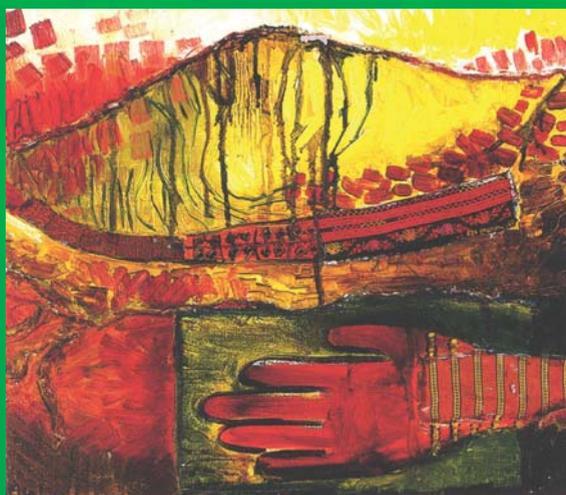
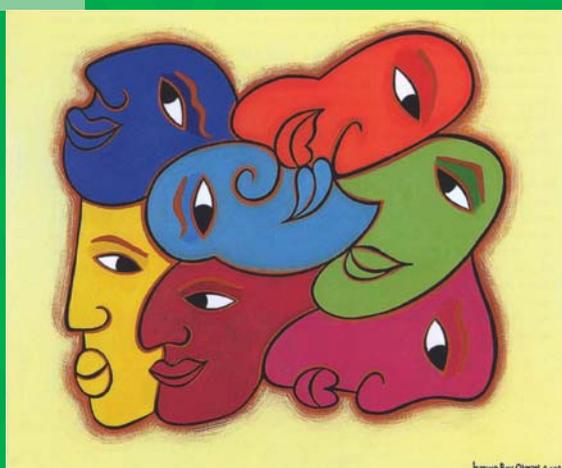
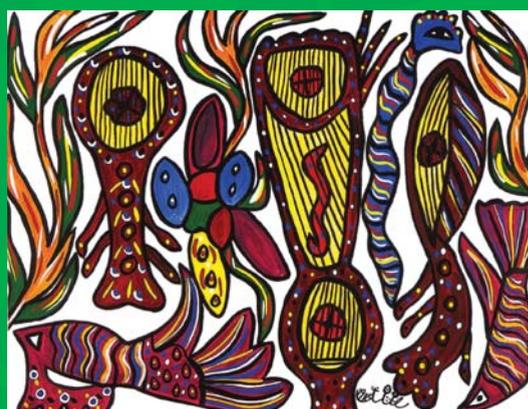




European Commission

EUROMED PARTNERSHIP: ACTING FOR GENDER EQUALITY



The present publication is the result of a joint collaboration between the Directorates General Europe Aid and External Relations (RELEX).

Thanks to the Euromed Info Center for its precious collaboration.

The pictures of this publication are artistic works from the exhibition “Breaking the Veils: Women Artists from the Islamic World” organised by the Royal Society of Fine Arts in Amman (Jordan), Pan-Mediterranean Women Artists Network, and the Representation in Amman of the “Fondazione Mediterraneo”.

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Cataloguing data can be found at the end of this publication.

Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2006

ISBN 92-79-02248-2

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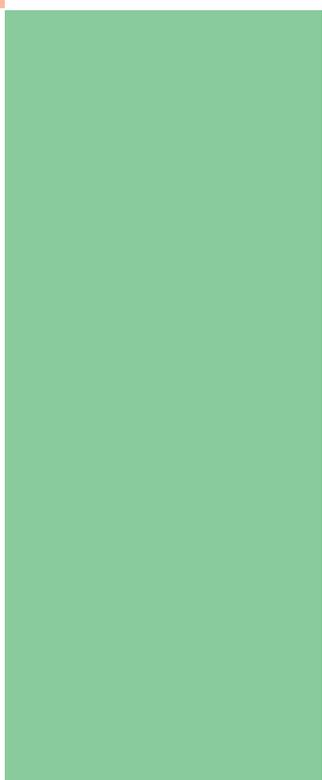
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Printed in Belgium

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EUROMED Partnership:

Acting for gender equality



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Foreword

Over the last decade we have heard many political pronouncements and commitments to empower women and promote gender equality. We have seen some progress as a result. But there is still a considerable gap between policy and practice. That gap will not be closed until women participate fully in the economic, social, political and cultural life of their country.

The Euro-mediterranean Partnership is now over ten years old. During that time the 25 EU countries and our 10 Mediterranean partners have made progress towards meeting the objective of the 1995 Barcelona declaration: creating a region of peace, security, prosperity and opportunity, based on democracy and human rights. But resolving serious gender inequalities is an essential prerequisite for achieving that objective.

Gender equality is one of the main drivers for development. The Arab Human Development Reports identified women's empowerment as one of the three deficits which pose a serious threat to human development in the Arab world. There are enormous challenges to achieving women's empowerment in the Mediterranean region, as there are in many parts of the world, but the message is clear: unless and until we do so, societies will never reach their full development potential.

Of course, many of the necessary changes take time – societal reform is a lengthy process. Girls' rates of school enrolment at all levels have shown tremendous improvement and some progress has been made in improving women's civil and political rights. However, the implementation of reforms has been uneven and inconsistent and existing laws often fail to reflect the changing reality of women's lives or present physical and psychological constraints to women's full participation in economic and political life. A major unresolved issue is violence against women. Everyone agrees that violence against women must be eradicated but stronger action is required to turn this into reality.

We must find solutions which are consistent with existing religious and cultural values, promoting opportunities for women in economic life and allowing them to contribute to their country's political, economic and social development.

The European Union has been at the forefront of efforts to achieve gender equality, both within the Union and outside its borders. We recently reiterated our commitment in our communication 'Roadmap to Gender Equality.' The European Commission has long focused on mainstreaming gender equality in all its cooperation programmes and projects.

The Euro-Mediterranean region has been no exception and over the years we have assisted our Mediterranean partners in promoting equality between women and men. Last November a five-year work programme which listed gender equality as one of its major priorities was endorsed by 35 Heads of State at the 10th Anniversary Summit of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

A parallel conference dedicated to gender issues identified a range of activities which could form part of a gender action plan. These were subsequently refined and ratified at a preparatory conference in Rabat in June this year. More than 130 representatives from government and civil society in the Euro-Mediterranean partner countries participated in the event.

Now, at the Istanbul Ministerial meeting on 'Strengthening the Role of Women in Society', we are seeking Ministerial endorsement and political backing for this work. Only by joint political engagement and determined action can we move closer to our ambitions and aspirations. I have high hopes that Istanbul will be a significant milestone on the path to gender equality in the Euro-Mediterranean region.



Benita Ferrero-Waldner

Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy

1. Policy and legal framework

Gender equality is a principle, an objective and a task for the EC enshrined in the EC Treaty and in the Charter of Fundamental rights of the European Union (2000). The EC supports the ratification and implementation of the CEDAW and is signatory to international agreements and declarations such as the Cairo Programme of Action (1994), the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the Declaration of the Millennium Development Goals (2000), (see box p.6).

