

Rome, 4 March 2011

RECOMMENDATION

Approved by the
**Committee on Women's Rights
in the Euro-Mediterranean countries**

On the following topics:

- **. Women and illiteracy in the Euro–Mediterranean Region:**

Rapporteurs: Mme. Malika BENARAB-ATTOU (PE) and Mme. Fatiha BAKKALI (Morocco)

- **Promotion of the role of women : her involvement in economic life as the best tool to having access to decision-making positions:**

Rapporteurs: M. Marc TARABELLA (PE)

The Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly,

- Having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10 December 1948,
- Having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights entered into force on 23 March 1976,
- Having regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 2 September 1989 and the Optional Protocols,
- Having regard to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of 18 December 1979,
- Having regard to Decision No 1098/2008/CE of the European Parliament and the Council of 22 October 2008 on the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010),
- Having regard to the Declaration of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean, held in Paris on 13 July 2008;
- Having regard to the final statement issued at the meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Union for the Mediterranean, held in Marseille on 3 and 4 November 2008;
- Having regard to the objectives of the 2010 Millennium Development Goals
- Having regard to the forthcoming 10th anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security;
- Having regard to the conclusions of the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society, held in Istanbul (November 2006) and Marrakech (November 2009);
- Having regard to the European Parliament resolution of 20 May 2010 on the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), which calls for the adoption of a project under the auspices of the UfM on the subject of women's entrepreneurship and their participation in public life;
- Having regard to the Commission's *Strategy Paper for the Thematic Programme 2007-2013*, which includes the empowerment of women and makes provision for a specific budget to improve the skills of non-state actors involved in promoting women's civil and political rights and their economic and social empowerment in the battle against gender stereotypes in the Mediterranean countries covered by the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI);
- Having regard to the recommendations approved by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean at its sixth plenary session, held in Amman on 13 and 14 March 2010;

A. Whereas education is a fundamental right according to which every person- child, teenager and adult - shall benefit from an education designed to meet the basic learning needs, in the broadest sense of the term;

B. Considering that the right to education is essential to the exercise of all other rights and fundamental freedoms; considering that it aims both to promote individual freedom and autonomy and to allow effective participation in society;

C. Whereas one of the eight Millennium Development Goals aims at achieving universal primary education for all; whereas 189 UN member states are signatories of the Declaration of 23 September 2000 on the MDGs and committed themselves to meet its targets by 2015;

D. Whereas, according to statistics from the UNESCO and the UNDP, illiteracy in Arab countries was estimated at 27.6% between 2005 and 2008, meaning 60 million people including 39 million women;

E. Whereas the main victims of non-school attendance are girls, for whom the rate is 58.4%.

F. Considering that gender discrimination is a major obstacle to the exercise of the right to education and underlining, to this end, the importance of improving and strengthening women literacy in order to promote girls' education;

G. Whereas progress has been made in recent years in terms of access to primary education especially in Southern Mediterranean countries; stressing the continuing gap between boys and girls, noting that 66% of non-enrolled school-age children in North Africa are girls, according to the 2010 report on the MDGs;

H. Whereas there are strong correlations between illiteracy and poverty and differences between rural and urban areas remain important; whereas other factors related to quality of life such as violence, disability, conflicts and social disintegration have a strong impact on the possibilities to access to education;

I. Whereas the scourge of illiteracy feeds on poverty and ignorance and provides fertile ground for violence and extremism.

J. Whereas education has a vital role to play in preventing conflict and building long-lasting stability and peace;

K. Whereas a decrease of illiteracy and better access to education would allow more space for debate and freedom in Southern Mediterranean countries affected by recent democratic movements;

L. Whereas education is the best way to bring about the social changes needed to make effective progress towards good governance and thereby help to resolve conflicts and to consolidate progress towards democracy as a means of social transformation;

M. Whereas education and training can break the vicious circle of inequality, although it is essential that the reforms undertaken should go hand in hand with economic and social reforms;

N. Whereas gender equality is not only a basic human right, but working towards it has significant socio-economic ramifications. Empowering women helps economies thrive and boosts productivity and growth;

O. Expressing grave concern at the flagrant violation of women's human rights in the context of the current economic and democratic crisis;

