



# Summary Report

## Union for the Mediterranean High-level Conference Fostering Women's Participation in Economic life May 19-21, 2015 - Barcelona

### I- Presentation

As part of the UFM strategy to consolidate women's socio-economic empowerment in the region, the above-mentioned Conference on Fostering Women's Participation in Economic Life was organised by the Union for the Mediterranean Secretariat from 19 to 21 May 2015 in Barcelona, Spain. This event was a follow-up of the Union for the Mediterranean Third Ministerial Declaration on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society, held in Paris in September 2013, in which the UfM Member States renewed their commitments to promote equality between women and men as regards their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

Building on the outcomes of the first UfM Conference on "Women's Socio-Economic Empowerment" held in Barcelona on 26-27 March 2014, the Conference brought together **over 250 participants from 35 countries**, including delegates from UfM Member States, representatives from international organisations and development agencies, parliamentarians and think tanks, private sector, donors, banks and civil society organisations, as well as promoters of projects.

**The Conference allowed setting up a *regional dialogue*, facilitating the sharing of experiences, and promoting new regional projects and the identification of new initiatives.**

**The Minister of Women and Family Affairs of Tunisia, Ms. Samira Merai Friia, proposed that Tunisia hosts the next Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on increasing the role of women in Society, in 2016.**

#### Agenda and content

Opened by the Minister of Women and Family Affairs of Tunisia, **Ms. Samira Merai-Friia** and Ambassador **Delphine Borione**, Deputy Secretary General of the UfM, and closed by the President of the Anna Lindh Foundation, **Ms. Elisabeth Guigou** and Secretary General of the UfM, **Mr. Fathallah Sijilmassi**, the Conference brought together 50 speakers - governments, parliamentarians, mayors, international and financial organisations, civil society, private sector and promoters of projects - from all the countries of the Mediterranean.

**Over 3 days, participants actively debated the extent of women's economic participation in the Mediterranean region, highlighting the benefits and examining ways to overcome the main obstacles to**



**full economic participation. Solutions to design an enabling environment for economic participation of women and reinforce synergies and coordination between actors across the region were discussed. The key role of donors and financial institutions was also explored.**

Speakers and participants shared **experiences and best practices** to concretely improve the situation, whether in terms of public policies (such as gender-sensitive budgeting, or care policies), or in terms of private sector good practices. They made recommendations on how to concretely promote inclusive growth and gender equality in the region.

**Three thematic workshops allowed participants to elaborate recommendations** for increasing employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for women in innovative sectors such as **Social and solidarity economy, Green economy and ICTs**. A fourth workshop highlighted the key **Role of the Media** to improve the image of women's role in economy.

### **Presentation and launch of Projects**

The UfM dedicated the last morning of the Conference to the presentation of concrete projects and initiatives. Two projects were officially launched: **“Developing Women Empowerment” promoted by the “Euro Mediterranean Women Foundation”** and **“Forming Responsible Citizen” promoted by Ideaborn**. With the coaching of a professional curator, several initiatives and projects were also presented by their promoters.

### **Launch of a Regional Dialogue on women empowerment**

Back-to-back with this Conference, the first **“Regional Dialogue on women empowerment”** was launched, involving UfM members' governments and regional and international stakeholders, including civil society organisations. This Dialogue will take forward the implementation of the Paris UFM Ministerial commitments on strengthening the role of women in society - more specifically, in the field of **participation of women in economic life, combat against violence, women leadership and change of stereotypes**.

## **II- Recommendations**

### **General recommendations**

Participants stressed the urgency to improve women's economic participation and called for concrete measures and greater synergy between key actors in the region. All participants agreed that **“when women work, the economy wins”**. Better integration of women into the labour market could allow an improvement of at least 25% of GDP in the MENA region. The need to have **an integrated vision and holistic approach when dealing with gender issues was fully recognised**: gender issues are not the responsibility only of the ministries in charge of promoting the situation of Women, but are cross-sectorial.

To improve the situation on women's economic participation in the region, participants proposed the following **General Recommendations**:



- Fill the gap between strategies, policies, legislations and measures adopted by governments relating to gender equality, and actual implementation on the ground. It is urgent to accelerate the implementation of public policies in this regard.
- Set up in all sectors additional mechanisms and tools for the monitoring and evaluating of policies, and encourage the production of reliable gender-sensitive data, indicators and statistics.
- Combat on a daily basis gender-based stereotypes at work, in parallel to building an enabling environment to foster economic participation of women, and alleviating social and cultural barriers which still hinder the achievement of gender equality in the region. Involving men in this action is necessary.
- Improve governance of mechanisms to support entrepreneurship to ensure equal access of women to offered opportunities, such as equal access to finance, markets and investors.
- Encourage adequate training and the culture of entrepreneurship from primary school and at all levels of education.
- Share best practices and encourage networking between women, and promote women in decision making positions.
- Provide mechanisms to help women reconcile private and professional life.
- Launch projects for disadvantaged women (ill, poor, discriminated, persons with disabilities, etc.), in order to guarantee them a decent life.
- Take into account the situation of women suffering from armed conflicts.

