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Combating Violence Against Women and Girls and Strengthening Women's Rights in the context of Covid 19 pandemic



ONLINE POLICY DIALOGUE 21 September 2020

REPORT

REPORT

ON-LINE POLICY DIALOGUE COMBATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS AND STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

21 September 2020

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MAIN TERMINOLOGIES AND ABBREVIATIONS

CSOs	Civil Society Organisations CSOs include charities, NGOs, community groups and women's rights organisations
EFI	EuroMed Feminist Initiative
EU	European Union
MoSD	Ministry of Social Development
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development consists of 17 SDGs including achieving equality for Women. In 2015 all United Nations Member States pledged to achieve the 17 goals
UfM	Union for the Mediterranean The UfM is an intergovernmental institution which brings together the European Union Member States and 15 countries from the Southern and Eastern region of the Mediterranean to promote dialogue and cooperation
UfM Ministerial Declaration on Women's Rights	Four Ministerial Conferences looking at how to strengthen the role of women were held in Istanbul in 2006, Marrakech in 2009, Paris in 2013 and Cairo in 2017
UNSCR 1325	United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security. The UNSCR 1325 was adopted in 2000 and recognises the important role women and girls play in addressing issues of peace and security
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
WHO	World Health Organization
WPSA	Women, Peace and Security Agenda

I. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY DIALOGUE

Background

EuroMed Feminist Initiative (EFI) has followed up on the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Ministerial Process on strengthening the role of women in society as a major tool to promote gender equality in the whole Euro-Med region since the first ministerial conference in Istanbul 2006. Responding to the Ministerial Declaration from the last 4th UfM Ministerial Conference on Women's Rights (27 November 2017, Cairo), EuroMed Feminist Initiative with a consortium of nine member women's rights organizations in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia initiated in 2019 a Regional campaign on *Zero Tolerance for Violence Against Women and Girls* (VAWG), funded by the European Union (EU). (Campaign website www.ostik.org).

As part of the campaign, a series of national and regional policy dialogues are taking place in the Southern Mediterranean, providing a common platform to discuss VAWG and how to tackle it. The aim of these dialogues is to follow up on and support the implementation of the action points of the 4th UfM Ministerial Declaration.

The regional policy dialogue on *Combating Violence Against Women and Girls and Strengthening Women's Rights During the Covid-19 Pandemic* was organised in collaboration with the Minister of Social Development (MoSD) in Jordan. Initially scheduled to take place in March 2020, it was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and took place on September 21, 2020 using an online platform.

Objectives

The policy dialogue discussed the implementation of the UfM Ministerial Declaration during crisis, and particularly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Decision makers and ministerial representatives, legal and gender experts, researchers, and women's rights organizations from the Euro-Mediterranean region (See Annex 2: Biographies of speakers and moderators) came together and shared challenges, experiences, best practices and lessons learned on two interlinked topics:

1. Addressing VAWG and advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (WPSA) in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.
2. Ensuring a gender perspective is integrated into Covid-19 crisis preparedness, response, and recovery measures, with a focus on health, economic participation, education, media, and participation in decision-making processes.

The recommendations from the dialogue aim to support the implementation of the 4th UfM Ministerial Declaration during the Covid-19 health crisis. (See Separate document: Recommendations) They will be forwarded to the UfM high-level ministerial conference to be held on November 16-20, 2020 to contribute to all efforts to integrate gender into the Covid-19 response and recovery measures, and specifically in addressing VAWG.

The dialogue included an opening session and two plenaries (See Annex 1: Agenda) and took place in Arabic, English, and French.

II. POLICY DIALOGUE PROCEEDINGS

2.1. Opening session

SPEAKERS

H.E. Ms. Basma Mousa Ishaqat - Minister of Social Development, Jordan

H.E. Ms. Jamila El Mossali - Minister of Solidarity, Social Development, Equality and Family, Morocco

H.E. Ms. Amal Hamad - Minister of Women Affairs, Palestine

H.E. Ms. Imen Zahouani Houimel - Minister of Women, Family, Childhood, and the Elderly, Tunisia

H.E. Ms. Marisa Farrugia - Deputy Secretary General for Social and Civil Affairs, Union of Mediterranean

Ms. Henrike Trautmann - Head of Unit, Regional Programmes Neighbourhood South, Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, European Commission

Ms. Lilian Halls-French - Co-President, EuroMed Feminist Initiative

1. H.E. Ms. Basma Mousa Ishaqat - Minister of Social Development, Jordan

The recommendations stemming from this dialogue will be forwarded to the high-level ministerial conference that will be held on November 16-20, 2020. This will guide efforts to integrate gender into the Covid-19 response and recovery measures and specifically address VAWG.

As co-chair for the UfM, which works with the EU, my responsibility includes monitoring progress and fulfilment of recommendations announced by the Ministerial Declaration. The institution produces an agreed upon document that governments in the region must commit to as part of their efforts to secure women's rights and gender equality.

Many social, political, and economic challenges hinder regional efforts to achieve women's rights. Along with Covid-19, the region faces challenges such as civil unrest, a refugee crisis, migration, occupation, natural disasters, and the prevalence of violent extremism.

Covid-19 has had a direct and dual impact on women. Women are at the forefront of responding to the pandemic. They constitute 70% of those working in the health sector, making them more susceptible to the virus. It is a challenge to share information with women about Covid-19 as there is a high illiteracy rate among women. Women also provide 75% of the unpaid care work in Jordan, ensuring care is provided for their families, children, and the elderly.

In the Arab world, women spend 7.4 times longer than men carrying out unpaid care work, which is considered the highest rate in the world. Women also take up low-wage work. More than six in 10 (62%) women work in the informal sector where there is lack of social protection and unstable working conditions. This makes them the weakest and most vulnerable members of the labour force. As a result, they are more likely to fall into poverty.

The pandemic has amplified the harsh realities of life for many women. With public transport suspended during lockdown, women living in areas of poverty could not reach vital health services especially during pregnancy, labour, and birth. Women have also faced difficulty in accessing other services and getting to work. Decisions taken by governments to make people work and study from home has created extra financial pressures for women. They have had to buy electronic devices and set up internet access. Women refugees and migrant workers are more susceptible to getting sick and catching the virus due to lack of basic health services and limited financial resources.

The rate of VAWG has increased as a result of the lockdown measures and forced coexistence. The pandemic has impeded women's access to support services.

The government of Jordan introduced three main phases and levels to deal with the pandemic:

1. Direct response phase involving semi and total lockdown measures.
2. Adaptation and recovery programming phase involving:
 - work from home measures or reducing the number of employees at work launching online platform services, e.g. mobility services during lockdown, air travel clearance and applying for Social security Covid-19 relief packages.
 - expanding social protection services especially for daily wage workers and those benefiting from national aid funds.
 - establishing funds to support workers and sectors affected by the pandemic.
 - protective health measures taken in shelters, in elderly and childcare institutions.
3. Recovery phase involving:
 - giving support to the most affected sectors.
 - introducing online services and expanding social protection services.

To address the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on women and girls, we need a coordinated approach from regional and international bodies. The regional policy dialogue is an important opportunity to exchange experiences and best practices.

2. H.E. Ms. Jamila El Mossali - Minister of Solidarity, Social Development, Equality and Family, Morocco

Achieving sustainable social and economic development cannot be attained without equality for women and addressing VAWG. As such, progress for communities and countries is linked to women living in dignity and peace.

Covid-19 has taken its toll on women. In addition to existing care work, women have had to support their children's learning at home. Although women face many challenges, it is vital to acknowledge they are at the forefront of fighting this pandemic and active members of the community in all sectors.

