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

**#WOMEN4**  
**MEDITERRANEAN**

# Women4Mediterranean Conference 2020 Report



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**5** GENDER  
EQUALITY



# Women4Mediterranean Conference 2020 Report



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Social & Civil Affairs

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# Foreword

COVID-19 has immersed us into a new era, bringing to the fore alarming vulnerabilities and inequalities. The consequences and effects of this pandemic will be extremely far-reaching and will surely unfold for years ahead, particularly in the Euro-Mediterranean region, where conditions of fragility are further concentrated.

Across our region, the virus poses the highest risks to the most vulnerable, especially to those who were already living on the economic and social margins. Emerging data confirms that the impacts of crises are never gender neutral, and COVID-19 is no exception. Women and girls are particularly affected by the resulting economic and social fallouts of predicaments.

Women are losing their livelihoods faster because they are more exposed to hard-hit economic sectors. According to a **new analysis commissioned by UN Women and UNDP**, around 435 million women and girls will be living on less than \$1.90 a day by 2021 — including 47 million pushed into poverty as a result of COVID-19.

When we look at the MENA region more particularly, it is estimated that the outbreak will result in a loss of 42 billion USD in regional GDP. This discouraging picture of unevenly distributed repercussions is explained by the fact that some of the sectors hardest hit by the pandemic are women dominated sectors, characterized by low pay and poor working conditions. Even though women account today for 70% of the health and social care workforce, they remain largely segregated into lower-status and lower-paid jobs and are still under-represented in leadership and decision-making processes: 70% of executive directors of global health organizations are men and only 5% are women in low- and middle-income countries.

Additionally, this crisis has made the imbalances in the distribution of unpaid domestic and care work more visible. With children out of school, the need for caregiving and cleaning services has increased, and the care needs of the elderly and ill family members also increased exponentially. These care jobs are predominantly ensured by women, and the daily functioning of families, communities, and the formal economy are dependent on this invisible work.

Infographic COVID-19 & WOMEN IN THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN REGION

**COVID-19 & WOMEN** IN THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN REGION

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25 YEARS 1985 - 2020  
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#WOMEN4MEDITERRANEAN

**LABOUR MARKET**

**20%** The Female labour force participation rate in the region is the lowest worldwide

... and unemployment is as high as **43%** for female youth

... **WOMEN IN THE ARAB WORLD** will lose **+700,000 JOBS** as a result of the pandemic

**FINANCIAL INCLUSION**

Around the world **435 million women & girls** will be living on less than... **\$1.90 A DAY** by 2021 ...including **47 million** pushed into **POVERTY**

Across the region, women have lower rates of financial inclusion than men. **Only 38%** of women have a bank account compared to **57%** of men

**HEALTHCARE LEADERSHIP**

Women account for **70%** of the health and social care workforce

Women are under-represented in leadership and decision-making processes: **30%** of executive directors of global health organizations are women

**Women4Mediterranean Conference 2020**  
Accelerating gender equality in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic  
16-20 November 2020 | Online

**REGISTER HERE TO KNOW MORE**





*There are urgent steps to be taken to help mitigate the impacts of gender-based violence during this pandemic and ensure that quality services are provided as a part of the pandemic response.*

On the economic and business development fronts, women still have a long way to go. Lesser access to land, financial capital and other assets, lack of knowledge for business start-ups, or other discriminatory gender norms make it harder for women to endure a crisis, absorb economic shocks, bounce back and rebuild their small businesses.

Across the region, women have lower rates of financial inclusion. Only 38% of women have a bank account, compared to 57% of men, and much fewer women than men have bank loans. Women-owned businesses need therefore grants and other stimulus funding targeted specifically to them.

While the female formal labour force participation rate is already the lowest worldwide (of 20% at regional level), and that unemployment is as high as 43% for female youth, the UN estimates that women in the Arab World will lose more than 700,000 jobs as a result of the pandemic. Young women face therefore a double-edged challenge.

Finally, with lockdowns and restricted measures, domestic violence has also increased during the pandemic. Data show that since the outbreak of COVID-19, violence against women and girls has surged in many countries. With deepened economic and social stress, together with movement and physical distancing restrictions, calls to helplines in the

first days of confinement increased fivefold in some countries. At the same time, other countries saw a decline in reports, suggesting that some women face barriers to reporting violence or seeking help. While lockdown measures were being implemented, services such as helplines, crisis centres, shelters or legal aid were scaled back, further reducing access to the few available help resources. This is far worse for women who are displaced, refugees, and living in conflict-affected areas, or are particularly vulnerable.

There are urgent steps to be taken to help mitigate the impacts of gender-based violence during this pandemic and ensure that quality services are provided as a part of the pandemic response.

Coinciding with the 25th anniversaries of the [Barcelona Process](#) and the [Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action](#), the **V UfM Women4Mediterranean Conference 2020** offered an opportunity to review 25 years of progress in equality in the Euro-Mediterranean region and look ahead to what remains to be achieved. Considering the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, the Conference also analysed its impact on women and girls and highlighted the key role played by women in pandemic response.

**Ambassador Marisa Farrugia**, Deputy Secretary-General, Social and Civil Affairs (UfM)



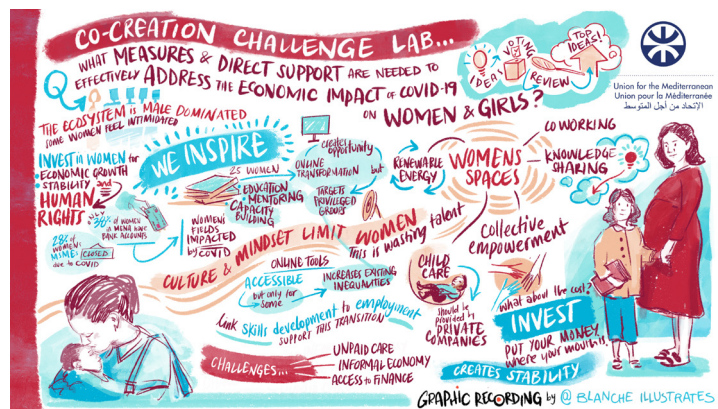
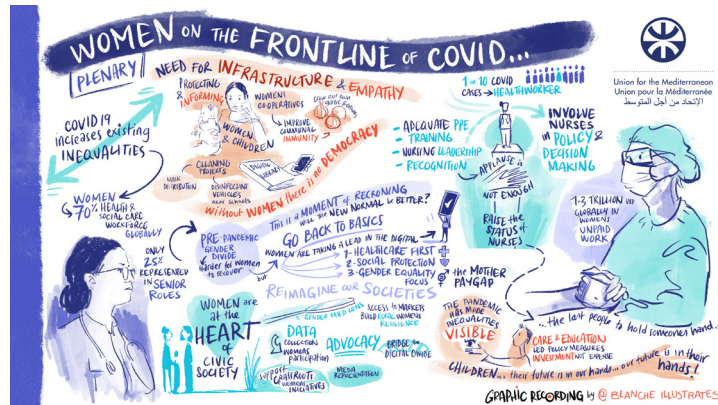
# The UfM 2020 Women4Mediterranean Conference

The **VUfM Women4Mediterranean Conference 2020** featured the participation of diverse stakeholders in gender equality and women's empowerment in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The Conference welcomed more than 100 expert speakers, including high-level representatives from the UfM Co-Presidency, the Ministries of twelve countries from both the Northern and Southern shore of the Mediterranean and the main international organisations working in the region such as the UN Women and WHO, as well as several representatives of the civil society operating in the region.

Several side events led by key experts to learn in-depth about the most pressing issues regarding gender equality, and to co-create ideas, solutions and policy recommendations were hosted in the framework of the 5 days of Conference. The pre-Conference Challenge Labs offered an opportunity to submit project ideas or good practices, and vote for others, to find actionable solutions that can drive real change for women in the areas of the economic impact of COVID-19 for women entrepreneurs in MENA and violence against women and girls during the pandemic.

Registered participants had the opportunity to connect with others and grow their network through live chat and video and use the Match-making space to find experts and partners for business activities or projects. The Conference was structured as a full week of plenary sessions, side-events and Challenge Labs. All conference sessions had simultaneous interpretation in English, French, Arabic, Spanish and International Sign. All recordings of the sessions [are available online](#).

- **Plenary session 1: Women on the front-line of COVID-19 - 17 Nov.** How can we integrate women and female values into pandemic response? What needs to be done to support women on the frontline?
- **Plenary session 2: Preventing gender-based violence in times of crisis - 19 Nov.** How can policy makers and national authorities address VAW in preparedness and response plans for COVID and what are the best ways to make them accessible?



**Blanche Illustrates**

1. Women on the Frontline.
2. Challenge Lab 1 & Women Entrepreneurs Forum.
3. Plenary 2 & Challenge Lab 2.





Blanche Illustrates

4. Side Event: The role of youth in combatting gender stereotypes in the audio-visual sector.

- **Side Event: Gender Equitable Leadership in the Global Health Workforce - 17 Nov.** How can large-scale gender-transformative progress be accelerated to address the gender leadership gap in the health and social care workforce? In partnership with WHO.
- **Side Event Building equal, safe and inclusive post-COVID societies for women and girls: how can Med regions and cities take the lead? - 18 Nov.** The Mediterranean region is rising to the challenges of COVID through collaboration and transformative good practices. We explored how to build on efforts so far and extrapolate to build safer inclusive societies. This side event was organised in collaboration with the Generalitat de Catalunya and the City Council of Barcelona. Session 2 was also organised in collaboration with [Smart City Live 2020](#).
- **Side Event: A project perspective on the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in navigating through the COVID-19 crisis - 18 Nov.** Across the region, extraordinary women entrepreneurs are rising to the challenges of COVID and pivoting to take advantage of new opportunities. In partnership with CEED.
- **Side Event: Mainstreaming Gender in Recovery Responses of Agri-Food Sectors and Rural Areas - 19 Nov.** This session will explore which measures should be promoted to address the gendered impact of COVID-19 in rural Mediterranean areas with reference to agriculture, food security and nutrition. In partnership with CIHEAM.
- **Side Event: The Role of Youth in Combating Gender Stereotypes - 20 Nov.** Gender stereotypes can be negative, limiting and degrading, and they present a serious barrier to the achievement of real gender equality. How can youth take the lead in combatting gender stereotypes? In partnership with Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

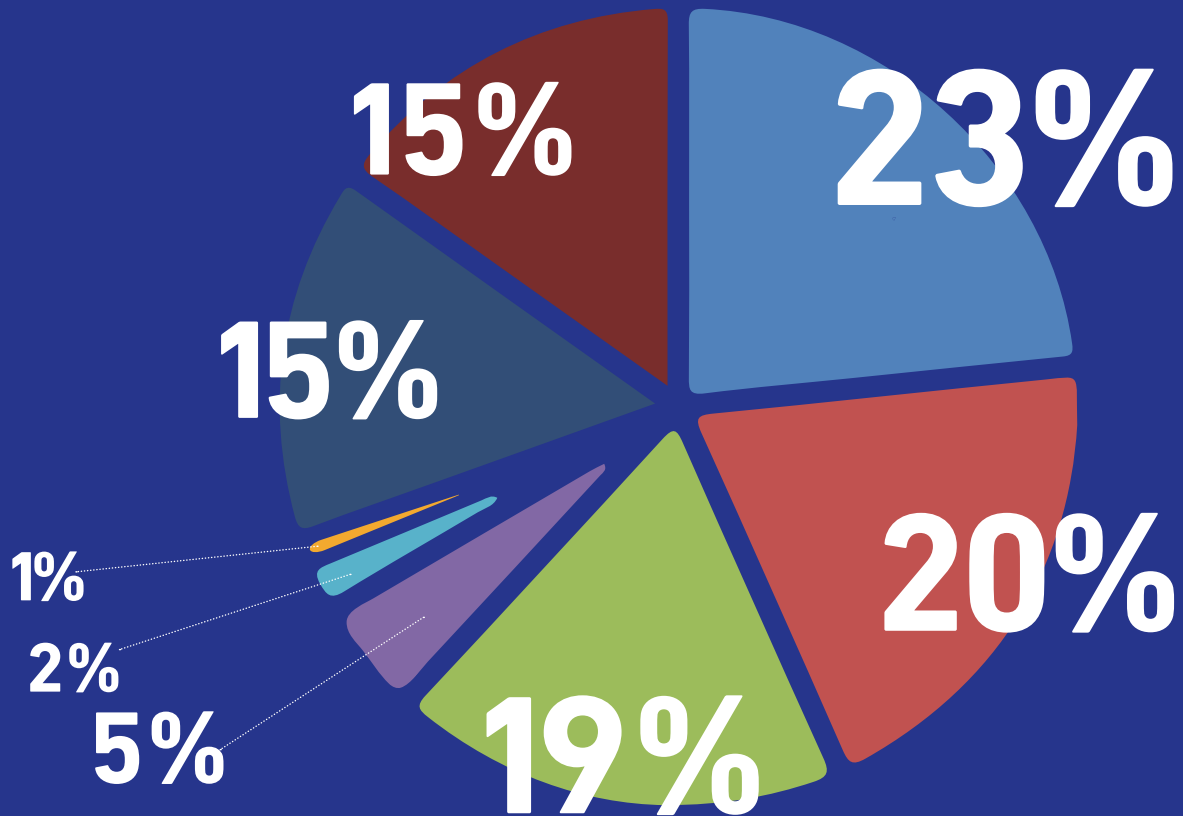
The Conference also marked the launch of the UfM Institutional Ministerial follow-up mechanism and its indicators, adopted by UfM Member States to monitor and measure progress in gender parity over the coming years and provide policy and action-oriented recommendations to close the gender gap.



# The Conference in Numbers

## Participants

- Government
- Media
- Private Sector
- International Organisation
- Think Tank
- Research/Academia
- NGO
- Financial institution



**+1,600**  
Participants  
**70**  
Countries



**56%** North Med  
**40%** South & East Med  
**4%** Other

**+8,000** Views  
on Facebook


 **LIVE**  
**22** interviews

**+100** speakers  
**+20** High-Level representatives



 **120**  
news articles  
reaching a potential  
**105M** audience

**51%** Southern Med  
Media coverage  
**30%** Northern Med



## Regional Dialogue Meeting on Women Empowerment

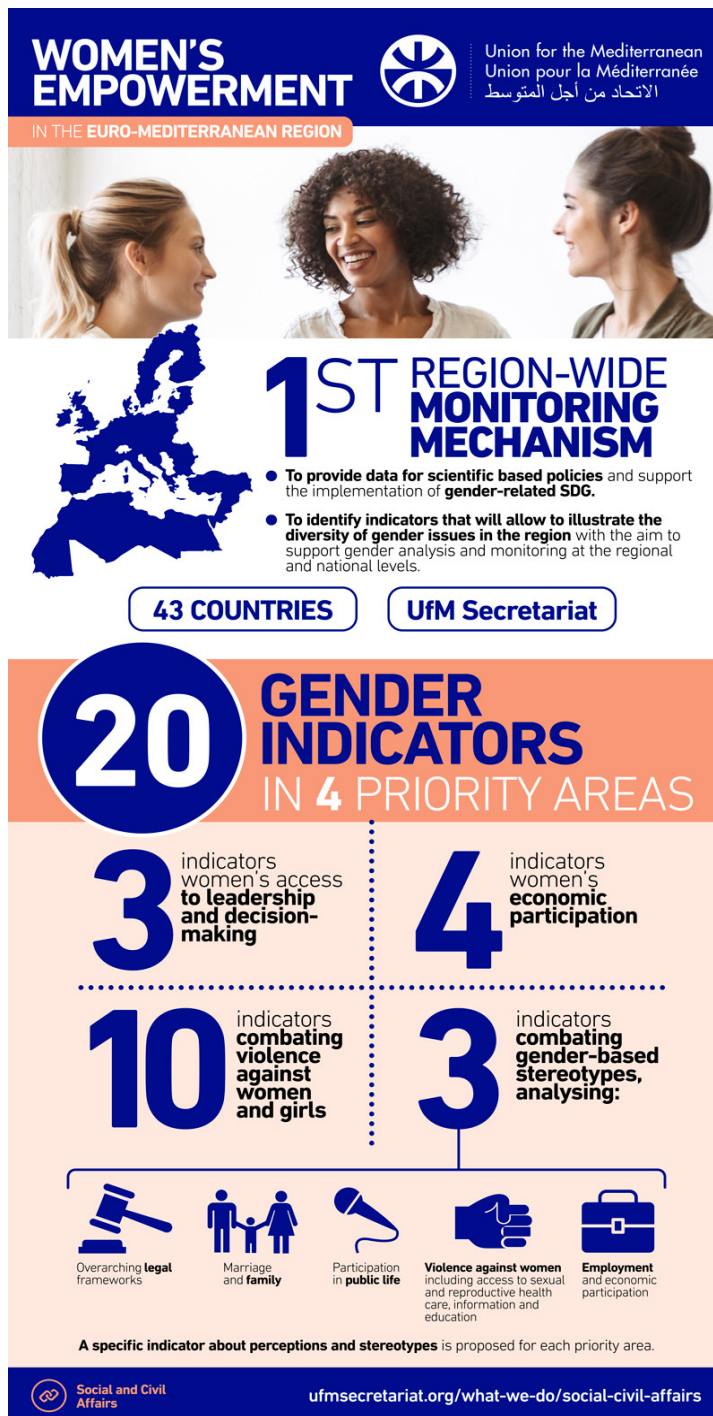
The Conference also marked the **launch of the UfM Institutional Ministerial follow-up mechanism and its indicators**, adopted by UfM Member States to monitor and measure progress in gender parity over the coming years and provide policy and action-oriented recommendations to close the gender gap.

