

2025

Euro-Mediterranean
Women's Foundation



Mediterranean Women :

Among resistances
and Power Strategies

Workshop and presentation of the FFEM 2025 Report November 12, 2025 IEMed, UpM Barcelona

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Main conclusions and significance of the report

Since 2020, the world has undergone major **social and political changes** that have **affected the rights of women and girls**. The Covid-19 pandemic has intensified these vulnerabilities, leading to an increase in domestic violence and a slowdown in progress towards gender equality. At the same time, **the rise of movements opposed to women's rights threatens to undermine the gains that have been made, aggravating inequalities that are already exacerbated, particularly by armed conflict and climate change**.

In both the North and the South, women are **underrepresented in positions of economic and political power**, and **overrepresented in precarious, unstable, low-paid, undervalued, and insecure jobs**. In the current global context of political, economic, institutional, and social crisis, we are witnessing **a serious and flagrant regression in women's rights**, a reinforcement of inequalities, and **the massive feminization of poverty**.

It is important to remember that sexism is the system that fuels all mechanisms of male domination, stereotypes that stigmatize women and disqualify their humanity. The field is vast because inequalities are systemic. Sexism kills, it must be clearly identified and combated with specific tools and actions to enable younger generations to live in a more peaceful and egalitarian world. Although society has become more mobilized against sexism and the violence that results from it, sexism continues to claim victims and the women who are spared are extremely few.

Changes are happening, albeit too slowly and still under threat. As long as decision-making power is monopolized by half of humanity to the detriment of the other half, it is futile to expect progress. It is precisely in women's equal access to decision-making that resistance is strongest, because what is at stake is the sharing of power and, therefore, a loss of power for men.s.

The fight against discrimination and violence suffered by women, their capacity for resistance are not enough. Women cannot continue to “ask,” “convince,” and advocate; they must invest heavily in decision-making forums. Men must understand that it is in their interest, in terms of development, social peace, and justice. They must be allies in the cause of peace and development. It is urgent that they take action. The challenge is theirs. Their education is an absolute priority.

Thirty years after the Fourth United Nations World Conference, held in September 2025 in Beijing, adopted the most ambitious roadmap for the empowerment of women and girls around the world, women in the Mediterranean are visible but still have to resist. Progress has been made, goals have been adopted, and projects have been successfully implemented in the field, but this is not enough.

The difficulties encountered by women in participating fully in political and economic life remain numerous. **The gap between the legislative and regulatory measures** taken by states and **the reality of their effective implementation on the ground** remains nonsignificant. Thirty years after the meeting of ministers from European and Mediterranean countries and the Civil Society Forum held in Barcelona in November 1995, Euro-Mediterranean societies still do not give women equal rights and opportunities.

Women's expectations are not being met, as we have seen in the first two reports. This third report confirms **women's commitment to projects that promote their economic empowerment**, limit the consequences of climate change, and reject sexism. It demonstrates women's commitment in all areas. It highlights their creativity, resilience, and resistance.

They must :

- Resist discrimination,
- Resist violence,
- Resist to obtain rights, the right to work, the right to lead.

These rights are supported by the UfM throughout sectoral ministerial conferences bringing together ministers from member countries, and by focusing on the development of concrete projects. For the first time within the Union for the Mediterranean, these commitments have been regularly monitored, with some involvement from civil society actors.

This mechanism is essential, but insufficient.

For many years, at all international meetings, the absence or lack of effective implementation of states' commitments on the ground has been regretted.

In this sense, this third report by the Euromediterranean Women's Foundation does not provide an overview of the situation of women, theme by theme and country by country.

We have placed greater emphasis **on the good practices** implemented by civil society, presenting field projects, pilot projects, sustainable and replicable projects, to remove the obstacles that still stand in the way of women's empowerment.

I cannot address all the topics covered in the report that has been provided to you, nor all the experiences of the field projects.

But before focusing on the recommendations, I will first briefly discuss :

- **The risks and impacts of climate change for women,**
- The undeniable economic and professional progress made by Mediterranean women,
- The role of civil society in the fight against violence in Lebanon, Algeria, and Morocco.