With regard to the Mediterranean region, the Barcelona Declaration of November 1995 translates global policy commitments on gender equality to the Mediterranean region by recognising “the key role of women in development” and the need “to promote their active participation in economic and social life, and in the creation of employment”.

The 1996 MEDA Regulation¹ and the subsequent amendment of November 2000, usually called MEDA II, have both referred to the need to recognise and enhance women’s social and economic roles, and to the importance of education and employment creation for women.

In its Communication ‘Reinvigorating the Barcelona Process’ (2001), the Commission emphasised the need to take account the social impact of economic transition in the Mediterranean Partner countries². It stressed that specific emphasis should be put on the enhancement of the role of women in economic development, along with the implementation of best practice on linking training policies with employment needs. It recommended greater attention to the sector of justice and home affairs, which includes seeking conformity of judicial systems, including family and inheritance law.

Following the statement made by the Arab Human Development Report in 2002, a communication of the Commission named “Reinvigorating EU actions on human rights and democratisation with Mediterranean partners” and issued in 2003 draws in particular attention to the need to cope with the marginalisation of women, the undermining of their participation in political life and the subsequent hampering of the economic and social development of the Mediterranean countries. Noteworthy are the recommendations aimed at fostering greater knowledge of the position and rights of women in the different Mediterranean countries. It was also stated that gender issues should be put at the core of an enhanced dialogue with civil society organisations.

The European Neighbourhood Policy has already stated that gender equality constitutes one of the “common values” to which the ENP seeks to enhance commitment. This new framework for relations with the European Union Member States and their Eastern and Southern Neighbours has already been translated into European Neighbourhood Action Plans, several of which highlight the need to promote women’s participation in political and economic life in particular, and to support actions leading to equality between men and women.

The 10th anniversary of the Barcelona declaration placed decisive emphasis on the promotion of gender equality in the Euromed partnership, with one of the key objectives to be pursued over the next five years being to “take measures to achieve gender equality, preventing all forms of discrimination and ensuring the protection of the rights of women”. A Euromed Women’s Conference was held in Barcelona 24/25 November, 2005 on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Euro-Mediterranean Summit of 1995.

(¹) Council Regulation no EC/1488/96

(²) “Re-invigorating the Barcelona Process” Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament COM (2000) 497 final

One of the recommendations to emerge from the Conference was that a Euromed Ministerial Conference on Women in the Mediterranean should take place in the second half of 2006, under the auspices of the Finnish Presidency of the EU, to endorse a Plan of Action to strengthen the role of women in society.

In preparation for the Ministerial conference a preparatory meeting took place in Rabat 12-14 June, 2006. The conclusions of the meeting (see p. 21) were used as the basis of the Action Plan to be endorsed by the Ministerial Conference in November 2006.

The European Union's gender policy

The European Union has a longstanding commitment to promoting gender equality and to this end has played a major role on the international stage. At the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the EU was an active party in drafting the Platform for Action. Since then, gender mainstreaming – integrating the priorities and needs of women and men in all key policies – has become an important strategy to achieve the goal of gender equality. Gender mainstreaming is reinforced by specific measures, programmes and projects to support the empowerment of women.

In the field of external action, in addition to regional programmes such as MEDA, the Commission funds gender- and women's rights-related programmes among others through its Gender budget line and the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights. New instruments, of which 'Investing in People' is particularly relevant to gender issues, will become operational as of 1 January 2007.

On 8 March 2006, the Commission issued a Communication entitled "A Roadmap for equality between women and men", outlining six priority areas for EU action on gender equality for the period 2006-2010: equal economic independence for women and men; reconciliation of private and professional life; equal representation in decision-making; eradication of all forms of gender-based violence; elimination of gender stereotypes; and promotion of gender equality in external and development policies.

A new European Institute for Gender Equality will be operational in 2007. This independent centre of excellence was requested by the European Council in June 2004 and has also been demanded by the European Parliament. Funded by the European Commission, with a proposed budget of 52.5 million EUR for the period 2007 to 2013, it will gather, analyse and disseminate comparable research data and information needed by policy-makers in Brussels and in the Member States. It will raise awareness of gender equality policies with events including conferences, campaigns and seminars. Another vital task will be to further develop tools for supporting the integration of gender equality into all Community policies.

The Role of the European Parliament

In May 2005, the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) set up an ad hoc Committee on Women's Rights in a practical move reflecting the importance it attributes to promoting equality between men and women. The main aim of this Committee, comprising 40 representatives of parliaments in the Mediterranean partner countries, EU national parliaments and the European Parliament, is to further examine the role and the status of women in the countries of the partnership. It proposes policies to promote women's rights and to enable their full participation in social, economic and political life.

In June 2006, the EMPA ad hoc Women's Committee met in Warsaw to exchange views concerning the situation of women's rights in the EU and the Mediterranean countries, based on a comparative analysis in the sectors of legislation, economic life, education and health.

“Women are a precious and essential potential for succeeding in implementing the goals of development and democracy in each country separately as well as the common goals in the Mediterranean. Gender equality should exploit all avenues: a strategy for equal opportunities, an effective use of structural funds, new financial possibilities and gender mainstreaming in European and national policies.”

Rodi Kratsa, MEP, Vice-Chair of the EMPA Ad Hoc Women's Committee.



© Rym Karoui (Tunisia) :
Untitled (Mixed media on paper. 1999)

2. Spotlight on European Commission projects

‘Girl-friendly’ schools to tackle illiteracy problem in Egypt

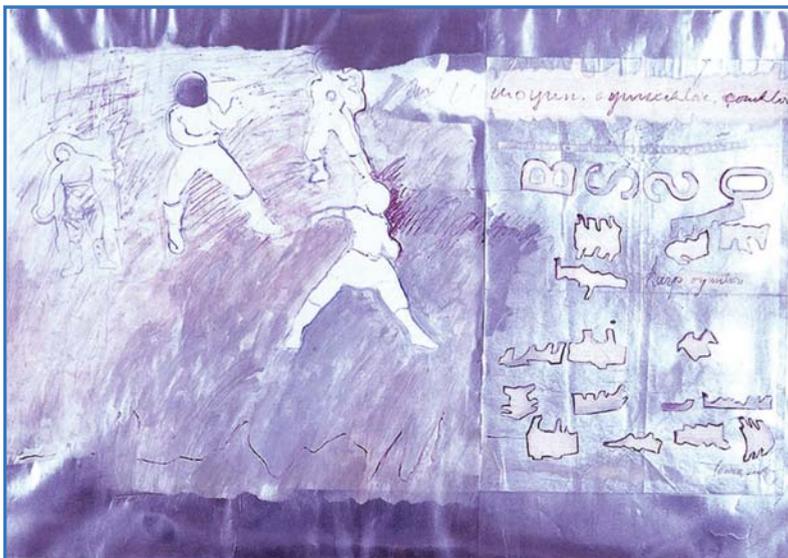
EC funding for 200 new schools

With the objective of improving the living conditions and prospects of social re-integration of some of the most economically vulnerable and socially marginalised groups in Egyptian society, a €20 million ‘Children at Risk’ programme was initiated in May 2004, aimed specifically at assisting children in need of urgent support. These include street children, disabled children and working children.