In July 2020, the 42 Member States endorsed a clear set of 20 indicators on gender equality covering the 4 key priority areas. Out the 20, 6 indicators and their sub-indicators have been pre-selected for the first reporting exercise to be launched in 2021 in order to get more accurate data. The monitoring mechanism that will be operational from 2021, with countries, National Statistic Offices and the regional and national stakeholders, will support the preparation of country progress reports that will provide both qualitative and quantitative data.

The UfM Regional Dialogue meeting on Women Empowerment aiming at launching the first reporting exercise on gender equality at Euro-Mediterranean regional level took place in a virtual format on 16 November and registered more than 80 participants who agreed on the importance of harmonization and standardization of available data and of any further data collection processes for the UfM reporting exercise.

A timeline for launching the exercise early 2021 has been indicated and proposed to the Member States with the next steps and way forward. The Secretariat of the UfM will closely work with ad hoc Working groups involving countries and stakeholders on a common and shared methodology to gather and analyse qualitative and quantitative data. The participation in this process by the UfM Member States is on a voluntary basis.

National focal points and stakeholders are aware that this is a complex and a long process, which will require regional cooperation and commitment from the participating countries and their respective national statistics organisations. Nevertheless, the high number of participants in the meeting showed the commitment and interest in strengthening data collection and in



depth analysis on gender equality and women's empowerment in the region.

The lack of gender specific data can hide a lot of inequalities: the progress report will allow monitoring the progress achieved at country level in terms of gender equality and formulating concrete recommendations to build gender-based policies at country and regional level. This will help women by reducing the gender gap in equal pay, increasing equal social protection, allowing equal access to the labour market and protecting women and girls against gender-based violence.

**Infographic** Women's Empowerment in the Euro-Mediterranean Region



# Opening Session



**H.E. Nasser Kamel,**  
Secretary General of the  
Union for the Mediterranean

## Key issues discussed

The Opening Session, moderated by International Expert and Consultant, Paz Arancibia, was officially inaugurated by the Secretary General of the UfM, H.E. Nasser Kamel, who delivered the opening speech.

**H.E. Nasser Kamel, Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean,** stressed that the impacts of crises are never gender-neutral and COVID-19 is no exception. This Conference has become one of the main regional tools to assess progress made in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. For almost five years, it has been a catalyst for policy advocacy, concrete initiatives and projects, new ideas, multi-stakeholder collaborations and partnerships. In the face of current disruptive events, the need for coordinated cooperation is now more important than ever. He closed his speech with a message of hope to rethink a future based on resilience, solidarity, and stronger regional cooperation, within a caring society that leaves no one behind.

*"Rebuilding our societies and economies requires investing in women and creating a gender equal business ecosystem and leadership. This is not just about fighting long-existing inequalities but about building, together, a more resilient and inclusive world."*

**Mrs. Laia Bonet, Deputy Mayor for the 2030 agenda, digital transition and international relations,** representing the Mayor of Barcelona, Ada Colau, stated that the COVID-19 crisis has further highlighted the structural inequalities of the current socio-economic system and revealed what we already knew: the greater vulnerability of women when that system is under stress. She referred to the Barcelona Process, started 25 years ago, to bring peace, stability and prosperity to the Mediterranean region and indicated that the current crisis is an opportunity—within the framework of the UfM and its multilateral cooperation and the shared roadmap of the **2030 Agenda**—to move towards economic progress and dialogue between people. She insisted that the response to the crisis must be conditioned from a perspective of feminism, defence of col-

lective interests and a balanced relationship with natural resources.

*"It is important to see this moment as an opportunity to trigger a broader transformation during recovery."*

**H.E. Helena Dalli, EU Commissioner for Equality** explained that the consequences of the pandemic are hitting women disproportionately, with reports of domestic violence surging during lockdown and many women exposed to the virus when working on the frontline of response. Commissioner Dalli indicated that women have also been shouldering most of the care work at home, which has reinforced longstanding stereotypical gender roles. Commissioner Dalli explained that the EU has mobilized necessary tools and programmes to support health care systems, businesses and workers, including women workers during this difficult period, highlighting the need to address inequalities through recovery programmes. She pointed to the **2025 EU Gender Equality Strategy** as one of the motors for the EU's recovery from the crisis, tackling gender-based violence and labour market inequalities.

*"Exactly 25 years after the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean and the Beijing Platform for Action to achieve gender equality, we are faced with a global pandemic, a pandemic that is shaking our societies and economies to the core while exacerbating existing gender inequalities."*  
[Watch video message here](#)

**H.E. Ayman Al-Mufleh, Minister of Social Development, The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan,** expressed how the pandemic has had a double impact on women. For instance, women on the frontline in the health sector, such as doctors, nurses, midwives and support staff. He indicated that the COVID-19 outbreak is expected to result in the loss of millions of jobs occupied by women, and highlighted the impact on women workers with low salaries or working in unstable and informal sectors due to lack of Social Security protection. He also underlined the different forms of violence against women and girls, which has increased during the pandemic due to lockdowns and curfews. The Minister continued



**Mrs. Laia Bonet,** Deputy  
Mayor for the 2030 agenda,  
digital transition and  
international relations



**H.E. Helena Dalli,** EU  
Commissioner for Equality



**H.E. Ayman Al-Mufleh,**  
Minister of Social  
Development, The  
Hashemite Kingdom of  
Jordan

by illustrating some of the measures taken by the central government during the pandemic, including increased social aid funds, particularly for women beneficiaries. He ended his speech by laying out some recommendations to assist women, namely: first ensuring their participation in leading roles of the response and recovery stages; enhancement of social protection systems in order to ensure all different age groups benefit from such systems; and ensuring women's access to online services, including remote learning.

*"The outbreak of the pandemic had double impacts on women, especially at a health care level, where they are the biggest percentage of workers and therefore more at risk."*

[Watch video message here](#)

**H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President Emeritus of the Republic of Malta**, stated that our societies cannot afford the absence of women in leadership. She urged male leaders to come to terms with the need for women to be at the forefront and an integral part of think tanks for much-needed recovery plans. She acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound negative impact on women, who still bear the weight of caring for the sick and vulnerable. With school closures, their unpaid workload at home increased drastically. Mothers have had to shoulder immeasurable burdens during lockdown, with home-schooling of their children and, in many cases, giving up their financial independence to take care of them. She praised the few female political leaders who have handled the COVID-19 crisis admirably, stating that their leadership qualities, coupled with empathy and compassion, have made our countries and people stand out. She called for reflection to ensure that, in moving forward, policy measures and recovery plans embrace a gender lens, incorporating the unique perspectives and aspirations of all women.

*"COVID-19 is showing us the beauty of the strength of women as frontliners, as being the brave people of the world that are not afraid to face the dangers and the risks of the multitude of situations that are arising from one minute to the other."*

[Watch video message here](#)

**H.E. Noelia Vera Ruiz-Herrera, Secretary of State for Equality and Gender Violence, Kingdom of Spain**, said it is fundamental that feminist movements, civil society organisations and the public and private sectors work together to face the pandemic. She mentioned the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the

Beijing Declaration and the need to continue working towards the Goals on the 2030 horizon to put all the necessary tools in place to create a reality that is sustainable and fair for both men and women. She expressed the Spanish Government's commitment to continue relentlessly for gender equality in cooperation with all Mediterranean countries.

*"We need to keep on working to reach the goals of the 2030 horizon, to create a reality that is fair for men and for women and that is sustainable."*

[Watch video message here](#)

**H.E. Elena Bonetti, Minister for Gender Equality and Family, Italian Republic**, indicated that the pandemic has exposed the fragilities in our social system and undermined our certainties and traditional way of life. Women have already paid the highest price of the pandemic, she said, stressing that when we talk about heroes, we are mostly talking about heroines. She outlined how, during lockdown, the Italian government immediately adopted additional tools to support work-life balance, starting with parental leave to reduce the negative impact on women's work. She expressed the need, on both sides of the Mediterranean, to start again, taking a risk but with an opportunity: to take advantage of this moment to build back better towards equality between women and men. She stated that women's contribution is essential to defeat the virus, build and project themselves into the future and now is the time to seize this opportunity.

*"Our model of society has proven to be fragile in the face of a systemic crisis. Consequently, the new social model we wanted and we still want should put together the pieces of humanity in an integrated and global vision."*

[Watch video message here](#)

**H.E. Emily Yiolitis, Minister of Justice and Public Order, Republic of Cyprus**, stated that, in Cyprus, systematic efforts have been made in recent years to increase budgets and funding allocated to women's and civil society organisations. She highlighted that the pandemic has shown us the true risk of overlooking gender inequality and discriminatory gender norms and demanded changes to our lifestyles, including more flexible ways of work and rethinking distribution of work at home. Responses have highlighted the value of women's leadership and the acute need for solidarity and cooperation.



**H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca**, President Emeritus of the Republic of Malta



**H.E. Noelia Vera Ruiz-Herrera**, Secretary of State for Equality and Gender Violence, Kingdom of Spain,



**H.E. Elena Bonetti**, Minister for Gender Equality and Family, Italian Republic



**H.E. Emily Yiolitis**, Minister of Justice and Public Order, Republic of Cyprus



**H.E. Åsa Lindhagen,**  
Minister of Gender Equality,  
Kingdom of Sweden

*“Despite any difficulties, responses to the pandemic have also created opportunities to transform society in positive ways. The pandemic has shone a spotlight on the real value of care workers and care work. It has demonstrated the real risk of overlooking gender inequality and discriminatory gender norms.”*  
[Watch video message here](#)

**H.E. Åsa Lindhagen, Minister of Gender Equality, Kingdom of Sweden,** introduced herself as a representative of the world’s first feminist government, one that is committed to achieving it through a policy agenda that combats inequality and inhibitive gender roles and structures. She stated that gender equality must be central to all decision making and resource allocation. 2020 was supposed to be a celebration of equality, a year to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, the 20th anniversary of **Security Council Resolution 1325**, and the 5th anniversary of Agenda 2030. Instead, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed inequalities and increased the gap between women and men on a global scale. She called for a strong welfare state that includes gender-transformative reforms to tackle the challenges and build back better during and after COVID-19. She stressed that gender equality is a prerequisite for democracy and reaffirmed Sweden’s pursuit of a feminist foreign policy and its commitment as a partner in the continued work to achieve gender equality.

*“A strong welfare state that includes gender transformative reforms is a must to tackle this challenge when we build back better during and after COVID-19.”*  
[Watch the video message here](#)

**H.E. Kaoutar Krikou, Minister of National Solidarity of Family and the Status Women, People’s Republic of Algeria,** highlighted the solidarity shown by everyone in combating COVID-19, where women play a key role. She also stressed the importance of platforms such as the Women4Mediterranean Conference as an opportunity to exchange experiences. She emphasized that the Algerian Constitution speaks about gender equality, the need to observe equality between individuals, non-discrimination, protection of women’s rights and freedoms and their protection from all forms of violence. She concluded her speech underlining the major role women have played in renewing the country.

*“We affirm the political determination and confidence in the capabilities of the Alge-*

*rian women and their interest in building the institutional State structures alongside her brother, the man, with the same wilful determination.”*

[Watch the video message here](#)

**H.E. Mariana Vieira da Silva, Minister of State for the Presidency, Republic of Portugal,** addressed the Conference honouring the celebration of 25 years of two important dialogues for our society. On the one hand, the Barcelona Process, which laid the foundations for a Mediterranean partnership embedded in the values of mutual understanding and cultural and social exchange. On the other, the Beijing Platform for Action, an important framework for achieving gender equality, protecting women’s rights and enshrining equality between men and women in all policy areas. She explained that, in Portugal, research is ongoing to study the gendered effects of the pandemic, and announced that during the Portuguese presidency of the European Union, they will reflect on the impact of COVID-19 on gender equality, focusing on working conditions, the labour market and work-life balance. She called on everyone to keep working daily to fight discrimination, protect women’s rights and ensure the pandemic does not set efforts back.

*“Recently, we have been seeing backslides in the path towards gender equality, making it even more fundamental to stand for those that contribute to change. We must tackle the challenges that persist and that are now heavily exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.”*

[Watch video message here](#)

**H.E. Jamila El Mossali, Minister of Solidarity, Social Development, Equality and the Family, Kingdom of Morocco,** outlined the many advances and developments Moroccan women have seen along the road to economic, social and cultural empowerment. These, she said, have been incorporated into the Constitution and the different regulatory frameworks and legislations. She underlined the significance of the national governmental plan for equality, which involves all stakeholders concerned with gender equality and the women’s empowerment program aimed at fostering economic opportunities for women. She highlighted work on monitoring and following up on indicators of women’s empowerment and gender equality and reiterated the strong political will as regards to this.

*“Moroccan women today have seen a lot of development in terms of political, eco-*



**H.E. Kaoutar Krikou,**  
Minister of National  
Solidarity of Family and the  
Status Women, People’s  
Republic of Algeria



**H.E. Mariana Vieira da  
Silva,** Minister of State for  
the Presidency, Republic of  
Portugal



**H.E. Jamila El Mossali,**  
Minister of Solidarity, Social  
Development, Equality and  
the Family, Kingdom of  
Morocco



*conomic, social, cultural and environmental empowerment.”*

[Watch video message here](#)

**H.E Rosianne Cutajar, Parliamentary Secretary for Equality and Reforms, Republic of Malta**, stressed that gender equality is a fundamental human right and an essential condition for social justice, a thriving economy and representative democracy. She detailed initiatives from the Maltese Government to ensure and address protection and promotion of gender equality, especially concerning vulnerable groups of women such as the elderly, migrants, LGBTQ women, those living in poverty and more. She called for gender mainstreaming in all areas of the recovery strategy and declared a strong commitment to continue working to further safeguard equality in different sectors to strengthen the considerable progress made to date and address new and ongoing challenges to achieving equality.

*“Recognising the extent to which disease outbreaks affect women and men differently is a fundamental step towards understanding the primary and secondary effects of a public health emergency on different individuals, genders and communities, and thus creating effective equitable policies and interventions.”*

[Watch video message here](#)

**H.E Gunhild Berge Stang, State Secretary, Ministry of Culture, Kingdom of Norway**, expressed the importance of putting in place gender-sensitive measures that hinder the spread of the virus and reach all those in need. She explained that the Norwegian Government has implemented several measures to tackle the negative consequences, such as information campaigns or support services. She noted that women and men work in different segments of the labour market and that when it comes to

COVID-19, there are more women than men in sectors with high exposure to infection. She emphasised that women spend more time on household chores and childcare than their partners, irrespective of their workload outside the home, which has placed them under greater pressure. She pointed out that crises tend to reinforce traditional gender roles, but that this crisis may also be a chance to accelerate gender equality.

*“Crises tend to reinforce traditional gender roles. A survey in Norway showed that when schools and kindergartens closed, a greater share of the increased care burden fell on women.”*

[Watch video message here](#)

**H.E. Maya Morsy, President, National Council for Women, Arab Republic of Egypt**, indicated that hers was the first country in the world to launch a national strategy for women’s empowerment in response to the UN SDGs. This is composed of four intersectional pillars: political, economic, social empowerment and protection. She explained that the strategy is considered as the official plan for all government’s work on women’s empowerment until 2030. She highlighted the importance of women being at the heart of the decision making and explained that Egypt has indeed broken the glass ceiling for women: the national security advisor to the President is, for the first time, a woman, as is the Vice-President of the Central Bank of Egypt, the president of the economic court, senior and criminal court judges and the Assistant Minister of Justice for women and children’s affairs.

