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Report Regional Forum on **Equality in Education** in the Southern Mediterranean



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Report
Regional Forum on
Equality in Education
in the Southern Mediterranean

This report is intended to reflect the discussions during the conference. The content and opinions of expressed within this publication are the sole responsibility of the speakers and participants and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union or other donors.

EuroMed Feminist Initiative provides expertise in the field of gender equality and advocates for women's universal human rights as inseparable from democracy building and citizenship, for political solutions to all conflicts, and for the right of peoples to self-determination.

*Report
Regional Forum on
Equality in Education
in the Southern Mediterranean*

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ACRONYMS

CBOs	Community Based Organisations
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
EFI	EuroMed Feminist Initiative
Euro-Med	Euro Mediterranean
EU	European Union
GBV	Gender Based Violence
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UfM	Union for the Mediterranean
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls

BACKGROUND

EuroMed Feminist Initiative has followed the Union for Mediterranean (UfM) Ministerial Process on strengthening the role of women in society since its beginning in 2006 and considers it as a major regional tool for promoting women's rights and equality between women and men across the Euro-Med Region. The Ministerial Declaration from the 4th UfM Ministerial Conference (27 Nov 2017, Cairo) underlines that violence against women and girls (VAWG) is the root cause for persisting inequality between women and men and remains a main obstacle for women to enjoy safety and security throughout their lives.

Education is one of the most important components in this regard. Ministers have underlined their commitment to the financing and achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Euro-Med region, in particular SDG 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning. SDGs Target 4.5 specifically calls for the elimination of disparities between girls and boys in education and equal access for all.

In the frame of the four-year regional program "*Combating Violence against Women and Girls in the Southern Mediterranean Region*" funded by the European Union (EU), EuroMed Feminist Initiative along with a consortium of 9 members and partner organisations from Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia strengthened the capacities of more than 1000 teachers and raised awareness of 6000 pupils and students on equality and equal opportunities for both women and men, girls and boys. *A Manual for Teachers on Gender Sensitive Education* was produced in 2020 and was used in the whole region, for training sessions with teachers, and workshops with pupils and students. Furthermore, 8050 card games were distributed in 202 schools in all the countries, promoting equal treatment and combating stereotypes. In 2021, the *ABC for a Gender Sensitive Education* was developed as a user-friendly tool to bring insights for educators, raise awareness of curriculum developers, practitioners, and civil society organizations (CSOs) and support the governmental commitments to equality.

OBJECTIVES OF THE REGIONAL FORUM

The Regional Forum, organized in partnership with Jordan Ministry of Education aimed at sharing experiences and discussing strategies to achieve more equality in and through education in the region.

The Forum also provided unique opportunities for teachers from the pilot schools to come together and exchange lessons learnt so that best practices can be scaled up at national level.

PARTICIPANTS

The Forum gathered over 130 participants from Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia, including Ministers and representatives of Ministries of Education, Ministries of Women's Affairs and women's machineries, as well as teachers, experts, members of parliament and representatives of women's rights organizations.

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS I DAY ONE



WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

The Region Forum was opened by **Ms. Lilian Halls-French**, Co-President EuroMed Feminist Initiative, **H.E. Ambassador John Paul Grech**, DSG Social and Civil Affairs Division Union for the Mediterranean, **Ms. Angela Martini**, Chargé d’Affaires a.i. at the European Union Delegation, and **H.E. Prof. Wajih Owais**, Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Jordan.

Ms. Lilian Halls-French on behalf of EuroMed Feminist Initiative thanked the Ministry of Education of Jordan,



and H.E. Minister Owais himself, for the fruitful partnership. The participation of high-level decision makers signals the importance of this issue on both national and regional levels. It is needed to share experiences and best practices in order to elaborate best solutions based on lessons learned.

“Elaborating the best ways of improvement cannot be done without sharing experiences and discussing common challenges.”

H.E. Ambassador John Paul Grech, highlighted the importance of mainstreaming, prevention and response



to VAWG in education systems. The prevention and response must be integrated through trainings in the schools' curricula, including: (i) education on human rights, including gender equality and women's rights; (ii) respectful relationships between women and men; (iii) VAWG prevention, juridical framework and available assistance for VAWG survivors, and (iv) protection against cyberviolence.

“Part of the success of educational change for women lies in the capability of schoolteachers to raise awareness.”

