



Fostering Women's Participation in Economic Life

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The Union for the Mediterranean has put women empowerment and gender equality at the heart of its mandate, among its main 3 priorities of action.

The UFM is doing so by promoting the gender equality agenda as a public policy priority; by supporting concrete projects benefiting more than 50.000 women on the ground, and by acting as a regional platform for bringing more impact and synergies among all stakeholders in the region, building partnerships with international and regional organisations, donors, the private sector and civil society organisations.

The UfM Secretariat also started building a regionally structured multi-stakeholder dialogue on women's empowerment involving governments and non-governmental organisations which aims to monitor stakeholders' commitments and facilitate the exchange of information, experiences, best practices and opportunities between key actors involved in the field of gender equality and women empowerment.

The UfM Secretariat also implements a gender mainstreaming approach in all its sectorial projects and initiatives.

Women as drivers of economic development in the Mediterranean



Photo F. Maié / econostrum.info

Delphine Borione, UfM's Deputy Secretary General for social and civil affairs.

All efforts to promote economic development in the Mediterranean will be worthless unless women are further involved. For the General Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean this is a fact and almost a profession of faith. Its strategy on this issue is based on four pillars. The first of these is the implementation of projects directly focused on women's socio-economic empowerment. Its second aim is to mainstream the "gender" dimension across all Union for the Mediterranean projects. Thirdly it aims to establish partnerships on this topic with its partner institutions and financial backers. Finally, the UfM intends to fully play its role as a platform for multi-stakeholder discussions between the 43 Member States, to create synergies and lead to exchanges of good practice.

It is in this inclusive spirit that, every year, the General Secretariat of the

Encouraging women's participation in the economy is not merely a social issue; it is also essential for development.

UfM organises a high-level conference to bring together numerous organisations from the South and North of the Mediterranean.

This year the UfM's General Secretariat aims to do more and better. It is organising two significant meetings leading up to the conference, bringing together the governments of UfM members and key regional stakeholders. This will be an opportunity to take stock of achievements since the ministerial meeting in September 2013 and initiate regional dialogue aimed at identifying the operational and specific measures to be taken to transform ambitious political commitments into success on the ground.

According to Delphine Borione, UfM's Deputy Secretary General for social and civil affairs *"the Mediterranean basin continues to be the area where women are least integrated into the world of work. Only around 23% of women participate in the labour market. This has a direct impact on GDP. Ensuring equal participation of women in economic life would increase income in North African and Middle Eastern countries by more than 25%. The theme we have chosen for this conference is therefore, at the same time, a major social issue for the development of societies, a question of*

human rights but also an issue relevant to the 'smart economy'".

" Building bridges between training and employment "

This year, this key event for the UfM and the Euro-Mediterranean region will focus on four priority topics that are likely to lead to new opportunities: [the promotion of women in the social and solidarity economy](#), [the green economy](#), [information and communication technologies](#) and [finally, the role of the media](#) as a vehicle for changing our image of women.

Delphine Borione takes the digital sector, backed up by relevant figures, as an example, to highlight the reality of the situation. *"A study by the European Union shows that increasing women's presence in this sector would increase European GDP by €9 billion,"* she points out.

We also need to reflect on stereotypes of "women at work" and on access to training. *"We have to build bridges to establish better links between training and employment, to increase women's presence in private sector companies and to foster entrepreneurship and create new opportunities for women, for instance in the digital sector"*, adds Delphine Borione.

Supporting female entrepreneurship

After a first successful phase, the Union for the Mediterranean “Young women as job creators” scheme, developed by female business leaders, has been extended to three more countries, namely Egypt, Tunisia and Albania.

The “Young women as job creators” project, which has been approved by the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) is already in its second phase. AFAEMME ⁽¹⁾, a federation of associations of Mediterranean businesswomen, which currently comprises 44 associations in 27 countries around the Mediterranean, is tasked with implementing the project. “During the first phase we looked in particular at competency gaps and funding problems” explains Stella Mally, AFAEMME’s international coordinator.

The scheme has benefitted to 800 young students from 32 Mediterranean universities (in Morocco, Jordan, Palestine and Spain). The UfM was able to convince donors including Norway and Gas Natural to support the initiative. Monaco will be involved in “Phase 2” of the project, which has an initial budget of €350k to fund work in Jordan, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia, Albania and Egypt. The position of women in these six countries is similar in several ways. They all have a high level of unemployment, excellent standards of training, and societal barriers, which prevent them from achieving their full potential. “We now need to equip young entrepreneurs to be better able to access funding”, adds Stella Mally.