*“Policies, decisions and actions will never be sustainable if women were not at the heart of the decision.”*

[Watch video message here](#)



**H.E Gunhild Berge Stang**,  
State Secretary, Ministry of  
Culture, Kingdom of Norway



**H.E Rosianne Cutajar**,  
Parliamentary Secretary  
for Equality and Reforms,  
Republic of Malta



**H.E. Maya Morsy**, President,  
National Council for Women,  
Arab Republic of Egypt



# PLENARY SESSION 1: Women on the frontline of Covid-19



**Ms. Fatma Sahin**, Mayor of Gaziantep, The Republic of Turkey

This session explored the positive contribution of women to response and management of the COVID-19 pandemic, women's leadership and the challenges of achieving equitable representation in decision-making positions. In two round tables, experts and women leaders examined the main challenges and opportunities, strategies and achievements of women in leading positive change.

## Key issues discussed

**Ms. Fatma Sahin, Mayor of Gaziantep, The Republic of Turkey**, started her intervention by stressing that local responses are particularly important in the fight against the pandemic. She also detailed programmes implemented to protect and care for vulnerable women and children by providing digital services and enabling public access to the digital library.



**Ms. Haifa Al Kaylani**, Founder & Chairman, Arab International Women's Forum

She stressed the importance of securing the food supply chain in a crisis like COVID-19; therefore, efforts centred on helping women collaborate more with each other to establish different digital marketing mechanisms to sell their products. The municipality also supported women's associations to produce herbs, spices and sauces that are beneficial for the immune system. These products are mostly produced by women and sold worldwide through digital marketing. Ms. Sahin finalized her intervention by highlighting that without the participation of women there can be no development and democracy. She emphasized that development begins at the local level.

*"We are facing a problem that should be solved from a woman's perspective, with emotion and empathy" - Ms. Fatma Sahin, Mayor of Gaziantep.*



**Dr. Mary Kwar**, Former Minister for Planning and International Cooperation, The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

**Ms. Haifa Al Kaylani, Founder & Chairman, Arab International Women's Forum** began her speech quoting UN Women: "Many of the key decision-makers managing the COVID-19 pandemic are men because women in the MENA and other regions don't enjoy the same degree of participation in major decision-making bodies. Gender concerns are not yet shaping the decisions that male leaders are making." She stressed that strategies and poli-

cies are needed to ensure women participate at all levels of society in managing the COVID-19 pandemic. She recalled the importance of empowering civil society, raising women's voices and including women in public life and parliaments. She reminded the audience that, although there has been some progress, women's participation in the business sector in the region remains one of the lowest in the world. She also stressed that education is extremely important, especially technological education; women must be supported to develop the necessary skills to access technology. There is also a need for gender-based data on how the pandemic affects women and men. At local level, it is also urgent to support grassroots women and empower them to actively participate in solving local problems. To this end, their voices must be placed at the centre of local media, and advocacy strategies must be designed to eliminate negative perceptions of women's leadership. Addressing gender-based violence by creating safe local spaces for women and encouraging them to report abuse is also crucial. She stressed that it is vital to support rural women and facilitate their access to markets and agricultural resources. She concluded by recommending that the United Nations adopt a resolution like UN Resolution 1325, which would address the issue of women in the fight against COVID-19 and in post-COVID-19 recovery.

*"Adopting a gender-lens to decision making and participation should be systematic" - Ms. Haifa Al Kaylani, Founder & Chairman, Arab International Women's Forum*

**Dr. Mary Kwar, Former Minister for Planning and International Cooperation, The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan**, stressed that before the pandemic, health and social protection issues were not at the forefront of policymaking. She reminded the audience that, as a global community, we are debating issues fundamental to every society: lives and livelihoods. Before the pandemic, we made some progress in eliminating gender inequalities in the region, although there are still many limitations, which the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated. She stressed that it is necessary to go back to basics and focus on the social sectors while rebuilding the economy.

She highlighted three points: 1) Health comes first; many countries do not have universal health systems and some have been deteriorating in quality, forcing the poor to seek private health care. She highlighted that investing in citizens' health is much cheaper than the huge investments that are now needed to rebuild the economy. 2) We must not lose sight of the long-term perspective and provide income support and offer rescue packages that allow people to survive and spend. Social protection mechanisms are needed to expand coverage and provide incentives for informal workers to register or to change legal frameworks to protect vulnerable groups, especially women. 3) The impact of the pandemic on women should motivate all stakeholders in the region to make efforts and work together in a coordinated and synchronized manner. She concluded that now is the time to put lives and livelihoods at the centre of COVID-19 response, address the needs of women and ensure their presence at the table when policies are developed. She highlighted that the gender equality agenda will remain a priority during these times.

*"The progress towards gender equality should not be compromised today. We in the region already have a long to-do-list in achieving gender equality. The pandemic's impact on women should motivate everybody to put all our efforts in pushing hard towards this objective." - Dr. Mary Kawar, Former Minister for Planning and International Cooperation, The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.*

**Karen Kautzman Bjørø, Board Member, International Council of Nurses**, shared the statistic that nurses represent 95% of health professionals, 80% of whom are women. Nurses are on the front line of COVID-19, and their lack of preparedness for the pandemic had a major impact on them. She acknowledged that there is a long way to go and that we must raise our voices together, demanding that all of society unite to defeat the virus. Nurses need training, leadership skills and public support that recognizes their value to society. The WHO has recognized that universal health cannot be achieved without the empowerment of nurses. She emphasized that health promoters are important in raising the status of nurses and awareness of their contribution. She concluded by recalling the need to have champions who inspire.

*"At the International Council of Nurses we are saying that a clap isn't enough, we need action. ICN calls to demonstrate public support and recognize the value*

*of nurses to society" - Karen Kautzman Bjørø, ICN Board Member*

**Anne-Claire de Liedekerke, President, Make Mothers Matter**, stressed that care and education are not a problem but rather a necessary resource for the present and the future. Care is indispensable to sustain the world economy, even if it is not counted in terms of GDP. She added that one of the few pieces of good news from the pandemic is that it has made the importance of care and education more visible. She recalled that care is a collective responsibility that concerns us all and cannot be ignored. Ms Liedekerke quoted the UN Secretary-General, saying, "The pandemic has shown us who is doing the work that really matters - the nurses, the teachers, the health workers." However, she stressed that mothers and fathers are also performing this work. She also stressed that the pandemic gives all governments the opportunity to realize what really matters and implement measures that require courage and imagination. She urged governments to prioritize care and education as an investment rather than expenditure and suggested three points: 1) Early childhood development: measures need to be taken to mitigate the short- and long-term effects, investing in early childhood development as one of the most powerful investments in a country's development. 2) GDP: the current economic system does not recognize the important role of care and education. Governments need to go beyond GDP, using indicators that are more related to human wellbeing. She explained that MMM has joined the Alliance for Welfare Economics, which demands humanity determine the economy and not the other way around and considers that care and education should not only be seen as indicators but also as cornerstones of the system. 3) Education: she stressed that education is a victim of the pandemic but also a solution for long-term recovery. Finally, she recalled that reducing inequalities is essential to ensure that children can go to school and achieve their full potential and concluded by noting that educated mothers have healthier and more educated children.

*"Care is not a problem, as it is often referred to -a problem, a burden- but a most necessary resource for our present and our future. Care is a necessity, it is a treasure and a resource" - Anne-Claire de Liedekerke, President of Make Mothers Matter*



**Karen Kautzman Bjørø**, Board Member, International Council of Nurses



**Anne-Claire de Liedekerke**, President, Make Mothers Matter



## SIDE EVENT: Building back better through gender-equitable leadership in the global health workforce



**Dr. Myrna Abi Abdallah-Doumit**, President, Order of Nurses, Lebanon

These panel discussion sessions, organised in collaboration with the WHO, examined which policy tools can be used to advance women's leadership, especially in the health and social care workforce. Having women leaders can help achieve universal health coverage and strengthen health provision, and gender and leadership gaps in health are a barrier to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and universal health coverage. Therefore, truly gender-equitable leadership in the health and social care workforces will have a multiplier effect, not only achieving the health SDG but also many others.

### Key issues discussed



**Ann Keeling**, Senior Fellow, Women in Global Health

**Dr. Myrna Abi Abdallah-Doumit, President, Order of Nurses, Lebanon**, opened her intervention by outlining the difficulties experienced by many nurses in Lebanon—where almost 80% of the nursing workforce is female—over the past year, particularly as front-line workers and the backbone of the healthcare system during the COVID-19 pandemic. She shared the guidelines she tries to follow as President of the Order of Nurses when working to improve the status of her peers in her country. She also highlighted the importance of building reliable partnerships to increase the outreach of actions and keep moving forward. Nurses have a unique understanding of the healthcare system so it is essential for them to go outside of the hospitals, understand the highly complex nature of policy influence and get involved in policymaking. She explained how she has also initiatives to train nurses about policy and communicating with policymakers as well as speaking to the media.

*“As nurses, we have a unique understanding of the healthcare system. So we need not to be satisfied with working within the walls of the hospitals: we need to go outside the hospitals, we need to understand the highly complex nature of policy influence, and be involved in policy*

*making, if we want our voice to be heard”*  
- *Dr. Myrna Abi Abdallah Doumit, President of the order of Nurses.*

**Ann Keeling, Senior Fellow, Women in Global Health**, presented the work being done by the WHO Gender Equity Hub of the Global Health Workforce Network, a group co-chaired by the WHO and Women in Global Health and composed of a group of experts focusing on gender equity in the health and social care workforce. In 2019, they produced a landmark report entitled **Delivered by Women, Led by Men: A Gender and Equity Analysis of the Global Health and Social Workforce**, the first major literature review of gender and equity in the health workforce. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the report found gender leadership gaps are driven by stereotypes, discrimination, power imbalance and privilege. **Ms. Keeling** explained that global health is weakened by the exclusion of women's talent, ideas and knowledge and that women leaders, particularly political ones, can strengthen the health agenda and, therefore, healthcare for everyone. She warned that gender leadership gaps in health are a serious barrier to achieving the SDGs and universal health coverage.

She went on to explain that women are stuck in the global health talent pipeline. There is no shortage of women, or women experts, in the field but men still have a fast track to leadership even in this female-dominated profession. Regrettably, this pattern has been repeated during the pandemic: male-led response delivered by women on the frontline. According to Women in Global Health, 85% of 114 national COVID-19 task forces are mostly male. In the political sphere, however, women-led countries—just 12 of 195—have been highly praised, though it remains to be seen how things play out in a pandemic that is far from over.

She also highlighted examples of decisions made during the pandemic that would likely not have been taken by majority-female bodies, including

classification of maternal and reproductive health services as non-essential; PPE modelled on the male body and, therefore, unsuitable for women, exposing them to greater infection risk; confining domestic violence victims with their abusers on the assumption that home is a safe space for all women, despite evidence to the contrary. Rectifying this situation requires consideration of the ecosystem as a whole: public policy, legal frameworks, community factors, gender norms and stereotypes, interpersonal factors like occupational sexual harassment, and personal factors like imposter syndrome that affect women. Working towards gender equity requires a framework for change built on a foundation of equality, which includes laws, policies that are absent in so many countries, addressing social norms and stereotypes, many of which are external to the health workforce.

**Ms. Keeling** concluded with some key messages: Firstly, the issue cannot be resolved by fixing women; it's the system that needs fixing. Secondly, inequality is systemic and the pipeline can't be unblocked without deliberate action at all levels. Thirdly, leadership matters; equality and diversity are something no leader can delegate and all must be gender transformative leaders and take it on at a personal level. She also emphasized the need for intersectional and pay gap data; going beyond gender parity; requiring all leaders to be gender transformative; and that addressing all forms of inequality in the workplace is everyone's business.

*"Women are stuck in the global health talent pipeline. There is no shortage of women in this field. There is no shortage of expert women. Women are the experts in this field but men still have a fast track to leadership." - Ann Keeling, Senior Fellow in Women in Global Health*

**H.E. Päivi Sillanaukee, Ambassador for Health and Wellbeing, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Republic of Finland,** highlighted the increased sustainability of countries with women in decision making positions, pointing to free, quality education and health services as necessary for people to thrive and achieve their potential. She also addressed the needs of women when combining family life and career, the need for governmental support for high-quality, affordable day care and parental leave for both parents. She outlined the Finnish Equality Act, which applies to state administrative committees, advisory boards, working groups, other bodies and municipal boards and committees where at least 40% male and female representation is required. During the crisis, this ensured more equal representa-

tion on un-elected decision-making bodies. She indicated that Finland currently has 58% female representation in government and women leaders in all five parties of the current coalition government, most of whom are quite young, demonstrating their interest in high-up positions. She further noted that several are mothers to small children and share responsibilities with their spouses, proving it is possible to reconcile career and family.

*"We need legislation to ensure that there are enough women participating in decision-making" - H.E. Päivi Sillanaukee, Ambassador for Health and Wellbeing, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Republic of Finland.*

**Maryam Bigdeli, WHO representative for Morocco,** noted the still-large leadership gender gap, detailing the situation in Morocco, which persists despite policies embedded in the constitution regarding equal rights and parity, as well as equality plans enacted by the Ministry of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social Development. Ms. Bigdeli pointed to the annual gender report complementing the budget law in Morocco, which has resulted in the feminization of the public health workforce, with more women entering medical education in recent years. Currently, almost 60% of the health workforce is female but there remains a significant imbalance in leadership. She mentioned a recent study on midwives' experiences during COVID-19, highlighting the burden assumed and emotional stress endured, challenges in collaborating with colleagues, exhaustion and the huge challenge presented by working conditions. She further identified their struggle to balance work with family responsibilities, leaving them overloaded and, therefore, underrepresented and unable to participate in HR decisions. She called for multi-sectoral approaches to promote women in leadership, not just in the health sector but also in rural areas and poor communities in terms of personal safety, voice and ability to express themselves.

*"A multi-sectoral approach is needed to promote women in leadership" - Maryam Bigdeli, WHO representative for Morocco*

**Francesca Colombo, Head of the Health Division, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD),** stressed the importance of addressing gender equality from the human, economic, equity and fairness perspectives. In times of crisis, she said, societies must utilise all talent available to address challenges, and having gender-equal leadership and a diverse workforce yields important eco-



**H.E. Päivi Sillanaukee,**  
Ambassador for Health and Wellbeing, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Republic of Finland



**Maryam Bigdeli,** WHO representative for Morocco



**Francesca Colombo,**  
Head of the Health  
Division, Organisation for  
Economic Co-operation and  
Development (OECD)

conomic benefits and better solutions. However, greater equality in leadership and representation starts with equal opportunities. Specifically, in health, the culture begins in medical school and training with certain culturally ingrained gender roles. The digital divide is also important given the growth in digital technologies and their implications for the future of jobs in the sector. She called for voluntary targets in boardrooms and more gender-balanced committees and steering groups and noted the pay gap even within specialist areas and pointed to economic analyses demonstrating the positive impact on economic growth and success of a diverse and more gender-equal health workforce.

*“There are very important economic benefits of having gender equality in leadership roles” - Francesca Colombo, Head of the Health Division, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)*



**Dr. Andreas Ullrich, MD, MPH,** Charité University Hospital Department of Gynaecology, Berlin

**Dr. Andreas Ullrich, MD, MPH, Charité University Hospital Department of Gynaecology, Berlin,** highlighted the main areas where inequitable crisis response leadership impacts on women’s health: downgrading of essential women’s services like contraception; attended birth; sexual and reproductive health services; lack of protective equipment for nurses on the frontline of primary health care; and the need to address the important issue of violence against women. He highlighted the role of organisations like Union for the Mediterranean as unique political platforms uniting 42 regional countries with the political will to work together on women’s empowerment. He also outlined Charité University’s contribution to a partnership network of Mediterranean hospitals, particularly in Morocco and other northern African countries, to develop training programs for nurses and specialized doctors in women’s health and cancer. He stressed the importance of academic platforms to overcome knowledge gaps, exchange experiences and training in health leadership, as well as the importance of organisations like UfM, ILO, WHO and OECD to partner and work together in a regional context.