Ms. Angela Martini underlined the EU priority in supporting the Jordanian efforts in the educational sector



to ensure the inclusion of all categories of vulnerable students in schools. Equity and inclusion are essential for building just and resilient societies and decision makers should consider this. There are plenty of issues to think of under the education sector, such as gender pay gaps and qualifications gaps among teachers, high repetition and drop-out rates in secondary schools among vulnerable groups in particular.

“One of our key priorities in the education sector is to support the Jordanian efforts to ensure the inclusion of all categories of vulnerable students in schools.”

H.E. Prof. Wajih Owais affirmed the focus of the Ministry on the Goals 4 and 5 of the SDGs which are high-quality education for all people and equality, regardless of



ethnicity, religion, or gender. Ministry of Education in Jordan gives particular emphasis to inclusive education. Among the achievements is the opening of 266 refugee schools, hiring more teachers for the purpose of accommodating a high number of students, and developing the non-formal and literacy education programs.

“In our governmental institutions, we have fought to raise the position of women and empower them.”

HIGH-LEVEL PANEL – MINISTERIAL REMARKS

The high-level ministerial panel was moderated by H.E. Dr. Najwa Qubailat, Secretary General of Ministry of Education of Jordan. The panel featured the interventions of H.E. Ms. Haifa Najjar, Minister of Culture of Jordan, H.E. Ms. Wafa Bani Mustafa, Minister of State for Legal Affairs and Chairperson of the Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) for Women’s Empowerment of Jordan, H.E. Dr. Abbas Halabi, Minister of Education and Higher Education of Lebanon, H.E. Dr. Marwan Awartani, Minister of Education of Palestine, and Dr. Randa Shahine, Secretary General and Director of Public Education on behalf of Minister of Education and Technical Education of Egypt. Ministers discussed the countries achievements and challenges in advancing equality in education.

H.E. Ms. Haifa Najjar indicated that in the recommendations of the Royal Reform Commission, the word



“Jordanians men and women” have been added in the new amendments, and wherever they appear, they mean to achieve citizenship, equality, equal opportunities, equitable representation, the rule of law and the realization of the principles and foundations of women's empowerment. Ministry of Culture puts a special focus on promoting values of justice and equality in the fields of culture and education. For example, the cultural centres in Amman, Karak, Zarqa,

and Irbid offer opportunities for both sexes to enrol in the industrial development courses including a number of artistic fields, such as plastic art, sculpture, Arabic calligraphy, graphic, music, and theatre.

“Modernizing the political system, and the resulting amendments to the law and the constitution will enhance women's representation and participation in various spheres of life and society.”

H.E. Ms. Wafa Bani Mustafa showcased the role of the IMC in education. Indicating that when questioning



the inequality, the answer is always education and quality of education for girls. When girls face closed doors, the education is always the key to open these doors. In Jordan there is a huge number of well trained and educated women and girls whom we must find ways to invest in. The inter-ministerial committee is working on reflecting the role of trained and educated women in the labour market as part of the strategy of the economic vision.

“Jordanian women and girls are well trained and educated. They are a treasure to invest in.”

H.E. Dr. Abbas Halabi works in cooperation with partners and donor countries to find solutions to secure a



school year that guarantees the right to education for all children in Lebanon. A right that eliminates discrimination and ensures the inclusion of the marginalized groups. Lebanon Ministry of Education has launched the Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) with the support of donors to promote gender equality. The Ministry is implementing a policy of safeguarding students to protect students' wellbeing at

schools. A team of specialists has been recruited in order to respond to and prevent gender-based violence.

"The Ministry is implementing students' safeguarding policy to protect students at schools and a team of specialists works on preventing gender-based violence."

H.E. Dr. Marwan Awartani, emphasized the Ministry's commitment to all international conventions relating



to equality and gender. The Palestinian Ministry of Education established an Education Cluster Working Group specialized in gender mainstreaming. The Ministry also administered a unique experience in making parliaments at schools; through which students are able to make decisions, contribute to changes and participate in outlining policies with Ministers.

"Now is the perfect time for a paradigm shift and all equality-related issues."

Dr. Randa Shahine addressed the importance of ensuring women and men of different ages having equal



access to adequate educational opportunities of appropriate quality. Offering educational facilities does not provide guarantees per se that they will be used to students' full potential, because the educational system consists of several layers, including educational staff, training programs, well-designed curricula. It is therefore essential to have well-trained teachers and suitable curricula.

"There is also a real need to raising awareness among the people in rural governorates who need education the most."