P. Whereas the failure to break down social and economic barriers and the relegation of subjects relating to equal opportunities between men and women to the bottom of government agendas have ensured that the role of women in economic and political life has not been strengthened;

Q. Whereas there is still some way to go before all women in the MENA region can develop their potential and make a full contribution to the economy and society;

R. Whereas gender issues and improvements to the situation of women need to be part of public policies on sustainable development. This presupposes that women can participate in decision-making, particularly in relation to agriculture and biodiversity;

S. Whereas women's participation in public life and especially in decision-making processes, is crucial. This participation must include not only devising and managing projects, but also monitoring and evaluating them. The gender-based approach must be mainstreamed in all public policies. Although political will is essential, it is also crucial that additional funds should be earmarked to achieve these objectives;

T. Whereas it is not possible to talk about political and economic development without talking about women's participation, since there is a direct correlation between the economic weakness of a country and women's involvement in economic life. In the southern Mediterranean, women are starting to become the drivers of economic and cultural growth, but there is still much to be done to eliminate gender inequalities in that region;

U. Whereas a stronger, healthier and fairer economy, in the MENA region and in the rest of the world, will be possible only if the balance between men and women in business is improved and if the enormous productive potential of women is released. If women are not empowered, half the economy is under-utilised;

V. Whereas women are largely relegated to more precarious forms of employment and are over-represented in the informal sector, which offers no security and social advantages, while top-level jobs are still mainly the preserve of men;

W. Whereas stereotypes concerning women's unfitness for certain jobs exist in every society, often bolstered by the importance attached to respecting tradition, and play an important part in excluding women from certain occupations, such as manual trades (plumbers, masons, joiners) or jobs related to security (firefighters, police officers);

X. Whereas women are slowly achieving political power, albeit mainly when quotas and other special measures are put in place to encourage them; positive discrimination remains the main driver of women's progress;

Y. Whereas expenditure on women's support programmes is a highly profitable investment, as women's productivity constitutes an excellent investment opportunity;

Z. Having regard to the development of micro-finance, which emerged in the 1990s in the Mediterranean countries and has enjoyed official status in Libya, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia since the late 1990s; for women, micro-finance represents an effective way of combating poverty, achieving financial independence and increasing employment rates;

AA. Having regard to the example of Morocco, where 77% of the customers of micro-finance institutions are women;

BB. Whereas in many countries women have entered the labour market on equal terms with men, but the additional workload borne by women has not always been recognised;

CC. Whereas the attitude public authorities adopt towards women in their personnel policies needs to be improved in many respects: legal standards, recruitment and promotion on merit, budgetary policies, capacity building and measures to improve the work-life balance;

DD. Whereas the four key areas in which action is needed in order to integrate women into economic life are women's access to and participation in the labour market, business start-ups (micro, small and medium) by women, financial tools, and education and training;

EE. Whereas, in the face of piecemeal measures and funding, it is essential to join forces and create new momentum by sharing best practices;

FF. Supporting civil society's efforts to promote gender equality and women's rights in local development and support women's participation in politics and local decision-making processes, promoting dialogue with local authorities and actors on local development and the socio-economic strategies that can liberate women, and supporting gender-sensitive budget initiatives;

1. Welcomes all initiatives - global conferences, national action plans, measures and strategies taken at the international, European and national levels in order to promote literacy and access to education; considers that, despite the progress accomplished, fight against illiteracy must be a top priority for all Euro-Mediterranean countries;

2. Believes that the right to education, as a fundamental right, is both a matter of public health and a prerequisite to sustainable development; as such, recalls the commitments from UN Members' states to fulfil the Millennium Development Goals by 2015;

3. Stresses that the education of girls remains a major challenge and stresses the importance of eliminating gender inequalities in primary and secondary schools, of achieving equality by ensuring fair and unrestricted access, for girls and women, to basic and quality education, with equal chance of success;

4. Recalls that the right to education as an inclusive principle should include not only formal education but also early childhood education and literacy programs and acquisition of skills that are useful in everyday's life; hereby stresses the importance of using both formal and informal approaches in order to take into account the needs of disadvantaged people, including rural population and nomads in isolated areas, ethnic and linguistic minorities, children, youth and adults affected by some conflicts;

