



Union for the Mediterranean  
Union pour la Méditerranée  
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In the framework of  
**25** YEARS 1995 - 2020  
**BARCELONA**  
**PROCESS**  
Union for the Mediterranean

#WOMEN4  
MEDITERRANEAN

# Women4Mediterranean Conference 2020

Accelerating gender  
equality in the context of  
the COVID-19 pandemic



16-20 November 2020 | Online



The UfM Secretariat  
is co-funded by the  
EUROPEAN UNION

5 GENDER  
EQUALITY





## Women4Mediterranean Conference 2020



The 2020 UfM High-level Women4Mediterranean Conference coincides with the **25th Anniversary of the Barcelona Process**, a vast dynamic cooperation partnership between the European Union and 12 Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries, that laid the foundations of the Union for the Mediterranean. This year also marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action, also adopted in 1995 in Beijing, China, that is considered as the most pivotal global roadmap for the achievement of gender equality. These two important dates serve as a milestone for the UfM Member States to assess the progress made in advancing gender equality in the region, not only to address the remaining challenges but also to update their strategies for the years to come towards the achievement of the SDGs.

Since 1995, **four Ministerial meetings on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society took place in the Euro-Mediterranean region** - in 2006 in Istanbul, 2009 in Marrakech, 2013 in Paris and 2017 in Cairo - where strong commitments towards achieving gender equality were endorsed by countries. Important legal reforms and supportive policy actions for gender equality and women participation have been undertaken since then by **UfM countries and the case for gender equality has**

**never been more obvious**, thanks to extensive data and research, and a growing transparency. However, despite the significant policy progress and the invested efforts that have taken place in the UfM countries, data from the region shows that the impact on women and girls is far from being fully achieved. While most countries are close to gender parity in education and health outcomes, important gaps still exist in employment, earnings, financial and property ownership, mobility, digital use and affordable access, and acquisition of soft skills such as decision ma-

king and leadership. Discriminatory practices, social barriers, insufficient institutional protection and unequal access to services and resources continue to hinder women's progress in the region. The progress has also been stalled or slowed down because of the several pressing social, economic and security challenges faced by the region over the past 25 years. Women and girls are amongst those most severely affected by the impact of the financial crisis and the armed conflicts that occurred in the region.

**The Women4Mediterranean Conference intends to serve as a milestone to appraise and take stock of what has been achieved over the past 25 years**, to learn from what has worked and to further identify areas that require improvement. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the scenario. Preliminary data shows that the pandemic is deepening pre-existing gender inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems which are in turn amplifying the impacts of the pandemic on women and girls' lives. All these impacts are further intensified in contexts of fragility, conflict, and emergencies where social cohesion is already undermined, and institutional capacity and services are limited.

**The Conference seeks to further analyse the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women and girls** and to highlight the key role played by women in addressing the pandemic. It also aims to identify what is needed to better value the role of women and foster women's participation in policy and decision-making to address the pandemic.

**Important gaps still exist in employment, earnings, financial and property ownership, mobility, digital use and affordable access.**

The Conference will be the appropriate occasion to launch the UfM Institutional Ministerial follow-up mechanism and its indicators, adopted this year by the UfM Member States, that will allow to monitor and measure for the coming years gender equality progress in the region and will provide policy and action-oriented recommendations to close the gender gap.



## Thematic Focus



### Women on the frontline of COVID-19

The COVID-19 crisis has shown that the **decision-making bodies** established specifically to manage the pandemic **do not reflect a gender balance** between women and men.

Today **women account for 70% of the health and social care workforce**. However, they are still under-represented in leadership and decision-making processes; 70% of executive directors of global health organizations are men and only 5% are women in low- and middle-income countries. Women health workers are also regularly subjected to abuse and harassment by colleagues and patients, a situation that has become worse with COVID-19. Women health providers are more exposed to the virus, they are experiencing unprecedented levels of stress and are at risk

of burnout, threatening their ability to continue to do their vital work. They also have more risk of being stigmatized for their life-saving work with patients who have COVID-19.

**Policies and decision-making processes related to health that do not include women have been shown to be less effective**, and to negatively affect the health outcomes of women and children around the world. During the Ebola crisis, the inclusion of women's groups in the management of the pandemic improved the capacity of response. **Women's organizations** that are often at the forefront of the response in communities **should be represented in decision-making bodies and supported**.