Girls in Egypt face a number of serious problems, one being exclusion from education. As a result, some 45% of girls and women over the age of 15 years old are illiterate. There have always been barriers to girls’ education, including cost (it is free in theory though not always in practice), long walking distances to school (often perceived as unsafe for girls) and a variety of cultural factors: many girls are forced to undertake domestic responsibilities such as taking care of younger siblings; others are expected to enter into early marriages; some parents believe that girls should not study with boys or be taught by men.

One way of resolving some of these issues has been the construction of so-called ‘girl-friendly schools’, especially in remote areas, which provide girls aged 6-13 with a formal primary education. Following positive assessments of 520 existing girl-friendly schools established in recent years by the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) in seven governorates across Egypt, the European Union recently pledged to fund 200 such “girl-friendly” schools throughout Egypt, in a joint bid with the NCCM to work towards a greater inclusion of females in education.

Most existing girl-friendly schools are located in Upper Egypt, where school attendance rates – particularly among girls – are lowest. “We go where there aren’t any schools in the



© Tomur Atagök (Turkey) : “Games, Toys, Children, War. Love Series” (Mixed media on paper. 2000)

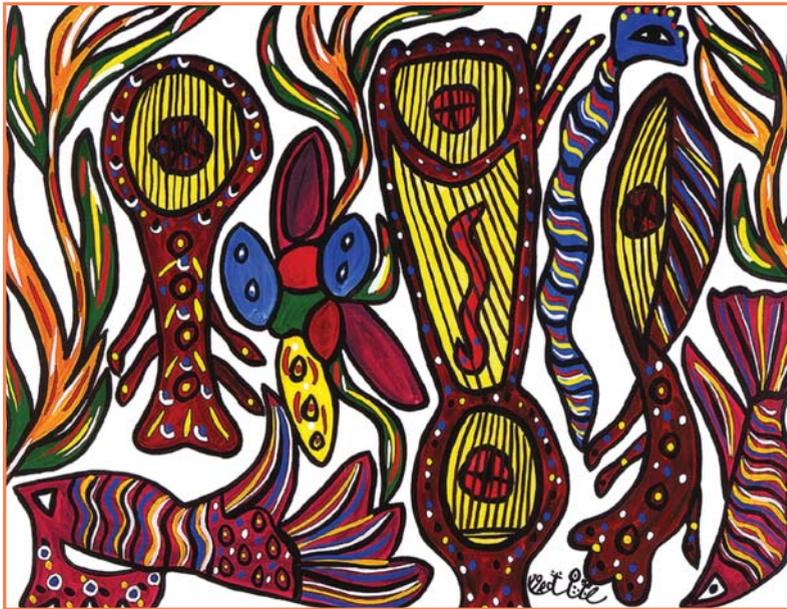
vicinity,” says Dalia Hassan, executive director of the NCCM girls’ education programme. “There are many areas the education ministry hasn’t reached, and girls in particular find it difficult to walk more than two or three kilometres to go to school.”

While girl-friendly schools cater both to girls and boys, their curricula and administration are specifically designed to encourage girls – often burdened with traditional household responsibilities – to attend. Girl-friendly schools enable children both to work with their parents and attend school.

“We go where there aren’t any schools in the vicinity. There are many areas the education ministry hasn’t reached.”

In addition, curricula are tailored to meet the needs of rural children, enabling children to decide what they want to focus on, rather than simply imposing traditional modes of learning.

Construction of the new schools is due to be completed by December 2006 and they will be up and running by February 2007.



© Baya (Algeria): *Untitled*
(Watercolor on paper. 1984)

Eliminating the ‘culture of shame’ surrounding manual and blue collar jobs in Jordan

The Izdihar project promotes rights and responsibilities

“Izdihar – Social Empowerment and Human Rights” is an ambitious EU-funded poverty alleviation project aimed at empowering underprivileged women and men in Jordan to acquire the skills needed to enter the labour market, lift themselves up from poverty and become a force of positive change in their communities. The project addresses the so-called ‘culture of shame’ which continues to hinder the free movement of women and implies disrespect for manual and blue-collar work.

In close coordination with families and community leaders, young women and men are provided with professional training and, later on, job opportunities. This type of individual empowerment not only encourages them lead others by their example but it naturally increases family income, thus contributing to a sustainable improvement in living conditions and consolidating the ground for democracy and respect for human rights.

Izdihar (meaning 'prosperity') focuses on preparing motivated men and women aged over 18 for jobs in the service industry, an employment sector largely dominated by foreign workers despite a high rate of unemployment among Jordanians. Although employers prefer to hire qualified, local staff, the 'culture of shame' makes these jobs undesirable for many Jordanians.

Izdihar was established under the patronage of Her Majesty Queen Rania Al-Abdullah by the Families Development Association, a local NGO dedicated to improving the lives of women from low-income households. The project receives essential financial, technical, and moral support from the Friedrich Naumann Foundation which has been active in Jordan since 1981, encouraging and supporting liberal democracy, human rights, the tenets of an open market economy and rule of law.

The Izdihar programme encourages the perception of service workers as professionals rather than servants through a three-point strategy comprising job skills training, help in entering the labour market and combating the 'culture of shame.'

The Izdihar programme encourages the perception of service workers as professionals rather than servants

"It is through education that we learn to see things through the eyes of others, and so come to understand and respect difference. Education is vital for combating ignorance, prejudice and misunderstanding, at local, national and international level. It allows people to see beyond a world of hate and hopelessness to one of possibilities. Education unleashes the creative contributions of every citizen to improve their own lives and build the common good."

Benita Ferrero-Waldner,
European Commissioner
for External Relations
and European
Neighbourhood Policy



© Samira Badran (Palestine) : *Untitled* (Photography, 2001)

• Job skills training

Izdihar runs regular four-month courses providing training in English, housekeeping, cooking, childcare, child education and caring for the elderly. In addition to vocational skills, participants receive instruction in human rights, conflict resolution and self-awareness. To complement their coursework, participants also gain on-the-job experience during a one-month internship with a local employer.

• Entering the labour market

Izdihar assists new graduates through every step of the job-search process, identifying potential employers, representing graduates during the job application process and monitoring both the performance and well-being of new employees. The project works with employers to ensure fair employment conditions and respect for the rights and dignity of graduates.

• **Combating the ‘culture of shame’**

The ‘culture of shame’ in Jordan stems from a combination of cultural, religious and political factors that stigmatise service jobs as shameful. Women are discouraged from working outside the home and are thus denied the opportunity to contribute to their family’s – and their community’s – prosperity.

The direct beneficiaries of the Izdihar programme are not only the trainees themselves, who gain marketable job skills, as well as confidence and increased self-awareness, but also their families – an average of eight people per trainee. The extra income generated by Izdihar graduates constitutes a significant contribution to their families’ economic stability, often doubling the family’s monthly budget. Izdihar graduates also apply their training to their family life, improving hygiene practices and social conditions. Employers also benefit from having access to a motivated, local workforce. Izdihar graduates have a reputation for being skilled, dependable employees.

