

South Programme IV

Women Empowerment Conference

PROTECTING GIRLS

Reinforcing the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation to protect girls
from gender-based violence

29 June 2022

European Centre Jean Monnet
Lisbon, Portugal

In partnership with

European Commission Representation in Portugal

Concept Note

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Context and background

Referring to the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child for 2016-2021, It is acknowledged that "girls in particular are more likely to be confronted with sexual violence, sexist stereotypes, or sex-based discrimination. For example, 27 % of women have experienced some form of physical abuse before the age of 15 at the hands of an adult"¹.

According to the State of World Population report 2020², "every day, hundreds of thousands of girls around the world are subjected to practices that harm them physically or psychologically, or both". Due to the intersection of age, gender, and risk factors related to emergencies and/or conflicts, girls are particularly vulnerable to become victims of gender-based violence. The lack of legal provisions regarding the minimum age of marriage, the critical rise of violence against girls in humanitarian settings and the lack of public awareness on the harmful practices to which girls are subjected to, are among the main priorities highlighted by civil society organisations and grassroots workers in the Southern Mediterranean.³

In this context, the 2022 Women Empowerment Conference will address the issue of protection of girls against violence in the Southern Mediterranean, focusing on under-addressed situations of girls in vulnerable contexts, such as humanitarian, conflict, or post-conflict settings. The conference aims to raise awareness on the need for urgent and coordinated action from the local to the international level to ensure girls' access to protection services.

The Conference is organised in the framework of the joint programme between the European Union and the Council of Europe "[Regional Support to Reinforce Human rights, Rule of Law and Democracy in the Southern Mediterranean](#)" (South Programme IV), which goal is to support the ongoing democratic reforms and their successful completion in the Southern Mediterranean region. As part of the South Programme, the North-South Centre leads the project of the "[Euro-Mediterranean cooperation for the protection of women and girls against violence](#)", which aims at strengthening the capacities of civil society in the region to improve the protection and support services provided to victims of violence against women. The project promotes regional cooperation and exchange of good practices, as well as the multi-sectoral coordination efforts in line with human rights-based and victim-centred approaches.

Activity description and objectives

With the aim to reinforce the peer-exchanges between stakeholders from Europe and the Southern Mediterranean region, as well as multi-sectorial cooperation, the North-South Centre organises a one-day hybrid conference in Lisbon (Portugal). Under the theme of the protection

¹ Read more: [Children's rights \(coe.int\)](#)

² [SWOP Report 2020 | UNFPA - United Nations Population Fund](#)

³ Based on the inputs of the [North-South Centre's pool of experts](#) and the organisations' beneficiaries of the project's [Regional Grant Scheme](#) in charge of identifying the main transversal issues in the area of combating violence against women in the Southern Mediterranean region.

of girls against gender-based violence in the Southern Mediterranean region, the event will address issues related to combating and preventing gender-based violence and harmful practices against girls, especially in humanitarian settings.

In line with [Resolution 2380 \(2021\)](#) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the Humanitarian action for refugees and migrants in countries in North Africa and the Middle East, the intended outcomes are the following:

- To encourage multilateral and multisectoral cooperation to improve the protection of girls against violence in the Euro-Mediterranean region.
- To put forward recommended actions for national and cross-border cooperation with regards to exploitation and trafficking of girls.
- To reinforce technical cooperation between Council of Europe and SouthernMediterranean countries while promoting Council of Europe conventions, particularly the following: [The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children Against SexualExploitation and Sexual Abuse](#) (Lanzarote Convention), [the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings](#) and the [Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence](#) (Istanbul Convention), as well as relevant recommendations such as the [GREVIO's General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women](#))

The conference will gather key governmental, parliamentary and civil society representatives from the Euro-Mediterranean region to tackle current pressing regional issues and assess possible solutions to overcome them. Civil society actors will play the critical role of emphasising these issues at the conference. To this end, specific workshops for and by civil society will be organised ahead of the conference to identify today's challenges and solutions.

Timeline

May-June 2022: Civil society consultation organised around online meetings, respectively focusing on the online dimension of gender-based violence against girls; gender-based violence against girls in humanitarians' settings; access to protection services for children.

29 June 2022: Hybrid event (both online and in Lisbon, Portugal) structured around three discussions:

- Plenary on the civil society consultations' conclusions.
- Session 1: Investing in Prevention and Protection measures that have proven their effectiveness.
- Session 2: Investing in cross-border and multi-sectoral cooperation for an effective domestic implementation of laws and international standards.