition (TAMAS)

The Madani organisation is a UK-based non-profit organisation whose aim is to support the role of the Syrian civil society in modern state building, as well as in achieving peace and stability in the country and democratic transition. Among its activities, Madani focuses on promoting unarmed civilian protection and interrupting violence. Since 2014, the organisation has been a devoted founder and partner of the Syrian Civil Coalition (TAMAS). The aim of TAMAS, which involves more than 50 Syrian groups and organisations, is to unite, cooperate, and share experience, knowledge and resources in face of a unique crisis in Syria.



## TUNISIA

### BEITY

Beity association is a shelter for homeless women. The association was the first one to work on homelessness of women and violence against women. Beity offers psychological support services and helps in gathering information for social investigation file. Beity provides legal assistance in prosecution cases for domestic violence or for the granting of a patronymic family name to children of





singles mothers. The association also provides capacity building for rights awareness and education and ensures school enrolment for all children including non-Tunisian children. The association makes sure that victims have access to social care and allowances free of charge.

### Medias Development and Human Rights Observatory (OMDDH)

The association Medias Development and Human Rights Observatory develops activities for the integration of Libyan, Syrian and sub-Saharan African migrants in Tunisia, as well as awareness raising activities targeting medias in order to fight discriminations against migrants.

## 2.4 PRESENTATION OF COUNCIL OF EUROPE DEPARTMENTS

### Gender Equality Unit

The Gender Equality Unit is behind the [Council of Europe's Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023](#), which was published on the last 8<sup>th</sup> March. The new Gender Equality Strategy which replaces the Strategy [2014-2017](#) and its five 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) includes a new objective on protecting the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls. In April 2018, the Gender Equality Commission gathered 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.



### Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (Congress)

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 neighborhood 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.



### 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.



### Gender Equality Cooperation Projects with Southern Mediterranean Countries

The programme aims at promoting dialogue and cooperation 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 are recognised as priority areas for cooperation and 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.

### **Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination - Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)**



Among the nine committees, the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination is composed of 81 members, who 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.

### **European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission)**



The Venice Commission is the Council of Europe's partial agreement and advisory body on constitutional matters. Besides legal advice, the Venice Commission coordinates cooperation activities with several Southern Mediterranean countries as well as regional cooperation activities. 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.

## **3. CONCLUSIONS**

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### **3.1 ON COUNCIL OF EUROPE STANDARDS AND TOOLS**

Sessions on Council of Europe standards, tools and work were all followed by questions and answers' sessions between the relevant departments' representatives and the experts. These exchanges allowed experts to have an overview of the Council of Europe's multidimensional actions in the area of women's rights and gender equality and neighbourhood cooperation with Southern Mediterranean countries.

During these meetings, experts benefitted from insights of the implementation and/or use of [Council of Europe's standards and tools](#), in particular, the following:

- Council of Europe's Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023;
- European Convention on Human Rights;
- Istanbul Convention;
- Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings;
- Committee of Ministers political recommendations related to medias and education and recommendation on combating sexism currently under preparation.

The Council of Europe's action in the Southern neighbouring countries covers the areas of women and children rights, as well as human trafficking issues. All themes of the Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023 can also frame activities focused on women in the Southern Mediterranean region, in particular with regard to political participation. Several Council of Europe reference documents were translated into Arabic and could be used as guidance tools.

In addition, the reinforced dialogue between Council of Europe and Southern Mediterranean countries contributes to raise European awareness on challenges faced in the South in order to strengthen cooperation and solidarity between the peers in the region.

The issues addressed during the sessions were the following:

- ◆ Women's access to justice
- ◆ Women's participation in decision making
- ◆ Gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures
- ◆ Rights of migrant women and girls
- ◆ Protection of refugee women from gender based violence
- ◆ Political and legislative participation and representation of women on the two shores of the Mediterranean
- ◆ Political dialogue between Europe and Southern Mediterranean countries
- ◆ Coordination and monitoring in combating violence against women

### 3.2 POOL OF EXPERTS' WORKING SESSIONS

The three working sessions, organised in parallel to the exchanges with Council of Europe departments, allowed the experts to define precisely the roles, objectives and actions of the experts' pool, to work on the guidelines development and to prepare the next project activity: the Athens conference.



#### 3.2.1 Exchange of ideas

Experts had the opportunity to briefly report on the current state of play in their countries, the latest developments and new regional challenges. The session was also devoted to the North-South Centre's project to create and coordinate a pool of experts in the Southern Mediterranean. After a review of priorities identified during the meeting of Amman in October 2017, it appeared essential for the experts to agree on common definitions and clarify the respective roles within the project.

On the overall objective to achieve gender equality and guarantee women's rights, the pool of experts will focus on combating violence against women using Council of Europe tools, namely the Istanbul Convention, considering its comprehensive and universal dimension. In the framework of regional cooperation, experts decided to use the Istanbul Convention and the [questionnaire](#) developed by the GREVIO as guidance tools in promoting multi-agency coordination, as reference to evaluate the national state of play and as an indicator of performance for the pool of experts' work.

#### 3.2.2 Practical guidelines project

The exchange organised about the guidelines project allowed to address preliminary essential questions such as: what do the guidelines intend to do? To who are they targeted at? How they can be used? Etc. These questions were useful to determine the target group, the content to be developed, the format and appropriate language of the guidelines.

On the basis of the experts' proposals, the following actions were identified:

1. To define the pool's common principles and concepts;
2. To develop a gender-specific glossary clarifying notions and references of the guidelines;
3. To list forms of violence faced by women in the region and in particular the specific ones related to the regional context;



4. To map laws, mechanisms and services related to the protection and prevention from gender based violence;
5. To assess mechanisms providing improvement through transversal themes (such as medias, protection, awareness, etc.);
6. To introduce simplified and specific indicators to the Southern Mediterranean region in order to evaluate the progress achieved in women's rights and encourage a human rights-based approach;
7. To create a database of best practices in combating violence against women.

### 3.2.3 Migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women

The NSPEW III project includes a conference on “migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women and girls in the Euro-Mediterranean region” to be held in July 2018, in Athens. The conference will aim to highlight best practices in protection, integration and/or reception of migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women and girls. The conference will also aim at:

- ◆ taking stock of the situation and raising awareness on forms of violence faced by migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women and girls;
- ◆ presenting Council of Europe standards and tools;
- ◆ promoting cooperation with relevant stakeholders of the *quadrilogue*, and ;
- ◆ underline the role of diaspora communities as strategic partners in migration management, social and economic inclusion, intercultural dialogue and peace building processes.

Then, the meeting of the pool of experts was an opportunity to discuss the theme of the conference which was identified as one of the priorities during the meeting in Amman. New challenges and/or issues such as female genital mutilation, statelessness of children and cooperation between local non-governmental organisations and international organisations were tackled. Experts underlined that these problematic areas need to be addressed more often. They also raised the need to promote the implementation of protection and integration actions which have demonstrated success, while also supporting the important role that women organisations are playing on the ground.

## 3.3 NEXT STEPS



The working group marked the kick off of the North-South Centre's project, NSPEW III, in cooperation with experts from the Southern Mediterranean and in coordination with the Council of Europe's different sectors. Experts are invited to share a national state of play which will initiate the guidelines' project. In parallel, the North-South Centre, as coordinator of the project, will organise the next pool of experts' meetings, the next of which is planned on the margin of the Athens Conference. The North-South Centre will also encourage communication and cooperation

between the project's partners for an enhanced coordination and increased solidarity between key actors able to achieve concrete gender equality and women rights in the Euro-Mediterranean region.