SESSION ONE | OPERATIONALIZING “ABC FOR A GENDER SENSITIVE EDUCATION”



This panel moderated by Ms. Salam Nawafleh, research officer at EuroMed Feminist Initiative discussed best practices and ways to best operationalise the use of handbook *ABC for a Gender Sensitive Education*, published by EuroMed Feminist Initiative and written by Ms. Lilian Halls French and Ms. Sylvie Cromer. The *ABC* is seen as a global tool bringing insights, raising awareness, and stimulating debate as well as boosting governmental stated commitments to mainstreaming equality in education.



H.E. Ambassador Charlotta Sparre, Director of Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa indicated that although Sweden is a leading country in gender equality following the principle of “leave no one behind”, there is still a need to further work on overcoming obstacles in all learning settings. To ensure that all learners in schools experience gendered and inclusive educational environment, it is important to address the barriers that hinder the achievement of equality. Gender equality is not a topic that

can be accomplished in a day, it must be worked on constantly. The overall objective of engendered educational system is to make sure that women and men can equally participate and shape their society and their own lives.

Ms. Lilian Halls French underlined the urgency of a development of societies towards ending the patriarchal discourse structured by a fierce resistance to equality. Therefore, EuroMed Feminist Initiative

published three *ABCs*; (i) *ABC for a Gender Sensitive Constitution*, (ii) *ABC for a Gender Sensitive Legislation*, and (iii) *ABC for a Gender Sensitive Education*.

The *ABCs* were elaborated in tight cooperation between women's rights activists, academics and researchers and are EFI collective contribution to support the long way of women towards autonomy, full citizenship and security.

It is known that the majority of schools teachers' behavior inside the classroom can reproduce the inequality between girls and boys, women and men, that exist in the society. Also, the majority of school books are framed by the social and cultural sexist prejudice and ignore the role of women in the history, culture, science, and the politics of countries.

The ABC for a Gender Sensitive Education is a center piece of the regional campaign on Zero Tolerance for VAWG. This book encourages and engages teachers and students to combat discriminatory stereotypes, behaviors and violence against women and girls.

Ms. Sylvie Cromer shared with the audience that a main challenge faced when it was decided to produce the *ABC for a Gender Sensitive Education* was to propose a new original vision on the universal issue of inequality in education, as it is still persisting, and even worsening in some regions. Equality between women and men still seems an idealistic concept which is difficult to achieve. Therefore, the *ABC* book which is a programmatic and pragmatic product was built on three essential principles: (i) scientific knowledge, (ii) inspiring experiences, (iii) egalitarian education as a whole.



CONCLUSIONS

Following a lively discussion participants agreed on:

- ❖ The *ABC for Gender Sensitive Education* reflects tangible ways of how school can and must promote equality in and through education transversally and inter-sectionally.
- ❖ *ABC for Gender Sensitive Education* is an important tool to be used by educators, decision-and-policy makers, as well as CSOs to close the gender gaps in education.
- ❖ Concerted efforts should be exerted to spread the *ABC for Gender Sensitive Education* at Ministries of education, schools, universities, research centres, libraries, and all relevant institutions.

SESSION TWO | BEST PRACTICES IN ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

Teachers from the pilot schools supported by the project presented best practices on advancing equality between girls and boys in education and identified barriers within education systems.

Jordan experience was one of the leading examples in sensitizing the education system. The teachers in the project piloted schools were trained on the concepts of gender, sex, justice, equality, stereotypes and VAWG. They facilitated diverse opportunities for both girls and

boys, for example in playing sports. The trainings affected positively the selection of topics in the school radio, the posters inside the classes, and the sensitivity towards the content of the curriculum.

Participants reflected on the strategies being used to promote equality in education in the different countries. The delegations of Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco and Jordan presented their achievements from projects implemented in the educational sphere. The most important lesson learned is that the equality in education must ensure full involvement of girls and boys from different socioeconomic backgrounds, marginalized groups, ethnic groups, migrants, refugees and displaced people.

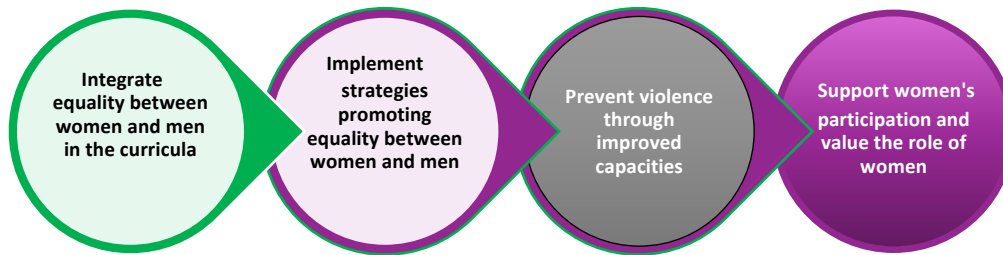
The success of different projects was built on four main pillars: (i) make quality education available to all students (girls and boys) (ii) enjoy the right to education as a fundamental human right and through equal learning opportunities (iii) fulfil the students' potential and aspirations (iv) contribute to national development.