When it comes to climate justice and women's rights, the situation is very clear: it will get hotter and hotter, 80% of the population will live in urban areas, and we will see large-scale climate migration, with women and children being the most affected by the consequences of climate risks, given the place and role still assigned to them in our patriarchal societies.

Faced with deadly heat waves amplified by cities, threats to essential crops such as wheat and olives, a 55% decline in water availability, and coastal erosion, **the Euro-Mediterranean region must redouble its efforts to counter social inequalities, poverty, and the marginalization of part of its population.**

The challenges may seem insurmountable. That is why feminists have been calling since the Barcelona Process and the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean for a more inclusive society that combines economic development, climate justice, and equality between women and men.

Women are responsible for agricultural production in many Mediterranean countries. They are familiar with production methods that respect biodiversity and are more inclined than men to respect sustainable practices. **They must therefore be given access to genuine entrepreneurial status in all countries and no longer work for free for their families and communities.** Access to credit and the professionalization of their daily tasks are essential to their empowerment.

Societal barriers to women's independence must be removed through **education and schooling for girls.** Their academic orientation towards science and finance is necessary so that they can become more involved in professions related to climate change and the green economy. In every country, **the empowerment of girls and women must involve respect for their sexual and reproductive rights.** In most Mediterranean countries, more girls pursue university studies and they are more successful.

They are therefore able to take on leadership responsibilities provided they can control their motherhood as they wish and are supported by **an equitable sharing of daily tasks between themselves and their partner or spouse.**

Fifteen innovative field projects were presented in Tunis in September 2025 as part of the workshop "Green, circular economy and artificial intelligence: levers for women's entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean" organized by CAWTAR with FFEM. Among the twenty or so concrete examples and more recent initiatives like :

- the BONEX (NEXUS WEFE) project for the efficient reuse of treated wastewater in OUARDANINE (Tunisia), funded under PRIMA.
- A second project, GDA JINENE SIDI THABET, is a sustainable agriculture initiative whose missions and objectives are to enhance local natural resources, promote environmentally friendly agriculture, create stable sources of income for rural women, and encourage the integration of innovative practices to address climate and economic challenges.

Other projects were presented at other meetings, such as that of the association **"La Ruche de la citoyenneté active de Tozeur"** (The Hive of Active Citizenship in Tozeur) or Thatin the Kabylie region of Algeria, which is that of the association **"Grana Nostra Climate Change, Gender, Circular Economy and Economic Empowerment of Women in ATH WAABAN"**, which has helped to strengthen financial autonomy through the creation of income generating activities (**IGAs**), integrating the dimension of gender equality, economic recognition of women's work, the preservation of biodiversity (endemic seeds, medicinal flora, beehives and the circular economy: a sustainable model where every local resource is valued, reused and transformed to create income and limit losses.

I will now move directly to the conclusions and recommendations of this workshop, during which **the importance of the local to the global** was reiterated.

Change must start at the grassroots level, through local initiatives. Associations on the ground are more familiar with real needs and are essential in guiding policy.

Successful experiences have shown that these local initiatives have a direct and measurable impact on women's daily lives. The bottom-up approach is essential for policy design, but it must be complemented by a top-down approach. The two are complementary.

This workshop confirmed that **women are not vulnerable ; they are made vulnerable by discriminatory structures and contexts.** Women's participation is a necessary but not sufficient condition : it does not automatically guarantee greater equality or gender sensitivity.

We must go further, towards capacity building, leadership, and meaningful engagement, i.e., a real ability to participate in decision-making. Women should not be confined to "women's issues" but integrated across the board into all policies (climate, transportation, innovation, peace, security).

The inclusion of women should not be justified solely by the added value of their perspective and should be considered above all as an inalienable human right.

Integrating women is a prerequisite for the success of the green and circular economy. But empowerment cannot be achieved without women's access to basic financial services. Gender equality is not only a women's issue.

The Tunis Workshop made other recommendations. These included the need to encourage governments to systematically integrate equality into environmental policies and to convince decision-makers of the importance of the NEXUS approach (climate, water, energy, security, gender), which aims to take an integrated view of critical resources such as water, energy, food, and the environment, which attracted the attention of participants.