However, Covid-19 contributed to increasing violence at home and the Moroccan government had to address that. Protective, preventive and empowerment strategies were put in place to address VAWG, based on Morocco's Constitution (articles on non-discrimination and combating all forms of VAWG), and the ratification of international conventions. The principle of equality is integrated into all policies, as well as Morocco's new law to combat VAWG which is considered a step forward in protecting women's rights.

At an institutional level, a national committee was set up to support women victims of violence. As part of this, there are sub-central and decentralised committees with representatives from courts, the judiciary system, health sector, the police force and security, as well as women and young people.

The most important aspect was the set-up of 65 centres that served as both shelters for women victims of violence and a centre for capacity building and awareness raising programmes.

The government also launched an awareness raising campaign about VAWG during the first lockdown, as well as providing remote support services for women and girls. An app was set up for women and girls to access support 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

A special health program was launched to provide free health care for women and children victims of violence. Morocco also launched the Maternal Safety Programme, the National Programme for Reproductive Health, the Early Detection for Breast and Cervical Cancer Programme, the Village Health Program, and the Care Program dedicated to Covid-19 patients and affected areas.

Realizing the importance of women's economic empowerment in protecting women against violence, Morocco launched a special program called "Morocco for Empowerment" to give women access to job opportunities, training, and education. It aims to provide an enabling working environment for women and protect women's labour rights. Morocco's economic recovery plan aims to promote social security programs to increase the number of people accessing social security support.

Many important lessons can be learned from the Covid-19 crisis including the benefits of working from home or working remotely, especially for women, and the ability to combine online and onsite education. The pandemic has also strengthened global solidarity and unity between people, communities, and countries. As the pandemic continues the world needs to find new common values to strengthen solidarity.

3. H.E. Ms. Amal Hamad - Minister of Women Affairs, Palestine

The pandemic has taken its toll on the most vulnerable people, especially women. There is an unstable political and economic situation coupled with high unemployment rates and increased levels of poverty.

It has also resulted in a number of social and economic challenges for Palestinian women which have been made worse by the Israeli occupation and its punitive military measures. This has intensified the impact of the pandemic.

The recent political decisions by some of the Arab countries to normalise with Israel has put immense pressure on Palestinian people and institutions.

At the national level, the biggest threat is posed by the continued Israeli occupation and the illegal annexation of Palestinian lands in the West bank and Jordan Valley. Militarization and the extraction of national resources have a huge impact on the conditions of Palestinian women and are threatening their livelihood.

To address the needs of women, and fulfil the UfM recommendations, the following governmental decisions were issued at the Prime minister level:

- Raising the age of marriage for women to 18.
- Allowing women to choose their children's school.
- Allowing women to open bank accounts for their children.
- Annuling Article 308 that could allow rapists to escape punishment if they married their victims.
- Exempting women victims of violence from paying for health care, examination reports, and ambulance and paramedic expenses.
- Considering women's testimony in cases related to sale and purchase of land.

The following actions were taken to tackle VAWG:

- Establishing special visitation areas for children and their families in Sharia courts.
- Setting up a national observatory to ensure coordinated efforts between partners and establishing a national hotline for women victims of violence to access support.
- Conducting a comprehensive survey on VAWG.
- Developing a national referral system and a procedural guide.
- Introducing 14 steps on receiving and dealing with cases of violence.
- Activating the national committees of police, media, and social and psychological workers to combat violence.
- Establishing 300 sub-community committees across governorates which include 2,700 women and youth.

Under the WPSA, national consultations were carried out to develop and improve the National Action Plan for the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325). All laws related to local organizations, unions and political parties and the electoral law were reviewed and amended to increase women's political participation to 30%, in accordance with government decision.

Other actions included endorsing 26 October as the national day for Palestinian women to highlight their struggle, in reference to the first Palestine Arab Women's Congress held on October 26, 1929 in Jerusalem. Programmes have also been introduced to increase the number of women working in high-tech and information technology industries and the alternative and renewable energies sector.

During the pandemic, a gender dimension was integrated into the national crisis management and recovery plans. This included setting up support funds to assist women who have lost their jobs. Day-care centres were also reopened under new health and safety measures to ensure women remain in the labour market. An Institute for Gender Studies and Policies was also established.

4. H.E. Ms. Imen Zahouani Houimel - Minister of Women, Family, Childhood and the Elderly, Tunisia*

To end VAWG, we need to consolidate and coordinate efforts and share best practices and challenges to define practical solutions that support women's rights, freedom, and equality. It is important to protect and build on what has been achieved to date to further progress and advance women's rights.

The Tunisian legal framework and constitution, specifically section 46 that relates to ending VAWG, and the basic law, number 58 issued in 2017, provides a comprehensive plan for protection, prevention, and penalizing. In 2019 an important law was passed, under fiscal law number 15, to ensure gender sensitive budgeting and gender mainstreaming programming. Another decree came in 2020 in line with the law to end violence which updated and advanced the national monitoring observatory on VAWG.

In April 2020, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe responded favourably to Tunisia's official request to be invited to accede to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) and called the Government of Tunisia to complete the ratification procedures.

A legal review was carried out recently following Tunisia's endorsement of the International Labour Organisation agreement #189 for decent work conditions for domestic workers.

Tunisia is committed to ensuring SDGs are fulfilled following the international conference it hosted in August 2020 on "*Sustainable Development Goals from a Gender Perspective: Tunisia's Priorities After the Covid-19 Pandemic*". This is in line with government and CSOs' pledges and plans to raise awareness on VAWG, develop training programmes, activate the legal framework and hold perpetrators accountable.

An important agreement was signed between relevant stakeholders and Ministries including Interior, Judicial, Social Development, and Women, Family and Elderly Affairs to coordinate efforts to address VAWG. The agreement stated that all entities should take part in coordination committees and abide by a set of coordinated steps to address VAWG and protect victims of violence. A government decree was issued in 2016 to establish an Advisory Council on equality between men and women. Its aim is to combat VAWGs and ensure gender is integrated into national plans, programming and budgeting.

To ensure adequate services and systems are in place for victims of VAWG, a legal framework was enacted which listed all procedural steps to follow. This covered how to respond to complaints, legal, health and psychological counselling, and rehabilitation and economic support. Also, on August 14, 2020, a government decree was issued to set up services and shelters for victims of violence.

Training programs were carried out among police, the judicial system, and the social care and health sectors to make sure systems are in place to protect women victims of violence, prevent cases of VAWG and inspect, detect, monitor and handle cases. This was in line with the approach used by the Centre for Research, Studies, Documentation and Information for Women – an organization affiliated with the Women's Ministry – to monitor the implementation of law 58 and protect victims of VAWG.

The pandemic has increased cases of VAWG. The Ministry took immediate action and implemented a series of steps to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on women – especially as essential support services were closed.

The Ministries of Interior, Judiciary and Justice worked together to undertake immediate action to protect children and women victims of violence. This included:

- Setting up a local telephone hotline "the Green Hotline" for victims of violence to access support.
- Setting up a hotline to assist families and children during the pandemic, led by experts in physical and mental health.
- Providing a temporary shelter for women victims of violence.
- Developing a radio and TV campaign to support families and victims of violence.
- Launching a social media campaign with the hashtag #Wearewithyou to lessen the psychological impact on families during lockdown.
- Implementing protective measures to support women and children under threat of violence, through the family judiciary.

Economic support was provided to women including interest-free loans for women headed households, financial aid for women working in agriculture, the Bank of Tunisia allocating 70% of the loan budget to women projects, and the Tunisian Solidarity Bank supporting women working in cooperatives and vocational and agriculture work.