5. Calls upon all Euro-Mediterranean countries to fully implement all international conventions relating to children's rights, access to education for all and equality of opportunity between men and women, to lift existing reserves to those rights and translate them into national legislation;
6. Welcomes the putting in place by Morocco of post-literacy programmes for adults aimed at providing them with vocational skills, in association with new governmental partners: the General Directorate of Local Collectivities, the Human Rights Advisory Council and the Partnership for Development Agency;
7. Believes that the European Neighbourhood Policy should put greater emphasis on the right to education, through the promotion and issuing of visas for students and teachers, and make it a priority within the framework of its strategic revision, using all technical and financial means to its disposal in order to support ambitious and holistic literacy programmes;
8. Suggests to develop partnerships between schools of the two sides of the Mediterranean and to favour establishments promoting girls education and, more broadly, respecting the right to public, quality, free and accessible education for all;
9. Encourages the Arab immigrants who live in the West to share their acquired skills in order to contribute to developing education in their countries of origin;
10. Underlines that the implementation of literacy policies must be part of a more global programme, aiming to establish political, economic and cultural conditions favourable to literacy for all;
11. Recommends that policies, programmes and literacy projects be conceived on the basis of concrete and necessarily differentiated demand of populations, and be completed by research and evaluation programmes.
12. Emphasises the need for more in-depth analysis of the role of women's rights in the context of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, with a particular focus on areas requiring improvement and on the increased support that should be provided to civil society organisations working in this field, so that the numerous initiatives under way can receive the assistance they deserve from the EU;
13. Calls for the gender dimension to be incorporated into association agreements through the inclusion of a special section on the protection of women's rights, and for women's participation in negotiations on such agreements to be regarded as a prerequisite for the balanced implementation of the future free trade area; suggests that the gender dimension could be integrated more fully into political dialogue with partner countries by establishing effective partnerships with public authorities, civil society, academics and international organisations, inter alia, with a view to dialogue on gender equality and development;
14. Calls on the Commission and the UfM to supply information concerning the fulfilment of financial commitments to support active participation of women in economic and social life and in development, action programmes designed to promote education and training for women and access to the labour market, and efforts to boost the role of women in business;
15. Recommends that the Commission financially supports civil society organisations and bodies working on specific projects to combat stereotypes relating to women's work;

16. Recommends promoting the appropriate microcredit programmes which can help businesswomen faced with laws restricting women's access to bank loans; takes the view that microcredit programmes should be part of a series of measures, including training in the skills needed on the labour market and efforts to simplify access to land and other assets and resources; advises the Commission to encourage the Member States to follow Morocco's example in promoting micro-finance and helping to develop access to microcredit;

17. Encourages the participation of women in social dialogue and collective bargaining, and, in particular, greater representation of women in marginalised economic sectors; takes the view that trade unions should be strengthened and professional bodies involved in a social dialogue that encompasses the gender dimension, including through the introduction of quotas for the number of women in management positions;

18. Emphasises that the conclusions and recommendations of the Second Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society, held in Marrakesh on 11 and 12 November 2009, must lead to political decisions and practical action, in particular as regards the establishment of a Euro-Mediterranean observatory on gender equality and of a Euro-Mediterranean network of academics and scientists working in the gender studies field, designed to serve as a forum for exchanges and for the coordination of local development projects involving women in the region;

19. Calls for the decisions taken at the Marrakesh Ministerial Conference to be included in the conclusions of all Euro-Mediterranean ministerial meetings, and asks that they be incorporated fully and effectively into existing instruments, namely the ENP, the UfM, partner countries' national action plans and all regional partnership agreements;

20. Recommends recognising the full citizenship of all women living in the Euro-Mediterranean area, including migrant women, and guaranteeing their social, political, economic and legal right; this includes the recognition of their equal rights as regards the inheritance of assets, the ownership and transfer of property and access to employment, and of the principle of equal work for equal pay;

21. Calls on the Commission to step up its role as an investor and partner, and to develop specific guidelines on responsible investments that help to reduce social inequality;

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22. Instructs the President of the Assembly to forward this recommendation to the Co-presidency of the "the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean" and its Secretary General, to the Speaker of parliaments and governments of member countries of "the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean", to the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference of Foreign affairs, to the Presidency of the European Union, to the European Parliament, to the European Commission, as well as to all the institutions concerned.