*“Lack of women’s leadership has a huge impact on women’s health” - Dr. Andreas Ullrich, MD, MPH, Charité University Hospital Department of Gynaecology, Berlin*

**Christiane Wiskow, Senior Health Sector Specialist, Sectoral Policies Department, International Labour Organization (ILO),** commented on an issue that falls within ILO’s



**Christiane Wiskow,**  
Senior Health Sector  
Specialist, Sectoral Policies  
Department, International  
Labour Organization (ILO)

mission: fixing and ensuring decent workplaces so people enjoy fair pay and equal opportunities, recommending thinking about fixing workplace systems as part of the discussion around leadership. She referred to several ILO conventions that become legal instruments when ratified by countries, two of which concern equal remuneration and occupational discrimination. She also mentioned the UN High-Level Commission on health employment and economic growth, whose **2016 report** stressed the need to maximize women’s talents and empower them to participate in the labour force, which has a global gap of 26%. She also commented on the importance of balancing work and family life with 20% of women providing unpaid care compared with 1% of men. She stated that legislation plays a large part but that huge mind-set change is required, which is more challenging. Finally, she highlighted the need to give women a voice through representation in trade unions and employers’ organisations.

*“The work life starts at home: we see that 20% of women do unpaid care work, compared to 1% of men. So we need to look beyond the workplace, and have a whole life approach” - Christiane Wiskow, Senior Health Sector Specialist, Sectoral Policies Department, International Labour Organization (ILO)*

**During the Q&A,** when asked if women’s roles can be redefined without creating cultural and societal conflict, **Dr. Myrna Abi Abdallah-Doumit** stressed the need to understand the culture and create alliances with people within it, noting that change always initially meets with resistance. **Maryam Bigdeli** added that the last mile in gender inequality is the hardest since inequalities are less visible and, thus, harder to bring to the table, analyse and name, and find policies to address them. Therefore, we must continue to highlight inequalities at the level of leadership.

Asked about quotas, **H.E. Päivi Sillanaukee** noted increasing calls for binding quotas at EU level, saying women need the chance to gain experience in leadership and stressing the importance of equal gender representation in the public sector, government, advisory boards and committees to have different perspectives.

In closing, **Ann Keeling** affirmed we cannot afford for equality to be a long-term agenda; it is urgent and must be tackled now. She pointed to the work of the Gender Equity Hub as a source of policy guidance and good practices. **Dr. Myrna Abi Abdallah-Doumit** highlighted



the importance of investing in women's leadership for positive economic returns on family, national or global economies. **Dr. Andreas Ullrich** recommended the UfM and its empowerment agenda as a good platform for all stakeholders to come together and move things forward. **Christiane Wiskow** reminded participants that change starts with us; individuals must stand up and speak up. **Maryam Bigdeli** echoed the need to speak about gender ine-

quality in the workplace, one's environment and private life. **H.E. Päivi Sillanaukee** underlined gender mainstreaming as an essential government approach. **Moderator Roopa Dhatt** closed the session by reminding everyone of the crucial need to take full advantage of the talent pool to face global challenges and called for the applause for health workers to translate into real action and investment in creating gender-transformative policy at all levels.



Moderator **Roopa Dhatt**



# SIDE EVENT: Building equal, safe, and inclusive post-COVID-19 societies for women and girls: How can Mediterranean regions and cities take the lead?



**Giovanna Pugliese,**  
Regional Councillor  
for Tourism and Equal  
Opportunities, Regione  
Lazio

This side event was organized in collaboration with the Generalitat de Catalunya and the City Council of Barcelona. It consisted of three panel discussions. Panel 2 was also live streamed through the [Smart City Live](#) Platform.

## Session 1: Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women. Local and Regional responses

This session aimed to provide a forum to discuss regional and local initiatives that have paved the way for inclusive and intersectional policies in the Mediterranean during the pandemic.

The discussion topics were the impact of the current pandemic on women and girls, and what the policies regions and cities can implement for better and inclusive pandemic recovery.

### Key issues discussed

**Giovanna Pugliese, Regional Councillor for Tourism and Equal Opportunities, Regione Lazio**, focused her intervention on action taken by the regional government in Lazio Region. Among pandemic relief measures adopted, access to credit was facilitated for companies and small businesses, over 50 million euros was assigned to protect housing rentals and provide vouchers for food and medicines. Certain regional taxes were also suspended and public childcare and other types of care services were established. In terms of gender-sensitive policies, the regional government invested in gender-based violence awareness campaigns, reinforced shelters and safe housing, and established a legal protocol of action. An awareness-raising campaign in schools was also initiated to prevent gender-based violence,

homophobic, racist or other discriminatory behaviour to promote a culture of respect in a male-dominated society.

*"We need to promote radical change and work for a world where gender equality is not only something we talk about but a reality." - Giovanna Pugliese*

**Núria Ramon, Executive Director, Institut Català de les Dones, Generalitat de Catalunya**, shared data illustrating the unequal impact of COVID-19 on women and girls. Women have been at the forefront of the fight against the pandemic, representing 70% of the healthcare and 80% of social services workers and 45% of women in Catalonia have seen a decrease in their income. In terms of gender-based violence, the number of helpline calls increased by 98% in some periods of confinement while the number of official reports decreased by 31%. Institut Català de les Dones reinforced helplines and complemented the phone service with a WhatsApp number. Legal and reporting services have also been improved and a new section was created on their website to provide updated information about services throughout the region. They also implemented awareness-raising community campaigns and distributed information about available services. Lastly, she emphasized the importance of regional and inter-organizational cooperation in times of crisis to establish collaborative strategies to ensure pandemic recovery measures are gender-sensitive and intersectional so as not to undo progress made in gender equality.

*"We need to establish collaboration regional strategies that keep us from going backwards with regards to women's human rights and raise awareness*



**Núria Ramon,** Executive  
Director, Institut Català de  
les Dones, Generalitat de  
Catalunya

*of how gender inequalities are shared throughout the countries in the Mediterranean.” - Nuria Ramon*

**Alicia Ramos, Adviser to the Deputy Mayor for Gender Issues, Ajuntament de Barcelona,**

also underlined the importance of inter institutional collaboration. She argued that cities have proven strategic not only in the fight against the virus but also for the articulation of policies and recovery measures to combat inequalities further exacerbated by the pandemic. Additionally, she said that this crisis has exposed our vulnerabilities and pointed to the need for citizen participation and collective care. It has also shed light on the feminization of poverty and precarity. Hence, we need to strive for structural change to combat these inequalities and vulnerabilities. She also illustrated some transversal policy measures implemented by the Barcelona city hall to combat the effects of the pandemic, which focused on providing economic and financial support, professional empowerment and legal and emotional support services, especially for women working in care and informal sectors, as well as awareness campaigns on the importance of care work, and attention and support services for victims of gender-based violence.

*“The pandemic has shown that cities are strategic both in the contention and in the articulation of policy measures that can respond to this crisis and tackle different forms of oppression and social inequality” - Alicia Ramos*

**Nadia Nair, Member, Union de l'Action Feministe, Tetouan,**

brought a civil society perspective to the panel discussions, stating that the pandemic has impacted negatively on women and girls worldwide, but particularly in the Mediterranean region. She pointed out the still present gender-based inequalities in a variety of areas such as economic empowerment, gender-based violence, maternal mortality and access to digital technology and the pandemic has deepened these inequalities. She mentioned the fact that, even though civil society must support public measures, they cannot bear the responsibility for reacting to such a crucial issue. She focused on gender-based violence, the informal sector, unequal distribution of domestic and care work and an increase of female unemployment. She also drew attention to the issue of human trafficking, which has increased in the region during the pandemic and requires a comprehensive, transnational response. It is, therefore, urgent to fight for gender parity and equality, especially now.

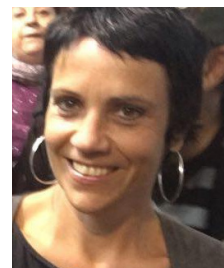
*“The pandemic has exacerbated already existing inequalities, and despite all the efforts and specific measures implemented to combat the covid-19 pandemic, women have been somewhat forgotten”  
Nadia Nair*

**During the Q&A,** speakers discussed the need for collaboration and cooperation between different women's networks and organizations. They also discussed whether pandemic recovery response could provide an opportunity to foster gender equality and how local initiatives can lead the way and have broader influence.

Speakers agreed it is paramount to work through networks, not only between institutions but also platforms and associations working together on gender equality. Additionally, this network exchange must be sustainable and focus on building a long-term, global agenda, creating spaces and alliances to exchange good practices and face challenges together.

They were also united on the key role of local initiatives, explaining that, while resources and competencies may not always be available at local level to implement ambitious, large-scale programs, it is possible to create pilot projects whose influence extends beyond the local and which can be replicated at a broader level. This crisis is a reminder of the need to come together, both regionally and locally, involving social movements, civil society and women's organizations. Speakers also underlined the importance of north-south cooperation and the vital role of civil society in response and recovery measures stating the need to recognize civil society's social value and support it in its work. Overall, the speakers agreed the crisis provides an opportunity to instil a gender perspective in all local initiatives to advance women's rights. However, this opportunity must be properly understood and taken advantage of to prevent any reversal in either human or women's rights.

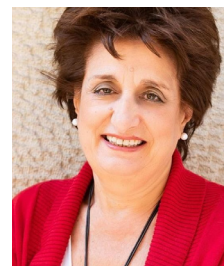
*“Women state leaders have proven to be more effective in confronting the pandemic. They were more decisive, took measures that were more friendly to human lives and care demands. Parity democracy needs to be extended to all democratic states. For the benefit of society, for the benefit of the people.”  
Maria Stratigaki, Moderator, Associate Professor at the Department of Social Policy at Panteion University. Vice Mayor of Athens for Social Solidarity, Welfare and Equality (2014-2019).*



**Alicia Ramos,** Adviser to the Deputy Mayor for Gender Issues, Ajuntament de Barcelona



**Nadia Nair,** Member, Union de l'Action Feministe, Tetouan



**Maria Stratigaki,** Moderator, Associate Professor at the Department of Social Policy at Panteion University. Vice Mayor of Athens for Social Solidarity, Welfare and Equality (2014-2019).





Moderator **Nawal Haddadeen**, Secretary-General of the Arab Women's Association

## Session 2: Women Leadership in Mediterranean Cities and Regions: addressing the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond

### Key issues discussed

**Moderator Nawal Haddadeen, Secretary-General of the Arab Women's Association**, introduced the session by recalling the importance of rebuilding communities post-COVID-19 to ensure a more gender-equal world. She presented an overview of the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls, especially in the Euro-Mediterranean region, and called on governments to immediately end discrimination against women and ensure different types of social services and social protection measures, given the challenges women face. Secondly, since around 50% of women work in the informal sector, she stressed the need for regulatory and legal mechanisms to increase their participation in the formal labour market. Finally, she recognized the importance of urgent measures to protect refugees and migrant workers affected by the crisis due to lack of medical services and limited social protections.

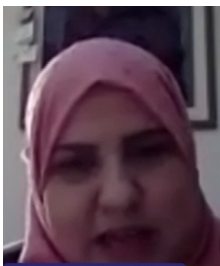


**Laia Bonet**, Deputy Mayor for the 2030 Agenda, Digital Transition and International Relations, Barcelona City Council, Spain

**Laia Bonet, Deputy Mayor for the 2030 Agenda, Digital Transition and International Relations, Barcelona City Council, Spain**, began by highlighting structural inequalities exposed by the pandemic. She explained that the crisis has revealed the importance of basic services like health, care and food production, which are mostly occupied by women. COVID-19 has shown that women are absolutely necessary for the wellbeing of our societies despite frequently being overlooked and undervalued in economic terms. She stressed that now is the time to incorporate equality into urban planning, municipal services and legislation. She went on to explain that the pandemic has exacerbated gender-based violence and there is, therefore, a greater urgency to protect women globally and ensure access to services and care. She recalled the need to place renewed value on unpaid care work, mostly done by women, which also contributes to the economy. She emphasized the need to plan cities so they work for all groups, not just white middle-class men, and implement a model of care that puts people and public services at the centre.



**Samia Ghali**, Deputy Mayor for territorial equality, Euro-Mediterranean relations, attractiveness and major events, Marseille, France



**Wided Daikhi**, President of Commission Femme au Conseil Municipal, Tunisia

Speaking about the situation in the Mediterranean—probably one of the areas with the greatest inequalities and the impacts of climate change—she said the region suffers from destabilizing geopolitical considerations that require

feminization of politics to effectively address the challenges. In this regard, work is already underway to increase and include gender issues in the political arena, although women's representation in politics remains very low. She stressed the importance of the recent ministerial declaration on gender indicators that provides mechanisms to measure and monitor women's situation and progress towards gender equality in the region, as well as recommendations for action areas and women's access to politics. She highlighted that the Union for the Mediterranean consistently offers a good framework to promote these initiatives and concluded by reminding participants to stay as active as possible.

*"Women make up half the population of the planet, so they must be part of the decision-making process."- Laia Bonet*

**Samia Ghali, Deputy Mayor for territorial equality, Euro-Mediterranean relations, attractiveness and major events, Marseille, France**, noted that France has two women in leadership positions in its largest cities, stressing the importance of having more women leaders due to the good examples shown during this crisis. She reminded participants that women work mainly in essential activities such as education, health and food supply, work that is not always recognized but which is essential to countries' development and economies. Increasingly, women must care for families alone and educate children in a challenging situation. Marseille itself has problems with poverty and homelessness and the health crisis is accompanied by others such as the housing crisis. She stressed that although they have recently joined the city government, there is the will to progress in the fight against all these issues and the desire to work together within the Barcelona process.

*"The role of women everywhere is very important. In moments of crisis, women are the ones who assume and take the responsibilities of essential and care work, and this work is rarely recognized"- Samia Ghali*

**Wided Daikhi, President of Commission Femme au Conseil Municipal, Tunisia**, shared the cases of female councillors in Tunis, who are greater in number than male advisors, explaining how women participated in the different emergency units established in the municipality to respond to the requirements and needs of citizens and provide better services. She went on to say that Tunisia's municipal elections have shown it is possible to change

history by electing a woman leader for the first time, stressing that this is a positive indicator of increased confidence in women's governance and an expression of the appetite for change.

She highlighted some achievements of the municipal council, including adopting horizontal and vertical equality in the polls, thus ensuring women's participation in the council and greater involvement of young people. She also ensured women were part of the different committees, heading 11 municipal ones and participating in 16 others. Finally, she stressed that women can become key leaders, ensuring a balance between personal life and political commitments to guarantee the best service to communities.

*"Women are waging the war against COVID-19 just like men are. So the question is, can we hope that this crisis might change the situation for women? Can this crisis guarantee a more gender equal future?" - Wided Daikhi*

**Mrs. Elisabet Nebreda, Secretary for Foreign Affairs and EU Affairs, Generalitat de Catalunya**, began by stressing that a feminist revolution in foreign relations is necessary to achieve a sustainable future. She recalled that only 13-15% of corporate businesses in the Middle East and North Africa are run by women, far inferior to the 50% of the population they represent. Therefore, the Catalan government has adopted a **Mediterranean Strategy 2030** that puts women at the centre of all policies. She outlined the various challenges faced by women such as wage discrimination and unequal employment opportunities. She noted that women are a large majority and must be united and work together to lead and transform society but that this requires the collaboration of women in public positions of responsibility, government institutions, NGOs, civil society and men. She highlighted the collaboration launched by the Department of Foreign Affairs of Catalonia has with the Catalan Women's Institute to design and implement public policies for gender equality in Catalonia and abroad, supporting projects throughout the Mediterranean, cooperating with Catalan NGOs in the field and working with women's movements and organizations. She stressed that the Government of Catalonia is committed to promoting gender equality through internal policies and external action abroad. She further emphasized that, given OECD data showing a potential rise in GDP of 25% in the MENA region and 10% in the EU through women's empowerment, gender equality and empowerment must be at the centre of poli-

cies and external action must be transformed into feminist external action.

*"In the wake of the social and economic crisis caused by the pandemic, it seems, at the very least, reasonable to put gender equality and women empowerment at the center of our policies" - Elisabet Nebreda*

### Session 3: The future of gender equality in the Euro-Mediterranean region

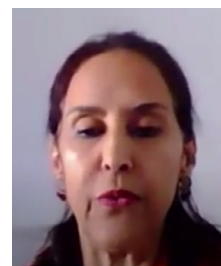
**Aouatif Derrous, Vice-president, Rabat-Salé-Kenitra region (IMC-CPMR), Morocco**, explained that the health crisis has widened the gender gap, although awareness of gender equity in the region has also increased, which has translated into programmes and projects that aim to provide sustainable benefits. She detailed actions taken in the region, including the Regional Council that is part of a programme whose objectives include improving the standard of living for women in precarious situations, with protection and integration in social areas to increase the capacity to provide care and promote women's social development. Community schools have also been created in rural areas to improve education, as well as cross-cutting programmes to improve gender equality and answer the specific needs of girls in education. In the field of work, supporting economic dynamism and creating better conditions for business access are also priorities, as is support for SMEs and small businesses, women or young entrepreneurs and the social and solidarity economy to improve the financing of e-commerce. In concluding, she detailed work to promote women in elected positions, stressing a strong desire to create synergies between regions and local associations and praising the work of civil society and associations. Women, she said, face many difficulties, particularly during the pandemic, but there is strong will at the regional level to participate in conferences and to share ideas and implement them.