There is an **interdependence between resources**: water, energy, food, and ecosystems are closely linked.

For example, producing energy may require water (hydroelectricity, cooling, etc.), agriculture needs water and energy, and the environment/ecosystems support all these uses.

The NEXUS WEFE seeks to manage these interconnections to prevent the management of one sector from harming another.

Sustainability objective : The aim is to promote solutions that take into account the effects on all of these sectors, in order to ensure food security, access to water, clean energy, and the preservation of ecosystems. Rather than considering each resource in isolation, the NEXUS proposes a systemic, multidisciplinary vision involving multiple stakeholders (researchers, policy makers, actors in the field).

This is important because of the growing pressures associated with climate change, population growth, water scarcity, loss of biodiversity, and increasing energy demand—all of which make separate management of these sectors increasingly unsustainable.

The NEXUS makes it possible to anticipate and minimize conflicts of use, waste, and negative impacts.

NEXUS encourages coordinated public policies, avoiding imbalances (e.g., subsidies in one sector that harm others, or contradictory regulations).

The theme of sustainability and long-term viability of projects was also highlighted, with support for long-term programs, as a real change in mentalities and structures cannot be achieved through short-term projects (2–3 years). It is necessary to ensure the sustainability of women's economic activities through their financial inclusion and the strengthening of their skills, for example by training women in the use of financial products and services, creating “green” guarantee funds dedicated to women, accelerating digitalization and facilitating access to markets, supporting green incubators and women's innovation hubs, and establishing a mechanism to monitor equality.

Investing in initiatives that enable women to recover and revive ancestral knowledge and agricultural and cultural heritage has emerged as essential, as it would contribute to developing women's economic empowerment. There is an urgent need to promote a multi-stakeholder and multisectoral approach involving associations, beneficiaries, the media, public authorities, and the private sector. And to optimize the impact of knowledge exchange platforms by ensuring active participation, reliable content, sustainable funding, and the ability to overcome technological barriers.

The progress made by Mediterranean women is undeniable from an economic and professional point of view :

We have noticed that the uniqueness of women in the Mediterranean, a region of contrasts but also a dynamic, evolving female civil society that is moving forward. They are weavers of peace in a torn geography. Overall, even though there are disparities between countries and within each country, **the Mediterranean countries of the so-called MENA region** (Middle East and North Africa) are distinguished by **a female activity rate lower than the average of other geographical areas** of the world, even though the region has a pool of educated women who are eager to work, representing 24% compared to an average of 60% in OECD countries.

Furthermore, countries on the southern and eastern shores are distinguished by differences between groups of women and the importance of informal survival work. This results in particular in unequal access to social protection. The OECD highlights the impact of legal and legislative frameworks and the need to improve legislation in order to implement decisive implementation strategies : "women remain an untapped potential for promoting and growing competitiveness and inclusive social development in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia."

According to the McKinsey Institute, equal participation of women and men in the labor market is expected to increase the GDP of the MENA region by more than 47% over the next decade. There is unanimous recognition of the progress made in terms of women's access to university, which has not yet been sufficiently translated into concrete results in terms of their autonomy.

Overall, the European countries of the Mediterranean, even if they are less well positioned than the Scandinavian countries (Finland and Sweden rank 3rd and 5th), show more favorable results than those in the southern Mediterranean, including the eastern Mediterranean. A real dynamic of female entrepreneurship is observed, particularly in the southern and eastern countries of the Mediterranean basin, with promising achievements, including in the sectors of so-called new technologies, including the dynamic of artificial intelligence, as evidenced by the many female entrepreneurs and their networks supported and brought together by the Union for the Mediterranean.

At the heart of the processes building economic equality between women and men are knowledge, exchange, and the implementation of a culture of respect and innovation with a view to expanding the role of women, who are concerned about a sustainable future for themselves and their children. This concerns all generations of women, with a particular focus on young women.

This development is part of a recognition and greater visibility of the work of women artists, visual artists, photographers, filmmakers, actresses, and writers, with award-winning exhibitions now accompanying gender analyses, reflections, and studies.