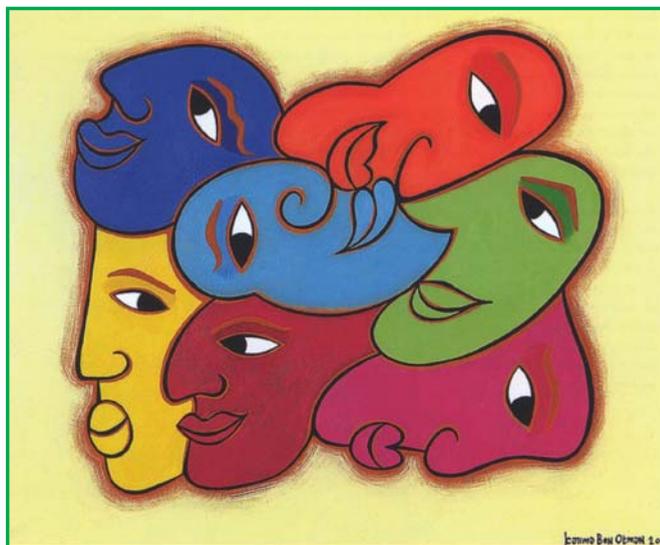
Indirect beneficiaries of the Izdihar project can be found at all levels of society. The empowerment of individuals is a catalyst for community awareness and development and the respect commanded by Izdihar graduates spreads to other service employees. Combating poverty benefits more than just the poor – it creates a more stable, productive society for all.

Enabling women to gain greater independence in south-west Morocco

Argan oil project helps women’s cooperatives

The past ten years have seen the creation of several women’s cooperatives, focused on the processing and trade of argan oil, a unique and typical product of the Souss-Massa region in south-west Morocco. This oil is the focus of growing economic interest both in Morocco and elsewhere, thanks to its nutritional and cosmetic properties.

For a growing number of women in the rural areas of this region, oil production is providing a substantial income in what is otherwise a fairly precarious socio-economic context. Although the women’s cooperatives are at differing stages of development (manual or semi-mechanised production), they all suffer from weaknesses that prevent them from progressing further, particularly regarding infrastructure, the training of their human resources, technology, marketing and quality control.



© Karima Bin Othman (Jordan): “Unity” (Acrylic on canvas. 2002)

For a growing number of women in the rural areas of this region, oil production is providing a substantial income.

At the same time, growing man-made pressures on the environment are bringing about an increasingly more pronounced degradation of the ecosystem of the argan forests. This is leading to desertification and the consequent impoverishment of the local population.

The Moroccan government's Social Development Agency and the European Commission have implemented a support programme to improve the working conditions of rural women and to ensure long-term management of the argan forest in south-west Morocco.

The programme aims at providing women involved in the exploitation of the argan forest with a decent income, through the better production of argan oil and its by-products, all legally protected and controlled, as well as other products and services arising from the argan forest. It is hoped that this approach will allow women to participate actively in guaranteeing the preservation and long-term management of the argan forest.

Members of the cooperatives benefit from programmes aimed at modernisation and improving working conditions. These include lessons in reading and writing and basic management, as well as improvements to infrastructure and equipment. Through technical assistance, the programmes seek to reduce the difficulties inherent in the oil extraction process, to improve the quantity and quality of the oils, marketing, etc. The programme also supports the implementation of a regulatory framework protecting and preserving this valuable natural resource.

In order to strengthen the local development potential in areas where the project is being undertaken, other basic social infrastructure projects will also help improve the population's quality of life. The project will not only assist in keeping the exploitation of argan oil at a local and regional level but will ensure that its added value comes back to its traditional beneficiaries. This, in turn, will enable women to gain greater independence and to become more integrated participants in the economic life of the region.



© Sohad Lachiri (Morocco): "Marked Faces" (Lithography on paper. Not dated)

Women encouraged to establish small enterprises in Syria

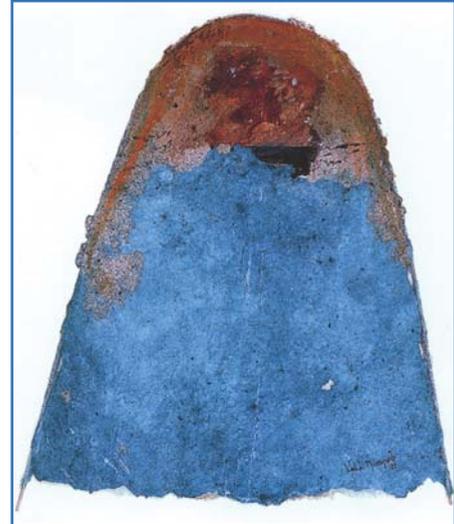
Village Business Incubator offers advice, training and technical assistance

Many women in Syria are disadvantaged due to poverty, illiteracy, poor nutrition and health care as well as a lack of economic opportunities. Their economic position is weakened even further in areas where, in order to prevent land fragmentation, it is customary for women to surrender their inheritance rights to their brothers, for which they are compensated in cash or animals. This creates a further dilemma when such women wish to apply for a bank loan since they are automatically rejected if they cannot offer land as collateral. A project targeting rural women recently showed that 97% of those surveyed did not benefit from any co-operative or extension services.

At the heart of the Village Business Incubator (VBI) project, co-financed by the European Union in Syria, is a drive to empower women through small-scale entrepreneurial activity. The overall objective of the VBI is to promote women's participation in the labour market by helping them establish micro and small enterprises. The project aims to develop the institutional networks necessary to establish a service centre for training and technical assistance for the creation of such enterprises, and to start up such enterprises managed by individual women or women's cooperatives.

The VBI also aims to:

- assist existing entrepreneurs in upgrading their activities from small to medium;
- strengthen the ability of local organisations to implement programmes for women entrepreneurs;
- promote and support the establishment of the Village Business Incubator as a permanent and sustainable centre which can be used as a model for initiatives elsewhere in the country.



© Laila Muraywid (Syria):
Untitled (Mixed media & handmade paper. 1992)

It is designed to direct women in their business choices, to train them in business management and to provide technical assistance. Specialised training will be provided in the production and processing of foodstuffs, silk and honey, and in other sectors identified by the women themselves during the course of the project.

The VBI currently operates in rural areas of the Latakia Governorate, within the framework of the project "Establishing a Village Business Incubator for women's micro and small enterprises in the coastal midlands area of Syria". This is co-financed by the European Union, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Fund for Integrated Rural Development of Syria (FIRDOS), with technical assistance from the Italian Association for Women in Development (AIDOS).

The project regards female entrepreneurship as a successful strategy for developing rural communities because it presents an opportunity to unlock women's potential in becoming active agents of socio-economic change. It supports women aged 20-50 from low-income households as well as existing micro-entrepreneurs running subsistence income-generating activities who are willing to turn them into growth-oriented businesses. The project aims to bring about a more equal distribution of profit within the household, to increase exposure to new prospects and to create job opportunities. It is hoped that the VBI will contribute to improving the local community's quality of life through the stimulation, diversification and promotion of the local economy, while helping the empowerment of women by increasing their self-esteem.

This is the first incubator of its kind in Syria and one of the few in the Middle East. Unlike others which focus on providing office space and facilities, this VBI lays emphasis on the acquisition of business skills, capacity building, information, marketing, and business promotion. It is expected that the pilot scheme, managed by a team of young motivated experts in training, business counselling, project management, marketing and promotion, will provide a successful model for the development of micro and small enterprises that can be subsequently extended to other rural areas of Syria.

