

## 6 Gender equality



Figure 6

The oppression of women, the exploitation and social pressures to which they are exposed, are not characteristic of Arab or Middle Eastern societies, or countries of the 'Third World' alone. They constitute an integral part of the political, economic, and cultural system, preponderant in most of the world.

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### 6.1 Introduction

Have you ever thought why, in the TV advertisements for detergents or household utensils, it is always women who clean the kitchen or the house, or do the washing or washing-up? Or have you ever wondered why presents for babies are often either blue or pink? Would you agree to be treated by a doctor of the opposite sex? Or, if you are actively involved in international youth work activities, have you ever reflected upon the fact that "gender equality" has also been listed among the priorities and requirements of many international programmes?

Every day, it is probable that we organise the ways we see ourselves and others according to gendered assumptions that we may not think much about.<sup>1</sup> However, gender is

everywhere and nowhere. Although we are well aware of the inequalities that result from gendered stereotypes, attitudes or roles, they continue to affect women and men all over the world.

This chapter is an attempt primarily to establish that “gender” causes inequalities. It deals first with the general concept of what gender is. Then follows a very short overview of feminism as a forceful movement towards overcoming gender inequalities in society; we also see how international frameworks deal with and promote gender equality. In the rest of the chapter, we explore issues in relation to gender, with a special focus on gender equality in the Euro-Mediterranean context and how gender can be covered in Euro-Mediterranean youth work.

## 6.2 What is ‘gender’?

### → 6.2.1 Gender v. sex

Gender is an idea that has been discussed, analysed and argued about from different perspectives for many years.<sup>2</sup> Simply stated, it is a term to describe “socially constructed” roles for women and men.<sup>3</sup> It refers to social attributes that are learned or acquired during socialisation as a member of a given community. Gender is a “dynamic” social construct. It changes according to time, place and culture. What it means to be a woman and a man is not the same in the 21st century as it was in ancient Egypt or in medieval Europe; nor are the relations between the sexes the same in Britain, in Saudi Arabia and in India today.<sup>4</sup>

Gender therefore refers to the socially given attributes, roles, activities, responsibilities and needs connected to being men (masculine) and women (feminine) in a given society at a given time, and as a member of a specific community within that society.<sup>5</sup> In that sense, gender is also the cultural part of what it is to be a woman or a man.

Although gender is a construct, it refers to and affects every aspect of people’s lives, encompassing both men and women, not just women alone. People’s gender identity determines how they are perceived and expected to think and act as men and women:<sup>6</sup> how people look, how people talk, what people eat and drink, what people wear, how people spend their leisure time, what jobs people do, and so on.<sup>7</sup> For example, women are often expected to take care of the children and elderly without being paid, while men are expected to work outside the home and earn money to sustain the family.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, all the institutions in a society (marriage, families, schools, workplaces, clubs, pubs, political organisations) are themselves gendered and are locations where the gendering of individuals and relationships takes place.<sup>9</sup>

So gender can be taken both as an analytical category, a way of thinking about how identities are constructed and a political idea that addresses the distribution of power in society.<sup>10</sup> Due to this characteristic, gender is an area that cuts across thinking about society, law, politics and culture, and it is frequently discussed in relation to other aspects of identity and social position, such as class, ethnicity, age and physical abilities.<sup>11</sup> Gender is a sensitive and political issue, related to language and power, that affects everybody.<sup>12</sup>

Sex refers to the biological characteristics of women (female) and men (male) due to certain identifiable physical features. Unlike gender, sex roles are fixed and do not change over time or across cultures. For example, women can bear children, while

men cannot; men have testicles while women do not. To put it another way, 'male' and 'female' are sex categories, while 'masculine' and 'feminine' are gender categories.<sup>13</sup>

**Q: What can women/girls do and men/boys cannot do in your own society? Why is this so?**

### → 6.2.2 Gender stereotypes and attitudes: gender roles

Stereotypes are shared beliefs or thoughts about the character of a particular human group. They are often overly generalised and do not take account of the individual differences within the group in question.<sup>14</sup> Gender stereotypes refer to those kinds of beliefs that people hold about members of the categories 'man' or 'woman'. Stereotypes such as "women always cry, but men never do" are particular attributes generalised to all members of the categories 'women' or 'men', which are viewed as more homogeneous than they really are. Stereotypes often form the basis of prejudice and discrimination against the group concerned.<sup>15</sup>

Attitudes are broader than stereotypes. They encompass feelings and intentions to act, as well as beliefs and thoughts. They can also apply to issues and events, in addition to groups of people.<sup>16</sup> In all cultures, attitudes are shaped and communicated directly or indirectly. For example, a woman is often perceived as more emotional, less rational, less strong and closer to nature, and is described with emphasis on her reproductive system as well as the hormones that differentiate her from a man.<sup>17</sup> In many cultures and languages, one can find proverbs glorifying mothers, as in "the mother is the light of the house" or "paradise lies under mothers' feet"; but also mothers of daughters are evaluated negatively, reflecting on the unequal status of girls and boys, as in the saying "let the one who bears a son be proud, let the one who bears a daughter beat herself".<sup>18</sup> From childhood, people hear statements that reflect gendered attitudes, such as "my beautiful daughter" or "my brave son"; girls are given dolls, boys are given toy trucks or cars; in cartoon books, mothers cook while fathers repair the car. As a consequence of these attitudes, men have always been seen as the norm, presenting superior values, with women as a deviation.<sup>19</sup>

#### Sexism

The actions or attitudes that favour one sex over the other, and discriminate against people solely on the basis of their gender, are called sexism. It is related to stereotypes, since the discriminatory actions or attitudes are frequently based on false beliefs or over-generalisations about gender and on seeing gender as relevant when it is not.<sup>20</sup> "Chairman", "mankind" and "housewife" are only a few examples of sexist language and attitudes, which are deeply embedded in many cultures and languages. In the 21st century, there is an increasing effort to change sexist and discriminatory attitudes for gender-neutral ones. To start with, how do these sound: "chairperson", "humankind" and "homemaker"?

**Q: Can you identify gender-biased or sexist attitudes in your own culture and language? Can you think of gender-neutral alternatives?**

Attitudes in a given society/community lead to gender roles, which are social roles ascribed to individuals on the basis of their sex,<sup>21</sup> and learned behaviours that condition the activities, tasks and responsibilities perceived as belonging to male and female.<sup>22</sup> For example, giving birth is a female sex role, while the role of infant nurturer and care giver (which could be performed by a male) is a gender role usually ascribed to females.<sup>23</sup> Because they can give birth and breastfeed their infants, women are expected to undertake all childcare and the associated socialisation, and it is believed that these activities determine their entire lives.<sup>24</sup>

Like the concept of gender, gender roles are affected by socio-economic, political, geographic and cultural contexts, and they vary widely within and between cultures. They also depend on other factors, like ethnicity, class, religion, sexual orientation and age.<sup>25</sup> Changes in gender roles often occur in response to changing economic, natural or political circumstances.