** H.E. Ms. Imen Zahouani Houimel was unable to attend the policy dialogue. Her speech was delivered on her behalf by Ms. Monia Kari, Director, National Observatory to Fight VAWG at the Ministry of Women, Family, Childhood and the Elderly.*

5. H.E. Ms. Marisa Farrugia - Deputy Secretary General for Social and Civil Affairs, Social and Civil Affairs Division, Union for the Mediterranean

The Union for the Mediterranean is an inter-governmental Euro-Mediterranean organization which brings together all countries of the European Union and 15 countries of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean. It contributes to regional stability and sustainable human development by promoting strong inter-relations. It also carries out policy work with Ministerial representatives meeting to define strategic areas and priorities for the region. Ministerial Declarations are adopted by consensus. Since it was set up, the UfM has made a tangible impact through 50 projects and over 300 ministerial meetings and expert forums. These have been supported by 25,000 stakeholders. UfM activities stem from a strong belief that regional challenges call for regional solutions. It puts equality, women's empowerment and ending VAWG at the centre of its agenda through the Paris 2013 and Cairo 2017 UfM declarations, the UfM 2017 roadmap and UN 2030 agenda for SDGs.

In line with the framework for the priorities set by the Cairo 2017 Ministerial Declaration, the UfM Secretariat was mandated to design, in consultation with governments and regional stakeholders, a set of 20 indicators under four priority areas. It was also asked to propose tools to monitor and report on:

- Women's participation in public life and decision making
- Women's economic participation
- Combating all forms of VAWG
- Challenging cultural and social norms to eliminate gender stereotypes.

The UfM Secretariat is responsible for making sure its member states have been working to develop a regional multi-stakeholder dialogue to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. On July 30, 2020 UfM member states endorsed a regional inter-governmental set of indicators to provide data for policies as part of the UfM ministerial follow-up mechanism. Out of the 20 proposed indicators, 10 quantitative and qualitative indicators fall under priority three of the Cairo 2017 Declaration, namely combating all forms of VAWG.

The validation of the indicators marks the next stage in the agreed ministerial follow-up mechanism to evaluate the gender gap. It provides recommendations to policymakers and stakeholders on how to improve the impact of the declaration and its action plan.

Future steps for the UfM include:

1. Launch Indicators and monitoring tools at the next regional dialogue meeting on women empowerment in November 2020 as part of the High-Level Conference on Women.
2. The regional dialogue will involve a discussion of the indicators including the countries' selected six indicators and the reporting exercise, in preparation for the second UfM regional progress.

3. Resume the dialogue and develop gender statistics to inform the monitoring of indicators to build a regional framework of gender data and statistics, focusing on the countries' six selected indicators for the upcoming reporting exercise. This will help prepare for the policy recommendations that will be set out at the next Ministerial Conference in 2022. These will be posted by UfM countries.

As one of the major regional events promoting gender equality and women's equal participation in the Euro-Mediterranean region, the UfM women conference in November 2020 will discuss the mandate and priorities set by the Cairo 2017 Ministerial Declaration.

The chosen theme for this year's high-level conference is "accelerating gender equality in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic". The conference will coincide with the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona process adopted in 1995 and the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration. It will analyse the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on women and girls and 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 role in policy and decision making to address the pandemic. The conference this year will feature three main plenaries:

1. Women on the frontline
2. Women's economic participation and Covid-19 responses
3. Ending VAWG.

Since 2013, nine projects were carried out under women's empowerment and gender equality, supporting over 50,000 beneficiaries. In 2020 a new project was set up by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UfM to strengthen the role of women in society by helping countries to address VAWG. The project involves 12 UfM countries. It aims to strengthen awareness, build capacity, and exchange experiences on the WHO tools on prevention and response against violence among policy makers and other stakeholders during the Covid-19 crisis.

UfM work is carried out in close collaboration with member states and key stakeholders operating in the region, including local authorities, international organizations, international financial institutions, CSOs and the private sector. There are several ongoing dynamics targeting the same objectives and issues and the same beneficiaries in the region. This calls for better coordination and regional cooperation to combat VAWG and strengthen women's rights through concrete and effective means.

The UfM endorses the recommendations proposed by EFI to ensure a gender perspective is considered in decisions about Covid-19.

6. Ms. Henrike Trautmann - Head of Regional Co-operation in the Southern Neighbourhood, DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, EU Commission

The pandemic has further exacerbated existing socio-economic and political inequalities, causing extreme poverty, exclusion from social protection services, political disenfranchisement, and violations of human rights.

Pre-existing gender and intersectional inequalities often worsen during crises, including public health emergencies. This is because gender inequality is not consistently included in global frameworks and policies. In the Southern Neighbourhood region, women perform nearly five times as much unpaid care work as men, while globally, women make up 70% of social and health workers. When health systems face pressures in responding to Covid-19, a greater burden is placed on women to care for the sick at home. This means women are more exposed to the virus. Even before Covid-19 existed, VAWG was already one of the greatest human rights violations. A year before the outbreak, 243 million women and girls, aged 15-49, across the world were subjected to sexual or physical violence by an intimate partner (UN Women, 2020).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, VAWG has soared around the planet. Women and girls living on mid and low incomes have been particularly impacted. Lockdown measures have meant that women in toxic relationships have been constantly exposed to their abuser, a situation that creates a fertile ground for the apparition and/or the rise of violence¹. According to UNICEF, related factors such as confinement, social isolation, increased levels of financial stress, and weak institutional response can increase and intensify levels of violence against women and girls².

The European Parliament Women's Rights committee noted a surge of cases of family violence by third in some European states³. In France, reports to police increased by 30% during the first week of lockdown (between 17 and 26 March), according to the Ministry of Home Affairs. In Egypt, cases of violence increased significantly, jumping from 368, in the period from 1 January to 17 March, to 984 cases in the period from 18 March to 31 May). And in Tunisia, the number of reports of VAWG increased by eightfold.

Most countries around the world lack a gender responsive preparedness and specialized support services that can be accessed by all groups of women and family members during civil emergencies and natural disasters. There is an absence of financial, material, infrastructure, and human resources to set up these services. In particular, there is a lack of trained and gender-sensitive professionals in the judiciary system and police force to support women and girls experiencing VAWG.

7. Ms. Lilian Halls-French - Co-President of EuroMed Feminist Initiative

This policy dialogue is a new step on the long road we have travelled together, as civil society and national institutions. It is a culmination of our efforts since the first UfM Ministerial Conference held in Istanbul in 2006, when women's rights CSOs addressed the UfM Ministerial process on strengthening the role of women in the Euro-Mediterranean region. It became an important instrument for the Euro- Mediterranean region among other statements and conventions.

The dialogue process that was initiated between the various political organizations and CSOs from 2015 to 2017, led to the creation of the Gender Regional Platform. The main benefits of this platform have been the wealth of knowledge and resources that have been shared. It has also given us the ability to create and develop common analyses and projects that promote equality in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

¹ The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes that violence against women is the "greatest health problem facing the world with its prevalence increasing in times of emergencies, including serious epidemics". The organization warns that COVID-19 and the measures adopted to halt the pandemic may exacerbate the risk of gender violence.

² See <https://blogs.unicef.org/evidence-for-action/five-ways-governments-are-responding-to-violence-against-women-and-children-during-Covid-19/>.

³ European Parliament, COVID-19: Stopping the rise in domestic violence during lockdown press release.

Tackling VAWG in all its forms is at the core of our work. With the support of the EU, a regional program "*Combating Violence Against Women and Girls in the Southern Mediterranean*" was set up in seven countries of the Euro-Mediterranean region. This includes a three-year regional campaign called "*Zero Tolerance for VAWG*". The Regional Civil Society Observatory (RCSO) on Combating VAWG was set up in Amman to support this project⁴.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the measures to curb its spread have led to unemployment, precariousness, insecurity, and restrictions in freedom, all this having impact on women's rights. The recommendations formulated during this policy dialogue are essential to tackling these challenges, dealing with, and stopping women's rights violations.