*"The healthcare crisis has increased the gap and inequalities between men and women, but it has also raised awareness of the situation and the importance of gender equality." Aouatif Derrous*

**Clare Hart, Vice-President for International Affairs and European Cooperation, Municipal Councillor for International Relations, Montpellier, France**, began by describing how the COVID-19 experience has revealed the distinct gendered impacts of public health



**Mrs. Elisabet Nebreda**, Secretary for Foreign Affairs and EU Affairs, Generalitat de Catalunya



**Aouatif Derrous**, Vice-president, Rabat-Salé-Kenitra region (IMC-CPMR), Morocco



**Clare Hart**, Vice-President for International Affairs and European Cooperation, Municipal Councillor for International Relations, Montpellier, France



**Nada Anid**, Moderator, Founder, Madanyat, Co-founder Women in Front, Lebanon



**Nabila Hamza**, Sociologist and Gender expert, Municipal Councillor of la Marsa; North-South Prize Lauréate 2019



**Laura Celià**, Director General of Cooperation Govern de les Illes Balears, Spain

outbreaks and crises and this one has posed a major threat to women's rights globally. The damaging impact will, she said, last longer and reach further than just a spike in violence and domestic abuse seen across the Mediterranean and the world. Women also form a major part of the frontline of the battle against the virus as they represent 90% of nursing staff and over 66% of teaching staff worldwide. Many are also mothers juggling work and schooling their own children, which can contribute to depression, anxiety and burnout and putting their careers on the line. A recent poll showed us that in 63% of French families, women cook the meals. At the same time, women's representation in decisions and policymaking at this crucial time has been low, as it has in media debates in which men have been overrepresented to give a more reassuring image for viewers. There has also been a rise in domestic and sexual abuse, including for young girls at school, cyberbullying and use of pornography. In closing, she highlighted the need to maintain government funding, research and international cooperation programs, as well as helplines for victims, police training in dealing with victims, and awareness-building campaigns. She also stressed the importance of working with civil society, associations and NGOs in the field. This crisis should, and could, be seen as a window of opportunity for gender-responsive measures that transform education systems, prioritize resilience and address the bottlenecks and barriers to true equality.

*"Experience has showed us through time that public health outbreaks and crises have distinct gendered impacts. And the preparedness and response efforts must take into account and understand that gender dimension" - Claire Hart*

**Nabila Hamza, Sociologist and Gender expert, Municipal Councillor of la Marsa; North-South Prize Lauréate 2019**, reminded the audience that this is a time to start again for governments, civil society, politicians, municipalities and the authorities and a time to learn the lessons of the global health crisis. She emphasized that municipalities are now facing a phenomenon they were unprepared for: many countries, like Tunisia, have seen a huge increase in domestic violence accompanied by the closure of the courts and tribunals, which exacerbated the situation as victims could not go to court or access the associations providing psychological assistance. The police themselves, she said, were not sympathetic, having many issues to deal with already and do not consider violence against women a priority in Tunisia.

She went on to say that COVID-19 has revealed the insufficiency of an entire system as regards combatting gender-based violence, something that is not confined to Tunisia but has happened at the global level. During the pandemic, women have been at home feeding children and families, cooking, cleaning and keeping house while working remotely to secure their salaries and help their families. Work-life balance is, therefore, a significant problem, considering the unpaid work women do. Steps must be taken so women are paid for domestic work and unpaid care. In general, she said, all Mediterranean cities are still male cities in terms of spaces for socialization, planning, sports infrastructure, access to transport systems, roads, etc. and we need to ensure women can also safely access services. She closed by saying it is vital, at the level of the Union for the Mediterranean, to put in place a strategy to help all municipalities truly integrate a gender perspective in city planning, urban infrastructure and transport programmes and projects as well as municipal budgets.

*"Cities are still essentially masculine spaces. It is very important to take measures to integrate the gender perspective in local management" - Nabila Hamza*

**Laura Celià, Director General of Cooperation Govern de les Illes Balears, Spain**, started her intervention by emphasizing the common problem of gender-based violence, explaining that the Balearic Islands was the Spanish region with the most reports of gender violence during confinement. She noted this challenge must be tackled by working at local level and in cooperation with southern countries through local and municipal authorities which are closest to citizens. Decentralized projects offer a tool for transformation and awareness-raising in remote areas. She continued by detailing their participation in the European Project Med Town, which facilitates important spaces for exchange and experiences relating to gender. Ending her speech, she stressed that working from a transversal perspective is vital, as is the cooperation to give space to voices from the south to learn from each other. Finally, she said, transformation is men's business as well, since without their transformation we will never achieve full equality and consign big issues like gender-based violence to the past.

*"Women have been striving to break the glass ceiling, but only when men work for this transformation process, will we achieve full gender equality". Laura Celià*



# CHALLENGE LAB 1: What measures and direct support are needed to effectively address the economic impact of COVID-19 on women and girls?

Challenge Lab 1 was a 30-minute session designed to review selected proposals submitted by conference participants via the online platform. The focus was the economic impact of covid-19 on women and girls, and how women entrepreneurs in the MENA region can become more resilient and adapt to the challenges of the pandemic. During this brief session, the moderator and two experts discussed their preferred initiatives, commenting on their strengths and weaknesses. The overall aim was to provide food for thought, stimulate debate and share ideas and good practices to foster change in the region.

## Key speakers

- **David Svab.** Programme Management Specialist, UN Women Regional Office for Arab States.
- **Sana Afouaiz.** Founder & CEO Womenpreneur Initiative and award-winning gender expert.
- **Moderator: Paz Arancibia.** International Expert & Consultant.

## Key issues discussed

The main issues discussed were **digitalization, access to finance** and the importance of a collaborative and **integrative entrepreneurial ecosystem**.

During the session, the experts highlighted the importance of financial support to women's businesses, particularly in times of crisis. Women face more difficulties in accessing financial aid, as well as when it comes to property ownership or loans. The issue of unpaid care was also highlighted as a major barrier to

self-employment and equal participation in the labour market.

The CEED project "**We Inspire**" was also discussed to underline the importance of education, training and mentoring in times like these. "We Inspire" was adapted from a physical to a digital capacity-building program, with all activities carried out online. Similarly, the project **Emerging Advances Global Learning Enhanced Start-ups** (Eagles) was mentioned to highlight the importance of digital learning and training platforms, linking skills development to business and start-up development.

Overall, the importance of digitalization and digital tools was highlighted as a catalyst for greater change, scalability and new business opportunities. However, both experts agreed that digitalization can also exacerbate existing inequalities. Therefore, there is a need to invest in women entrepreneurs' access to and use of new technology and skills as an enabler of new and innovative business processes, thus working to close the digital gap.

In discussing one of the initiatives submitted by the public, experts also underlined the usefulness of creating a support network. They discussed one of the initiatives to create a women's cooperative, a space dedicated to the needs of women entrepreneurs, "Women Business Center" by "Women Cooperatives." The speakers underlined the relevance of investing in such a space, which could provide not only a variety of resources for women entrepreneurs, from financial and legal to child care, but also a space for networking and exchanging experiences and good practices.



**David Svab.** Programme Management Specialist, UN Women Regional Office for Arab States



**Sana Afouaiz.** Founder & CEO Womenpreneur Initiative and award-winning gender expert



Moderator: **Paz Arancibia.** International Expert & Consultant.

# SIDE EVENT: Women Entrepreneurs Forum



**Sondes Bannouri**, founder of Dasri Sterile. She participated in CEED Grow Siliana 2018 program

This side event featured two panels organised in collaboration with CEED Tunisia and CEED Morocco, respectively.

## Session 1: A project perspective on the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in navigating through the COVID-19 crisis

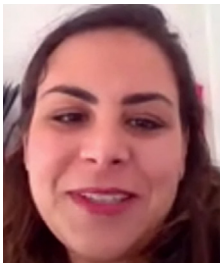
The COVID-19 pandemic has weakened many businesses and forced shutdown of industrial units and several projects have been forced to reduce or suspend their activities. Finding support solutions during this crisis was the priority of CEED Tunisia's team which organised over 100 virtual one-to-one sessions with experts and coaches to guide entrepreneurs with tips and tricks. Under the name of CEED NETWORK, a platform to connect entrepreneurs was also created.

Based on this network, CEED Tunisia and CEED Morocco decided to run the program "We Inspire," sponsored by UfM, which aims to help women overcome the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and restart the growth of their businesses through mentoring, training and networking with other entrepreneurs in Tunisia and Morocco.

In this panel, moderated by Wafa Makhoulf, executive director of CEED Tunisia, entrepreneurs shared their experiences on how they navigated the crisis and how CEED helped them during this period.

### Key issues discussed

**Sondes Bannouri, founder of Dasri Sterile. She participated in CEED Grow Siliana 2018 program**, said that, despite initial anxieties and doubts, the crisis has been an opportunity for her business, which provides sterilization services. With the help and support of the Tunisian jobs program, as well as online expert advice and the CEED network platform, it has not only survived, but has provided improved services, creating jobs, and having a positive societal impact.



**Manel Kanzari**, Founder of Beyond Pictures. She was a candidate of CEED Grow Tunis, 2015

**Manel Kanzari, Founder of Beyond Pictures. She was a candidate of CEED Grow Tunis, 2015**, said that the skills and tools she had acquired through her training had enabled her to face this crisis. Investing in and building a strategic vision and a united and cohesive team helped them endure the shock of the pandemic. She underlined the importance of having a network, an ecosystem of other entrepreneurs to overcome these challenges, as well as the importance of having a good and flexible strategy.

Right from the start of the pandemic, the reactions of **Ines Temmimi (Founder of Collectun D3e Recyclage. She was a candidate of CEED Grow Tunis, 2015)** were proactive. She wanted to ensure the safety of her team while salvaging her project, which she was forced to redirect. She indicated that CEED had been a huge help for her in terms of resources, tools and network. CEED inspired her to push through the hard times, leading her to participate in its "We Inspire" Program.

When asked about the key tools to survive the pandemic, all agreed that besides access to financial support and the possibility of refinancing debt—which the Tunisian government has been providing both to women and men entrepreneurs—having a good network of collaborators and a strong and united team are crucial. For this reason, it is important to invest in trust relationships with suppliers and clients as this forms the basis for understanding and flexibility in challenging times like these.

All the speakers sent a message of optimism and bravery, encouraging women to push forward and stay strong since they have always been the leverage point of the regional economy. However, they all agreed on the importance of having a strategy and focusing on those business opportunities that offer the most profitability. It is key, they said, to analyse the situation first and have a clear vision to develop appropriate skills and surround oneself with a valued team.

To conclude, the speakers summarized their main take-homes from the session. They first emphasised the need to understand and prepare for risk and integrate it into business strat-



**Ines Temmimi** (Founder of Collectun D3e Recyclage. She was a candidate of CEED Grow Tunis, 2015)

egies. Also, networks and support systems to share best practices, benchmark and develop a clearer business vision are key. They reinforced the importance of having a strong team that shows solidarity, works together and helps each other out, which makes a big difference in times of crisis. Finally, they reminded the public of the importance of continuous training and mentoring.

## Session 2: Women Empowerment: A story of a Moroccan Leader

CEED Morocco has 7 years of experience serving entrepreneurs. During this period, it has created communities of entrepreneurs while developing the ecosystems in which they operate. It has established a space where entrepreneurs are provided with the skills, tools, and support they need to develop their business.

In this session, **Mrs Samira Khamlichi, CEO of Wafacash, the leading money transfer company in Morocco**, the first female director of a banking company in Morocco, shared her experience of how she managed her role as a CEO of one of the top financial institutions in Morocco during the crisis. She also imparted tips on how to build and grow a company during a crisis like the current one.

Moderator: **Sara El Mahi, Deputy Director of CEED Morocco**

### Key issues discussed

When asked about the gender gap in leadership positions, **Mrs. Khamlichi** sent a can-do and empowering message, arguing that women are capable of anything if they are given the tools and means. She noted women generally lack confidence and trust, and this contributes to the gap in leadership. Success can only happen when women have confidence and trust in themselves and their environment; if these exist, there are no reasons why women should not be successful and occupy decision-making positions.

She explained that her career has spanned several roles in the banking sector from HR to marketing and strategy. She admitted that, when appointed as CEO, she experienced self-doubt and imposter syndrome but called on women to leave this attitude and response behind, to own their success and be confident in it.

She also emphasized the importance of networking and pointed to stereotypes and social norms as something to be addressed. She argued that the gender gap begins to open at a very

early age and that women do not start essential networking until much later than men. She emphasised the role of education and leadership training in instilling confidence.

Regarding how women can make a difference, she emphasised leadership and the difference between male and female styles. In an increasingly complicated and ever-changing world, she advocated for a more feminine style of leadership, one more frank, transparent, humane, empathetic and inspiring and advocated for women seizing this opportunity to occupy leadership roles and contribute to societal development. We can no longer afford, she said, to have 50% of the world's population and its potential and resources virtually un-operational. Although women are still underrepresented in the public and private sectors, they enter higher education, take risks and, therefore, steps towards gender equality and claiming their societal role. The business world needs to be collaborative, which entails promoting entrepreneurship in the region to ensure gender equality.

**Mrs. Khamlichi** explained how she put together a team to address how to navigate the COVID-19 crisis and continue to provide cross-country banking services, as well as consider relationships with collaborators and staff. They enabled a fully virtual, digital system so everybody had the tools to work from home and guarantee daily operations in the 10,000+ contacts and selling points. She also underlined the importance of staying connected, continuing with meetings and keeping communication lines open to guarantee both physical and mental and emotional support and health. It was also important to analyse the situation in each country with key operations and follow up on the needs of staff and collaborators.

Finally, **Mrs. Khamlichi** underlined the importance of solidarity, of seeking and giving help and sharing experience and good practices. To this end, she is a mentor with CEED and other associations in Morocco. She advocates fostering solidarity and accepting equal rights for women and men. We have wonderful women role models, she said, and we must be more confident in order to redress gender imbalance.

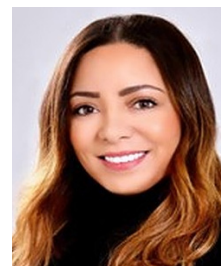
*“Women just need the same means and opportunities as men, so we can all advance together”- Samira Khamlichi, CEO Wafacash*



Moderator: **Wafa Makhoulouf**, Executive Director of CEED Tunisia



**Mrs Samira Khamlichi**, CEO of Wafacash, the leading money transfer company in Morocco



Moderator: **Sara El Mahi**, Deputy Director of CEED Morocco



# CHALLENGE LAB 2: How to prevent and address violence against women in the context of a crisis?

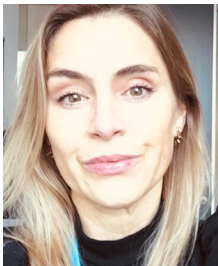


**Megi Llubani.** Technical project analyst, UN Women Regional Program on ending violence against women and girls.

Challenge Lab 2 was a 30-minute session to review the selected proposals submitted by conference participants to the platform. The topic of the session was combatting violence against women and girls in the context of a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. During this brief session, the moderator and the two experts discussed some initiatives that have been carried out during the pandemic and lockdown to support women victims of violence. The overall aim was to provide food for thought, stimulate debate and share ideas and good practices to foster change in the area.

## Key speakers

- **Megi Llubani.** Technical project analyst, UN Women Regional Program on ending violence against women and girls.
- **Aasa Hanna Mari Nihlén.** WHO regional Office for Europe
- **Moderator: Aurélie Salvaire.** Author and social entrepreneur



**Aasa Hanna Mari Nihlén.** WHO regional Office for Europe

## Key issues discussed

Both experts started by highlighting the serious nature of the issue. Across UfM member states, the number of gender-based violence reports rose during lockdown. However, they both noted that, while the numbers are worrying, violence against women and girls (VAWG) remains underreported. Hence, we only see the tip of the iceberg.