Photo Afaemme

No gender distinction in new business creation

The first phase of the project noted that there are no “gender specificities” in new business creation. This applies to all industry sectors. “Stereotypes stem from the way women are viewed in each country, which is why it is important for us to bolster the resources of local partner associations. That’s why our federation operates as a network”, adds Helena de Felipe Lehtonen, president of AFAEMME.

There are several other schemes involved in promoting female entrepreneurship around the Mediterranean, including the American NGO CEED (Centre of Entrepreneurial and Executive Development). This NGO is dedicated to all new entrepreneurs, but has

a high proportion of women in its Mediterranean delegations, particularly in the Maghreb.

In Morocco, new or existing entrepreneurs represent 100% of the beneficiaries of the CEED support programme “Grow”. This project is currently being developed in partnership with the UfM, allowing guaranteed growth through the development of networks and know-how. The scheme is part of a general trend of the feminisation of the business world in Morocco, which currently has 5000 female entrepreneurs but where women still only represent a quarter of the working population.

⁽¹⁾ Association of Organisations of Mediterranean Businesswomen

Med NC, a new chance for Mediterranean women

The New Chance Mediterranean Network (Med NC) is building on the success of the Second Chance Schools in Marseille and across France. It allows young women in particular to benefit from personalised pathways support, to escape their exclusion from the labour market.



Photo Med NC

According to the International Labour Organisation, only 15% of Algerian, 25% of Tunisian and 27% of Moroccan women are employed.

The women who are “not in education, employment or training”, “NEETs”, represents a major challenge but also a potential source of opportunities. Strongly inspired by the know-how it gained from the [French network of Second Chance Schools \(E2C\)](#), which began in Marseille, Med NC is transferring the experience to Morocco and Tunisia to offer young people in the region the chance for a new start in life. Med NC, labelled by the Union for the Mediterranean, offers young Mediterranean women, in particular, a way out of exclusion by allowing them to find a job after upgrading their skills and giving them

personalised support including work experience placements.

“The Mission Locale de Marseille (note: local youth employment association) directed me towards the Second Chance School in Marseille. I began with some training in core subjects and then I had the chance to complete three different nine-month internships in hospitals” explains Delphine Crespo (26 years old), medical secretary at the new Hôpital Européen de Marseille since late 2013.

Five years earlier, she had given up after failing her Professional Baccalaureate in secretarial skills, and moved from one precarious job to another without having any real prospects for the future. Now, thanks to her permanent contract, this young woman has been able to

Med NC consists in the development of network of Nouvelle Chance accredited centers designed to increase the employability of young Mediterraneans.

take her driving test and rent her own apartment. She says she is “happy to have earned her independence.”

Exchange of know-how

Launched in 2013, the Mediterranean Med NC network harnesses the experience of the French network. It already involves [five training centres in Morocco, promoted by the Office Chérifien des Phosphates \(OCP\)](#), where 54% of the students are women.

In Tunisia the initiative was started by volunteer teachers from [ISCAE \(the Higher Institute of Accounting and Business Administration\)](#) in January 2015. It targets unemployed ISCAE graduates and out of twenty-two students on the scheme, nineteen are women. “We hope to find an organisation to support the extension of the scheme to Algeria. We also have contacts in Egypt, through the governor of Alexandria”, explains Anis Saïdi, Med NC programme manager.

By the end of 2016, the programme will benefit 1500 young people including 60% women.

A social, solidarity... and female economy

The Social and Solidarity Economy is playing an active role in the economic integration of women in the Mediterranean. View of **Rodérick Egal**, president of **iesMed** (Innovation & Social Economy in the Mediterranean) cooperative company.

What role does the Social and Solidarity Economy play in women's economic integration?

Rodérick Egal : The Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) plays an active part in women's integration in the Mediterranean, particularly in Morocco, where many female-run cooperatives have been developed, mainly in the craft and agricultural industries. But it remains a category that is unfairly thought of as the "economy of the poor". However, these companies are just as concerned with profitability, except that in the Social and Solidarity Economy, money is not an end in itself but rather a means. Income is not redistributed to benefit shareholders but rather to reward producers, as well as being used to grow the company, as demonstrated by the largest cooperative in the world, the Spanish group Mondragon.