## DISCUSSION POINTS

- **How can women's leadership and equal representation in all COVID-19 response planning and decision-making be ensured?**
- **How can we support women during the pandemic** in areas such as health, education, and care?
- **What measures are needed to support parents and unpaid care workers** during the COVID-19 pandemic?



## Women's economic participation and the impact of COVID-19

The impact of COVID-19 across the global economy will be profound. **Markets and supply chains have been disrupted, businesses were closed, and millions have or will lose their jobs and livelihoods.** Travel restrictions, and the cancellation of many planned visits,

flights, business and leisure events are severely affecting many sectors. And this is likely to persist for some time. The ILO has estimated that full or partial lockdown measures now affect almost 2.7 billion workers, representing around 81% of the world's workforce, while the IMF projects a significant contraction of global output in 2020.

Emerging evidence suggests that women's economic and productive lives **will be affected disproportionately and differently from those of men.** Across the globe, women earn less, save less,

hold less secure jobs, and are more likely to be employed in the informal sector. **They have less access to social protections and represent the majority of single-parent households.** Their capacity to absorb economic shocks is therefore less than that of men.

Such impacts risk rolling back the already fragile gains made in female labour force participation. In many countries, the first round of layoffs has been particularly acute in the services sector, including retail, hospitality and tourism, where women are overrepresented.



## DISCUSSION POINTS

- **What policy measures and direct support are needed to effectively address** the economic impact of COVID-19 on women and girls?
- **How should targeting methodologies of pre-existing national social protection programs** be adapted to ensure income for sectors affected by COVID-19, especially where women are heavily represented (tourism, teaching, retail, restaurants, hospitality, etc.)?
- **What actions are needed to reach and protect women workers** from informal sectors?
- **What role can women's networks and civil society organizations,** including microfinance and savings groups, play in dire economic situations impacted by a pandemic?



## Ending violence against women and girls (VAWG)

According to recent data, 243 Million women and girls aged 15-49 have been subjected to sexual and/or physical violence worldwide by an intimate partner in the previous 12 months.

**VAWG tends to increase during every type of emergency, including epidemics.** The Ebola pandemic demonstrated that multiple forms of violence were exacerbated within crisis contexts, including domestic violence, trafficking, child marriage, and sexual exploitation and abuse.

Emerging data shows that since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, that has deepened economic and social stress, coupled with restricted movement, social isolation measures, and less access to community support, VAWG has surged in many countries including some UfM countries.

Since the lockdown, in some countries, **calls to a helpline in the first days of confinement increased fivefold.** However, other countries have seen a decline in reports, suggesting that **some women face barriers to reporting violence or seeking help.** In addition, with a strained health sys-



tem, **access to vital sexual and reproductive health services, including for women subjected to violence, is likely becoming more limited.**

Other services, such as hotlines, crisis centres, shelters, legal aid, and protection services may also be scaled back, further reducing access to the few sources of help that women in abusive relationships might have. This is worse for women who are displaced, refugees, and living in conflict-affected areas who are particularly vulnerable.

Evidence from previous pandemics also reveals increased violence against female health workers, online violence, femicide, harmful practices, and racial and ethnic discrimination and violence. Government need to take urgent measures to support women and girls experiencing violence and ensure that quality services are provided as a part of the pandemic response.

## DISCUSSION POINTS

- **How can we strengthen advocacy and engagement of different actors** to address VAWG during COVID-19?
- **How can women's organisations be involved in the preparation of recovery plans** and the provision of longer-term solutions to address VAWG during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- **What role do civil society organisations play in addressing VAWG** in the Euro-Mediterranean region?
- **What actions are needed to raise awareness among community members** and families about the increased risk of domestic/partner violence during this pandemic, and the need to keep in touch and provide support safely to women subjected to violence?



# Women4Mediterranean Conference Overall Objectives

*UfM Women4Mediterranean  
Conference 2018, Lisbon,  
Portugal*



## Creating impact by connecting advocates and decision makers

Organised every two years since 2013, **the UfM high level Women4Mediterranean Conference** is one of the major regional events that promotes gender equality and women's equal participation in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Over the years, the Conference has created impact by bringing together hundreds of stakeholders and policy leaders from the Euro-Mediterranean region —go-

vernments, parliaments, private sector, international organisations, civil society, academia, media, young women and men— to work together as a collective intelligence platform that discusses, generates ideas and solutions, exchanges experiences and identifies concrete actions toward advancing gender equality in UfM countries.