The discussion focused on two main topics. The experts first discussed measures that have been built around existing **communities**. Both speakers agreed that community is one of the most powerful, inclusive and low-tech tools to fight against VAWG. The panel discussed measures established during lockdown that involved community support or built upon existing networks of support. Initiatives such as Masca- rilla-19 in Spain were discussed as innovative

measures that facilitated risk-free reporting. Building solutions on trust networks is key to providing services where they are most needed to ensure women are not afraid to report violence and seek help and services. However, these services need to go beyond just access to reporting. The speakers highlighted the challenge of uniting all services within the system to ensure true protection to victims of violence.

Additionally, experts underlined the key role of NGOs in protecting women during the pandemic, since they stepped forward to provide the services that were lacking.

Then, the discussion moved on to the **role of digital** tools and technology in these innovative responses. From the emergence of apps, text and WhatsApp for reporting and support services to digital awareness campaigns and remote service management, online services proved very valuable during the pandemic and lockdown. There has been a huge variety of responses within a very short time and both speakers saw this as a huge step and something that should remain in place in the long term. Again, inherent inequalities between women and their access to technology were mentioned as a huge barrier to accessing help and reporting services. Technology can be a great tool in cases of violence but it is important to pair digital services with community and in-person services to ensure nobody is left behind.



Moderator: **Aurélie Salvaire.** Author and social entrepreneur

## PLENARY SESSION 2: Preventing gender-based violence in times of crisis

According to **recent data**, 243 million women and girls worldwide aged 15-49 have been subjected to sexual and/or physical violence by an intimate partner in the previous 12 months. Emerging data also shows that, since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, VAWG has surged in many countries, including the Euro-Mediterranean region.

In addition, an overburdened healthcare system means access to vital sexual and reproductive health services, including for victims of gender violence, could be more limited. Other services, such as hotlines, crisis centres, shelters, legal aid, and protection services may also be scaled back.

In this plenary session, moderated by **Aurélie Salvaire**, author and social entrepreneur, Founder of Shiftbalance, speakers discussed the severity of the situation and the importance of urgent government measures to protect victims and ensure protection services remain part of pandemic response. They also shared best practices and experiences from the first few months of the pandemic, while underlining the key role of civil society.

### Panel 1: A snapshot of attitudes and perceptions on VAWG in the region

#### Key issues discussed

**Janneke van der Graaff-Kukler, Deputy Regional Director for the Arab States, UN Women** drew attention to the seriousness of the issue, saying that we know violence escalates in times of crisis and this increase goes hand in hand with reduced services. VAWG is high even in 'normal' times: 37% of women in the Eastern Mediterranean are recorded as having experienced violence at some point. And this is taking into account that violence tends to be underreported. The underlying causes for this high figure include deep-seated, deep-rooted discrimination and gender bias.

She drew the attention on the increased number of victims and survivors of violence at a time

when services were paralysed altogether and funds diverted to COVID-19 responses were compromised. But she also mentioned the innovative solutions such as the establishment of online systems and hotlines put in place.

She highlighted that UN Women has focused on understanding the root causes of the increase through an online survey and mapping the mechanisms in place to understand where support is needed. They worked closely with civil society organizations to bridge the digital gap and address some women's lack of access to online services. Survey findings show an increase in different forms of violence, including online harassment, and a greater feeling of insecurity among women. As regards seeking help, reporting remains low. Ms. van der Graaff-Kukler also claimed domestic violence is still seen as a private matter, with a corresponding stigma attached. In closing, she underlined the key role played by civil society and women's organizations and the importance of working with and supporting women at community level. The sustainability of services and funding remains a challenge, necessitating their continued support.

*"We know that in moments of crisis, violence escalates. In particular, we know that violence against the most vulnerable women escalates." - Janneke van der Graaff-Kukler*

Following on from this, **Souad Sassi, International Cooperation and Exterior Relations, Municipality of Tunis**, outlined how the city of Tunis upheld women's rights during the pandemic, pointing to its female mayor as evidence of willingness to foster women's leadership. With regards to COVID-19, the city implemented a free 24/7 women's helpline. There is also a medical centre offering free services for women and a partnership with civil society to support shelter and refuge services, as well as work ongoing to empower women economically and professionally.

*"Men were always prioritized, whereas women were relegated to the second plan."*



**Janneke van der Graaff-Kukler**, Deputy Regional Director for the Arab States, UN Women



**Souad Sassi**, International Cooperation and Exterior Relations, Municipality of Tunis

*But this time, the situation is different. Women are mobilized, fighting in the forefront against COVID-19” - Souad Sassi*

## Panel 2: The role of civil society and the private sector in addressing VAWG

### Key issues discussed

**Marcela Pirrone, President, Women Against Violence Network Europe, Austria**, discussed the role of women’s civil society in the fight against gender-based violence, saying they are the reason why we are where we are today. Lacking extra funds, and often operating at the limits of financial survival, they have done incredible work in this unprecedented crisis. However, she expressed concern about the lack of attention VAWG has received pre- and post-pandemic, arguing this will change during the economic recession we are experiencing. She highlighted the mental health effects of suffering such violence, especially in a context of lockdown, which will increase if the matter is not prioritized. Women’s organizations must be supported with sufficient and sustainable funding to continue their important work, something which must go hand in hand with gender-sensitive policies and measures to tackle the root causes of VAWG.



**Marcela Pirrone**, President, Women Against Violence Network Europe, Austria

*“The best way individuals can help combat gender-based violence is to be informed of the issue, avoid spreading false information and support women who are victims” - Marcela Pirrone*

**Melsa Ararat, Founding Director, Corporate Governance Forum of Turkey, Sabanci Business School, Istanbul**, focused on the role of companies and business organizations, particularly her experience in Turkey. After giving some background on the country and its commitment to eradicate VAWG, she said that transforming a patriarchal state is a long process and, therefore, many women still do not trust public services. She said businesses must be aware of the disproportionate effect this crisis has had on women and actively support them.



**Melsa Ararat**, Founding Director, Corporate Governance Forum of Turkey, Sabanci Business School, Istanbul



**Lucy Dechifre**, Program Manager of VAWG, Euromed Feminist Initiative

Her university, the UN Population Fund and Turkish business associations have, therefore, developed the Business Against Domestic Violence project to support companies in developing policies to promote gender equality and freedom from violence as an organizational value. Thousands of men and women now receive gender equality training to recognize

the signs of abuse and support victims. Companies that participated in the project have also established a platform to support each other and help other companies to develop workplace policies. A survey suggests both companies and employees have benefited from these policies: female employees find their work more meaningful, place greater trust in management, aim higher and are more likely to stay in the labour force. The surveys also revealed an increased percentage of women experiencing violence during the pandemic but the effect on women employed by companies that had developed these policies were much less severe. Therefore, it appears gender sensitized companies offered better support to employees during the pandemic and the percentage of female employees experiencing physical violence is lower. Ms Ararat concluded by saying that companies and employers can contribute to a more inclusive and egalitarian society by adopting and promoting workplace policies based on egalitarian values.

*“Companies and employers can contribute to a more inclusive and egalitarian society by adopting and promoting workplace policies based on egalitarian values. By doing so, they develop organizational cultures that have a transformational impact on society” - Melsa Ararat*

**Lucy Dechifre, Program Manager of VAWG, Euromed Feminist Initiative**, opened by shedding light on structural inequalities worsened by the crisis, saying civil society has been key both in addressing the consequences of the crisis for women and girls as well as addressing structural inequalities. They have also played a key role in the crisis response and service delivery, ensuring continuity of care, sexual and reproductive health services, psychosocial services and dissemination of information about existing services. In addition, civil society has been a valuable source of data, including gender-disaggregated data, to understand the true impact on women and girls, and played an important role in monitoring implementation of regional and national action recovery plans and been crucial in advocacy, calling for intersectional and gender sensitivity to ensure inclusive national response plans. However, decision making bodies still lack gender balance, and global COVID-19 responses lack a gendered lens. Therefore, the objectives for Euromed Feminist Initiative are: to provide members with space for advocacy; recognize women as active agents of change and not just victims or passive participants; set up a regional civil society observatory; and follow up on implementation of key national and regional plans and mech-



anism. In concluding, she drew attention to the power of collective organization and networks to give women greater impact and voice.

*"We need to recognize women as active agents of change, not only as victims or passive"- Lucy Dechifre.*

### Panel 3: Ensuring continuity of services for survivors of violence in times of crisis

#### Key issues discussed

**Claudine Aoun Roukoz, President of National Commission for Lebanese Women,** began with an overview of how Lebanon had tackled VAWG when lockdown started, outlining multi-level coordination, from the National Commission for Lebanese Women to the Parliament to civil society and women's organizations in order to continue providing necessary services. They also implemented hotlines and online services to contact security forces and report cases of violence and the National Commission for Jurists worked to provide support and protection services to victims. All these initiatives formed part of a national plan to combat VAWG. As well as COVID-19, she also mentioned the recent Beirut explosion and its impact on women and girls.

*"Gender equality is a global priority that cannot be compromised. Women are capable and will continue to advance towards gender equality." - Claudine Aoun Roukoz*

**Nino Berdzuli, Director, Division of Country Health Programmes, WHO Regional Office for Europe,** started by mentioning the recent WHO project labelled by the UfM that aims to bring together countries from all around the Mediterranean and focuses on building capacities to prevent and respond to VAWG as a key public health issue. Since the start of the pandemic, the WHO has raised awareness about connections between the pandemic and violence against women; published guidance for governments and health services so survivors can access health services; issued recommendations on data collection; and conducted rapid assessments of the impact of COVID-19 and actions taken to ensure the continuity of services. Important initiatives have also been implemented, including increasing budgets for VAWG services, more shelter spaces and help-lines, and pop-up consultation services and code words for support services. Most coun-

tries have turned to digital solutions to ensure continuity of support, reporting, psychological services and more. She concluded by adding that NGO initiatives were crucial to fill the gaps in government and national responses.

*"Since the beginning, WHO has raised the attention on the interconnections between the pandemic and violence against women"- Nino Berdzuli*

**During the Q&A,** speakers discussed cyber violence and online harassment as a big issue to be addressed, as well as the need for a cross-sectoral, integrated, holistic model to tackle domestic violence transversally. It is, they said, important to focus not only on support but also on the level of prevention, protection and prosecution, and integrate this into policy-making strategies.

They also discussed the need to focus on and work with perpetrators as well as victims. Souad Sassi said that the city of Tunis has been working with perpetrators to understand the reasons for violence and to provide them with psychological help and services. They also carry out work in schools with the Ministry of Education to conduct training on gender-based violence and stereotypes and foster a culture of respect and diversity. Overall, speakers agreed that stereotypes and gender norms lay at the core of gender-based violence and that work in educational institutions on masculinities and gender-stereotypes, and engaging men and boys, adolescents and youth, as well as the media sector, was crucial to combat gender-based violence.

Finally, they touched on the need for data collection and how good data can anticipate the harm of issues like gender-based violence, noting that data collection must respect women's privacy and safety and not put them at greater risk of harm or distress. Otherwise, the type of data collected and the methods used need to be addressed.



**Claudine Aoun Roukoz,**  
President of National  
Commission for Lebanese  
Women



**Nino Berdzuli,** Director,  
Division of Country Health  
Programmes, WHO  
Regional Office for Europe



# SIDE EVENT: Mainstreaming gender in recovery responses of agri-food sectors and rural areas



Moderator: **Yasmine Seghirate El Guerrab**, Communications and Publications Manager, Gender Policy and Women Empowerment focal point, CIHEAM Headquarters

This side event, organised in collaboration with CIHEAM, explored how the COVID-19 crisis has impacted women in the agricultural sector, including in production, processing and distribution. Women are an important part of agri-food chains yet often work in informal or precarious conditions with limited access to social protections, finance, land and natural resources. Discussions focused on how to tackle these challenges and promote women's greater participation in decision and empowerment at all levels. Priorities identified included the need for collaboration and partnerships, bottom-up policies and actions, better data, closing the digital gap and the involvement of grass-roots organisations and civil society to address the gendered impacts of the pandemic.

*"Empowering and strengthening the place of women in sustainable agri-food systems and rural areas is one of the priorities of my mandate. So that they can deploy their full potential, the CIHEAM supports them through training and capacity building." Plácido Plaza*

**H.E. Akissa Bahri, Minister of Agriculture, Water Resources and Fisheries, Republic of Tunisia**, gave statistics revealing Tunisian women's high participation in the workforce versus low rates of ownership, access to resources and revenue compared to men. She outlined Tunisia's economic, social and legislative efforts to empower rural women, promote remuneration for their work and help the vulnerable. She also noted ongoing concerns like female illiteracy, mortality, poverty, wage discrimination and precarious or seasonal employment, particularly among rural women.



**Plácido Plaza**, Secretary-General, International Center for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM)

## Insights from keynote speakers

The opening session was moderated by **Yasmine Seghirate El Guerrab, Communications and Publications Manager, Gender Policy and Women Empowerment focal point, CIHEAM Headquarters**.

*"In rural and agricultural areas, there is a need to invest heavily in human capital and the socio-economic potential of women and men. Often neglected, they are nevertheless at the heart of the resilience of our societies and the condition for the success of post-Covid sustainable development policies"* Yasmine Seghirate El Guerrab

**Plácido Plaza, Secretary-General, International Center for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM)**. Mr Plaza opened by praising CIHEAM's solid collaboration with UfM and highlighting CIHEAM's commitment to and actions on gender empowerment in line with the SDGs. He noted that women and youth empowerment and social and economic inclusion are major topics for the upcoming CIHEAM ministerial meeting.

She described the difficulties faced by rural women during lockdown in terms of infection risk, increased burden of family care and lost revenue. She stressed the urgent need for their financial autonomy and independence and their crucial role in the agricultural sector, also the positive impact on crop yields and sustainability when they work independently. She also said equal access to technology, removal of barriers and restraints and empowerment in trade and agriculture are vital for women to combat poverty, malnutrition and starvation and contribute to their country's economic growth.

She concluded by describing initiatives such as a state program to guarantee food security in rural areas, training to ensure women's products meet hygiene and quality standards, technological platforms to commercialise their work and make crops ecological and improve access to credit.

*"Only 3% of women working in rural areas have their own resources and revenue, against 90% of men. Now more than ever,*

*rural women need their financial autonomy and independence to face their future and their needs” - H.E. Akissa Bahri*

**Marcela Villarreal, PhD, Director, Partnerships and UN Collaboration**, commented on gender inequalities and the development agenda, including access to resources and food security and nutrition. She stressed that SDG 5 comprises both education and equal access to resources, particularly in rural areas, with huge potential impact in societal gains in food security and nutrition and, consequently, health and other desirable aspects for development.

She drew attention to huge inequalities in the Euro-Mediterranean in land ownership and representation, noting the importance of land as collateral for finance and the need for women’s voice and strong organisations in political, policy and legislative forums. She described the gendered effects of mobility and healthcare restrictions in rural areas, including reduced access to markets and economic downturn, saying women already face more precarity, mobility challenges, physical and cultural barriers and are more vulnerable due to structural inequalities in access to resources.

**Ms. Villareal** made recommendations to revise mobility restrictions to ensure access to markets; prioritize support for labourers, informal and seasonal workers; provide social protections that answer women’s needs; and invest in women’s leadership and organisations. She noted the need for better sex and age disaggregated data to monitor gendered impacts and develop policies and technology accordingly and concluded by reminding the audience that food security in this fast-growing food crisis means not food aid but the ability to actually produce or buy food.

**Dr. Leonard Mizzi, Head of Unit, European Commission, Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development - Rural development, food security and nutrition**, opened with figures from UN Women indicating COVID-19 will result in the loss of 1.7 million jobs in the Arab region, including 700,000 held by women, mostly in rural areas. He stressed the need for women’s empowerment in food systems and agricultural value chains to promote recovery, equality, sustainability, productivity, resilience and build back better following the pandemic. He emphasised how COVID-19 has exposed women’s additional burden and confirmed the need for women-led, bottom-up solutions; financial and technological inclusion; gender-responsive solutions and institutions; innovative problem

solving; and cross-donor community expertise to put women and girls at the centre of agri-trade approaches and investment strategies. He gave examples of EU responses, including 36 billion Euros mobilised with member states and financial institutions, and stressed the need for partnerships, coordination and actors on the ground.

**Dr. Mizzi** advocated for a safety net and framework for communities to bounce back and held out hopes for the Italian G20 presidency, the UN Food Summit, Gender Action Plan 3 and multi-institution collaborations to scale gender transformative approaches, promote sustainable agriculture, end hunger and address root causes of inequality. He concluded saying the SDGs cannot be met without improving women’s status, and Build Back Better is only a reality if the framework conditions for good policy-making are embedded in the system. He also noted digital transformation is vital but must be applied in a structured, rights-based way to avoid deepening existing inequalities.