But how can the SSE allow women to better integrate into the economy?

Rodérick Egal : Women are directly affected because it is a type of economy that allows them to establish their own livelihoods

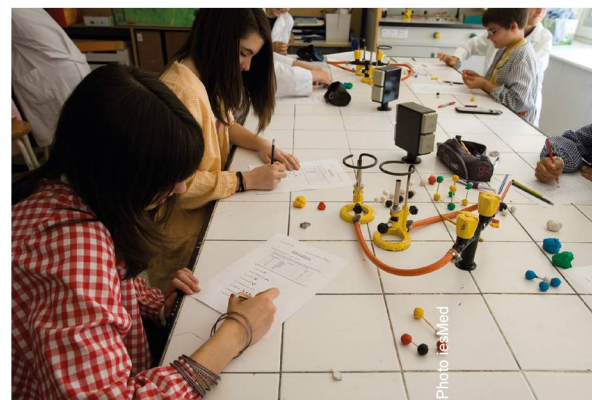
and independence, particularly in traditional societies. The social and solidarity economy depends on people's willingness to play their role as citizens and participate actively in society. I am convinced that this is a major issue for women.

To the south of the Mediterranean, this embryonic economy continues to be affected by the difficulties of development. That's one of the reasons why SSE companies have trouble accessing funding in these countries. Bankers do not trust these companies because they believe that they are unlikely to grow significantly, which is why we need to change this view.

The Union for the Mediterranean plays a paramount role

What can the Union for the Mediterranean do to improve the situation?

Rodérick Egal : I believe that the Union for the Mediterranean has a very important role to play to ensure better integration of women in the social and solidarity economy. It is



Ginebró school, a cooperative education founded 40 years ago in Catalonia. A company model of solidary and social economy supported by l'iesMed.

“ A major issue for women's economic integration in the Mediterranean

essential that the private sector be involved in this area to the south of the Mediterranean. Indeed it is the capacity to create synergies between the public and private sectors that makes the Union for the Mediterranean so important. And we mustn't forget its ability to connect stakeholders in this economy with lenders, in order to spread funding tools that are not truly available yet.

One of iesMed's aims is to create a "meso" culture by connecting "macro" lenders (i.e. those that currently fund development in the Mediterranean) with "micro" projects, particularly those led by women in North Africa. The Union for the Mediterranean is particularly well placed to support this drive.

Giving a voice to women in Mediterranean media

Better integrating women into the media while tackling stereotypes would not only bolster their economic power but also ensure a greater variety of information. That is exactly what the MedMedia project, supported by the European Union, is aiming to achieve.

A study carried out by [Maria João Cunha](#), professor at the Institute of Social & Political Sciences of the University of Lisbon, examines women's participation and representation in the media and makes some harsh observations. In terms of "participation", the academic notes [inequality in access to and distribution of high-level jobs between men and women](#). With regard to "representation", the study finds that women are presented in the media with an almost homogenised image, based on the [stereotypes promoted by advertising, which cultivate the objectification of women](#) (using the recurring themes of beauty, youth, perfection, sophistication, success, seduction and slimness).

It is therefore logical to ask questions about these two sides of women's involvement in the media and how they are related. It seems fairly clear that changing the way women are presented in the media would lead to greater female participation, since stereotypes act as a barrier for women who wish to access careers in communication. This is one of the focuses of the MedMedia project, which aims to create a favourable



Photo MedMedia

environment for media reform in the southern Mediterranean region (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine). MedMedia must also raise awareness of the pressure imposed on women eager to access decision-making jobs in the media, who sometimes face sexual or moral harassment, leading to marginalisation.

One way of giving more economic power to women

"Better integration of women in the media is a political issue, because it would give them more economic sway in traditional societies, particularly

in the north of Africa" believes [Leila Nachawati](#), Professor at the University Carlos III of Madrid, and Spanish-Syrian blogger. *"We have seen that women sometimes offer a different approach, particularly in journalistic coverage of conflicts, where they tend to be more interested in people's daily lives and in social or political issues"*.