The project presents an opportunity to unlock women's potential in becoming active agents of socio-economic change.

Protecting migrant workers' human rights in Lebanon

“Maid in Lebanon” leads to new legislation

Over the past 35 years, more than a million young women have migrated to work in Lebanese homes. Live-in workers are frequently denied rights of freedom by their employers/sponsors who may withhold their passports and restrict their movements in order to safeguard their ‘investment’ in air fares, agency charges, visas, work and residence permits. Even if they understand the terms and conditions laid down in their employment contracts, these women rarely have the wherewithal to enforce them or challenge violations. As in many other countries, they are frequently unprotected by local laws, and even where strict labour standards have been adopted, they remain unaware of their rights.

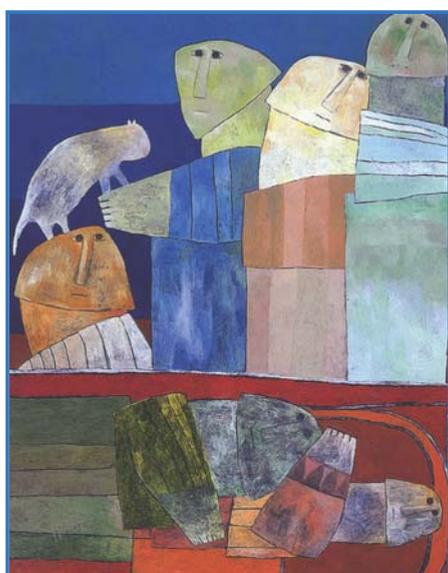
Awareness of the plight of immigrant women inspired the EC-funded project “Protection for Human Rights of Migrant Workers, Refugees and Asylum-Seekers,” initiated in 2002.

The “Protection for Human Rights of Migrant Workers, Refugees and Asylum-Seekers” project, implemented by the Caritas Lebanon Migrant Centre, has organised seminars for 8,500 migrant workers and 2,000 refugees to inform them about their rights and the services available to them in Lebanon. Counsellors and social workers were recently granted permission to distribute pamphlets and brochures to newly-arrived domestic workers within Beirut International Airport and to brief them on their rights and on the services and protection available to them. The project has backed them in more than 300 court cases, opened appeal procedures, and arranged protection. Many cases were won in result of the legal assistance and intervention before the court and created some precedents namely restoration of unpaid wages, payment of indemnity or infliction of penalties (money or imprisonment) for a physical and sexual abuse and declaration of innocence following false complaint of thefts. More than 3,000 migrant workers have benefited from legal assistance and legal counselling.

Given the high level of ignorance on the part of employers and the broader Lebanese public concerning the rights of migrant workers, the project initiated a wide-reaching lobbying/advocacy campaign, promoting best practices and correct behaviour towards migrant workers and enhancing respect for their rights. As part of this campaign, the project provided financial assistance for the making of a film entitled “Maid in Lebanon” which documents the fate of Sri Lankan women seeking better ways abroad to support their families.

Funded by the Caritas Migrant Centre Lebanon, with European Commission funds and the support of Caritas Sweden, the Netherlands Embassy in Beirut and the International Labour Organisation, the film is currently being shown in Lebanese schools and Universities, during civic events, to Lebanese community groups and to students worldwide in an attempt to create a greater awareness of the problems faced by migrant workers.

More than 3,000 migrant workers have benefited from legal assistance and legal counselling.



© Rabab Nimer (Egypt): *Untitled* (Oil on wood, 1985)

To date, more than 2,000 Lebanese have participated in awareness-raising workshops. One significant result of the advocacy campaign, and in particular of the film, has been the decision by Lebanon's Ministry of Labour to set up a committee, of which the Caritas Migrant Centre is a member, to draw up a new standard contract for domestic workers, to draft new labour legislation and to write and publish a booklet on "rights and responsibilities" for household migrant workers.

Towards the eradication of an age-old practice in Egypt

Attitudes changing towards Female Genital Mutilation

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a traditional practice that reportedly affects 96% of married women of reproductive age (15-49) in Egypt. It poses serious health risks not only for girls and women but also for their unborn children. A majority of Egyptians declare themselves in favour of the practice, in the belief that it adds to a girl's chance of marriage. Recent data suggests that 27.7% of girls under 17 support the practice, a figure that increases rapidly from age 11 onward to a peak of 77% among girls aged 15-17.

The UNDP FGM Free Village Model Project, which the European Commission's 'Children at Risk' project supports, aims to address the mistaken perceptions that justify the practice through dialogue, initiative, interaction and advocacy. By targeting not only girls and women but also men of all ages, teachers, community and religious leaders, the media and others, it intends to provide an environment of social support and pressure that will foster rapid changes in attitudes and behaviour, ultimately leading to a public declaration by community leaders against FGM.

The FGM Free Village Model Project started in 2003 in 60 villages in six governorates in the south of Egypt, spearheaded by the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM), UNDP and donors. In addition, hundreds of Egyptian volunteers have been mobilised by the project to work in their communities under the guidance of 24 UN Volunteers. It also aims to strengthen the ability of governmental agencies as well as local development, health and human rights NGOs to design, implement, monitor and evaluate FGM prevention activities.

One young Egyptian woman volunteer explains how hard it has been to alter age-old beliefs and customs: "We have faced many difficulties in convincing the people of the village about the futility of this habit. For many decades, society has used socially acceptable names such as 'a girl's purification' to justify this custom. Therefore, changing this perspective seemed almost impossible at first. One of the greatest challenges we faced was convincing people that neither Islam nor Christianity support this practice. We sought the help of church leaders from both faiths in eliminating these mistaken beliefs."

There is, indeed, no doctrinal basis for the practice in either Islam or Christianity. However, although high officials in both the Muslim and Christian religious establishments have voiced opposition to FGM, it is still supported by some local religious authorities. Moreover, many Egyptians, including women, believe that this is an important part of maintaining female chastity, which is part of religious tradition. In one survey, almost 75% of women felt that husbands would prefer their wives to

© Naima Shishini (Egypt):
"Arabic Calligraphy" (Oil on canvas, 1982)



undergo the procedure. More than one-third cited cleanliness as a reason, while a smaller number saw it as a way to prevent promiscuity before marriage and unfaithfulness within the marriage.

There is, however, a growing recognition of the many adverse health consequences of the practice. Many community leaders have signed public declarations calling for the abolition of FGM. The government and NGOs use the media to disseminate information on the health risks of this practice. Government newspapers and magazines have published stories presenting the views of prominent figures in medicine and academia who oppose this practice and television programmes condemning the practice have been broadcast. Senior government officials, including the Minister of Health and Population, have appeared on television to discuss FGM as both a health and a religious issue.

“One of the greatest challenges we faced was convincing people that neither Islam nor Christianity support this practice.”

Promoting and publicising women’s rights in the Palestinian community in Israel

Media campaign aims to raise awareness

Research has revealed that a high proportion of Arab/Palestinian women in Israel – almost 25% – have been physically abused periodically, with a large number of incidents of violence against women going unreported, either due to societal pressure, lack of awareness of the existence of crisis centres, or fear of further violence. Until recently, this issue has tended to be neglected or not properly addressed.