**Q: Has there been any change in the perception of gender roles between, for example, the generation of your grandparents and yours?**

Social construction of gender roles has considerable impact on a person's life, and also affects young people considerably. People start learning gender and gender roles when they are very young. A part of this learning occurs throughout socialisation processes, influenced by the collective practices of institutions such as school, church, media and family, which construct and reinforce particular forms of masculinity and femininity.<sup>26</sup> In the modern world, new forms of socialisation – such as new information technologies and burgeoning cultural practices (in music, media and television) – may also strengthen similar stereotypes and produce similar consequences, increasing the social power of men and maintaining the subordination of women.<sup>27</sup> The autonomy of the individual is also influential in the construction and internalisation of gender roles.

Gender roles undoubtedly affect people's lives, women's lives generally negatively, and maybe young women's lives more negatively still. Where women are perceived as overstepping the limits of their accepted roles, they can be physically or sexually abused by male partners: in many cultures, beatings or rape in marriage are considered acceptable in the existing legal framework.<sup>28</sup> Women are often expected to stay within their homes and take care of their spouses and children. Working women often experience the dichotomy of home versus work.<sup>29</sup> Gender roles are also visible in categories of jobs considered typically female or male: nursing or teaching are predominantly female occupations; technical jobs, driving, forestry and politics are predominantly male occupations.<sup>30</sup> As a result, education opportunities are also affected by gender roles. Very often legal systems reflect gender roles to the extent that they regulate everyday aspects of life. The public approach to women's physical and psychological well-being on issues such as virginity, abortion or rape is shaped by these definitions<sup>31</sup> because 'sexuality'<sup>32</sup> is one of the complex aspects of gender roles.

**Q: When you consider social aspects of your life (going out, dependency on parents/family, sexual relationships), can you see any differences between you and a friend of the opposite sex?**

### → 6.2.3 Gender equality, multiple inequalities and discrimination

Gender is socially constructed and socially reinforced by stereotypes, attitudes and gender roles. To the extent that gender roles indicate difference, power relationships between the sexes become more and more unequal<sup>33</sup> and gender relations become more hierarchical, to the disadvantage of women.<sup>34</sup> This gender inequality and power imbalance between sexes can be seen in a range of gendered practices in every aspect of life: the division of labour and resources; gendered ideologies such as the norms and values of acceptable behaviour for women or men; and gendered institutions such as the family, political and legal systems. Since historically women have been excluded from many institutional spheres or their participation has been limited, they often have less bargaining power to affect change.<sup>35</sup>

There are different theories and models for understanding how men have historically and predominantly placed themselves in social hierarchies over women.<sup>36</sup> Patriarchy<sup>37</sup> is an important concept in appreciating the extent of gender inequality. It may be defined as the systematic societal structures that institutionalise male physical, social and economic power over women. These structures work to the benefit of men by constraining women's life choices and chances. Although there are many differing interpretations of patriarchy, the roots are often located in women's reproductive role and in sexual violence (acceptance of fundamental ideas about the nature and value of women, mostly their biological roles as wife and mother<sup>38</sup>), interwoven with processes of capitalist exploitation. The main 'sites' of patriarchal oppression have been identified as housework, paid work, the state, culture, sexuality and violence. Behaviours that discriminate against women because of their gender are often seen as patriarchal practices; for example, occupational segregation, exclusion and unequal pay.

**Q: Is it common in your society that women and are paid less than men for similar work?**

#### **Masculinities**

Those behaviours, languages and practices, in specific cultural and organisational locations, that are commonly associated with men (and thus culturally defined as not feminine) are called masculinities.<sup>39</sup> This implies multiple interpretations for a man to demonstrate he is 'a man'. The pressure and expectation to behave in terms of dominant codes of masculinity and 'manhood' remain a prevalent experience for many men, with consequences for women, children and men in turn.<sup>40</sup> It varies across socio-cultural contexts and within groups and networks, and different men with different experiences, relationships and pressures often demonstrate their masculinity in different ways.<sup>41</sup>

Gender inequality and gender oppression are not uniform across time and space. Nor do they exclude other forms of social inequality, such as age, class, disability, caste, religion, ethnicity and race. The theory of male dominance and the concept of patriarchy contribute to identifying gender inequality in societies. But women are not a homogeneous group constrained in identical ways, even in the same society. Gender inequalities interact and intersect with other social inequalities, which may be prioritised over gender concerns in certain contexts.

So, although women are oppressed and subject to unequal practices in almost all societies, not all women experience this inequality in the same way, because multiple inequalities also exist. There are clear differences between “being a woman”, “being an old woman”, “being a deaf woman”, “being a rich woman”, “being a black woman”, “being a Roma woman” and “being a Muslim/Christian/Jewish woman” even in the same society. This implies that it is difficult to develop gender equality without paying attention to and fighting other forms of inequality at the same time.<sup>42</sup>

**Q: What are the multiple inequalities that affect a young woman's life in your community?**

Gender discrimination is any practice against gender equality. It covers “any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of socially constructed gender roles and norms which prevents a person from enjoying full human rights”.<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, discrimination against women refers to “any distinction, exclusion, or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field”.<sup>44</sup>

**Homophobia**

This is an example of discrimination based on sexual orientation. It is “an irrational fear of and aversion to homosexuality and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people based on prejudice and is similar to racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and sexism”. It manifests itself in the private and public spheres in different forms, such as hate speech, incitement to discrimination, ridicule, verbal, psychological and physical violence, persecution and even murder, as well as any discrimination in violation of the principle of equality or unjustified and unreasonable limitation of rights.<sup>45</sup> In 2008, about 80 countries in the world still criminalise homosexuality and condemn consensual same-sex acts with imprisonment; of these, nine still have the death penalty.<sup>46</sup>

Gender discrimination is often based on stereotypes, attitudes, gender roles and gender relations. It occurs in any aspect of life, but most clearly in employment, even in those circumstances where women have the same qualifications as their male counterparts: men are preferred over women for technical jobs such as engineering or construction; in job interviews, women are asked if they plan to bear children or not; women are paid less for the same jobs.

The negative consequences of widespread forms of overt or covert discrimination have led some societies to adopt practices of positive discrimination, also known as affirmative action, which deliberately favour or give preference to a certain group or groups, such as women, disabled people or specific ethnic groups. The main purpose of such policies is to overcome structural forms of discrimination, which otherwise would prevail against specific social groups, and to redress balances in representation.<sup>47</sup>

Legal and practical inequality and discrimination against women all over the world have given rise to the legal concept of gender equality in the context of international human rights. Gender equality originates from the idea that “all human beings, both men and women, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, prejudices and rigid gender roles” and suggests that “the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally”. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that “their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female”.<sup>48</sup>

Gender equality is further developed into the idea of women’s human rights; that women have all the fundamental human rights laid out in all the major human rights conventions as human beings, and have rights as gender-specific beings. These rights are an integral part of the fundamental human rights of all human beings, and at the same time they are meant to safeguard the specific needs of women, because women suffer from the denial of these rights around the world.<sup>49</sup> For example, “a life free from violence” is a basic human right; however, violence against women and girls represents one of the greatest human rights problems for women and cuts across all countries, social groups, ethnicities, religions and socio-economic classes.<sup>50</sup>