CONCLUSIONS

The main shared priorities for future action that emerged during the open discussion and based on the shared experiences are outlined below:

- ❖ Supporting educators to integrate the concept of equality between women and men in the curricula.
- ❖ Implementing strategies that promote equality between women and men inside the classrooms.
- ❖ Enhancing the capacities of teachers to prevent all forms of violence in schools.
- ❖ Providing opportunities for women to participate in societal development while also teaching students to respect and value the role of women.





CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS I DAY TWO

SESSION THREE | PROMOTING EQUALITY IN EDUCATION IN SOUTH MEDITERRANEAN: COUNTRIES EXPERIENCES

Representatives from Ministries of Education and women’s rights organizations discussed challenges and opportunities in promoting equality in education in the South Mediterranean. The experts discussed also stereotypes in curricula, textbooks, teaching processes, violence in and out of school, performance, enrolment, dropouts, strategies and policies, school environment, discriminatory practices in schools and equal access to education.

Improving the quality of education is a continuous process to ensure the principle of equal opportunities between girls and boys. The improvement of quality of education must be through:

- (i) Developing and reviewing schools’ curricula
- (ii) Improving school services
- (iii) Right to equality in and through education and learning to be included in national strategies
- (iv) Incorporating life skills into schools’ curricula
- (v) Focusing on digital skills
- (vi) Responding to school dropouts and violence against women

The panelists from Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia emphasized the **general foundations of quality of education:**

- (i) The right to education as a right of all human beings
- (ii) Compulsory education until the age of 16
- (iii) Achieving the principle of equal opportunities and equity for all
- (iv) providing students with opportunities to acquire values and knowledge on equality between women and men, and skills to develop positive attitudes
- (v) Ensuring the right of both girls and boys to an active and productive school life

The common challenges in the during the reform processes came down to the recurrent social, security and economic crises that hamper many plans and programs.

Furthermore, common challenges include the societal cultural challenges and their impact on public sectors including the educational sector as well as the lack of operational capacity to implement legislations that would achieve gender equality, likewise the lack of experience among women in the area of digital competence.

Foundations of Equality in Education

The right to education is a right of all human beings

Compulsory education until the age of 16

Achieving the principle of equal opportunities and equity for all

Providing students with opportunities to acquire values and knowledge of equality and skills to develop positive attitudes

Ensuring the right of both girls and boys to an active and productive school life

CONCLUSIONS

Girls' education goes beyond simply attending school; it also means ensuring that girls:

- ❖ Are educated and feel safe in school.
- ❖ Have the opportunity to complete all levels of education.
- ❖ Have the knowledge and skills to compete in the labour market.
- ❖ Learn the social, emotional and life skills necessary to cope with and adapt to a changing world.
- ❖ Make decisions about their lives and contribute to their communities and the world at large.

SESSION FOUR | WORKING GROUPS: SCALING UP THE USE OF THE MANUAL FOR A GENDER SENSITIVE EDUCATION and THE ABC FOR A GENDER SENSITIVE EDUCATION

The participants formed four working groups to discuss the promotion of equality in and through education and the impact on the society. The participants provided recommendations to scale up the use of the “*ABC for a Gender Sensitive Education*” and the “*Manual for Teachers on Gender-Sensitive Education*” as user-friendly tools to promote equality in education on national level.

The groups discussed and elaborated recommendations around **two questions**:

- The most urgent issues to be addressed to improve equality in and through education.
 - The most appropriate means or mechanisms to solve them.
- ❖ **The most urgent issues to be addressed and solved to improve equality in and through education**

Participants identified four issues as most urgent to be addressed:

- (i) Development of strategies to gender sensitize education system and public policies linked to education
- (ii) Development of measures to gender sensitize educational programs (curricula textbooks and learning materials)
- (iii) Institutionalizing of training programs for teachers
- (iv) Combatting violence against women and girls in schools.



1. Education and public policies

The groups discussed the lack of laws that promote equality between women and men. If laws exist, countries are facing lack of implementation as well as lack of public knowledge and information about them. Furthermore, lack of gender-responsive national and local budgets is an additional obstacle to finding effective solutions.