Young women and men from the Mediterranean region who uphold collective values and are driven by the desire to be actors and actresses, each of their own destiny. Cooperation and solidarity between Europe and the Mediterranean region. Young women and men from the Mediterranean who uphold collective values, driven by the desire to be actors or actresses, each shaping their own destiny. Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and solidarity, and dialogue between generations, between women and men, between civil society and institutions.

The challenge facing national, European, and international public policies is that of their duration, or even sustainability, with the need to ensure monitoring, adaptation, and replication of local actions that are renewed as economic and technological conditions evolve, or even undergo radical change, particularly with the spread of artificial intelligence throughout the world, especially around the Mediterranean.

I have chosen to talk to you more specifically about **the Regional Center for Financial Education (REF)**, which is the only center in the region specializing in financial education. It helps to strengthen the financial security and well-being of individuals and communities by promoting financial and digital inclusion and literacy among the most vulnerable and excluded groups, particularly women.

It is a unit of **the Arab Women's Center for Training and Research (CAWTAR)**, which provides institutional support mechanisms such as a technical committee, free self-learning platforms, a gender information exchange room, the Arab Network for Gender and Development (ANGED), as well as tools, databases, and electronic systems.

Toolkits complement the resources of the Regional Center for Financial Education with the provision of practical guides for trainers and training tools (presentations, videos, etc.).

The role of civil society in combating violence in Lebanon, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia.

Long ignored, violence against women spares no environment, no territory, no generation, no nationality, no religion. This violence is evident and is the mark of a society that is unequal between women and men, in which relationships of domination and power constitute social control over women and their sexuality.

Associations play a fundamental role **in the fight against gender-based and sexual violence. Associations that help victims of gender-based and sexual violence exist throughout the Euro-Mediterranean region.** Some are national or even international, while others focus on a specific territory. All their actions are based on partnerships with local authorities or government services. In addition to the efforts of national and multilateral authorities, feminist and activist movements are also mobilizing and putting pressure on politicians.

Several seminars, civil society forums, and workshops have been held over the past 30 years, such as the one held in Marrakech on November 28, 2014, at the initiative of the Federation of Democratic Women's Leagues of Morocco. The Euro-Mediterranean Women's Foundation, together with its founding members, has carried out various projects against violence in the field of women's rights.

Democratic Leagues for Women's Rights in Morocco, the Euro-Mediterranean Women's Foundation, together with its founding members, has carried out various projects to combat violence in the areas of prevention and changing attitudes, protection and support for victims, and prosecution and imprisonment of perpetrators of violence.

In Lebanon, we have observed, together with the KAFA association, **a flagrant regression in the application of laws that can provide even minimal protection, a decline in the representation of women in politics even though it was never satisfactory, a violent misogynistic attitude in all sectors of work, including political bodies**, and the media conveying a degrading image of women in a context of the rise of religion and religious sectarianism, which represents a real danger to women, who must play a central role in the reconstruction of the nation and its institutions. Lebanese feminists envision a future in which Lebanon becomes a civil state guaranteeing equality for all its citizens; a state where women are protected from violence, exploitation, and harassment, and where their fundamental rights and freedoms are respected.

However, this vision cannot be realized as long as Lebanon continues to maintain 15 different personal status laws, which contain discriminatory provisions that treat women as second-class citizens and inflict, directly or indirectly, numerous forms of violence upon them.

These religious laws do not recognize women as independent legal entities and subordinate them in essential areas such as divorce, child custody, guardianship, alimony, inheritance, and the right to pass on Lebanese nationality to their children and husbands.

Until now, the Lebanese confessional system has rejected all efforts to establish a unified civil law on personal status that would guarantee equality between all citizens of Lebanon.

The political, economic, and social situations following successive wars accentuate and exacerbate all kinds of regressions in civil rights and the development of poverty, as they increase the regression of education. The rise of confessionalism is equally detrimental to women's rights (18 recognized confessions), their political representation, and their individual freedoms.

In Algeria, despite amendments introduced to the Family Code in 2005 - notably the removal of the provision on the "wife's duty of obedience" - and the adoption of a law on domestic violence and street harassment in 2015, the problem remains unresolved.

This law should have marked a turning point, but it has not gone beyond the written stage. One of the most critical moments for women is when they try to separate from their violent spouses. The death threats that follow are warning signs, but they are often ignored.