#### → 6.2.4 Gender mainstreaming

Awareness of the problems, inequalities and discrimination that women disproportionately suffer all over the world has required a holistic approach to ensure women’s human rights and gender equality, because social, economic and political rights are indivisible and interdependent. For example, discriminatory inheritance laws (civil rights) have a serious impact on the ability of women to participate in economic life (economic rights); women being registered as voters on the family card under the name of their husband or father (civil rights) limits their effective ability to enjoy their legal right to vote as autonomous individuals (political rights); and restrictions on the mobility of women (civil rights) have an impact on their access to health and reproductive care and education (social rights).<sup>51</sup>

Stemming from such a holistic approach, the recognition of women’s human rights in international human rights law by international organisations such as the United Nations (UN), the Council of Europe (CoE) and the European Union (EU) has brought about a focus on gender mainstreaming, as a means and strategy of promoting and incorporating gender equality in all aspects of life and policies. It has been defined as “the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making”.<sup>52</sup> Mainstreaming is not an end in itself but a strategy, an approach, a means of ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities such as policy development, research, advocacy/dialogue, legislation, resource allocation, and the planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects.<sup>53</sup>

Any approach to gender mainstreaming requires sufficient resources, as well as high-level political and societal commitment and authority. It requires cross-sectoral policy supervision and monitoring, combined with a network of gender specialists. The building of alliances between governmental gender machineries and outside constituencies, such as women’s organisations and the media, is crucial for success.<sup>54</sup>

### Gender mainstreaming

The United Nations defines gender mainstreaming principles as:<sup>55</sup>

- forging and strengthening the political will to achieve gender equality and equity, at the local, national, regional and global levels;
- incorporating a gender perspective into the planning processes of all ministries and departments of government, such as macro-economic and development planning, personnel policies and management, and legal affairs;
- integrating a gender perspective into all phases of sectoral planning cycles, including analysis, development, appraisal, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes and projects;
- using sex-disaggregated data in statistical analysis to reveal how policies impact differently on women and men;
- increasing the numbers of women in decision-making positions in government and in the private and public sectors;
- providing tools and training in gender awareness, gender analysis and gender planning for decision-makers, senior managers and other key personnel;
- forging links between governments, the private sector, civil society and other stakeholders to ensure a better use of resources.

**Q: How do you think gender mainstreaming can be used as a tool in youth work to ensure gender equality?**

## 6.3 Feminism(s)

Feminism refers to a number of movements, theories and philosophies that have been concerned basically with equality and justice for women, women's rights and ending sexism in all its forms. It denotes both an intellectual commitment and a political movement, of many different kinds. Feminism includes a wide range of perspectives on social, cultural, and political phenomena, though not all feminists may agree on the different elements and components of feminist struggle. Important topics for feminist theory and politics include: the body, class and work, disability, the family, globalisation, human rights, popular culture, race and racism, reproduction, science, the self, sex work and sexuality.<sup>56</sup>

Feminism has altered aspects of societies in which women have struggled for women's rights, ranging from culture to law. More specifically, feminist activists have campaigned for women's legal rights (rights of contract, property rights, voting rights); for rights to bodily integrity and autonomy, for abortion rights, and for reproductive rights (including access to contraception and good-quality prenatal care); for protection from domestic violence, sexual harassment and rape; for workplace rights, including maternity leave and equal pay; and against other forms of discrimination.<sup>57</sup>



### → 6.3.1 Waves of feminism

It was not until the 19th century that organised women's movements started to fight against different and dominant aspects of gender inequality, which changed with the time and place. According to different emphases placed on the issues being fought about, the history of feminism is often divided into three waves. The first wave refers mainly to the women's suffrage movement, which was concerned with ensuring the right to vote for women (from the 19th to the early 20th centuries), mainly in the United Kingdom and the United States. Starting with the struggle to promote equal contract and property rights for women, activism in the first wave focused on political inequalities for women and on gaining political power. The second wave covers the period from the 1960s to the late 1980s, with an emphasis on fighting against social and cultural inequalities and ensuring women's liberation.<sup>58</sup> The personal spheres of life were also brought to the fore by the second-wave feminists, in order to bring what had formerly been seen as private matters (such as housework or domestic violence) onto the political agenda.<sup>59</sup> The third wave refers to a period beginning with the 1990s, often as a critique of second-wave feminism for its lack of attention to the differences among women due to race, ethnicity, class, nationality or religion. This period emphasises identity as a site for gender struggle.<sup>60</sup>

It is also important to note that not all feminists would agree with this identification of feminism with particular moments of political activism in history. One of the reasons for this is that those moments confine feminism to a few (white) women in the west over the past century or so and neglect other forms of resistance to male domination that should be considered "feminist" throughout history and across cultures. Another reason is that the historical perspective of the first and second wave ignores the ongoing resistance to male domination between the 1920s and 1960s and the resistance outside mainstream politics, particularly by women of colour and working-class women.<sup>61</sup>

### → 6.3.2 Forms of feminism

The feminist women's movements aim to achieve women's liberation, but different theoretical feminisms can also be categorised according to the emphasis they give to the sources of gender inequalities and domination over women. However, this does not mean that these perspectives are mutually exclusive. There are often attempts to synthesise different forms of feminism and to synthesise feminist analysis with other mainstream frameworks.<sup>62</sup>

Radical feminism suggests that men as a group dominate women as a group and that men benefit from the subordination of women.<sup>63</sup> Radical feminists aim to challenge and overthrow such patriarchy by opposing standard gender roles and male oppression of women.<sup>64</sup> They introduce a range of issues such as the appropriation of women's sexuality and bodies, men's violence against women, violence in the family and rape, which are systems of male domination and control over women.<sup>65</sup> Personal aspects of life are seen as part of this, which is also indicated by the slogan "the personal is political".<sup>66</sup>

Socialist feminism suggests that women's oppression is the result of a combination of patriarchy and capitalism.<sup>67</sup> It focuses upon both the public and private spheres of a woman's life and argues that liberation can only be achieved by working to end both the economic and cultural sources of women's oppression.<sup>68</sup>

Marxist feminism also argues that men's domination over women is a by-product of capital's domination over labour and class relations, where the economic exploitation of one class by another is the central feature of social structure that determines the nature of gender relations.<sup>69</sup> For Marxists, gender oppression is class oppression and women's subordination is a form of class oppression which serves the interests of capital and the ruling class. Accordingly, Marxists think that, when class oppression is overcome, gender oppression would vanish as well.<sup>70</sup>

Liberal feminism differs from both the above in conceiving women's subordination as the summation of numerous small-scale deprivations.<sup>71</sup> This means that there is no one basis of women's disadvantage, but more foci for analysis. A major concern is the denial of equal rights to women in education and in employment, which makes women disadvantaged due to prejudice against women. This is often combined with sexist attitudes, which act to sustain the situation because such attitudes are analysed as traditional and unresponsive to recent changes in real gender relations.<sup>72</sup> Liberal feminists demand the equality of men and women through political and legal reforms.

There are different currents of feminism among religious women's groups in different religions. These currents reconsider the traditions, practices, scriptures and theologies of their religion from a feminist perspective<sup>73</sup> and try to improve the religious, legal and social status of women regarding the religious interpretations of women and their roles in the society and in the family. Besides the efforts of religious women's movements, there are also discussions about the compatibility of religious books and laws with women's rights and feminism.