In July 2004, the organisation Women Against Violence (WAV) began an EU-funded campaign (€460,000) to raise awareness of women’s rights and services within the Palestinian Community in Israel and of gender-based violence on a nationwide level.

The campaign was geared towards the community as a whole, yet directed in particular at those segments of the population still unaware of, or resistant to, these issues. A preliminary nationwide survey was conducted in order to identify precisely these specific target groups, aimed at profiling the prevailing attitudes within the community regarding women, their rights, and gender-based violence.

WAV’s main purpose has always been to combat gender-based violence, by working to strengthen the social support system for women – the organisation itself operates a crisis centre and runs two shelters and accompanying halfway houses: one for young women, the other for battered wives and their children – and by lobbying for greater government responsibility for the protection of women.

The organisation works directly to promote gender equality, by implementing projects geared to inform the community about women’s issues, as well as those designed to protect and inform women where their ability to secure these rights is hindered.

The Women's Rights Project worked to create legitimisation and support within the community for the services providing protection for women.

The project aimed to raise public awareness through the media and to refine and redirect WAV's message to the community, in keeping with the changes that have already occurred there on women's rights while its specific objectives were to:

- Improve the dissemination of information and knowledge about women's rights within the Palestinian community in Israel on a nation-wide level.
- Raise awareness within the community about gender-based violence.
- Provide information to the women of the community regarding services established to protect them from gender-based violence.
- Empower women to take action in defence of their rights.
- Strengthen public sensitivity and the social support system in the community for women in the process of rebuilding their lives after having been violated.
- Accumulate and circulate statistics on the attitudes towards gender-based violence in the community as a means to better direct public awareness efforts to the community.
- Ensure the government's fulfilment of its responsibility for the lives and security of women and girls, and the enhancement of its actions to prevent women's rights violations.
- Strengthen the capacities of NGOs working in the field on the same or similar issues.

Women Against Violence plans to conduct an impact assessment three years from the conclusion of the project.

“Despite successes in awareness raising and standard-setting... very little has changed in the lives of most women. A few women have benefited from these changes, but for the vast majority, violence against women remains a taboo issue, invisible in society and a shameful fact of life. Statistics continue to show high rates of violence and abuse. Most cases of violence against women result in impunity for the perpetrators, which fuels the perpetuation of this grave violation.”

Radhika Coomaraswamy, first UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, in her final report to the Commission on Human Rights

Supporting human development and social integration in Morocco

The Centre for Information, Documentation and Studies on Women

The setting-up of the Moroccan Centre for Information, Documentation and Studies on Women (CMIDEF) is one of the very first examples of cooperation between the EU and a government authority of Mediterranean partner countries in the field of gender equality, which until then had essentially involved direct cooperation with civil society.

The project came at a particularly appropriate time, as Moroccan civil society has begun to reap the rewards of a long campaign for equal opportunities. Reforms to the legal status of women and an increase in the level of women's representation in Parliament are the most notable examples of this. These gains, however, are still fragile and need to be consolidated through an institutionalised approach to equality.

The project supports the efforts of the Secretariat of State in charge of Family, Children and the Disabled (SEFEPH), which is the national mechanism responsible for promoting women's issues, to set up the Moroccan Centre for Information, Documentation and Studies on Women (CMIDEF).

Gains need to be consolidated through an institutionalised approach to equality.

In addition to gathering, processing and distributing information and documentation concerning gender issues, the mission of the Centre is to establish a network of partners (government ministries, associations, university researchers, parliamentarians, the media, etc.) and to support and monitor public policies aiming at reducing disparities. Its ultimate objective is to help decision-makers take measures to eliminate the gender-based inequalities that still exist.

Seven “cooperative” experiences in Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey

EC support for projects on the role of women in economic life

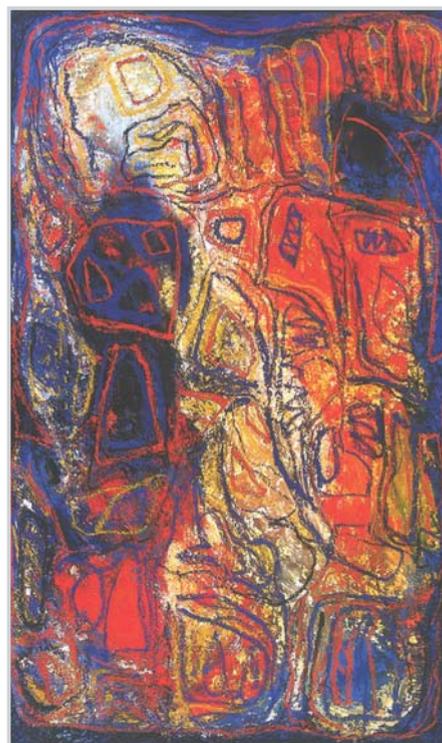
Many EC-funded projects on gender equality issues are undertaken in a single specific country but there are many examples of projects in which the EU works simultaneously with a number of Mediterranean countries on common issues. Seven such projects and their objectives are outlined below:

• Gender Equality in Employment and Small Enterprises (Egypt, Jordan)

Objective: To advance the economic status of women through micro- and small enterprises and by promoting career development through a combination of financial and non-financial services for women and capacity building programs for eight NGOs. Specific objectives of the project include increasing women’s access to the production of gender-sensitive training modules for NGOs and to credit and business development services required for the effective management of their businesses.

• Economic Empowerment for Palestinian Women: Turning Business Ideas into Reality (Palestinian Territories, Israel)

Objective: To help increase the participation of women in the labour market by facilitating the creation and management of women-owned enterprises through improved vocational training and the creation of sustainable networks, and by facilitating sustainable networks and cross-border cooperation and partnerships between Palestinian and Israeli women entrepreneurs.



© Suha Shoman (Jordan) *‘The Legend of Petra’*
(Oil on canvas. 1992)

- **Economic Empowerment of Rural Palestinian Women (Palestinian Territories, Israel)**

Objective: To enhance women's participation in and contribution to the growth and development of the Palestinian economy and society through an integrated training programme of personal empowerment, vocational training, skills enhancement and training in entrepreneurship and basic business skills. Additionally, the project will promote peaceful co-existence among Palestinians and Israelis through the sharing of practical knowledge and experience and the fostering of direct economic cooperation.

- **Free to Work (Jordan, Palestinian Territories)**

Objective: To identify the present and future state of the labour market in Amman and Gaza in order to increase sustainable employment possibilities for women and to host, inform, orient and counsel the targeted women on available jobs, the possibilities of vocational training and other accompanying measures. Through consultation with employers and in partnership with actors of civil society, human resource requirements will be identified and vacancies will be matched with the skills and competencies of unemployed women wishing to work. Employers will be encouraged to provide vocational training while society at large will be urged to review the social, cultural and religious constraints which presently prevent women from playing a full part in the economy of their communities and countries.