The risks are also exacerbated by the lack of adequate restraining and protective measures for women who file complaints against their partners. Often, security forces and institutions encourage women to return to the marital home even when violence prevails there. Feminist activists also deplore shortcomings in the legislation. **In particular, they denounce the "pardon clause," a provision in the penal code that provides that civil action will cease if the woman forgives her aggressor.** This clause "promotes impunity."

Twenty years ago **in Morocco**, the MOUDAWANA divided the political class as much as it did society as a whole.

The new code notably **gave women the right to seek divorce and to freely choose their spouse without the authorization of a guardian.**

The age of marriage was set at 18 and severe restrictions were placed on polygamy. However, feminist activists were quickly disappointed by its implementation, which was hampered by the weight of tradition and the discretion given to judges.

The marriage of minors is a case in point.

Although the legal minimum age is set at 18, socio-economic difficulties push families to request exemptions for their daughters, which are granted rather lightly. Ultimately, what was supposed to be the exception has become common practice.

In 2022, more than 13,000 authorizations were issued out of 20,000 requests.

The same is true for polygamy :

Consent of the first wife, guarantee of fairness...

The conditions are strict, but judges have complete discretion to circumvent them. **In 2024, nearly twenty years after its adoption, the application of the MOUDAWANA (Family Code) revealed significant shortcomings and numerous challenges.**

These limitations concern both certain provisions that are no longer in line with the 2011 Constitution, which enshrines equality between women and men in all rights, and Morocco's international commitments, notably the Convention on the Elimination all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW), to which the Kingdom withdrew its reservations and acceded to the Optional Protocol in 2022.

Spurred on by advocacy efforts led by women's rights associations, including the FLDF, which has been working since 2016 for a thorough overhaul of the MOUDAWANA and its harmonization with the Constitution and international conventions ratified by Morocco, an authority responsible for reforming the Family Code was established in 2023.

This process was marked by consultation with all stakeholders, including civil society coalitions.

In December 2024, the broad outlines of the reform were made public in a communiqué from the Royal Cabinet.

These guidelines contain several positive advances, but also persistent challenges, particularly with regard to how these principles will be translated into effective legislation.

The drafting committee is still working on the final wording of the bill, which civil society is awaiting publication in order to assess the concrete scope of the reform.

In Tunisia, the fight against gender-based violence is supported by a rich network of feminist associations, citizen collectives and innovative initiatives. These actions are part of a post-revolutionary dynamic reinforced by the adoption of a progressive legal framework, notably Law No. 2017-58.

In addition to CAWTAR, a founding member of the Euro-Mediterranean Women's Foundation, other examples include feminist associations that have set up initiatives to combat gender-based violence in all Arab countries.

Details can be found in the appendix to the report. The SafeNess app, created by CAWTAR, is available free of charge in Tunisia and in more than 36 regions in Morocco.

It is a free application that can be downloaded to a mobile phone to help prevent sexual harassment and combat violence in public spaces.

This application allows users to act quickly in case of danger. It is easy to use and allows you to choose a list of trusted people from your contacts and send them your location in case of a threat.

In conclusion, I would like to draw your attention to the contradictions in government policy.

On the one hand, the G20 meeting in South Africa adopted an excellent declaration on the economic empowerment of women.

On the other hand, on October 16, the Union for the Mediterranean and the European Union presented a document entitled **Pact for the Mediterranean** – One Sea, One Pact, One Future – a shared ambition for the region – which should contribute to the construction of a connected, prosperous, resilient, and secure common Mediterranean space.

This pact is based on three pillars :

- People as drivers of change, connections, and innovation.
- Stronger, more sustainable, and integrated economies.
- Security, preparedness, and migration management.

Only one word mentions women in a list.

When we don't name them, we make them invisible, we don't take into account discriminations, capabilities, or rights.

We must therefore **remain vigilant**, understand that nothing can ever be taken for granted for women, and that **we must always fight for recognition of their place in society**.

It is therefore urgent to **support networks of equality, advocate and to mobilize institutions, associations, men and women together to build a peaceful and egalitarian Mediterranean.**



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