## 6.4 Gender equality in international frameworks

The need to ensure gender equality encompasses all aspects of life and embraces all human beings, rather than only women. In the context of international human rights, the legal concept of gender equality is enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as in the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)<sup>74</sup> of 1979. The CEDAW, which had been ratified by 185 countries by the end of 2007, is often described as an international bill of rights for women. Consisting of a preamble and 30 articles, it defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. By ratifying this convention, states are legally bound to put its provisions into practice and committed to submitting national reports, at least every four years, on measures they have taken to comply with their treaty obligations. States also commit themselves to undertaking a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms, including measures:

- to incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in their legal systems, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt appropriate ones prohibiting discrimination against women;
- to establish tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination; and
- to ensure elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organisations or enterprises.<sup>75</sup>

The CEDAW provides the basis for achieving equality between women and men by ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life (including the rights to vote and to stand for election) as well as education, health and employment. The CEDAW requires states to ensure that women can enjoy all their

human rights and fundamental freedoms and to take appropriate measures against all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of women. It is the only human rights treaty that affirms the reproductive rights of women and targets culture and tradition as influential forces shaping gender roles and family relations.

**Q: Has your country signed the CEDAW and its Optional Protocol? With or without reservations? If so, which are the reservations of your country and what do they refer to in your country's context?<sup>76</sup>**

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women<sup>77</sup> is the body of 23 independent experts on women's rights from around the world that monitors the implementation of the convention. Countries who have become party to the treaty are obliged to submit regular reports to the committee on how the rights of the convention are implemented, and the committee considers each report and addresses its concerns and recommendations to the countries in the form of concluding observations.

The Optional Protocol<sup>78</sup> to the CEDAW was adopted in 1999, which brought in two important legal procedures for the benefit of women. With the optional protocol, individual women or groups of women may submit claims of violations of rights protected under the convention to the committee (if a number of criteria are met); and the committee may initiate inquiries into situations of grave or systematic violations of women's rights.<sup>79</sup>

The governments of the world reaffirmed their commitment in 1995 to "the equal rights and inherent human dignity of all women and men" in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,<sup>80</sup> which is an agenda for women's empowerment. It aims to remove all obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision making. It reaffirms that the human rights of women and girl children are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. It emphasises that women share common concerns that can be addressed only by working together and in partnership with men towards the common goal of equality.

The Platform for Action identified 12 critical areas of concern:

- the burden of poverty on women;
- access to education and training;
- access to health care;
- violence against women;
- the effects of armed or other kinds of conflict on women;
- inequality in economic structures and policies;
- inequality between men and women in sharing power and decision making at all levels;
- insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women;
- promotion and protection of the human rights of women;
- stereotyping of women and inequality in women's access to and participation in all communication systems, especially in the media;
- gender inequalities in managing natural resources and safeguarding the environment;
- the rights of girl children.<sup>81</sup>

In addition to these global efforts, there are also regional frameworks to ensure gender equality. The Council of Europe provides a number of legal instruments to promote equality between women and men in its member states. In the general perspective of the protection and promotion of human rights, the Council of Europe seeks to combat any interference with women's liberty and dignity (for example, violence against women or trafficking in human beings), to eliminate discrimination based on sex and to promote a balanced representation of women and men in political and public life.<sup>82</sup> The European Social Charter provides a number of specific rights for women, namely equal remuneration, protection of mothers and working women, and the social and economic protection of women and children. The Additional Protocol of 1988 included the right to equal opportunities and treatment with regard to employment and careers, without discrimination based on sex. Furthermore, the revised Social Charter contains a specific non-discrimination clause on a variety of grounds, one of which is sex.<sup>83</sup>

Gender equality is a fundamental right under the treaties and a priority policy of the European Union (EU). It provides a comprehensive approach which includes legislation, mainstreaming and positive actions. Key policy areas of the EU concern employment and the labour market; the role of men in promoting gender equality; the gender pay gap; education and training; gender balance in decision making; women and science; reconciliation between work and private life; gender budgeting; social inclusion and protection; development co-operation; migrant women; and gender-based violence and trafficking in women.<sup>84</sup>

In 2006, "A roadmap for equality between women and men" outlined six priority areas for EU action on gender equality for the period 2006-2010: equal economic independence for women and men; reconciliation of private and professional life; equal representation in decision making; eradication of all forms of gender-based violence; the elimination of gender stereotypes; and the promotion of gender equality in external and development policies.<sup>85</sup>

The European Institute for Gender Equality, based in Vilnius, is an independent centre providing help in terms of expertise, to improve knowledge and raise the visibility of equality between men and women.

The Barcelona Declaration of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP)<sup>86</sup> contains only three references to women's rights. Within the framework of the Economic and Financial Chapter, the signatories simply "recognise the key role of women in development" and pledge "to promote their active participation in economic and social life and in the creation of employment". As regards the Social, Cultural and Human Chapter, they call on all southern partners to pay particular attention to the role of women in the regular dialogue with the EU on educational policies. It is also noted that the EMP must contribute to an improvement of living and working conditions and greater levels of employment, "in particular of women and the neediest strata of the population". In short, the Barcelona Declaration has no references to the legal and political rights of women, to gender mainstreaming, to specific issues that affect women, such as gender violence, or to how progress should be measured.<sup>87</sup>

The Five-Year Work Programme<sup>88</sup> (2007-2011) adopted at the 10th anniversary of the Barcelona Declaration in November 2005 (Barcelona +10) placed decisive emphasis on the promotion of gender equality in the EMP, with one of the key objectives being to "take measures to achieve gender equality, preventing all forms of discrimination and ensuring the protection of the rights of women".<sup>89</sup> It also calls for a significant increase in the percentage of women in employment in all partner countries with

expansion and improvement in education opportunities for girls and women, along with political pluralism and participation, particularly for women and young people, through active promotion of a fair and competitive political environment, including fair and free elections, and increased participation of women in decision making in political, social, cultural and economic positions.

Starting with the Barcelona +10 Euro-Med Women's Conference held in 2005, a series of meetings on "strengthening the role of women in society" were held to strengthen women's roles in political, civil, social, economic and cultural spheres, and to fight discrimination. Its conclusions recognised that "the International Covenants on Human Rights include the obligation to ensure the equal rights of men and women to enjoy all economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights" and stated that "the Euro-Mediterranean partners will embrace a holistic approach based on the following interdependent and interlinked priorities":<sup>90</sup>

- women's political and civil rights;
- women's social and economic rights and sustainable development;
- women's rights in the cultural sphere and the role of communications and the mass media.

Regarding Euro-Mediterranean youth work, one of the thematic priorities of the Euro-Mediterranean Youth Programme at all its different phases has been to foster gender equality in all actions, especially to ensure that opportunities for active citizenship are equally available to young men and women. The programme has paid special attention to supporting youth projects that tackle the role of women in Euro-Mediterranean societies and to increasing the skills and competences of youth leaders, youth workers and trainers in the field of gender equality. Besides giving a thematic priority to young women's status in society and to gender equality, implementation of the programme is also designed to ensure balanced participation of young women and men in the individual youth projects and in the teams of trainers.