⁴ The Regional Civil Society Observatory on Combating Violence against Women (RCSO) was established by EuroMed Feminist Initiative (EFI) as a civil society independent mechanism to follow up on the implementation of the recommendations of the 4th UfM Ministerial Declaration on women's rights (November 27, 2017). The RCSO is hosted by the EFI at the regional office in Amman.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE OPENING SESSION

- Recognise the extent to which disease outbreaks affect women, girls, men and boys, and marginalized groups. This is fundamental to understanding the impacts of a health emergency and global crisis like Covid-19.
- Introduce a mechanism to respond to emergencies and crises as part of the monitoring progress set in the Cairo Ministerial Declaration.
- Develop indicators specific to the Covid-19 pandemic and ways to respond to its impact on women and girls.
- Ensure better coordination between regional, national, and international stakeholders working on the same issues and targeting the same beneficiaries. Ensure continuous exchange of experiences and lessons learned.
- Ensure a gender perspective is considered in governmental decisions about Covid-19.
- Create effective, responsive, and equitable policies, preparedness plans and responses.
- Incorporate a gender responsive approach into crisis management to ensure women have their human rights and can live a life free from violence.
- As acknowledged in the 2017 EU Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's External Action, women and girls should not only be viewed as a vulnerable group but as powerful agents for change. Promoting women as drivers of social, environmental, and economic development contributes to household, societal and political resilience. Women play an indispensable and essential role in crisis management, and in reducing vulnerabilities at multiple levels (state, society, and community).
- Ensure women play an active role in decision-making and at negotiating tables about health, economic, and humanitarian governance processes.
- Use the EU Gender Action Plan II, the EU Strategic Engagement on Women, Peace and Security, and the EU Strategy on Gender Equality 2020-2025 as powerful tools to guide actions and boost support.
- Use the UfM Ministerial Declaration as a strong and versatile mechanism to devise a gender responsive strategy, and to ensure women and girls are supported in these challenging times.
- With its multi-pronged approach, and well-defined pillars, the UfM Ministerial Declaration maps out how to devise national interventions that incorporate gender responsive measures to tackle the Covid-19 crisis. It also sets out how to maximise and strategise regional cooperation on a medium- and long-term basis.
- Strengthen partnerships between the EU and women's rights organisations to translate long-term commitments into action and safeguard women's rights. Local organisations can offer grassroots support to victims of violence who cannot access governmental services, and governments can implement gender responsive measures.

- Reinforce regional multi-stakeholder partnerships and commitment to develop a joint and coordinated response that puts women and girls at the heart of recovery plans. Women need to be active participants and strong leaders in the recovery of communities and economies.
- Intensify efforts to ensure laws are fully implemented and that stakeholders coordinate effectively to address VAWG during crises. A crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic requires national and regional policies to be actioned and women to play a key role in decision-making.
- Put forward recommendations discussed in the policy dialogue at the next UfM Conference on Accelerating Gender Equality during the Covid-19 pandemic. These recommendations are based on the key priority areas identified by member states in the UfM Declaration on women's participation.
- Integrate these recommendations into national plans and link them to monitoring and evaluation plans to measure achievements and progress.
- Ensure women are part of crisis management committees to develop policies that address gender needs.
- Use the media to raise awareness of VAWG.
- Mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic on women and use technology to establish quality economic support programming.

2.2. Panel one: VAWG, WPSA, women's participation in decision making and economic participation

MODERATOR

Mr. Saleh Al-Mashaqba - Head of Social Policies, Ministry of Social Development, Jordan

SPEAKERS

Women, Peace and Security Agenda

Mr. Daoud Al Deek - Deputy Minister, Ministry of Social Development, Palestine

Women's participation in decision-making

Ms. Wafa Beni Mustafa - Member of Parliament, Jordan

Economic participation

Ms. Marie-France Grangaud - Founding Member of the Foundation for Equality, Algeria

Violence Against Women and Girls

Ms. Najet Jaouadi - Director General of Human Rights, Ministry of Interior, Tunisia

1. Mr. Daoud Al Deek – Deputy Minister, Ministry of Social Development, Palestine

The struggle of Palestinian women under the Israeli occupation should be highlighted when addressing issues of women, peace, and security. It is well known that the first victims of occupation are women and girls. The impact of occupation, the blockade of the Gaza strip, the demolishing of homes and the confiscation of land on Palestinian women and their families is huge.

Under the recent Israeli unlawful annexation plan and complete disregard for international law, the suffering of Palestinian women will be deepened with the loss of land and income. There will also be pressure to work in Israeli settlements under discriminatory working conditions.

It is therefore important to hold the Israeli occupation accountable. Members of the international community must enforce international law, work to stop the construction and expansion of illegal settlements, and not reward the occupation by signing peace deals. We must acknowledge the role of the EU and CSOs which are working closely with the Palestinian government and in solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Since the outbreak of Covid-19, the suffering of poor and vulnerable families has deepened. They have lost their jobs and income. Women in particular face increased psychological pressures. In Palestine, as in all countries, statistics show there has been an increase in violence during the pandemic.

And despite women making up most of the health sector (70% of health workers in Palestine are women), decision-making positions are carried out by men. Most nurses working on the frontline are women who face daily challenges in providing relief efforts and support for patients. This work goes unacknowledged. Daily wage workers have also been left behind, with no legal working status or social protection. Likewise, women who head up households have found themselves even more vulnerable today. Women who look after children and women working in day-care centres have also been impacted, as well as women victims of violence.

The Palestinian government introduced a number of measures to support women. These included keeping shelters and care centres open and referral protocols functioning. Women also received support from financial aid programs and a gender perspective was integrated into the government's recovery plan.

Considering that 90% of companies in Palestine are small to medium, gender sensitive planning is needed to provide support for women workers. The social protection system must also be expanded to include women who are not currently registered to receive support.

A protection system against violence is needed including enacting a national law against violence, setting up and using a national referral system for women and the protective centres' system, and publishing CEDAW as a prerequisite for enhancing protection.

We undertook an important study in Palestine that analysed the impact of Covid-19 on women's social, health and legal status, as well as the impact on their education, and on VAWG. Integrating recommendations from this study should be part of future planning and programming. It is also important that future plans incorporate a gender perspective.

To support women and poor and vulnerable people, gaps in social and economic policies should be addressed. Public expenditure should be reviewed with money prioritized for social care. Social programming should also be invested in, as Covid-19 has exposed the huge inequality gap which is leaving vulnerable groups behind.

Under UNSCR 1325, the national plans should be part of the overarching national strategies and national executive plans, as well as national budgets. They should not be separate. International aid should be gender sensitive and consider the needs and rights of women. We should stand united against the politicizing of international humanitarian aid and donor funding which is used as a pressure card against Palestinian institutions and the rights of the Palestinian people.

We need to extract important lessons from Covid 19 and reflect on what needs to be changed. Despite the huge economic, social and human losses, it presents an important learning opportunity to reform economic and social policies and rebuild them on the basis of social justice.

Palestine deserves freedom and independence. It awaits support and solidarity from its international partners despite the political upheavals and agendas.

2. Ms. Wafa Bani Mustafa - Member of Parliament, Jordan

Most of the decision-making positions in Jordan are held by men. Women's involvement in parliament is not proportionate to the reality of the world where women make up 20% of heads of parliament in 190 countries.

During the pandemic, countries led by women heads of state have been successful in managing the crisis, providing good examples of leadership. A Covid-19 response plan should include the safety of women first. In Jordan, women were not considered.

At the present time, women do not have a voice in public life and very few play a part in decision making. The needs of women must be fully considered during pandemics and other disasters. To achieve this, women must be able to take part in decisions that frame their lives.