## Key issues discussed

### Panel 1: Gender impacts and responses to protect and promote the role of rural women during the COVID-19 pandemic

Moderator **Gaëlle Ferrant, Economist and Gender Programme Coordinator, OECD Development Centre**, asked panellists to comment on how COVID-19 has impacted women in agriculture, processing and distribution, and its impact on inter- and extra-familial gender relations in rural areas. Also, what national, international and local measures can address the gendered impacts in rural areas on agriculture, food security and nutrition, and what alliances and networks can serve a gender-responsive recovery agenda.

**Silvia Barbatello, Project Coordinator, Cooperation Office, CIHEAM Bari, Italy**, presented the **GEMAISA project** on enhancing gender mainstreaming for sustainable rural development and food security. She insisted on the need to consider as-yet unmeasured social and economic impacts of COVID-19—particularly in rural contexts where women’s pre-existing vulnerability and fragility have been exacerbated and which may be complicated by complex political contexts. The consequences, she said, cannot be understood in isolation.

She pointed to obstacles—social norms, traditions, access to resources, information, training,



**H.E. Akissa Bahri**, Minister of Agriculture, Water Resources and Fisheries, Republic of Tunisia



**Marcela Villarreal, PhD**, Director, Partnerships and UN Collaboration

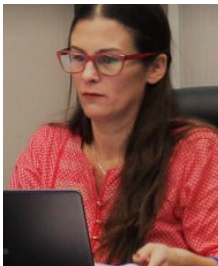


**Dr. Leonard Mizzi**, Head of Unit, European Commission, Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development - Rural development, food security and nutrition



Moderator **Gaëlle Ferrant**, Economist and Gender Programme Coordinator, OECD Development Centre





**Silvia Barbatello**, Project Coordinator, Cooperation Office, CIHEAM Bari, Italy

credit, basic services and social security—that limit rural women’s ability to actively participate in development. Also, potentially increased competition for access to markets, land and resources if men now reverse migrate from urban to rural areas looking for work. She was, however, positive about the potential of technology solutions but, like Dr. Mizzi, stressed the need for judicious application to ensure women’s participation.

She also highlighted the need for sound, abundant, locally gathered data on rural women to inform effective initiatives, identify the vulnerable and the factors that contribute to or alleviate their vulnerability. She closed by warning we must not assume women will continue to bear the burden of the socio-economic crisis and increased family duties and called for dialogue between donors, agencies, civil society, local and institutional partners and final beneficiaries.

*“A sustainable post-COVID-19 recovery process should be based on a thorough understanding of how the pandemic has impacted on gender roles and engaging rural women in the response design.”*  
**Silvia Barbatello**



**Ghizlaine Maghnoij Elmanjra**, social entrepreneur, activist for regenerative economy and Founder of Human for Human

**Ghizlaine Maghnoij Elmanjra, social entrepreneur, activist for regenerative economy and Founder of Human for Human**, reminded participants that the crisis in rural women’s vulnerability pre-dates COVID-19. She detailed pandemic impacts on Morocco’s large population of rural women, already at a disadvantage, who now face deepening poverty and unequal fallout from lockdown, industrial slowdown, facilities closures, loss of exports and access to healthcare, as well as increased domestic burden and violence. She noted that most businesses in the rural sector are small and micro-enterprises.

On a positive, COVID-19 has shaken up high-level decision-making and shown us what we can achieve under pressure with limited time and resources. She also welcomed the opportunity for activists and civil society to gain in voice and visibility at a time when we need exceptional, multidimensional, bottom-up solutions, societal transformation and the implementation of a social economy. This, she stressed, can only be achieved by thinking and acting locally, with the involvement of agile new stakeholders and actors on the ground, and by refreshing the “ego-system” and silos in which many currently work.



**Meher Al-Khelifi**, Founder of the Ahmini start-up

**Meher Al-Khelifi, Founder of the Ahmini** startup which helps rural women access social coverage and affiliation, shared experience of direct actions to protect rural Tunisian women working in agriculture, artisanal and handicraft trades, as well as owners of land or small business. He emphasized the challenges faced by women who must care for families and are, therefore, the cornerstone of food security, stressing that, for them, ceasing work during lockdown was not an option. He also drew attention to the tremendous losses resulting from the lack of marketing and distribution of commodities and everyday products. He went on to mention the issues of poor communication, transportation and long urban-rural commutes, as well as disruption to food supplies during lockdown. However, he noted positive interventions like Ahmini’s rapid development of applications to provide food and financial assistance to women, and efforts to address the barriers that limit women’s empowerment and that are the focus of Ahmini’s mission.

The session also featured a **video** of **Esmahane Etri, a DEVLOK beneficiary working with CIHEAM Montpellier**. As Founder and Manager of Chez Halima, Tunisia, she spoke about the challenges of securing supplies and continuing production and distribution of milk products during lockdown, as well as the solutions she found and her need for government assistance.

## **Panel 2: Strengthening resilience of rural women through education, training and research**

This panel, moderated by **Tomas Garcia Azcarate, Deputy Director, Institute of Economics, Geography and Demography, Spanish Research Council, Associate Researcher, CEIGRAM**, discussed how education, training and research in agri-foods can help limit the negative impacts of crises like COVID-19 on women, and the instruments, innovations and technologies that can be mobilised in response.

**Dr. Maroun El Moujabber, Projects Coordinator and CIHEAM Bari representative in the “Gender smart” project**, presented this inter-community project to strengthen gender equality in agriculture, life sciences research and innovation in institutions, management, research and teaching. He stressed how equality in research and innovation fosters creativity, excellence, fairness and business opportunities, warning that bias blinds us to people’s merits and ignoring inequality sends a message to women that it is normal and



**Esmahane Etri**, a DEVLOK beneficiary working with CIHEAM Montpellier

they are less valuable. He explained that gender equality plans are the main policy instruments to advance equality in the European research area and that the European Commission has established these as mandatory for research organisations and higher education to access funding from the next Horizon Europe.

During lockdown, to understand the gendered effects of the pandemic and how a gendered lens can help develop or strengthen measures to reduce gender inequality at work, CIHEAM Bari surveyed the human resources impact and measures taken by Gender Smart partner countries and organisations. They found COVID-19 has not been the same for everyone: men suffered more stress from lack of physical activity while women had more anxiety; men highlighted more time with the family as a possible life improvement, while women wanted more professional development. Dr. El Moujabber concluded by saying we cannot afford to revert to business as usual after COVID-19 and recommended strengthening support for tele- and home-working and incorporating the long-term presence of the virus into gender equality plans.

*“COVID-19 has not been the same for everybody. Building back better means a*

*person-centred and gendered approach.”  
Dr. Maroun El Moujabber*

**Carmen Urbano, Director-General of Agri-food Innovation & Promotion, Government of Aragon, Spain**, shared experiences from a region that has experienced massive rural depopulation and has very few women in the agri-food sector. To mitigate this, the government applies positive discrimination to support women-led projects and has developed a legislative framework to promote direct marketing and a publicly funded e-commerce platform, open to all producers. Through case studies of women-led farming and production, she illustrated how Aragón has played to its strengths as a major exporter of black truffle. It has also taken advantage of the UNESCO World Heritage status of the Mediterranean Diet, as well as the trends towards more rural living, producer-to-consumer direct marketing, organic and healthy produce, and good internet coverage to enable e-commerce and networking.

*“I am convinced that Digital Transformation can contribute to a better future in rural areas, especially for women”  
Carmen Urbano*



**Tomas Garcia Azcarate**, Deputy Director, Institute of Economics, Geography and Demography, Spanish Research Council, Associate Researcher, CEIGRAM



**Dr. Maroun El Moujabber**, Projects Coordinator and CIHEAM Bari representative in the “Gender smart” project

The screenshot shows a webinar interface. On the left, there are two video thumbnails: the top one shows Dr. Maroun El Moujabber and the bottom one shows Carmen Urbano. The main content area features the 'Gender SMART' logo (Science, Management, Innovation, Research, and Teaching) and the 'Union for the Mediterranean' logo. The title of the event is 'Mainstreaming gender in Covid-19 recovery responses of agri-food sectors and rural areas', dated 19 November 2020. A slide titled 'Strengthening Gender Equality in Agriculture and Life Sciences Research and Innovation Institutions: Challenging the COVID-19 Pandemic' by Maroun El Moujabber, CIHEAM Bari, is displayed. The bottom of the slide lists various partner logos including the European Union, ANR, CIHEAM, CIRAD, and Wageningen.

The screenshot shows a presentation slide with a map of the Mediterranean region. The title is 'ARAGON, REGION ESPAGNOLE TRÈS “MED”...'. The map highlights the Mediterranean basin, including countries like Spain, France, Italy, Greece, Turkey, and others. Two video thumbnails on the left show Carmen Urbano speaking. The slide also includes the CIHEAM logo and the text 'ARAGON, REGION ESPAGNOLE TRÈS “MED”...'.



**Carmen Urbano**, Director-General of Agri-food Innovation & Promotion, Government of Aragon, Spain

# SIDE EVENT: The role of youth in combatting gender stereotypes in the audio-visual sector



**Ambassador Marisa Farrugia**, Deputy Secretary-General, Social and Civil Affairs (UfM)

This side event was organized in collaboration with Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and featured three sessions.

The **UfM Ministerial Declaration on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society, Cairo 2017**, recognised combating gender stereotypes as one of UfM's four priority areas. Images of women in the media are imbued with stereotypes about who women are and what their roles should be in society. These stereotypes can be negative, limiting and degrading. In this regard, this side event aimed to map and recognise the extent of challenging discrimination and barriers related to gender stereotyping in the media.

Through the participation of experts from academia, audio-visual stakeholders, policy-makers, young female activists and media influencers, this side event analysed how the media can be an effective lever to amplify women's voices and combat gender stereotypes. At the same time, discussions focused on identifying actions and tangible solutions required to effect change.

The discussion also touched upon the role of youth in influencing and modifying cultural attitudes, gender stereotypes and general perceptions of roles and images of women in the media.

## Opening remarks

- **Ambassador Marisa Farrugia, Deputy Secretary-General, Social and Civil Affairs (UfM).**

## Key issues discussed

In her opening remarks, **Ambassador Marisa Farrugia** highlighted that we are making progress in women's empowerment but are far from achieving gender equality. Therefore, we need to focus on the root causes of disparity and discrimination. She underlined the role and influ-

ence of the media and its potential to instead promote non-stereotypical portrayals of women and men. Ambassador Farrugia called upon the younger generation to combat norms and prejudices that are detrimental to women and hinder their personal and professional progress. She added that men have an equally important role to play in this endeavour.

She stated that Artificial Intelligence poses a particular challenge since the use of algorithms can reinforce stereotypes; we must not allow AI to replicate the mistakes of the past. Hence, a gender equality perspective must be included in AI education and policy plans.

*"Transforming social norms and attitudes is required to ensure gender equality among citizens" - DSG Marisa Farrugia*

## Panel 1: Understanding Gender Stereotypes and their impact on our societies

**Moderator: Aurelie Salvaire, Author and Social Entrepreneur**

## Key issues discussed

**Dr. Severine Le Loarne - Lemaire, Professor at the Ecole de Management in Grenoble and Head of the Department of Women and Economic Renewal (France)**, started her intervention by stating that stereotypes are very widespread and are, in fact, how we depict the world, learn and communicate. Hence, they are not inherently good or bad. The problem lies within social norms, task allocation and, most importantly, the roles generally allocated to women in society.

*"Women have (legally but also in practice) the right to shape their environment and to claim they are not the type of person that get presented by medias (social or others)" - Dr Séverine Le Loarne-Lemaire*



**Dr. Insaf Ouhiba, filmmaker and critic, researcher in film studies and producer (Tunisia)**, started by highlighting the importance of images and cinema and its impact on society. In her intervention, she focused on body images and stereotypes, as well as on the objectification of women in the media and film, to underline how harmful these stereotypes can be.

*“Education on how to read images is crucial and has to be done from a very young age” - Dr. Insaf Ouhiba*

During this panel, speakers discussed the importance of reflecting on stereotypes and how they reinforce male dominance. The speakers also shared some good practices in fighting these stereotypes, such as the inclusion and presence of women in the sector. Additionally, they underlined the importance of diversity of images and representations of women and men. Lastly, the role of education in image consumption from a very young age is crucial, especially now when the digital world is so easily accessible.

**Panel 2:  
The portrayal of women in the audiovisual media and the messages transmitted to society at large - from a professional and or personal perspective**

**Moderator: Dr. Abdelkader EL KHISSASSI. Senior Advisor, UfM**

#### Key issues discussed

**Ms. Julia Hahn, Journalist (Germany)**, started by pointing out that, in terms of visibility, women are under-represented in the media. In terms of content, the persistence of stereotypes has harmful consequences for women, who are seen as beautiful, nurturing and emotional, while men are rational, knowledgeable and have natural talents for science. These stereotypes and dichotomies have a detrimental impact on how we see ourselves as women and our role in society. For that reason, journalists and media professionals have a huge responsibility to depict women or girls in ways that defy gender stereotypes.

*“It is very important to detect and challenge gender stereotypes to make sure they do not hold us back, and journalists and media professionals have a huge responsibility in that” - Julia Hahn*

**Ms. Rania Hashem, Journalist (Egypt)**, similarly underlined why women are still portrayed in ‘soft’ roles, as emotional, and emotionally vulnerable, as care-givers and child-bearers. However, women are courageous drivers of change, capable of leading and fostering progress. She focused mostly on Arab women and highlighted the importance of events like this to exchange experiences and help portray an accurate and non-stereotyped image of women.

To change this, there is a need for media companies to stand up for gender equality, to have anti-discrimination policies in place and give women access to decision-making bodies. Beyond that, as female journalists, both speakers agreed that they have the power to give women a voice and make them more visible. It is important to focus on the messages that are transmitted to women and girls through the media. Hence, there is a compelling and urgent need for new stories that break free of the narrative of victimhood, of women as simply emotional characters, but instead as role models who appear as experts, relevant characters, talented and successful professionals.

*“We need to focus on solidarity between women and push together towards changing those misconceptions about women and harmful stereotypes” – Rania Hashem*

They both also highlighted the role of solidarity and sorority among women and the importance of exchange and networking with fellow women journalists.

**Panel 3:  
The need to enhance the media’s potential for women’s empowerment in the audio-visual sector – Identifying barriers and proposing recommendations.**

**Moderator: Ms. Amel Saidane. Tech Entrepreneur. CEO and Co-founder of BetaCube**

#### Key issues discussed

When addressing the barriers that women face to building a career in the audio-visual sector, **Ms. Shahed Deebajah, Journalist (Jordan)**, started by highlighting that women face challenges and barriers to accessing leadership positions in all fields and sectors, not only in the audio-visual sector. She emphasised the impact of the rural and urban divide and how this impacts women’s access to the media sector.



**Dr. Severine Le Loarne - Lemaire**, Professor at the Ecole de Management in Grenoble / Head of the Department of Women and Economic Renewal (France)



**Dr. Insaf Ouhiba**, filmmaker and critic, researcher in film studies and producer (Tunisia)



Moderator: **Dr. Abdelkader EL KHISSASSI**. Senior Advisor, UfM



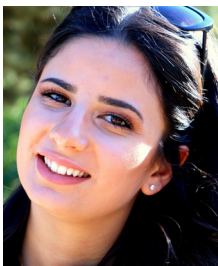
**Ms. Julia Hahn**, Journalist (Germany)



**Ms. Rania Hashem**, Journalist (Egypt)



Moderator: **Ms. Amel Saidane.** Tech Entrepreneur. CEO and Co-founder of BetaCube



**Ms. Shahed Deebajah,** Journalist (Jordan)



**Ms. Françeska Muço,** Secretary General of the Young Professionals Network, Member, Governing Board of RYCO - Youth and Women Activist (Albania)



**Thomas Volk.** Director of the Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean KAS

*“Women must be confident and have trust in themselves and in their ability to play an influential and important role in society” - Shahed Deebajah*

**Ms. Françeska Muço, Secretary General of the Young Professionals Network, Member, Governing Board of RYCO - Youth and Women Activist (Albania),** also highlighted stereotypes and sexism as a common barrier that hinders access to the sector. She also underlined that, even when women do access the sector, they normally only take part in certain types of programs, such as beauty or children’s programs, further reinforcing gender roles. Lastly, Françeska also touched upon the role of youth in the endeavour to overturn stereotypes as well as the need for cooperation at regional, international and local levels.