## **6.5 The Euro-Mediterranean context: issues and challenges of gender (in)equality and women's rights**

Gender inequality is a horizontal issue, experienced in every aspect of life. It is not specific to any region or country, but a global problem for women of all countries, with varying impact on women's lives. In addition, the needs of different groups of women sometimes show similarities between countries and sometimes vary considerably even within the same region or country. For example, poor women may be more concerned with easier access to the labour market and childcare benefits, while better-off women may be more concerned with expanding the grounds for divorce and increasing their autonomy *vis-à-vis* forms of male dominance.<sup>91</sup> In contrast, migrant women in different countries may experience similar problems in their lives. This fact is often not taken into account, even in multifaceted approaches to women's rights.

Women's rights are often guaranteed by the constitution of their country. However, these guarantees do not always translate into women realising their full civic, legal, and political rights because they often suffer from implementation gaps. Those rights are not accompanied by substantive socio-economic measures that allow all women

to benefit from them. When this is the case, the *de facto* enjoyment of new rights is restricted to a limited number of women, usually middle-class urban women, to the exclusion of most poorer women and those living in non-urban areas.<sup>92</sup>

Since the beginning of the 20th century, 8 March has been globally celebrated as International Women's Day, to highlight the issues, as well as the successes, of women's empowerment and the promotion of gender equality and equity.

The rest of this section looks at various major issues and problems in gender equality and women's rights that are shared by groups of women in European and Mediterranean countries. These issues are to an extent tackled or neglected by national policies, but they are always underlined by international actors, policies, actions and programmes. Naturally, these issues are not mutually exclusive. They are mostly embedded in similar societal, political and economic conditions and hence refer to the same root causes. Any positive or negative changes in one issue also affect other issues, since they are inter-related and interdependent.

### → 6.5.1 Political and civic participation<sup>93</sup>

Politics is often understood as a male sphere. This means that women are viewed as a minority to be protected, rather than the under-represented half of human society that they in fact are.<sup>94</sup>

Dr Azza Karam

The participation and representation of women is maybe the most important component of a democratic system, if women are to make their voices, preferences and problems heard by the decision-makers and find participatory ways of overcoming inequalities that they experience in their everyday lives. However, women's political representation and participation, in both the public and private spheres, has historically been very low worldwide. In European and especially in Mediterranean countries, while women's participation and representation is undoubtedly increasing, women are still marginalised in decision-making structures and many obstacles remain in their path. Although constitutions often guarantee equal political rights (such as the right to stand for election and the right to vote) for women and men in principle, women are not well represented in parliaments, with the exception of the Nordic countries; there are very few women ministers in governments, and women are not much encouraged to take active roles in political parties.

In fact, there is not much difference between some northern and southern states: the percentage of women in parliament in Morocco is 10.8%, compared with 11.5% in Italy and 12.2% in France; while Tunisia has 22.8%, well ahead of various EU states. Nordic countries are exceptions, and examples for other countries, with an average of almost 40% for women's participation in the legislative chambers. To overcome the imbalance, affirmative action or quota systems are used in countries like Jordan, Morocco and in northern countries. However, such actions do not alone resolve the problem of discrimination.

As regards the executive, the trend is positive and various policies have been adopted to promote greater representation and participation of women. There are women in

government at ministerial level in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey, as well as various European countries. However, representation in cabinet positions remains minimal both in Europe and the Mediterranean. For example, although women make up 52% of the population, only in Sweden do they have 50% of government posts and the EU average in 2001 was 24.8%. In addition, even if female ministers exist, their appointments are mostly in positions dealing with social or cultural affairs and hardly ever in positions in any of the core ministries. In many countries, a women's rights ministry does not exist.

Although some political parties in various countries (Algeria, Israel, Morocco, Tunisia and some European countries) have instituted quotas to ensure women's participation as electoral candidates, women experience significantly greater difficulty in participating in elections and the number of female representatives in established political parties is generally quite low.

Maybe due to the fact that women experience various difficulties in participating in public decision-making structures, women's organisations and their involvement in the civil society have always been an important part of the struggle for women's representation and participation. In European and Mediterranean countries, these organisations deal with most contemporary women's problems; they network with NGOs from different countries, religions, ages, and social and cultural backgrounds; they look for concrete and pragmatic solutions for women's problems; they have political projects for change; they are not only institutions but are composed of women's groups, movements or platforms of organisations.

There are four major issues that women's organisations have focused on: the reform of family law, the criminalisation of domestic violence and other gender-based violence such as honour crimes, nationality rights (for children through their mothers) and greater access to employment and participation in political decision making. Almost all women's organisations advocate that current reservations to the CEDAW should be removed and they ask for appeal to international human rights standards when national laws are in conflict with them. It should also be noted that women's organisations also face serious obstacles, given the limitations on freedom of expression, restrictive laws covering NGOs and lack of funding.

#### **The European Women's Lobby (EWL)<sup>95</sup>**

This is the largest umbrella organisation and a broad-based coalition of women's associations with members from 27 EU member states and three candidate countries. It was set up to participate in and contribute to the European decision-making process, where increasingly decisions are made that have a direct impact on the lives of European women but in which women have no voice, no consultation and no participation.<sup>96</sup> The EWL aims to promote women's rights and equality between women and men in the EU and is active in areas like women's economic and social position, women in decision making and violence against women.

The low numbers of women in politics both in European and Mediterranean countries (with the exception of the Nordic countries) clearly highlight severe failures in ensuring gender equality in political life. Maybe the fundamental problem is the historically constructed socio-cultural environments that discriminate against women and stereotype gender roles. The patriarchal structure of political and social life is pervasive,

and political, social, economic and legal realms of life are largely controlled through informal and personalised networks, ultimately controlled by men. Thus, even if women attain positions of power, they are often circumscribed in their capacity to act.

### → 6.5.2 Citizenship and legal status<sup>97</sup>

The rights of women are, on the one hand, an integral part of the fundamental human rights of all human beings, and on the other are about safeguarding the specific needs of women. Although international human rights laws try to overcome any inequality that might arise from this two-tiered citizenship, in many countries there is still a mismatch between public political or labour rights and private or family-related rights. In fact, discriminatory laws still exist as a sign of underlying social, economic and political discrimination, as well as patriarchal domination.

In many European countries, women's legal status is guaranteed in line with international human rights law, but it often remains discriminatory in many Mediterranean countries when compared with other regions in the world. Yet there have been legal reforms in those countries and a very slow but steady process of absorption and participation in international and multilateral gender-equality frameworks.

Women's private or social rights in Mediterranean countries are often limited by family laws or personal status laws that view women as dependent and minor with respect to marriage, divorce, child custody, the right to work, the right to travel and inheritance. It is possible to trace the social and traditional norms in those laws that often subordinate women to male guardianship or authority.

For example, in Turkey, until the amendment of civil law in 2001, the legal head of the family was the husband and there was no equal division of property acquired during marriage. Moreover, in many cases, sisters (though more informally than legally) were not allowed by their brothers or other male members of the family to claim inheritance rights from their parents' property. In many countries, male heads of family often demand obedience from women within marriage; men act as the primary intermediary between women and the state; and men can dissolve a marriage. With the marriage bond, the protection of the family is seen as more important than the protection of individual rights, especially those of women. In some cases, violence is even legalised in marriage and family life for the sake of the reinforcement and preservation of the family. This means that husbands also claim rights over their wives' bodies, so if they perceive any "disobedience" from their wives, they can claim the right to physically abuse or rape their wives.