Promoting women's participation will require several steps:

1. Amend discriminatory laws, especially election laws.
2. Facilitate the process of women competing as candidates in elections.
3. Promote women's experience in decision-making.
4. Emphasise the importance of equal participation especially in school curricula.
5. Work with CSOs and NGOs.

As we move into recovery phases, it is important to consider women's education and health. Women, particularly those who are marginalized, must have safe access to health services including sexual health. Likewise, access to data needs to be enhanced (including access to online platforms).

The National Democratic Institute supported a national initiative in Jordan to protect women from political violence. A guide was drafted on how to tackle political violence, and a national advisory group consisting of 17 experts was formed to develop plans to combat political violence.

3. Ms. Marie-France Grangaud - Foundation for Equality, Algeria

The pandemic has impacted women immensely, but we are only beginning to measure its devastating effects. In Algeria, even though women's economic participation is increasing, numbers remain low. Most women are employed in the public sector and in education and health. A limited percentage work in decision-making roles. The unemployment rate for women is double that of men. There is a persistent reluctance to recruit women.

During the pandemic, most women have faced multiple challenges as they try to balance their time between paid work and unpaid care work. Women at home face a heavy domestic load. Women aged 25 to 69 years spend an average of six hours a day on household tasks compared to nine minutes for men. Women in the health sector were not given protective equipment until a woman doctor who was pregnant died from Covid-19. Following that, the protective measures were extended to include them.

The national commission in charge of the pandemic was composed exclusively of men. As a result, women were neglected from economic plans. They have experienced increased domestic burden and loss of income. Mobility for women was restricted as women were unable to travel and commute when public transport was halted. This meant they could not get to work. The informal sector in particular was under-resourced. There is an increase in unemployment, especially for women working in the private sector.

The positive aspect is that women in the public sector were able to keep their jobs and income, and financial aid was distributed by the government to those who lost their jobs in the private sector.

4. Ms. Najet Jaouadi - Director General of Human Rights, Ministry of Interior, Tunisia

During the crisis, the national institutions in Tunisia focused their attention on women victims of domestic violence because of the spike in the number and level of violence. All forms of violence were observed, including cyber violence, marital and domestic violence. There were cases of husbands locking up women inside the houses. There was also an increase in homicides and many women left their homes.

With the suspension of public transportation, only people with permits were allowed to use their cars, thus women suffering from violence at home were locked-up with their abusers, increasing their exposure to domestic violence and left isolated from people and resources available for support. The suspension of the judicial system also prevented women from filing complaints.

As a result, women could not access judicial help as administrative services were closed. Likewise, women could not obtain documents to prove their rights to custody and were unable to receive many other types of assistance.

The government issued instructions and orders to combat domestic and marital violence through the Ministry of Women, Family, Childhood and the Elderly, and the Ministry of Interior.

At the beginning of the pandemic, specialized teams at the Ministry of Interior provided assistance but only until 2pm. Afterwards, women were left without protection.

The Ministry of Women, Family, Childhood and Elderly later organized weekly online meetings to improve coordination with all stakeholders including CSOs (collaboration with CSOs is an ongoing practice in Tunisia). When services closed, a telephone hotline was set up for women to call. The personal numbers of officials were shared with the public. This tactic proved to be fruitful but overwhelming at times as phones rang constantly. This sent an important message to people that support is still available, and institutions are playing their role. The Ministry also visited various shelters to meet with victims of violence. It also set up a social media campaign to raise awareness of VAWG, using the strapline, "*No place for violence*".

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PANEL ONE

Violence Against Women and Girls

- Ensure laws are implemented and stakeholders work together to address VAWG during a crisis. It requires national policies and actions to be followed and women, and women's rights organisations to play an active role in decision-making.
- Introduce immediate protective measures during times of crisis.
- Conduct a comprehensive review of referral systems, protection systems and services that help support victims of violence, ensure laws are applied, raise awareness on the need to address VAWG, and ensure the harmonisation of CEDAW into national legislation.
- Develop national specific protocols and referral systems to address VAWG and protect victims of violence during pandemics, with special measures to support the most vulnerable among them.
- Develop a regional protocol to address VAWG and protect victims of violence during pandemics.
- Ensure women prisoners and those who are detained have access to protection and can protect themselves against violence from male family members.
- Ensure women prisoners have access to health, legal and judicial services, and reproductive health services during the pandemic.
- Establish a comprehensive and unified national database providing sex disaggregated data.
- Establish a regional platform to compile information, analysis, and best practices for preventive and protective measures.
- Provide safe access to sexual and reproductive health services in the response plans, especially for the most vulnerable groups during periods of crisis.
- Expand and develop the social protection system to address VAWG and support victims of violence.

Women, Peace and Security Agenda

- Enhance democracy, peace, and social justice in the region as a prerequisite for achieving gender equality.
- International agreements and treaties should be implemented, not remaining commitments on paper.
- Develop national action plans for implementation of UNSCR 1325 with sufficient budgets.
- Ensure all 1325 action plans have been incorporated and aligned with existing national strategies and plans of all government sectors.
- War and occupation have exacerbated the impact of Covid-19 on women's rights and weakened national programming and services. Ending wars and occupation, implementing international human rights resolutions, and providing international protection for women is essential for achieving women's freedom and rights.
- Rally and advocate for international solidarity for women's participation in peace agenda and conflict resolution.
- Palestinian women need to be protected from the Israeli occupation who are violating their rights.

- The rights and freedom of the Palestinian people should be upheld and supported by all governments and CSOs.
- International aid should be gender sensitive and consider the needs and rights of women. Politicizing of international humanitarian aid and funding which is used as a pressure card against Palestinian institutions and the rights of the Palestinian people should be uncovered and addressed.

Women's participation in decision making

- Promote women's experience in decision-making.
- Increase the participation of women in various decision-making bodies, by including women themselves, with their opinions and perspectives.
- Showcase and highlight examples of women leaders who have introduced successful measures and policies during Covid-19 to avoid policies and systems failing.
- Amend discriminatory laws, especially election laws to facilitate the process of women competing as candidates in elections.
- Emphasize the importance of equal participation especially in school curricula.
- Strengthen the cooperation with women's rights organisations.

Women's economic participation

- Promote the importance of women's work and their role in the economy at all levels as key for equality and sustainable development.
- Improve provision of childcare support services and centres.
- Expand the social protection system so everyone has equal access and ensure the necessary funding is in place for enhancing the social protection programmes.
- Ensure women have access to digital platforms and social security assistance programmes.
- Provide direct financial support and cash assistance to vulnerable women during the pandemic. These include nurses, caregivers in child education centres, female-headed households, women with disabilities or women with family members with disabilities, victims of violence and women in shelters.
- Provide victims of violence with access to comprehensive health care.
- Give daily wage workers, and women who have lost their jobs, access to financial compensation and unemployment assistance.
- Lessen the domestic and care burden on women and promote the importance of equal sharing of care work between women and men.
- Strive to change people's attitude towards unpaid care work by integrating a gender perspective into textbooks. This includes talking about equal reproductive roles and portrayal of men undertaking care work and household responsibilities.

2.3. Panel two: Education and learning, media, social media, and advertising, fostering implementation and strengthening of operational cooperation

MODERATOR

Ms. Aishih Wehbe-Herrera - Gender Expert, Regional Co-operation in the Southern Neighbourhood, European Commission

SPEAKERS

Media, including social media and advertising

Mr. Ahmad Mahmoud - Journalist, Al Ahram Newspaper, Egypt

Fostering implementation and strengthening operational cooperation

Ms. Muna Rfou - Head of Gender Department, Ministry of Social Development, Jordan

Education and Learning

Ms. Joumana Halabi - Gender Focal Point, Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Lebanon

1. Mr. Ahmad Mahmoud – Journalist, Al Ahram Newspaper, Egypt

It is important to understand how the media works to be able to use it for advancing women's rights issues. In today's world rumours, false news and negative gender perspective representations can quickly spread and be shared on a large scale. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are allowing people to share stories without evidence, or verification.