- **Sustainable Economic Opportunities for Women (Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria)**

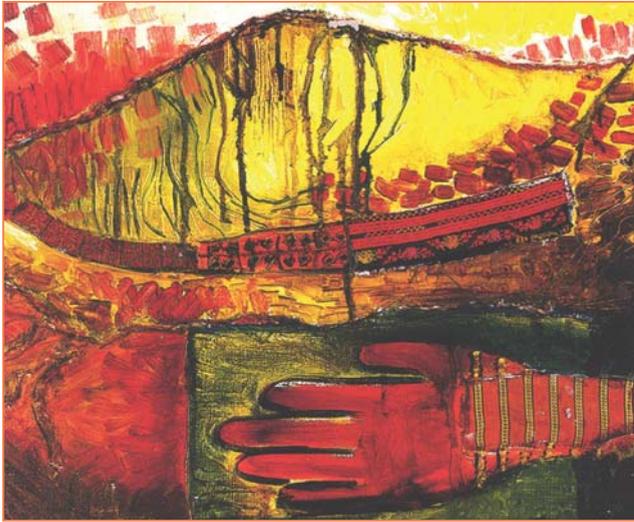
Objective: To contribute to poverty reduction and to achieving the Millennium Development Goals on equality by improving women's access to economic opportunities, creating new and alternative economic opportunities for women, promoting the participation of women and women's groups in policy debate and formulation, and encouraging debate on promoting and enhancing opportunities for women in economic life. The programme also focuses on the need to improve women's entrepreneurial skills through a combination of training, creation and dissemination of relevant resources as well as the setting up of local counselling and accompaniment structures. The project targets local development NGOs, women from local communities, particularly rural women, international development organisations, employers (especially those with a demonstrable commitment to corporate social responsibility), and government bodies.

- **Creating New Opportunities and Networking Facilities for Marginalised Home-based Working Women (Morocco, Turkey)**

Objective: To address the need for home-based working women and their organisations to gain access to new employment opportunities arising from the globalisation process, through capacity building in local organisations based in Morocco and Turkey, public awareness campaigns and networking at both sub-regional and regional levels. A grass-roots networking organisation will be created, as will a Mediterranean centre for the promotion and development of home-based working women.



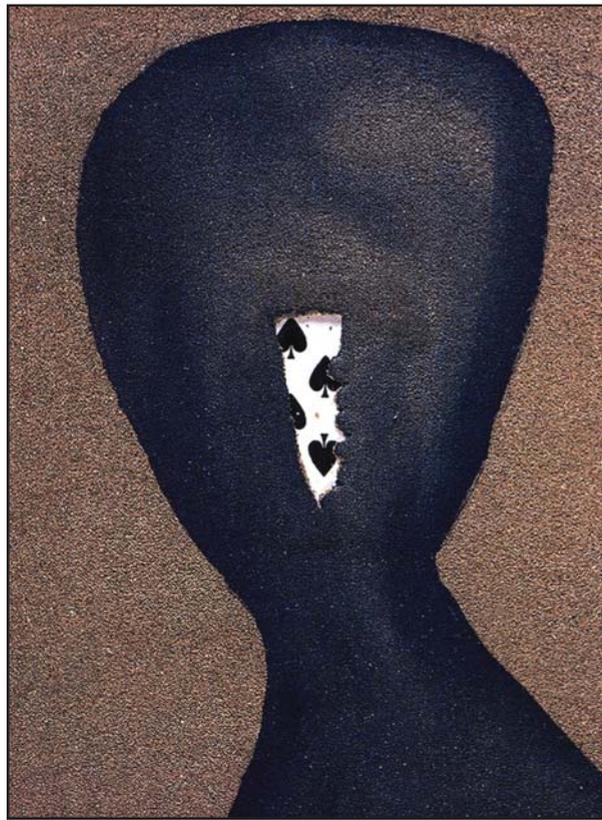
© Dodi Tabbaa (Jordan): "Black Magic" (Mixed media & collage. 1992)



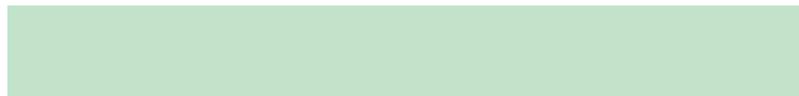
© Samia Zaru (Palestine): "The Endless Cause" (Oil on canvas. 1980)

- **Enhancing Capacities of Women Micro-entrepreneurs (Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia)**

Objective: To improve women's economic conditions by improving their income-generating capacity. Women micro-entrepreneurs are served by a growing number of micro-credit institutions in the region but most are self trained and require support to improve their products and management skills. This will be achieved through training of trainers, the setting up of a trade network aimed at selling products from micro-entrepreneurs in the southern Mediterranean to consumers in Europe, networking and self-employment in micro-enterprises.



© Meriem Boudelaba (Tunisia): *Untitled* (Mixed media. Not dated)



3. Towards a plan of action on gender equality in the EUROMED partnership:

Conclusions of the EUROMED preparatory conference in Rabat (Morocco, June 2006)

A preparatory meeting to the Euromed Ministerial Conference “Strengthening the Role of Women in Society” (Istanbul, November 2006) took place 14-16 June 2006 in Rabat, Morocco. The aim of the meeting, which brought together 130 participants from the Euromed partner countries (representatives of governments, parliaments and civil society), was to contribute to the Plan of Action (2007-2011) that will be endorsed in Istanbul under the Finnish Presidency. The meeting generated a large amount of proposals on how to strengthen women’s role in society, which were used as a basis for the draft Action Plan.

During the meeting, three working groups discussed the following themes:

- Women’s human rights as an essential component of democracy
- Women’s economic status and participation
- Socio-cultural influences on gender perceptions, roles and relations

The main documents related to the preparatory conference can be found on the EU website: http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/euromed/women/index.htm

“There can be no progress without significant progress towards the abolition of all forms of discrimination against women in the various countries of the region. In order to achieve this we must act – all together and each at his own level of responsibility – so as to update legislation as well as changing people’s mentality and their actions... These action plans must be considered, conceived and implemented with the actors of civil society who are best placed to relay them to our populations and are most aware of the realities in each country of the region.”

Mourad Allal, General Coordinator of the Euromed non-governmental platform, Rabat Conference

Observations and recommendations

“Women in the Arab world make up half of the population but, like their counterparts in the rest of the world, Arab women do not have enough resources from which to extract power. Even if there is political will for change and some human rights are given to women, there must be a movement to defend their rights. Such movements need to encompass not only the elite but large constituencies in every Arab country.”

*Hoda Badran,
President, Alliance for Arab Women (Egypt)*

Women's human rights as an essential component of democracy

- A very strong link exists between democracy, development and equality between men and women.
- Remaining reservations to CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) should be progressively removed. This could be monitored in the framework of the Euromed partnership. Countries which have not yet done so should be urged to ratify the CEDAW Optional Protocol.
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights should have supremacy over other declaration codifying rights; International commitments should be translated into national law, and national and customary laws aligned. The implementation of the law remains problematic and discriminatory practices are still notable in many respects.
- The principle of equality has been introduced in the constitution of some Mediterranean countries, but there is a need to unify the legal framework governing women's lives.
- Affirmative action should be envisaged to increase women's participation in political life. Quotas should be introduced at national and local level, and also in political parties.
- Legal literacy enabling women to become aware of their rights and measures empowering them to take part in political debates should be supported.
- Civil society organisations should be further strengthened through training and better networking across the Euromed region, as they have an important role in the advancement of women.
- Recognising the diversity of the situation in the region, there is a need for promoting research leading to harmonised statistics, indicators and more accurate data. Support should be given to institutions that analyse, compare and launch the debate on equality.
- The establishment of ombudsperson functions dealing with complaints related to discrimination against women should be considered.
- There should be an open discussion on political Islam and a review of concepts and definitions.