In European countries, women also face legal challenges, particularly where rights to full participation in employment are concerned. For example, although childcare is often seen as the responsibility of the mother, working women are given limited maternity provisions, and still in many European countries there is no paternity leave in place for men.

The issues of marriage, nationality, parental authority and freedom of movement are particularly relevant with the increasing mobility of individuals between European and Mediterranean countries. In some cases, women from Mediterranean countries cannot pass on their nationality to their children if their husbands are foreigners. In many countries, women are not allowed to travel alone without the consent of a male guardian, and married women often cannot travel alone abroad with their minor children without their husband's approval, which presents an obstacle to full freedom of movement. Mixed marriages also face many problems: in Lebanon, for instance, Muslims and Christians cannot inherit from each other.



### → 6.5.3 Education

Education has been, perhaps, the most important tool for overcoming gender inequalities in societies, by empowering women themselves, ensuring the participation of women in political, social and economic life as active citizens, and raising gender awareness in different segments of society, especially among men. For example, the prevention and eradication of violence against young women cannot be pursued without a major emphasis on education. The eradication of illiteracy and the elimination of gender disparity at all levels of education are often found on the agenda of national education policies as measures against inequality.

However, the ways in which education and education systems are structured and implemented are very important because any gender-insensitive education system may easily turn out to be a generator of gender inequality, rather than equality, especially through the reinforcement of gender stereotypes and gender roles in society.

Girls and women have been gaining greater access to education in most European countries. Female adult literacy rates in the EU countries do not fall below 85%, and are very close to 100% in many countries. However, education does not open doors for women's entry to, nor improve women's situation in, the labour market in all EU countries. Many Mediterranean countries have also made significant progress in closing the gender gap in education (a gap mostly caused by dominant traditional gender roles attached to girls and women): primary and secondary enrolment for girls has increased substantially and the gender gap has effectively been eliminated in higher-income countries.

Despite such advances, however, Mediterranean women still suffer from educational discrimination: secondary-school completion rates are still much lower for girls than for boys, and women account for one third to two thirds of adult illiterates, with significantly different rates between men and women. It should also be noted that not all females have opportunities to go to school, and there is a growing gap between an increasingly autonomous and self-sufficient class of women with a high level of education and a mass of impoverished women who lack the most basic literacy skills.<sup>98</sup>

Regarding education's role in eliminating gender stereotypes and gender roles in the Euro-Mediterranean context, some key problems still persist: the content of curriculum materials, the social organisational arrangements used in schools, teaching practices, and the design and scope of formal and non-formal educational programmes.<sup>99</sup> Although women dominate the profession of teaching in all 35 Euro-Mediterranean partner countries, this feminisation is not reflected in changes to educational content, maybe because teacher training rarely focuses on issues of gender awareness.<sup>100</sup> This is also a good example of why raising gender awareness should target not only men but also women; and why women should be empowered to participate in decision-making processes, in this case in education policies.

In addition, in most countries school textbooks present men and women as having different gender roles, where women are predominantly portrayed undertaking domestic activities at home as mothers and housewives.<sup>101</sup> An interesting example is the survey of 96 textbooks on various subjects published in 1999 in Jordan. According to the study, male actors account for 88% and female actors for only 12% of all social roles presented; and of the limited number of women, 65% are portrayed in private roles.<sup>102</sup> In addition, everyday classroom practices reinforce prejudice, which in turn reinforces gender differentiation. There is not enough human rights education in schools and youth work; therefore young people have little or no knowledge of women's rights as being a constituent element of all human rights.<sup>103</sup>

### → 6.5.4 Women and the labour market

In economic activities, three categories of women can be identified: employed women, unemployed women and non-employed or economically inactive women. All these categories of women are still facing obstacles mostly due to patriarchal societal norms, traditional and social perceptions of gender roles, the state of domestic economies, a lack of professional skills and higher education, and restrictive personal and labour laws. Unemployment rates, involvement in jobs with low advancement potential and limitations on access to social welfare are much higher for women than for men globally.<sup>104</sup>

In many countries women are systematically prevented from pursuing a professional career and remain marginalised in unpaid domestic activities (such as housekeeping and caring for children, the elderly or the disabled), low-paid jobs or the informal sector.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, rates of female participation in economic activity are mostly below those of men in many European and Mediterranean countries, because of obstacles to participating in the labour force and discrimination against women in the labour market, even though the latter is often legally prohibited.

Policies and strategies to promote and support gender equality as an integral part of the human rights agenda draw attention to unpaid care activities. Although age, class and urban/rural location are important factors, the involvement of girls and women in the unpaid care economy is also largely influenced by socio-cultural perceptions of gender roles, such as the traditional perceptions of the female reproductive role and women's perceived responsibility for (unpaid) childcare and housekeeping work. This has implications for women's decisions on when and where they will work, further affected by the existence or non-existence of affordable childcare facilities, linked to social status and household income.

The labour force is everybody who is either working or unemployed. The unemployed are people who are actively looking for work but who have not found more than one hour of paid work in the last week. The (female) unemployment rate is the number of unemployed (women) as a percentage of the (female) labour force.<sup>106</sup> The female employment rate is calculated by dividing the number of women (aged 15-64) in employment by the total female population of the same age group.<sup>107</sup>

There are some positive trends in female labour-force participation, yet female economic activity rates in the Mediterranean region are among the lowest worldwide. By 2005, the economic activity of females aged 15 years and above as a percentage of the male rate was highest (with 85%) in Israel, followed by 45% in Algeria and 44% in Syria but going down to 33-36% in Morocco, Jordan and Turkey.<sup>108</sup> In 2007, the average female employment rate in the EU with 27 member states was 58.3%, which was still lower than planned EU policy targets.<sup>109</sup> In the EU, by 2008, a sharp fall in the employment rate for women with young children was also observed, whereas the rate for men was rising.<sup>110</sup>

Unemployment trends in many Mediterranean countries are mostly due to such factors as the age/dependency structure of the population and low levels of female economic participation.<sup>111</sup> In 2004, the female unemployment rate was 20.7% in Jordan, 23.9% in Israel and 29.7% in Algeria, whereas rates in Turkey, Egypt and Morocco

were much lower: 9.7%, 11.3% and 1.4% respectively.<sup>112</sup> In 2007, the average female unemployment rate was 7.8% in the EU, being highest in Greece with 12.8%, and lowest in the Netherlands with 3.6%.<sup>113</sup>

Employed women are highly affected by labour-market segregation: women are under-represented in many sectors. This segregation by gender is not diminishing and is even increasing in certain countries in the EU and the Mediterranean, which means that women joining the labour market go into sectors and occupations already dominated by women. For example, women mostly work in the service sector (88% in Israel, 83% in Jordan, and an average of over 75% in the EU, especially in health and social services) or agriculture (over 50% in Morocco, Syria and Turkey), but few in industry (highest in the Mediterranean region is 28% in Algeria, with 19% in Morocco; the EU average is 25% or less in industry, transport and communications).<sup>114</sup> Only 29% of scientists and engineers in the EU are women.<sup>115</sup>