"The most important thing", continues Leila Nachawati, "is to develop the legal frameworks to increase protection for journalists on the ground. Women can indeed be more exposed to the pressure exerted by authorities in conflict zones, even if the admirable examples of Mayte Carrasco or Zaina Erhaim in Syria prove that women are able to stand up to such pressure".

“One village, one product”, and women at the helm

The European Neighbourhood Policy’s “One village, one product” scheme aims to promote the emergence of women in agricultural area development.

In the Egyptian governorate of Béni Suef, to the south of Lake Qaroun, **women have taken charge of milk production and, in turn, of their own destiny.** The female dairy producers take their milk to the local cooperative. There, at the purchasing desk, they negotiate the price directly, depending on its quality. These female producers, trained in hygiene and milk processing techniques, have acquired a new skills-based power.

This €50 000 project involves 700 small producers. It was made possible by a **partnership agreement between the cooperative, a local NGO, the Social Development Fund and the Danone dairy group**, with a budget granted by the European Union.

“The “One village, one product” schemes are meant to promote women’s access and full participation in economic and public life. They tackle the barriers that prevent women’s involvement” believes the European Commission spokesperson, Maja Kocijancic, quoting the explanatory statement for the project from the EU, which is co-financing the programme. It’s a question of giving the necessary legal, technical and economic

resources and training to women in rural areas to help them become economic actors.

“This model is based on shoring up local women’s know-how, developing their understanding of economic aspects and fostering partnerships that generate employment” the spokesperson explains.

400 women start their own business

This type of project is part of an **umbrella programme launched in 2012 by UN Women and the European Union, for more than eight million Euros.** The programme, entitled **“Spring Forward”**, focuses on Libya, Jordan, Tunisia and Egypt.

Through the scheme, female farmers in the Béheira region south of Cairo were invited to develop their own artichoke processing companies.

The scheme has already allowed 400 women to start their own business. It takes at least five people to process an artichoke harvested early in the morning into an exportable artichoke heart. Approximately 8 000 new jobs have been created so far. These have



Photo Commission européenne

Maja Kocijancic,
European Commission spokesperson

gone mainly to women, but also to unemployed husbands, brothers, etc.

The issue of how to create added value was on the agenda of the Conference on the socio-economic empowerment of women, organised by the UfM Secretariat in 2014. In the same year, the Union for the Mediterranean launched a **project on “skills for success - women’s employability”**, implemented by AMIDEAST. This project improves the skills of young disadvantaged or job-seeking women in Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan and Lebanon. Only 25 % of women are active in the labour market in the southern Mediterranean region, and the numbers are increasing extremely slowly; indeed they have risen by only 0.17 % per year for the last 30 years.

“We need to educate people about citizenship”

The “Forming responsible citizens” project, which has been approved by the Union for the Mediterranean and is founded on a government/NGO partnership, aims to contribute to instilling values of interdependent and sustainable development, freedom and gender equality from school age. **Chiara Guidetti, managing director of Ideaborn, explains the issues involved in this approach for Mediterranean women.**



Photo DR

How did the “Forming responsible citizens” project start?

Chiara Guidetti : Since the advent of the Arab springs, we have been approaching the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) to offer our experience in teaching citizenship. Until then our experience had been gained in South America. That led to the “Forming responsible citizens” scheme in the Mediterranean being approved by the UfM in 2014. We

will be rolling it out in cooperation with local NGOs in Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia. We are also relying on partnerships with the respective Education Ministries. We are hoping to have an estimated budget of €730K, some of which will be funded by the Norwegian government.

What are the project’s specific aims?

Chiara Guidetti : Firstly the project aims to ensure citizenship education is

seen as a way of preventing violence, particularly against women and girls. Then we will look at the content of textbooks for ten to fifteen-year-olds in schools in the three countries, working closely with the Education Ministries to establish good practices. We want to involve teachers and students in the project so that they take ownership of the various initiatives and continue them beyond the thirty months of the programme delivery.

“Essential for women’s economic integration”

How can it help promote women’s economic integration?

Chiara Guidetti : Of course we’re talking about children here, but this early-years education is essential for women’s economic integration. It’s a way of raising awareness of citizenship beyond gender boundaries. It is not only aimed at pupils but also teachers, who through this project, will be able to network and exchange good practices.

It’s a way of changing the stereotypes we see in girls’ education.