*Side-event - "UfM  
Regional Dialogue on  
Women Empowerment"*

## Regional action for national and global gender equality agendas

The Women4Mediterranean Conference has become one of the main regional tools to assess the progress made in implementing countries and stakeholders commitments on advancing gender equality and providing policy recommendations, as a contribution towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. For almost 5 years, the conference has been a catalyst for policy advocacy, concrete initiatives and projects, new ideas, multi-stakeholders' collaborations and partnerships.



## Focusing on the key role of women and girls as agents for change

The Conference focuses on women's leadership as **catalysts for change** and as **drivers of solutions** to address regional challenges. It raises awareness about the untapped capacity and talents of women in the region and the need to overcome cultural and social barriers to drive actions for gender equality.



Main hall - Photo exhibition on "Women in action: ending stereotypes in the Mediterranean"



Side-event - "Euro-Mediterranean Youth Forum: shaping the digital future"

## Harnessing the power of youth

The Conference, over years, has given a voice to young leaders and young advocates from the region by connecting them with each other and with policy makers to increase and improve their impact and work towards gender equality. In 2018, more than 50% of the Conference's participants were young

women and men. We work to increase this proportion in the future editions. We believe that achieving gender equality will only be possible by dedicating efforts, actions and policies to further involve young people, as they are the present and future of our region.

## Date and venue

**16-20 November 2020**

In light of ongoing COVID-19 developments, this flagship event will take place online on **16-20 November 2020**.



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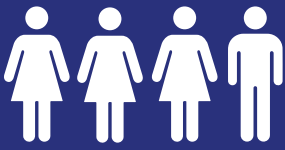
**#WOMEN4MEDITERRANEAN**

## Participants

The conference is expected to gather **about 500 participants** representing diverse stakeholders from all sectors involved in gender equality and women's empowerment in the Euro-Mediterranean region, including country representatives, ministers, local authorities and

public institutions, parliamentarians, international organisations, civil society platforms, youth, academics, private sector actors, project promoters, media and personalities with an outstanding commitment towards gender equality.

## 2018 Conference Highlights



**400+**  
participants  
from **30+** countries

**3** days  
**6** side-events

**5** panels  
*Women leaders; Breaking stereotypes; Private sector & media; Combating violence against women; Youth for women empowerment*  
**3** workshops  
*Women in rural areas; Women in science; Investing in sexual health*

**65** speakers  
from **all** sectors of society

More than **20** new regional projects and initiatives presented

## Attendees

**36%** from the Southern & Eastern Mediterranean

**32%** from the Northern Mediterranean

**31%** from Portugal (host country)

**1%** others



## Heard and Seen

Balanced media coverage  
**38%** Southern Med **41%** Northern Med

**250** articles reaching a potential **140 M** audience

**40** interviews in tier-1 national media across the region

**4** Media Partnerships  
France Medias Monde, Lusa, Radio Liban, BBC Arabic

**6,500** visits to the **Women4Mediterranean** web pages

**205K** interactions + **1,500** mentions of the hashtag on Twitter  
**+80%** in mentions compared to the 2016 edition

Trending Topic on Twitter in **Spain** and **Portugal**





## Format

Side-event - "Behavioral insights for women's economic empowerment"



## Plenary Sessions

Online sessions with high level keynote speakers, policy makers, experts, practitioners and youth representatives to explore the most recent developments, initiatives and innovative thinking around the main selected topics through engaging presentations and discussions with the audience. The objective will also be to present the progress made in implementing the UfM Ministerial commitments, in particular the Regional Dialogue's outcomes and the Ministerial follow-up mechanism and its indicators under development.

## Side Events

Virtual side events led by key experts will offer spaces to learn more in depth about the most pressing issues regarding gender equality and to co-create ideas, find solutions and policy recommendations to drive forward the agenda on gender equality and women's empowerment in the region.

Thematic focus:

- **Mainstreaming Gender in recovery responses of agri-food sectors and rural areas**
- **Gender Equitable Leadership in the Global Health Workforce**
- **The role of women managing the pandemic at local and regional level**
- **The role of youth in combatting gender stereotypes**



Plenary sessions

## Networking

People and organisations engaged in advancing progress for women and girls can connect online, have 1to1 discussions and exchange ideas, build partnerships and collaborations, share news on latest projects and research.

## Exhibition Space

An online space where organisations and participants can showcase their work, projects, good practices and innovative ideas to advance gender equality agenda in the region, with a focus on the Conference topics.



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