Women's disadvantaged status in the labour market is also reflected in gender pay gaps.<sup>116</sup> Despite national and international legal guarantees of equal pay for equal work, in practice, women earn less than men in both European and Mediterranean countries. Important gender pay gaps of 16% at EU level remain, ranging from below 10% in Italy and Portugal to more than 20% in Germany, the Netherlands and the UK.<sup>117</sup> The fact that there is still a gap among young people raises questions, particularly as young women have better success rates at school and university. Furthermore, the gap seems to grow wider with age, culminating at 17.8 points for the over-55s.<sup>118</sup> The relatively narrowest gap among Mediterranean countries in the period 1996-2005 was in Israel; the widest gap was registered in Morocco.<sup>119</sup>

A lot of women work part-time. In 2007, 31.4% of women employees worked part-time in the EU-27, while the corresponding figure for men was 7.8%.<sup>120</sup> Worldwide, the majority of the least visible informal workers are women, who sell or produce goods from their homes, such as garment makers, embroiderers, assemblers of electronic parts, street vendors at local food markets and shoe makers.<sup>121</sup> Some of these home-based workers work on their own account or are family workers, while others work on a piece-rate basis for a contractor or a firm.<sup>122</sup>

### → 6.5.5 Gender-based violence

The problem of violence against women, young women and girls is a global one. It does not recognise borders, nor does it restrict itself to any social status, cultural or religious background, civil status or sexual orientation, nor to societies undergoing major change.<sup>123</sup> This kind of violence can easily be called "the most pervasive yet least recognised human rights abuse in the world."<sup>124</sup>

Gender-based violence (GBV) is "an umbrella term for any harm that is perpetrated against a person's will; that has a negative impact on the physical or psychological health, development, and identity of the person; and that is the result of gendered power inequities that exploit distinctions between males and females, among males, and among females."<sup>125</sup>

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines GBV as (but does not limit it to) the following:<sup>126</sup>

- a) physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;

- b) physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;
- c) physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the state, wherever it occurs.

Perpetrators may benefit in different ways when committing acts of violence. Gender-based violence on the one hand is a way of ensuring women's inferior position in society. On the other hand, as in the case of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) people and violence against men, it has the function of correction by example because LGBT people do not act according to dominant masculine gender roles and they are perceived as posing a threat to the normalised and dominant demands of male gender roles.<sup>127</sup> As can be seen, GBV is not exclusive to women and girls, but it principally affects them across all cultures. Since young women's sexual identities are often marginalised and discriminated against socially and politically, they are particularly vulnerable to these types of violence.<sup>128</sup> Within the domain of youth work, both the victims and perpetrators of GBV are present in schools, youth clubs, organisations, work camps and projects.<sup>129</sup>

The most common form of gender-based violence is domestic violence. Since it occurs at home, it has long been considered a private affair, in which the state and the judicial system have not taken the responsibility to interfere. Yet domestic violence is not only a violation of the physical and psychological well-being of the women concerned, but it also a direct attack on their human rights, while also being a criminal offence.<sup>130</sup> The United Nations Special Rapporteur has stated that it is a powerful tool of oppression and it serves as an essential component in societies which oppress women, because violence against women not only derives from but also sustains the dominant gender stereotypes and is used to control women in the one space traditionally dominated by women, the home.<sup>131</sup>

In the EU, between 20% and 50% of women of all classes and ages are victims of domestic violence; one fifth of women are subjected to sexual assault at some stage in their lives, the age of the victims ranging from two months to 90 years; 95% of all acts of violence against women in the EU occur within the home, 98% of aggressors are male and 50% are married men or living in a *de facto* marriage or as a couple.<sup>132</sup> Death is sometimes the result: in France six women every month and in Finland an average of 27 women every year die as a result of domestic violence; in the United Kingdom, two women die every week as a result of attacks by their partners or former partners. There are no similar statistics for southern Mediterranean countries, but it must be assumed that such violence is as endemic as it is in the EU.<sup>133</sup>

Another key problem for countries on both sides of the Mediterranean is trafficking in human beings, especially in women and children. It means "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation."<sup>134</sup> Increased illegal migration into the EU and the movement of people as a result of rising flows and stronger restrictions on legalisation have also brought about increased trafficking. In 2005, it was estimated that globally between 700 000 and two million women and children were trafficked every year and that selling women into forced prostitution had become one of the fastest-growing criminal activities in the world economy.<sup>135</sup>

An honour crime – it is often argued – is a consequence of the need to defend or protect the “honour of the family”. It is a typical example of the violation of human rights based on archaic, unjust cultures and traditions,<sup>136</sup> based on practices sanctioned by culture rather than religion, rooted in a complex code that allows a man to kill or abuse a female relative or partner for suspected or actual “immoral behaviour”.<sup>137</sup> Such behaviour may take various forms: marital infidelity, refusing to submit to an arranged marriage, demanding a divorce, flirting with or receiving telephone calls from men, failing to serve a meal on time or “allowing oneself” to be raped.<sup>138</sup> Around the world some 5 000 women fall victim to honour killings every year. Such a killing is defined as the murder of a woman by a close family member or partner as a result of (suspected or alleged) shame being brought on a family by the (real, suspected or alleged) action of the woman.<sup>139</sup>

The practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) is a cultural practice harmful to women, one that violates women’s human rights to life, bodily integrity, health and sexuality; since it is practised mostly on young girls, FGM also raises serious questions about children’s rights.<sup>140</sup> It affects an estimated 130 million girls and women and is most prevalent in Africa. For example in Egypt, 96% of married women of reproductive age (15-49) are affected by FGM.<sup>141</sup> There is no religious doctrinal basis for the practice and although high religious officials in both the Muslim and Christian establishments are opposed to FGM, it is still supported by some local religious authorities.<sup>142</sup>

### → 6.5.6 Immigrant and minority women<sup>143</sup>

Immigrant and minority women become vulnerable to multiple inequalities and discrimination, simply because of simultaneously being women, immigrants and usually workers in undervalued jobs in the country of destination. In addition to inequalities *vis-à-vis* men, the situation of immigrant women also highlights the creation of an inequality between immigrant women and the women in the country of destination.

Firstly, patriarchal and unequal gender roles affect relationships between men and women, whether they are immigrant or local. This is even more evident in the contact and relationship between immigrants and locals.<sup>144</sup> Immigrant women are often subject to more conservative social pressures than they would be in their country of origin;<sup>145</sup> in some European countries, the majority of so-called honour crimes occur in immigrant communities.<sup>146</sup>

Secondly, immigrant people are often ethnicised in cultural terms in the country of destination and are vulnerable to social exclusion, which makes immigrant women doubly disadvantaged in their attempts to integrate into a new society. For example, not being able to properly speak the language of the destination country or wearing a headscarf may reduce the ability of young immigrant women to have access to social structures such as schools or peer groups. In addition, the media perpetuate stereotyped cultural representations of immigrant women along with ethnocentric approaches common to immigrant people. It is possible to observe a constant interaction between gendered power relations and the articulation of a collective experience of immigrant women as a cultural minority.<sup>147</sup>

Thirdly, the feminisation of migration flows results in a transfer of the domestic burden from qualified local women (who are entering the labour market and cannot continue to bear the burden of the entire domestic and family workload on their own) to immigrant women.<sup>148</sup> This means that, while one category of women (local women) tends

to become emancipated, another category of women carries a doubled burden. Moreover, immigrant women usually perform social reproduction tasks and these activities are very often socially undervalued, regarded as practically unskilled and women's work, and often carried out within the informal economy. As a result, gender roles in the private sphere remain unchanged because the definition of the woman's perceived responsibility at home does not change or is not shared by the male counterpart, but only shifts from the local woman to the immigrant woman.<sup>149</sup> In addition, as a result of dominant gender roles, immigrant women are expected to perform reproductive activities both at their workplace, which is another home, and at their own home.