According to a 2018 study from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, false news and rumours spread on social media much faster than real news. This type of false or misleading news can create sense of fear and instability among communities.

It is important that CSOs and activists deal with logical and credible news sources and share accurate and objective information. Sharing stories of victims of violence in the media could harm women and make them more vulnerable to further violence from their family. It is vital we share news and research from trusted official sites that use credible sources and proper citation with accurate dates and links and always consider the victims' opinions.

2. Ms. Muna Rfou - Head of Gender Department, Ministry of Social Development, Jordan

The Ministry of Social Development response to the pandemic came as part of the Jordan Covid-19 Response plan. This was launched by the Government in coordination with the National Centre for Crises Management under three phases: response, adaptation, and recovery. The MoSD plan was managed by a committee which provided precautionary health and safety measures for elderly centres, women's shelters, and directorates. It also extended social security services and financial aid to daily wage workers and beneficiaries of the National Aid Fund: a government service provider set up in 1986 to protect and support individuals and families in need.

A social protection team was formed and headed by the Minister of Social Development with relevant ministries and organizations coordinating the distribution of financial and in-kind aid to vulnerable groups. They expanded the database of the National Aid Fund to include daily wage workers who lost their income.

Prior to the pandemic the MoSD conducted a gender analysis to identify gaps in human resources and ways to increase women's representation in decision making to mainstream gender at the ministry. The ministry also put together a specific gender policy in line with the governmental gender policy which was issued by the Inter-Ministerial Committee for Women Empowerment.

During the pandemic, the MoSD continued its gender mainstreaming efforts to narrow the gender gap by increasing the number of women leaders in the ministry and in decision making positions who would develop and deliver the response plan. Indicators showed that before the pandemic women made up 27% of decision-making roles across management, supervision, and field directorates, working around the clock and late hours.

The Ministry has trained its staff, particularly those working in shelters on the importance of gender mainstreaming in projects and action plans. It has also trained staff on how to develop gender indicators, raise awareness of gender-based violence and how best to deal with victims.

The MoSD has also worked with the Social Security Corporation to make sure women have access to information on ways to enrol in social security and receive social support packages.

The MoSD is managing a productivity enhancement and poverty reduction programme to increase women's economic participation. Women can access loans with no interest and in-kind aid. During the pandemic women also benefited from the Ministry's housing project. The Ministry also took the decision to reopen day-care centres in June to support women to go back to work.

During the pandemic, the Ministry continued to raise awareness about health among women in MoSD, day-care centres and shelters. Strict health and safety measures and social distancing have been implemented in the shelters. The Ministry is also preparing for the 16 Days of Activism Campaign Against Gender-Based Violence focusing on protection for women, early marriage, and girl's marriage.

To give women access to social services, the Ministry's programmes took the UNSCR 1325 national plan and the fulfilment of its third goal into account. During the pandemic, the MoSD has carried out numerous visits to shelters to make sure they are abiding by health and safety procedures.

The Inter-Ministerial Committee for Women Empowerment organised a meeting to bring together relevant Ministries and CSOs to:

- Address gender issues in the media.
- Combat VAWG.
- Increase women's participation in the labour force during the pandemic.

3. Ms. Joumana Halabi - Gender Focal Point, Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Lebanon

While attending school enhances young people's sense of belonging to a place and provides interaction with other students, online education has caused challenges. Home learning has increased tension in relationships, as families must maintain a quiet environment for children to learn and provide electronic devices and online connectivity despite losing their income.

Online education has distracted female students from learning as they are expected to undertake house chores while at home. The pandemic has also increased the care workload for women as they have to complete household chores and support their children with learning, making sure they have submitted their homework on time.

Online education has many shortcomings that have affected the quality of learning. One of the key issues is that engagement between students and teachers is limited. It is therefore vital to engage parents in the process of online learning so they can help support their children at home.

The other challenge is a lack of online connectivity. This has contributed to widening economic and social gaps between people. At the same time, schools could not follow up on or monitor cases of violence against students and young girls.

Along with attaining knowledge and skills, going back to school is vital for gaining life values skills and social behaviours that are necessary for building a sense of collaboration with others, while instilling the values of good citizenship.

4. Mr. Abdelilah Hmidouche - Head of the Women Directorate, Ministry of Solidarity, Social Development, Equality and Family, Morocco

In Morocco the illiteracy rate is 44% for women and 22% for men, while women make up 37% of high school enrolment and almost equal enrolment in elementary education.

Women's economic participation is 22% for women and 71% for men. Research has found that the barriers to women working include the reluctance of women to do vocational training or take on vocational jobs, the concentration of women in feminised jobs, the uncondusive working conditions that don't support women's entry into the job market and the lack of protection from VAWG and harassment in the world of work.

The women's economic participation programme, "Morocco for Empowerment", managed by the government of Morocco and supported by a royal decree, is backed by a number of legal and executive policies and plans. These include the Moroccan Constitution of 2011, a government program to support women's rights that integrates the principle of equality and combats all forms of discrimination and VAWG. "Morocco for Empowerment" also compliments the national plan for equality, Ikram II, the sustainable development plan and the national plan for enhancing statistical information from a gender perspective.

Legal reform was undertaken to harmonise national laws with international agreements. Several legal amendments were made including the endorsement of laws and the procedural measures, and gender mainstreaming in public policies and in the national budget.

The economic programme aims to consolidate progress achieved and address challenges and barriers such as duplication of efforts, inadequate cooperation, lack of mentoring, and limited human capacity and resources. The government is enhancing cooperation and collaboration between stakeholders, including women's NGOs and the private sector, through a comprehensive strategic framework with a clear action plan and funding mechanism.

Considered vital for development, the program identifies key priority areas: access to jobs, training and education, creating an enabling working environment for women and labour rights protection. It aims to increase women's economic participation to 30% in the workforce, double women's enrolment in vocational training and enhance decent work conditions for women.

During the Covid-19 pandemic the Moroccan government introduced measures to address the needs of women facing economic and social challenges. These included special programmes for women in remote areas, women workers in agriculture, women in the informal sector, and women led cooperatives, giving them access to technology, empowering women leading local councils and providing them with adequate budget.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PANEL TWO

Education and learning

- Mainstream gender into the education system.
- Include gender awareness in the education curriculum to inform future generations of the importance of combating VAWG as a major barrier to achieving gender equality.
- Provide capacity building for both teachers and parents and integrate a gender perspective in the online education system to ensure quality learning. Prioritize spending on health, education, and infrastructure to address the needs of the most vulnerable women. This includes providing computers and internet access to families and vulnerable groups.
- Train parents (fathers and mothers) on how to use online school platforms to make sure children and youth receive high quality learning and education.
- Redistribute care work between women and men, and between the state and society/families to lessen the care burden on women and teachers.

Media, including social media and advertising

- Raise awareness and share credible and adequate information about services and assistance. This is vital to ensuring access to services and assistance by women especially under measures that impose lockdown and isolation.
- Ensure the media plays a key role in raising awareness and changing attitudes towards VAWG.
- Use the media and social media platforms in a creative manner to target youth and men and change attitudes about VAWG.
- Use credible and well-sourced information about VAWG in media outlets and on social media platforms to avoid spreading gender stereotyped representation of women.
- Ensure women victims of violence are well quoted, and their opinion and perspective are respected.
- Ensure there are no potential threats of additional violence because of victims being featured in the media.

Fostering implementation and strengthening of operational cooperation

- Prepare well-functioning plans and a comprehensive roadmap with a gender perspective to make sure previously outlined recommendations have been implemented and to address gaps caused by Covid-19.