*“We need to be persistent on combating gender stereotypes and social norms and cooperate between each other, creating a regional platform addressing the common problem women and youth face within the region”- Françeska Muço*

They both agreed on the need for tangible action, concrete policy and taxation that criminalizes the pay gap, discrimination and violence. Additionally, they underlined the importance of empowering women through training and education so they are equally prepared to access the sector, especially leadership positions. Education is also a key tool to fight discrimination and overturn and challenge social norms from an early age, providing equal opportunities to girls to access the audio-visual sector.

There is also a need for stronger cooperation between women within the sector. In this sense, women have a responsibility to give visibility to the stories of other women and the role played by female leaders. Women must be confident and trust themselves since they do play a key role in societal progress. Having women role models to look up to will also help attract women and girls to the media sector and defy existing stereotypes.

**Closing remarks**

- **Thomas Volk. Director of the Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean KAS**

Stereotypes are simplifying images that promote gender imbalance and inequality. Hence, we must make united efforts to overturn them. But fighting for gender equality goes beyond fighting stereotypes and requires a more holistic and strong commitment from all sectors, as well as from women and men.

The Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean (KAS) not only works to promote democracy and development but also focuses on women’s empowerment, something which is at the core of the program.

*“It is our common endeavour and responsibility to stand against simplifying gender stereotypes and come up with a more gender balanced approach in the audio-visual sector.” - Thomas Volk*



# Closing Ceremony: Wrap-Up and Way Forward

The Conference closed with an opportunity for rapporteurs from the different sessions to present the results of the varied discussions and debates, as well as for high-level and keynote speakers to discuss what remains to be done and the road ahead for gender equality and women's empowerment. The conclusions of the sessions are summarized in the Conference Findings and Key Recommendations section of this report.

The session opened with remarks for high-level representatives:

## Susanne Eldhagen, UN Women Regional Director for the Arab States Region

*"It is time for transformative actions, to move the needle and finally achieve the human rights of all women and girls: it is time for Generation Equality"*

[Watch video message here](#)

## Sarah Poole, Director of Regional Bureau for Arab States, UNDP

*"The pandemic provides us for the rare chance to do things differently to transform existing socio economic models towards a renewed social contract that prioritises social justice and gender equality."*

[Watch video message here](#)

## Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General WHO

*"Health systems are stronger when women who deliver health care have an equal say in national health plans, policies and systems."*

[Watch video message here](#)

## Plácido Plaza, Secretary-General of CIHEAM

*"Discriminating social norms, gender stereotypes and significant gaps in the quantitative and qualitative data available are barriers to gender mainstreaming in agricultural and rural development policies."*

[Watch video message here](#)



**Susanne Eldhagen**, UN Women Regional Director for the Arab States Region



**Sarah Poole**, Director of Regional Bureau for Arab States, UNDP



**Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus**, Director-General WHO



**Plácido Plaza**, Secretary-General of CIHEAM



**Laura Martínez, President, Institut Català de les Dones**

*“We need a global response to gender inequality by sharing experiences in order to avoid repeating mistakes and to learn from good practices moving forward.”*

[Watch video message here](#)

**Ahmed M. El Wakil, President of ASCAME**

*“The fast-track financial inclusion and bridging of the digital divide created by the global lockdown has created new jobs, besides making working from home a new normal, both of which are perfectly suited for women.”*

[Watch video message here](#)

**Jihen Boutiba, Secretary-General BusinessMed**

*“BUSINESSMED, which I represent as General Secretary, is an organisation of more than 20 country members from the Euro-Mediterranean region. As employers and private sector representatives, we work very much on women’s empowerment and women’s social dialogue.”*

[Watch video message here](#)

**Blanca Moreno-Dodson, Manager of Centre for Mediterranean Integration, World Bank**

*“We need some targeted measures that protect the most vulnerable, and women are definitely in that group. So this trend*

*towards regionalization could benefit women only if we have targeted measures that protect them and help them access the labour market.”*

[Watch video message here](#)

**Ambassador Marisa Farrugia**, Deputy Secretary General for Social and Civil Affairs of the UfM delivered the conference closing remarks by thanking the UfM partners UN Women, WHO, CIHEAM, CEED, the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Foundation, Barcelona City Council, the Generalitat of Catalunya, Smart City and the media partners for their collaboration on the organization of the Women’s Conference. She also thanked the Swedish Government for its support to the UfM Agenda, plans and initiatives, particularly in gender equality and women’s empowerment. She also mentioned the importance of the participation of high-level representatives of the UfM Member States, international and regional institutions, the private sector and civil society organizations which has enriched the conference. She underlined that “gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but a significant indication of development in our societies. Women empowerment is the precondition for prosperous, stable and sustainable societies. When women and men are on an equal footing in all spheres of life we will experience the true significance of gender equality”. Finally, she recalled that the Union for the Mediterranean has always put women’s empowerment and gender equality at the heart of its agenda and remains committed to working towards these strategic priorities.

**Laura Martínez**, President, Institut Català de les Dones



**Ahmed M. El Wakil**, President of ASCAME



**Jihen Boutiba**, Secretary-General BusinessMed



**Blanca Moreno-Dodson**, Manager of Centre for Mediterranean Integration, World Bank



# Conference Findings & Key Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic presents a unique opportunity for policymakers to rebuild more resilient, inclusive and sustainable economies and accelerate gender inclusive decision-making.

During the Women4Mediterranean Conference all the speakers had the opportunity to fully share their view, expertise and experiences on this impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on gender equality. But they were requested to take a step further and to provide all the participants with some key recommendations for building back better on women's rights in the future to be shared with the policy makers. The Union for the Mediterranean will commit to taking them on board in the framework of the on-going regional dialogue on Strengthening the role of women in the Mediterranean region and to promoting and upscaling at regional level the good practices and solutions implemented in the different countries.

In the meantime, please have a look at them!

## Women in the Frontline of COVID-19

Women are at the forefront of the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic, risking their lives to save others. Yet, this crisis has shown that the decision-making bodies, including those established specifically to manage the pandemic, do not reflect a gender balance between women and men. In order to achieve the SDGs in 2030, a transformative gender agenda that places women on a level with men is needed when it comes to decision making. The pandemic has made the importance of care and education more visible and given governments the opportunity to realize what really matters in order to implement measures to build back better.

- All stakeholders must work together to support and empower women's participation and increase their voice and leadership in civil society, government, local authorities, business, social media and the health and social care workforce;
- More disaggregated data on health and social care is needed to know how the pan-

demically affects women and men differently, and to design effective gender-sensitive policies and accelerate gender-inclusive decision-making;

- Local responses are particularly important in the fight against the pandemic, thus women's representation at all levels is essential as well as supporting grassroots women and empowering them to actively participate in solving local problems;
- Women's voices must be placed at the centre of local media, and advocacy strategies must be designed to eliminate negative perceptions of women's leadership;
- Health should come first: investing in citizens' health is much cheaper than the huge investments that are now needed to rebuild the economy;
- Nurses who are 95% of health professionals, and 80% female, need training, leadership skills and public support that recognizes their value to society;
- Governments should not lose sight of the long-term perspective and provide income support and offer rescue packages that allow people to survive and spend, particularly to vulnerable groups which include women;
- Care and education should be considered an investment rather than expenditure, governments need to go beyond GDP, using indicators that are more related to human wellbeing;
- Education has been a victim of the pandemic but it is also the solution for long-term recovery.

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

Emerging evidence suggests that women's economic and productive lives will be affected disproportionately and differently from those of men. Across the globe, women earn less, save less, hold less secure jobs, and are more likely to be employed in the informal sector. They have less access to social protections and are the majority of single-parent households. Their capacity to absorb economic shocks is therefore less than that of men. The sessions

on women's economic participation addressed the measures needed to support women and girls and how women entrepreneurs can better navigate the crisis. The main issues discussed were **digitalization, access to finance** and the importance of a collaborative and **integrative entrepreneurial ecosystem**.

- Unpaid care is major barrier to self-employment and equal participation in the labour market;
- Equality in the workplace must be accompanied by equal pay;
- Women's leadership is key to promoting entrepreneurship in the region;
- Investments in women development skills, continuous training and mentoring will increase Supporting women's businesses is crucial, particularly in times of crisis; the need to invest in women to develop skills and capacity to increase their resilience to future crises was highlighted;
- Financial support to entrepreneurs and the possibility of refinancing debt will help women navigating the crisis;
- It is important to invest in trust relationships with suppliers and clients as this forms the basis for understanding and flexibility in challenging times;
- More support is needed for women entrepreneurs to access and use new technology and expertise to facilitate business processes in the MENA region. Digitalization is a catalyst for greater change, scalability and new business opportunities;
- Breaking isolation is important for women entrepreneurs, investing in a network of support and collaborative action and building a team that can be relied upon in times of crisis;
- Support networks should be promoted to provide a variety of resources for women entrepreneurs, from financial and legal to child care, networking and exchanging experiences and good practices.
- The role of civil society in combating VAWG has been fundamental thanks to continued action and vigilance, particularly crucial considering the radicalization of some countries;
- The need to continue to improve reliable gender-disaggregated data in order to assess the true impact of violence on women and girls and to monitor the implementation of regional and national action recovery plans
- It is necessary to enhance partnerships with police and justice services in the region, ensure coordination with other sectors, including civil society organizations and strengthen referral systems while adopting a survival centred approach to service delivery;
- The use of technology has been proved effective during the pandemic to prevent and address VAWG. According to UN Women, 86% of women's organizations have changed how they reach out to communities and women and girls using more technological platforms, with 68% of organizations citing Facebook, and 50%, mobile applications;
- Civil society organizations have been calling for intersectional gender sensitivity in international aid to ensure refugee, migrant and displaced women are included in national COVID-19 response plans;
- Gender-sensitive response can only be achieved through meaningful participation of women and women's rights organizations in all policymaking and peacebuilding processes;
- The business sector plays an important role in prevention and response to VAWG as it can provide training for employees and management teams to recognise the signs of abuse and deal with vulnerable women supportively;
- Education and community involvement are key to combat gender-based violence: the work in educational institutions on masculinities and gender-stereotypes, and engaging men and boys, adolescents and youth, as well as the media sector, is crucial to combat gender-based violence;
- A call for a cross-sectoral, integrated, holistic model to tackle domestic violence transversally was there: the focus of the policy strategies should be not only on support but to the victims but also on the level of prevention, protection and prosecution;
- The financial support to VAWG services offering shelter spaces and helplines, ensuring continuity of care, sexual and reproductive health services, psychoso-

### Ending violence against women (VAWG)

Emerging data show that since the outbreak of COVID-19, VAWG has surged in many countries. With deepened economic and social stress, together with movement and physical isolation restrictions, calls to helplines in the first days of confinement increased fivefold in some countries. However, other countries saw a decline in reports, suggesting that some women face barriers to reporting violence or seeking help.



cial services and dissemination of information about existing services is crucial in a pandemic such as Covid-19.

- We cannot afford for equality to be a long-term agenda; it is urgent and must be tackled now.

## Key messages from Side Events

### Gender equitable leadership in the global health workforce

When analysing the data, it is clear that not enough has been done to ensure that women's voices are reflected at the decision-making table. Gender is often ignored when it comes to health emergency responses. In short, women deliver global health and men lead it. While women comprise 70% of the global health workforce, they only hold 25% of senior roles, making participation in the decision-making process and access to power a pervasive challenge.

- Women leaders, particularly political ones, can strengthen the health agenda and, therefore, healthcare for everyone: the gender leadership gaps in health are a serious barrier to achieving the SDGs and universal health coverage;
- In facing global challenges, all talents of women and men are needed, equal gender representation in the public sector, government, advisory boards and committees is essential to have different perspectives;
- It is important to institutionalize government policies to create gender parity;
- Building social protection systems is crucial to keep women in the workplace, especially by supporting childcare;
- The influence of cultural factors can make implementation of gender strategies a challenge even when policies and laws are in place to support them, it is necessary to understand the culture and create alliances with people within it, noting that change is always initially met with resistance;
- Gender parity has economic benefits, therefore, it is important to include women in the formal sector (currently some 50% work in the informal sector) as well as ensure a decent work agenda which guarantees decent working conditions for women;
- Binding quotas can be useful tools to give women the needed chance to gain experience in leadership in the health sector;
- Voluntary targets in boardrooms and more gender-balanced committees and steering groups should be adopted both in the public and private health sector in order also to reduce the pay gap even within specialist health areas;

### The role of women managing the pandemic at local and regional level

Gender inequalities are found throughout the Euro-Mediterranean region, necessitating the construction of a common agenda and a multi-level approach due to the diversity of socio-economic and cultural realities. Gender disparities have grown wider due to the pandemic, meaning the most vulnerable, including women, must be protected.

- Some regional gender-sensitive policies during the pandemic include gender-based violence awareness campaigns, reinforced shelters and safe housing, and established a legal protocol of action, as well as awareness-raising campaigns in schools;
- Although local initiatives may seem to have limited outreach, some pilot projects whose influence extends beyond local level can be later replicated at a broader level;
- Urgent measures are needed to protect refugees and migrant workers affected by the crisis due to lack of medical services and limited social protections;
- The crisis has further emphasized the need to plan cities so they work for all groups, and implement a model of care that puts people and public services at the centre; it is time to incorporate equality into urban planning, municipal services and legislation;
- It is important for women's representation at local and regional level, paving the way for feminist and intersectoral policies to ensure more equal opportunities;
- Locally rooted responses are a powerful means of putting citizens at the centre of policy and, therefore, recognising and supporting civil society organizations is crucial;
- Local and regional networks are essential for sharing common objectives and challenges, as are initiatives that facilitate replication in other contexts;
- The experiences of different municipalities and regions highlights the importance of involving various actors and designing collective responses;
- Regional and inter-organizational cooperation in times of crisis can be useful to establish collaborative strategies to ensure pandemic recovery measures are gender-sensitive and intersectional so as not to undo progress made in gender equality.

## Mainstreaming gender in recovery responses of agri-food sectors and rural areas

Agricultural and food sectors are essential, the health crisis caused by COVID-19 has the potential to degenerate into a food crisis requiring urgent attention from the international community. Rural women have been more impacted by the pandemic, on top of existing gender inequalities as well as disparities between urban and rural areas. The consequences of the COVID-19 crisis on women should not, therefore, be understood in isolation but rather holistically. A roadmap for cooperation and development was agreed on during the sessions based on three aspects:

### 1. Investing in technology and innovation

Mobile phones and internet connections have become weapons of mass production in the service of women's empowerment. The Internet has allowed them to develop or transform their activities, take distance learning courses and become better informed about their rights or benefit from social protection thanks to applications resulting from COVID-19. However, improving access to these technologies to close the digital GAP requires reassessment and massive investment in rural areas. The gender dimension in agricultural research and life sciences is not only an added value in terms of creativity and opportunities, but also a way of contributing to strengthening Mediterranean food systems.

### 2. Rethinking representation and participation mechanisms

Public authorities and development cooperation actors should be the key players of a participatory approach in order to ensure the full representativeness of rural women in the rural policies. They have a role to play in ensuring the availability of gender-disaggregated data and analysis, supporting measures for equal access to productive resources, financial services and markets, focusing on rural women's economic activities as producers, processors, traders and entrepreneurs and investing in women's leadership.

### 3. Transforming emergency solutions into sustainable policies

Many emergency measures have been implemented for women in rural areas and in the agricultural sector: health and social coverage has been extended and facilitated, financial and economic assistance has been provided and the

digitisation of certain services has been made possible. These measures must be sustained and lead to systemic change. Partnerships, whether inter-institutional or public-private, when responding to urgent needs, must lead to formalised renewed regional cooperation that is more inclusive and equitable not only for women but also for the most fragile and sometimes marginalised territories.

## The role of youth in combatting gender stereotypes

The need to improve social and cultural patterns of conduct and to eliminate practices that are based on stereotyped ideas of inferiority or superiority of either genders require further commitment. Grassroots education and training on national levels would help immensely to address this issue and bring about the much-needed paradigm shift in the public opinion. Youth holds potential and has an important role to play in combatting gender stereotypes.

- A gender gap has been reinforced by artificial intelligence and algorithms;
- Young generations need to fight stereotypes;
- It is urgent to recognize that images reflecting women in film and television have an impact on society. The media tries to present a perfect image of society but does not represent people realistically. It is also important to ensure a diversity of images of women and men;
- Media actors have a key role to play in initiating a new narrative, new stories and new representation of women;
- Nowadays, digital platforms, spaces dominated by men, are the biggest media platforms. Changing this will require applying pressure at the political level.



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