2. Educational programmes (curricula textbooks and learning materials)

In summing up the discussion, the participants found that the stereotypes in the schools' curricula still exist. What slows down the reform process is lack of clear policies to integrate gender equality in the curricula and the educational materials, lack of monitoring and evaluation as well as lack of gender responsive budgets to tackle the needed changes.

3. Institutionalizing of training programs for teachers

Three challenges were identified to be urgently addressed: the lack of clarity of gender and human rights concepts as well as the lack of budgets in order to design and implement training programs. Also, there are no implementation strategies to institutionalize training programs.

4. Combatting violence against women and girls in schools

The participants emphasized that VAWG is on top the list of human violations and there are many challenges in addressing it. However, among the toughest issues faced are schools' dropouts, bullying, poor prevention and protection programs, poor of cultural and social empowerment, discrimination, lack of sexual education and weakness in implementing gender supportive laws, as well as lack of communication and acceptance for diversity.



❖ **Mechanisms to enhance equality in and through education**

The discussion around appropriate means and mechanisms to address the above-identified issues, was linked with the need to conduct regular assessments, collect data to evaluate the exact needs, allocate sufficient budget, involve teachers, and implement or create national coordination tools.

A strong call was made to act and work systematically to **establish the following mechanisms:**

1. National commissions or committees with the participation of gender experts from the civil society and academia to analyse, design and develop education curricula based on:
 - Academic freedom and independence
 - Gender sensitive language and content
 - Gender sensitive civic education
 - Gender equality and women’s human rights
 - Contemporary learning tools and activities
 - Lifelong learning
2. National information systems to monitor violence in schools.
3. Cross sector committees/platforms where political actors, CSOs, syndicates, relevant members of parliaments, teachers and parents work together to curb VAWG at schools and promote equality in and through education.



MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

REGIONAL FORUM ON EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

- Ensure that educational policies address the factors of vulnerability and exclusion from schools through a gender-sensitive, intersectional and inclusive approach.
- Engage the educational community as a whole (pupils, students, teachers, head teachers, administrative staff, parents, counsellors, inspectors...) and a wide-range of stakeholders (communities, decision-makers, policymakers, the media) in the process of reforming education, ensuring gender mainstreaming in the education environment and system.
- Support teachers' continuous training and coaching/mentoring to self-reflect on gender stereotypes and good practices on gender-sensitive approaches in and through education.
- For this purpose adopt in all ministries the developed tools for teachers: *Manual for Gender Sensitive Education in the South Mediterranean* and the *ABC for a Gender Sensitive Education*.
- Support research, for example, through national and regional observatories on gender to provide data and evidence and evaluate the quality of education and effectiveness of policies and tools promoting gender equality in and through education.
- Ensure equality is mainstreamed in the curricula through a thorough review of contents and material.
- Provide a gender analysis on textbooks and ensure that they are revised to combat gender stereotypes and challenge stereotypical representation of roles of women and men.
- Ensure a child-friendly, safe environment for girls in the education system. For example, in terms of infrastructure, access to safe spaces and psychosocial support.
- Develop and implement mechanisms for the prevention of cases of violence against children (including gender-based violence), early detection – intervention, response and re-address within the education system.
- Ensure equality is mainstreamed in child protection policies while promoting a culture of peace and non-violence in the educational system and environment.
- Appoint focal point in schools and ensure availability of psychosocial services.

- Set up hotlines sensitive to the needs of both girls and boys to report cases of violence (harassment, assaults, etc.) against children, raise awareness of pupils/students on the availability of such hotlines.
- Support the role of and collaboration with civil society (women’s rights organisations in particular) in raising awareness and leading advocacy initiatives to change discriminatory legislation and policies in education.
- Call for international cooperation and availability of funds for gender equality in and through education.
- Adopt for gender-sensitive and gender-responsive budgets at governmental level.
- Adopt comprehensive laws to combat violence against women and girls that include provisions ensuring gender mainstreaming in education and amend discriminatory laws and policies accordingly (e.g. on child marriage and child labour).



For over a decade now, EuroMed Feminist Initiative has been following on, and supporting the implementation of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Ministerial Commitments on the Strengthening the Role of Women in Society.

Education has a transversal place across the main areas of the UfM Ministerial Declarations adopted in Cairo 2017, and in Madrid 2022, showing the commitments of the UfM and the Ministers to improve equality in and through education in order to improve women's status in terms of access to leadership and decision making, legislation, economic participation, preventing violence against women and girls (VAWG).

Education has been therefore a cornerstone of the on-going regional campaign on Zero Tolerance for VAWG.