- Form inter-ministerial committees with participation of experts and CSOs representatives to coordinate the work in providing precautionary health and safety measures for elderly centres, women's shelters, and directorates.
- Improve cooperation between CSOs and policymakers to enhance services, implement laws and provide protection measures.
- Review the timeframe for implementing the 2030 SDGs, including the fifth goal to end violence against women, and review the Three Zero commitments of the International Conference on Population and Development.
- Increase budget allocation for gender programming on health and education and make sure budgeting is gender responsive.
- Mainstream gender into the legal framework for health, education, technology, and media in times of crisis and emergency.
- Conduct continuous broad, national, and sectoral consultations that follow up on implementation of plans and specifically the protection of the most vulnerable women.

2.4. Closing remarks

Ms. Leila Al Ali - Co-President, EuroMed Feminist Initiative

Ms. Boriana Jonsson - Executive Director, EuroMed Feminist Initiative

Participants stressed the need to translate plans and policies into action during the pandemic. This means international agreements and treaties should come into effect and not remain as commitments only on paper.

One participant pointed out to the effect of the globalised economic system and its impact on the debt crisis, resulting in violence and armed conflicts and a decrease in social spending. This has disproportionately impacted many marginalised communities.

Participants stressed that action is needed to tackle the poverty and violence that women in the region. This requires collaboration of efforts and placing gender equality at the forefront of public policies and plans.

1. Ms. Leila Al Ali - Co-President, EuroMed Feminist Initiative

Remarks and recommendations by speakers and participants revolved around four necessary actions:

1. Expanding the social protection system.
2. Adopting gender sensitive mechanisms.
3. Amending discriminative laws.
4. Providing gender sensitive budgeting.

It is important to expand and develop the social protection system to provide health, legal and social services to women and girls. The system must apply a cross sector approach to VAWG and ensure a comprehensive support to victims of violence. As such, integrating a gender perspective into the legal framework for health, education, technology, and media in times of crisis and emergency requires both the introduction of immediate protective measures and legal amendments supporting long-term social change.

At the core is the need for gender sensitive mechanisms in response to crises and emergency situations as well as gender sensitive indicators to monitor progress. This includes recovery plans that governments must commit to, considering current and future crises. Budget reform is also needed to ensure adequate spending on gender programming and women's empowerment.

Participants also agree that war and occupation has exacerbated the impact of Covid-19 on women's rights as it has weakened support services and national programming. Therefore, ending war and occupation is essential to ending VAWG. International human rights resolutions need to be implemented and women must be given international protection. This will empower people to decide their destinies which in turn will enhance women's freedom and rights.

2. Ms. Boriana Jonsson - Executive Director, EuroMed Feminist Initiative

All participants and speakers agree that Covid-19 has revealed the shortcomings in the health and social protection systems. This has further exasperated the exclusion of women on different levels. To tackle a national or global crisis, it is vital to have national and regional strategies and plans that place women's rights at the centre of these plans.

Improved cooperation between stakeholders, civil society and policymakers was brought up several times as a way to enhance services, activate laws and provide protection measures. Likewise, there is the need for broader, national consultations to improve the systems and the protection of the most vulnerable people.

Another important recommendation is to highlight examples of women leaders who have introduced successful Covid-19 measures to inspire future policies.

Under the WPSA, all national action plans must be incorporated into national strategies and government plans.

It is vital to raise awareness of important information and services available for women during a crisis, especially under measures that impose lockdown and isolation.

The call to make sure there is gender mainstreaming in the education system and curriculum was repeated throughout the discussions. This will help to change attitudes towards gender and inform future generations of the importance of combating VAWG as a major barrier to achieving gender equality.

Annex 1: Agenda

21 September 2020 (GMT+3, Jordan/Lebanon/Palestine)

11:00 – 11:15

Technical introduction to the online dialogue

11:15 – 12:15

Welcome Address

H.E. Ms. Basma Mousa Ishaqat - Minister of Social Development, Jordan

H.E. Ms. Jamila El Mossali - Minister of Solidarity, Social Development, Equality & Family, Morocco

H.E. Ms. Amal Hamad - Minister of Women Affairs, Palestine

H.E. Ms. Imen Zahouani Houimel - Minister of Women, Family, Childhood and the Elderly, Tunisia

H.E. Ms. Marisa Farrugia - Deputy Secretary General for Social and Civil Affairs, Union for the Mediterranean

Ms. Henrike Trautmann - Head of Unit, Regional Programmes Neighbourhood South, Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, European Commission

Ms. Lilian Halls-French - Co-President, EuroMed Feminist Initiative

12:15 – 13:15

Panel 1: Recommendations for implementation of UfM Ministerial Declaration on Women's Rights under Covid 19

Moderator: Mr. Saleh Al-Mashaqqa - Head of Social Policies, Ministry of Social Development Jordan

- **Violence Against Women and Girls**

Ms. Najet Jaouadi - Director General of Human Rights, Ministry of Interior, Tunisia

- **Women, Peace and Security Agenda**

Mr. Daoud Al Deek - Deputy Minister, Ministry of Social Development, Palestine

- **Women participation in decision-making**

Ms. Wafa Beni Mustafa - Member of Parliament, Jordan

- **Economic participation**

Ms. Marie-France Grangaud - Founding Member of the Foundation for Equality, Algeria

Open Discussions

13:15 – 14:15

Panel 2: Recommendations for implementation of UfM Ministerial Declaration on Women's Rights under Covid 19

Moderator: Ms. Aishih Wehbe-Herrera - Gender Expert, Regional Co-operation in the Southern Neighbourhood, European Commission

- **Education and Learning**

Ms. Joumana Halabi - Gender Focal Point, Ministry of Education & Higher Education, Lebanon

- **Media, including social media and advertisements**

Mr. Ahmad Mahmoud - Journalist, Al Ahram Newspaper, Egypt

- **Fostering implementation and strengthening operational cooperation**

Ms. Muna Rfou - Head of Gender Department, Ministry of Social Development, Jordan

Open Discussions

14:15 – 14.30

Closing Remarks and campaign next steps

Ms. Boriana Jonsson - Executive Director, EuroMed Feminist Initiative

Ms. Leila Al Ali - Co-President EuroMed Feminist Initiative

Annex 2: Biographies of speakers and moderators

Welcome Address



H.E. Basma Mousa Ishaqat - Minister of Social Development, Jordan

H.E. Ms. Basma Mousa Ishaqat is the Minister of Social Development, Jordan, and the Chairwoman of the Board of Directors of the National Aid Fund since October 2018. She has held several previous positions including Head of Health Sector Projects in the Directorate of Social Projects in the Ministry of Planning, Liaison Officer with the United Nations Population Fund in the Directorate of International Cooperation in the Ministry of Planning and Economic Researcher in the Directorate of Regional Planning. She has over 30 years of practical experience in administrative, technical, and strategic planning, and program support and evaluation.



H.E. Ms. Jamila El Mossali - Minister of Solidarity, Social Development, Equality and Family, Morocco

H.E. Ms. Jamila El Mossali has been the Minister of Solidarity, Social Development, Equality and Family, Morocco since October 2019. A Member of Parliament for the Justice and Development Party, she served as Secretary of the House of Representatives from 2012 to 2015. In 2016, she was appointed Minister Delegate to the Ministry of Education. She is also a member of the Moroccan section of the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption and the President of the Wiam center for family counselling and guidance.



H.E. Amal Hamad - Minister for Women's Affairs, Palestine

H.E. Ms. Amal Hamad is the Minister for Women's Affairs in the Palestinian Government of Mohammad Shtayyeh, which was formed in April 2019. She was previously the director of the southern branch of the General Union of Palestinian Women, and a member of Fatah's Central Committee.