## Specific recommendations made during the Workshop sessions

### a) Social and solidarity economy (SSE) Workshop:

SSE is recognised as being an appropriate economic model given the crisis situation in some Mediterranean countries people, especially women. The SSE is a very important leverage point for women empowerment. The SSE can favour transition from informal to formal economy. The following needs were recognised:

- Monitor and measure qualitatively and quantitatively the results of the SSE in order to understand and assess its efficacy and impact.
- Support the development of a legal and favourable environment framework for the SSE in the Mediterranean region.
- Foster skills in the SSE in general and more particularly for women to allow them to access to decision making positions.
- Improve the visibility of the SSE institutions (and of women working in it) at the national and regional level.
- Federate the SSE associations and different stakeholders, in local, national and regional level, in order to give them a voice and visibility vis-à-vis public authorities and financial institutions.



### **b) Green economy for women's empowerment Workshop:**

- Encourage the production and availability of statistical data on women in green economy: data on the sectors that employ women, and gender disaggregated data on employability levels. EUROSTAT, UN or other relevant institutions could be encouraged to do more in this field.
- While it is very difficult to access the market of traditional industry, the green-tech or clean-tech are more open to entrepreneurship and it could constitute an opportunity for women. The upcoming Climate Conference in Paris (COP 21) is expected to provide impetus to the development of Green Economy.
- Develop forestry linked activities and the eco-tourism with the development and promotion of local products. But ensure to limit negative impacts of this tourism on ecosystems.
- Apply a gender based approach to impact studies, taking into account the needs of men and women.

### **c) Taking advantage of ICTs opportunities for women Workshop:**

Participants stressed the high potential of ICT for job creation and entrepreneurship, and the high potential of ICT as a tool for women's empowerment. However, the "gender digital divide" means that there are fewer women than men accessing and using ICT. There is a risk, if women do not have the capacity to exploit ICT for their empowerment, that ICT will reinforce the existing inequalities or create new ones. There is therefore a need for:

- Encourage ICT very early in the education curriculum system, starting on the primary education. Furthermore, schools should use ICT tools and the educators should be trained to use ICT tools. Also, entrepreneurship in ICT should be included early in education curriculum and system. To improve the attraction of the ICT sector for women, the education system should present relevant career guidance, improved image of the sector, successful female role models in ICT sector...
- Encourage ICT companies to employ more women, in order to change the culture and perception inside the sector. Recent study showed that companies with gender balance workforce are 70% more likely to capture more market.
- Provide mentorship and training to women with potential to create enterprises on ICT but also to those who are already entrepreneurs in the sector.
- Encourage national policies on gender equality to address the differential impact of ICT on men and women and consequently respond to the different needs of women.
- Create, in relation with the UfM, a platform to gather different initiatives, best practices, websites etc. on how to best engage women in the ICT sector.

### **d) Economic participation of women and role of media Workshop:**

The participation of women in the media is globally weak in the region, in particular at decision-making levels. Similarly, there is a weak representation of women as experts in the media. Through the images transmitted in their programmes and advertisements, media have a key role for changing stereotypes about women. Concrete recommendations included:

- Ensure higher participation of women in the media, in all types of jobs and positions.



- Mainstream combatting stereotypes within education policies.
- Produce and publish a Guide or Handbook of “expert women” in the Mediterranean, to show positive examples of women in the sector.
- Encourage public media to be the main guarantor of the respect of the gender equality values.
- Strengthen media regulatory authorities and encourage them to adopt women empowerment as a key policy.
- Improve tools to detect stereotypes. For this, exchange of best practices between north and south regarding relevant programmes could be helpful.
- Foster access of women to lead position in the media sector, since very few women are in decision-making positions.
- Promote capacity-building activities targeting stakeholders from the politics, the economy, the civil society and the media.
- Develop networks and exchange experiences, particularly in the new media and journalism.

NB: In addition to the above, the four workshops concluded with the need to further continue discussing and investigating on the opportunities offered by these innovative fields to women employment.

### III- Follow-Up

As a follow up of the Conference, the UFM Secretariat will:

- Circulate a **Detailed Report** on the 2015 Conference which will specify all recommendations made;
- Keep online the **UfM Women’s Socio Economic Empowerment online platform**, to facilitate networking between participants, exchange of information, and possible synergies and ways of cooperation.
- Share the work-in-progress document **“Mapping on the Gender equality and Women empowerment in the Mediterranean region”**.
- Facilitate the **UfM Regional Dialogue on Women Empowerment** which was launched on May 19th, in particular in relation to the identified priority to *“raise women participation in economic life”*. Continue providing a multi-stakeholders **platform of dialogue**, especially on the specific themes identified during the Conference
- **Accompany and monitor the UFM labelled projects** which were launched during the Conference and continue facilitating and monitoring the 10 other labelled projects; **Identify and support new regional initiatives** and projects that contribute to improve women’s economic participation in the region.
- **Organise the 3rd UFM Conference on Women Empowerment in 2016**, and contribute to the preparation of the **UfM Ministerial Conference on strengthening the role of Women in Society, to be held in 2016 in Tunis.**

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