“Despite achievements in the last few years and positive indications for political change, there are still many gaps and shortcomings in securing the equality of women and their integration. Countries need to speed up the lifting of reservations to CEDAW, overcome existing gaps between laws and practice, work towards changing traditions and social practices and adopt tools to follow up what is being done.”

*Farida Bennani,
Lawyer and University Professor (Morocco)*

"The production of a gender report in Morocco as part of the Economic and Financial Report which accompanied the 2006 Finance Bill was at the heart of a public management reform process geared toward the achievement of results. It was an instrumental way, addressed sustainable human development concerns where the status of women and their human rights were central and strategic for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals".

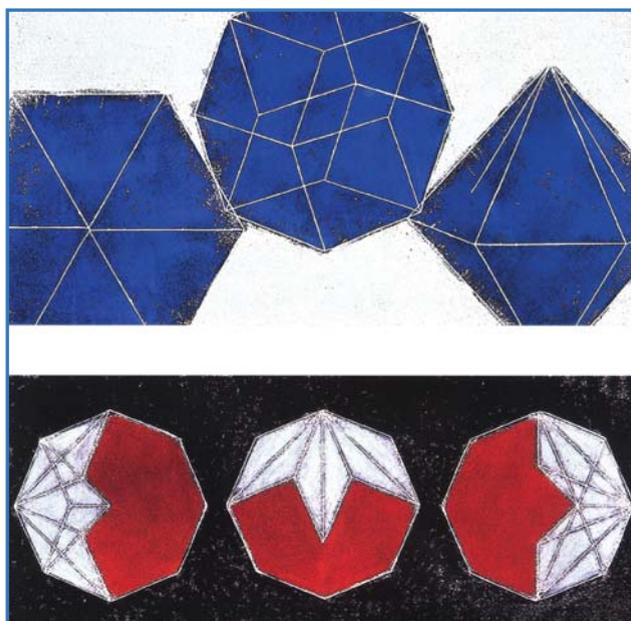
Mohammed Chafiki,
 Director of Studies and
 Financial Forecasts at
 the Moroccan Ministry
 of Finance and
 Privatisation.

Women's economic status and participation

- The capacity to collect gender-disaggregated data, as well as to conduct more qualitative research in the economic sector overall, particularly with regard to the informal sector, migration, sectoral and occupational labour trends and time use, should be strengthened. Better quantitative and qualitative indicators should be developed.
- Gender-sensitive budgeting should be supported at national and local levels; Morocco, which has promoted a gender-sensitive budget policy, could be used as a 'best practice' example for all partner countries.
- Formal employment placement services should be modernised and made more responsive to women's needs.
- Gender-sensitive technical and vocational training should be developed with an emphasis on breaking down gender-based occupational segregation and on promoting life-long learning for women.
- Social security systems and social safety networks should be further developed, specifically for the most vulnerable groups of women workers which run the greatest risk of being affected by economic reforms.
- The costs of maternity benefits should be socialised to reduce employers' disincentives to employ women.
- Gender imbalances in pension systems should be redressed and micro-finance should be linked to household savings plans to reduce the risk of female dependency later in life.
- In the case of migrant women, European legislation should be applied, especially regarding family issues. Also, the EU should foster integration policies in receiving countries.

"There is a need for an explicit gender equality agenda, from the level of employment and training policies to institutional strengthening and right down to curricula training materials, training delivery, training of trainers, training venues and facilities. Training delivery needs to be flexible, taking into account the time and location most convenient for women who should be given access to new opportunities relating to non-traditional occupations, including technical trades."

Mary Kawar, Specialist
 on Women Workers &
 Gender Questions,
 International Labour
 Organisation (Lebanon)



© Najja Mehadji (Morocco): "Rhomb" (Linoleum cutprint. 1993)

“We should not only focus on the political participation of women, as decision-making is also linked with other sectors, Women continue to be in charge of family life. If we want to reinforce their political participation, we have to ask men to share the responsibility in the family.”

“The media and education system also need to be involved.”

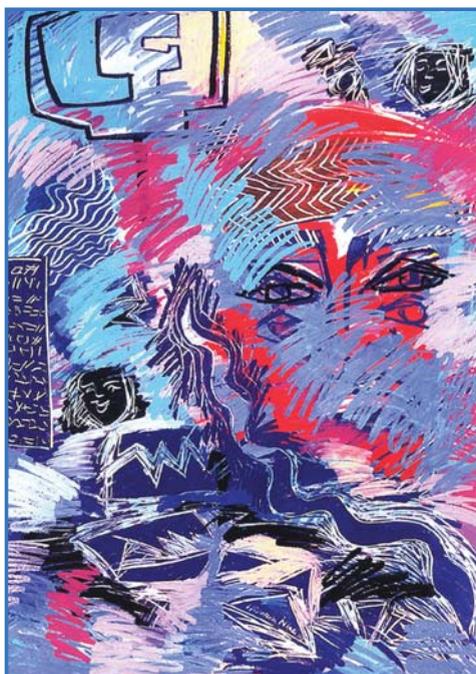
Soukeina Bouraoui,
*Executive Director,
Centre for Arab Women
for Training and
Research (CAWTAR)
(Tunisia)*

Socio-cultural influences on gender roles and relations

- Governments should enact effective policies and legislate forcefully to eradicate violence against women. Where such legislation exists Governments should make sure it is rigorously applied.
- In-depth research should be carried out and accurate data produced on violence against women in order to enable more effective policies and legislation.
- The judicial system’s important role was highlighted, with calls for punishment for the perpetrators of violence against women, the enhancement of women’s access to justice, the introduction of witness protection schemes and services to support victims of violence, and the training of police officers.
- The school system, mass media and culture have an influence on reproducing gender stereotypes, which underlie not only gender-based violence but also occupational segregation, etc. Recommendations were made to revise school curricula and teaching materials, to train teachers and journalists and to develop programmes that reinforce a culture of equality through these sectors. Specific attention should be paid to the sensitisation of young girls and boys.
- Women have a role in peace-building, therefore their participation should be systematically ensured and strengthened at all stages, from the negotiation of peace to its preparation and monitoring.
- Steps should be taken to strengthen the links between civil society peace activists and political decision-makers. Civil society organisations, particularly women’s organisations, working on peace issues should be supported.
- Conflict prevention and peace-building should be more effectively dealt with in the Euromed partnership.

“If we are seriously considering incorporating women into every aspect of life in the Euromed region, the first issue that has to be addressed and mainstreamed is that of peace. If we allow the perpetuation of military conflicts we’re essentially permitting the perpetuation of male domination as well. As long as conflict continues, unfortunately, women will always be second class citizens.”

Naomi Chazan,
*former Vice President
of the Israeli Knesset*



© Houria Niati (Algeria):
“The Last Words before the long Voyage”
(Oil pastel on paper. 1988)

European Commission

Euromed partnership: acting for gender equality

Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities

2006 — 24 pp. — 21 X 29.7 cm

ISBN 92-79-02248-2

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