H.E. Ms. Imen Zahouani Houimel - Minister of Women, Family, Childhood and the Elderly, Tunisia

H.E. Ms. Imen Zahouani Houimel has been the Minister of Women, Family, Childhood, and the Elderly in Tunisia since August 2020. She has held several positions in the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Women's Affairs, including Director General of Women and the Family and Policy Officer in the Minister's Office. From 2018 to 2020, she held the position of Program Coordinator at the office of the International Labour Organization. She was also a member of the Human Rights and Freedoms Committee and participated in the drafting of the law on combating Violence Against Women from 2013 to 2015.



H.E. Ms. Marisa Farrugia - Deputy Secretary General of the Union for Mediterranean

H.E. Ms. Marisa Farrugia is the Deputy Secretary General of the Union for Mediterranean, Barcelona. She is a Maltese diplomat who has held senior positions in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade Promotion abroad. Prior to her secondment as Special Envoy and Ambassador to the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean in August 2017, she was responsible for external relations, Mediterranean affairs, and the MENA region. She holds a Ph.D. in Arab and Oriental Studies from the University of Leeds.



Ms. Henrike Trautmann - Head of Unit, Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, European Commission

Ms. Henrike Trautmann has been the Head of Regional Co-operation in the Southern Neighbourhood, DG NEAR (Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations) of the European Union since January 2019, based in Brussels. A historian by training, she has worked in the European Commission for more than 20 years, focusing on external relations. She has worked on Common Foreign and Security Policy, communication, humanitarian assistance, and civil protection, as well as a number of policy files about resilience building in fragile countries.



Ms. Lilian Halls-French – Co-President, EuroMed Feminist Initiative

Ms. Lilian Halls-French is a French sociologist and a long-time defender of women's rights. She taught sociology at [organization name] and carried out research on work, mobility and security for different institutions, public firms, and public administrations. She also held the positions of member of the French Inter-Ministerial Commission on VAW, Minister's advisor on women's rights and Head of Ministerial Cabinet. She is the Co-President of the EuroMed Feminist Initiative (EFI).

First panel



Mr. Saleh Al-Mashaqpa (*Moderator*)

Mr. Saleh Al-Mashaqpa is the Head of Social Policies at the Ministry of Social Development in Jordan. He has experience in strategic planning and population studies, multidimensional poverty, and social protection. Mr. Saleh Al-Mashaqpa specialises in gender studies and women's empowerment. He also has experience in monitoring and evaluation from a gender perspective and designing social protection and poverty reduction policies. He is also a social work expert.



Mr. Daoud Al Deek (*Women, Peace and Security Agenda*)

Mr. Daoud Al Deek is Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Social Development in Palestine and has a master's degree in democracy and human rights. He is the co-chair of the Palestine-EU Subcommittee on Social Affairs and Health under the European Neighbourhood Policy, a member of the Advisory Council for Formal Statistics, and a member of the National Team for the Sustainable Development Goals 2030.



Ms. Najet Jaouadi (*Violence Against Women and Girls*)

Ms. Najet Jaouadi is the Director General of Human Rights at the Ministry of Interior in Tunisia. She holds a doctorate in private law (country, 2019) and is a graduate of the National Institute of Higher Studies in Security and Justice (Paris, 2016-2017). She was also the first woman to be appointed head of a police station in 2001. Ms. Najet Jaouadi was Head of the Protection of Minors service from 2003 to -2007, then Deputy Director of social prevention and Director of the judicial police. She was also the Director of the VAW unit at the Ministry of Interior for several years. She is an expert and trainer in the investigation of crimes and violence against women, human trafficking, and support of women victims of violence in the security sector.



Ms. Wafa Beni Mustafa (*Women's Participation in Decision-Making*)

Ms. Wafa Beni Mustafa is a Member of the House of Representatives in Jordan, and the Chairperson of the Coalition of Women MPs from Arab Countries to Combat Violence against Women. She is a lawyer with a master's degree in psychological counselling. She founded the Jordanian Women caucus in 2013 and was the first woman to chair a bloc in the Jordanian Parliament. She is also the Vice Chair of the Interparliamentary Union's Standing Committee on Sustainable Development and the Women Political Leaders' Ambassador to Jordan. An international observer on the legislative elections within the international missions of the National Democratic Institute, she was selected as one of the 50 international women leaders by Women in Public Life Initiative in the USA.



Ms. Marie-France Grangaud (*Women's Economic Participation*)

Ms. Marie-France Grangaud is a women's rights activist, a founding member of the Foundation for Equality and a consultant with the Information and Documentation Centre for the Rights of Children and Women in Algeria. She was Head of the Social Section of the National Statistics Office, where she studied discrimination in the Algerian workplace.

Second panel



Ms. Aishih Wehbe-Herrera (*Moderator*)

Ms. Aishih Wehbe-Herrera is the Gender Expert for the Regional Cooperation in the Southern Neighbourhood, European Union. She holds a Ph.D. on Gender Studies from the University of La Laguna in Spain and a M.A. in Human Rights from Columbia University in New York City USA. She has worked as a gender researcher, consultant and practitioner for the past 15 years, with a strong focus on VAWG, gender mainstreaming in international organizations and higher education institutions, good governance and masculinity studies.



Ms. Joumana Halabi (*Education and learning*)

Ms. Joumana Halabi is the Gender Focal Point at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Lebanon. She is working with the National Committee for Lebanese Women, Ministry of State for Women's Affairs, specialized NGOs and civil society to organise educational competitions for students in public and private schools. She also speaks at national and international workshops and conferences about gender issues. Ms. Joumana Halabi has a degree in law from the Lebanese University.



Mr. Ahmad Mahmoud (*Media, Social Media and Advertisements*)

Mr. Ahmad Mahmoud is a journalist at Al Ahram Economic magazine, as well as an advisor to the Chairman of Al-Ahram Press Foundation for Electronic Development and Digital Content. He is also a columnist for Mobtada.com news. In 2003, he worked as the Head of the Arab Web Project to create the Arabic Red Cross website. Then in 2013, he worked as a communication consultant to the UNFPA. With extensive experience in media and social networks, he has contributed to several international conferences on democracy, freedom of speech, gender and combating GBV. He has also been a member of the jury for different media contests about women's representation and rights.



Ms. Muna Rfou (*Fostering Implementation and Strengthening Operational Cooperation*)

Ms. Muna Rfou is the Head of Gender Department at the Ministry of Social Development in Jordan. She has held several positions in the Ministry and has experience in family and childhood, women's empowerment and protection from violence, integrating gender into policies and institutional control, women's rights, preparing international reports on women and gender gender-sensitive budgets, and the WPSA. She is an expert in managing women-based projects.

Closing remarks



Ms. Leila Al Ali

The Co-President of the EuroMed Feminist Initiative (EFI), Ms. Leila Al Ali is a Palestinian feminist and has been politically active since 1982. She promotes Palestinian national and human rights, with a focus on women. She was the Vice-President of the General Union of Palestinian Students in Lebanon from 1990 to 2004. In 2004, she became the Executive Director of Association Najdeh, a development NGO which has been working with women and children in refugee camps and settlements in Lebanon. She then took on the Vice-President role in 2008.



Ms. Boriana Jönsson

Ms. Boriana Jönsson is a women's rights and peace advocate with extensive experience in development and solidarity cooperation. For over a decade she has been working on women's empowerment in areas where there have been military conflicts and war. She is actively engaged in the global feminist movement and has been on the boards of different organizations, steering committees, and consultative bodies on VAWG, peace and security. She is the Executive Director of the EuroMed Feminist Initiative (EFI).



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The Regional Campaign for Zero Tolerance for Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) was launched in May 2019 as part of the “Combating Violence against Women in the Southern Mediterranean Region” Project funded by the EU. The campaign is implemented in seven countries by the EuroMed Feminist Initiative with a consortium of nine women's rights member organizations in the Southern Mediterranean Region.