### → 6.5.7 Religion, gender and women

Religions in various societies exist in harmony with the characteristics of those societies, but they also affect and change some of them. Whatever the religion, the specifics of religious dogma – alongside all economic, social, political and cultural conditions – are important in a religion's relation to gender, because gender inequality is related to cultural and social prejudices and stereotypes about male and female roles and identity.<sup>150</sup> Gender images are a product and a part of traditions shaped over centuries by religion and culture. Religions, especially monotheistic religions, play defining roles in the construction of these identities and images, and their acceptance and internalisation, for believers and non-believers alike. Thus religion, also as a part of culture, plays a homogenising role for the practices that define women's roles, status and images in a culture, as well as in the family, and religion often reinforces rigid gender differences through legitimisation and reification.<sup>151</sup>

Any culture's world-view contains images of women, which shape the conceptualisation of women for the whole culture. Most of these images are religious in origin and are mostly constructed not by women themselves, but by men. There is a close relationship between this reality, the establishment of patriarchy and the rise and institutionalisation of monotheistic religions.<sup>152</sup> Most of the time, any struggle against those images and gender inequalities requires the provision of alternative patterns and conceptualisations. When women fight for their self-determination, they inevitably have to deal with the images of "cursed Eve" or "women as source of *fitna*".<sup>153</sup> This implies the need to overcome gender stereotyping in the culture and in monotheistic religions, stereotyping which divides humanity into two separate identities biologically, physically and spiritually.<sup>154</sup> Although most religions teach equality of women and men before God, they attribute different roles to women and men on earth, which allows men a sense of superiority and accordingly leads to discriminatory treatment of women by men.<sup>155</sup> Paradoxically, the role and image of woman as wife, mother and housewife is not only perpetuated by men but also by women, the victims themselves.<sup>156</sup>

Women's rights are often violated in the name of religion in European and Mediterranean countries. In the attitude of three monotheistic faiths (Jewish, Christian and Muslim) to women, equality of women and men is not a doctrine that is central to the faith; on the contrary, centuries-old discrimination against women often continues to exist.<sup>157</sup> Although it is not easy to separate cultural traditions and religion, some seemingly religious practices violate women's rights. Some of the brutal examples are crimes of honour, certain practices linked to marriage and its dissolution, lack of access to education or certain professions, and the preferential treatment of boys.<sup>158</sup> Besides these practices, there are also controversial issues – for both religious authorities and the states – like contraception, abortion and divorce, which directly influence many women's lives.

It should also be added that, rather than the religions themselves, the interpretations of the religions and religious laws and doctrines can be blamed for women's continued oppression. In the case of Islam, for instance, gender asymmetry and the status of women in the Muslim world cannot be solely attributed to Islam, because the degree of adherence to Islamic precepts and the application of Islamic legal codes vary from one country to another.<sup>159</sup> In addition, within the same society it is possible to find different degrees of sex-segregation based on factors such as class. For example, in many Muslim societies nowadays, upper-class women are more mobile than lower-class women, even though the opposite was true in the past. Therefore, factors other than religion are still important in determining gender relations and gender (in)equalities in Muslim societies.<sup>160</sup>

### → 6.5.8 Gender and the media<sup>161</sup>

There are two main critical concerns about women and the media. The Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 referred to these as two strategic objectives: increasing women's participation in media decision making and promoting a balanced and non-stereotyped media portrayal of women and men.<sup>162</sup> However, as in other parts of the world, there are still challenges for women and the media in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

In Euro-Mediterranean countries, women still have very limited access to management and decision-making levels, in spite of growing numbers of women entering professions in the media sector and holding positions previously considered as men's domains, like reporting on armed conflicts. The educational gap between women and men, especially in technical fields, leads to male dominance in policy making, control and the design and development of information and communication technologies.<sup>163</sup> Moreover, gender as a topic is not included in the curricula of most journalism schools and only a limited number of training opportunities on gender sensitivity are offered to media professionals.<sup>164</sup>

The mass media, both audiovisual and written, have a role in the creation of public opinion. Media discourses are not free of discriminatory practices, which consciously or unconsciously reproduce biased, unequal and negative representations of women and gender relations in European and Mediterranean societies. A study by the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation<sup>165</sup> has examples of many such challenges in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Many programmes are often based on repetitive patterns of old-fashioned gender representation, with women dressed up like blond dolls, usually occupying supportive roles as homemakers and caregivers, often as sexual objects or as the weaker sex, while men are generally depicted as dynamically pursuing more substantial activities in society. Moreover, TV entertainment mainly targets women because they are seen as the main consumers.

On the other hand, women's points of view, voices, information, needs and concerns are absent in most journalistic products, and topics such as violence against women, equality before the law, women's right to education or trafficking are almost non-existent in the news. The media often generalise women as a homogeneous category and do not present a balanced picture of women's diverse lives and contributions to society.<sup>166</sup>

**Q: How are women portrayed in TV news and advertisements in your country?**

What can be done to overcome the negative representation of women and the reproduction of gender roles in the media? In European and Mediterranean countries, as well as specifically in the Euro-Mediterranean region, many international and non-governmental organisations work on various activities such as awareness campaigns, gender-sensitising and research, in order to ensure avenues for expression and balanced portrayal, to produce guidelines for ensuring and promoting gender equality in the media and for overcoming stereotypes, and to monitor the media for existing inequalities.

For example, Jordanian/Syrian/Danish co-operation in producing children's TV programmes portraying children as actors and decision-makers in their own lives is an example of access to information and media promoting equality. "Media Suitcase", developed by the German Association of Female Journalists, provides media observation groups with the tools required for the critical examination and analysis of media content, and is an example of monitoring the media. Swedish children's TV, portraying strong and independent girls such as Pippi Longstocking, has provided positive inspiration and role models for children for decades and is an example of overcoming stereotypes.<sup>167</sup>

### → 6.5.9 Women in conflict situations, war and peace

Peace is inextricably linked to equality between women and men in development. Armed and other types of conflicts, wars of aggression, foreign occupation, colonial or other alien domination, as well as terrorism, continue to cause serious obstacles to the advancement of women.<sup>168</sup>

Gender inequality reflects power imbalances in social structures that exist in pre-conflict periods and are exacerbated during and after armed conflicts. Armed conflict negatively affects women and men and results in gender-specific disadvantages, and women are often disproportionately affected by war abuses and traumas, disruptions and loss of resources.<sup>169</sup> Moreover, this is not always recognised or addressed by the mainstream, gender-blind understandings of conflict and reconstruction.<sup>170</sup> Stereotypical interpretations in armed conflict encourage expectations that men will fight and women will support them on the home front: men are soldiers or aggressors and women are wives, mothers, nurses, social workers and sex-workers. Although it is mainly men who are conscripted and killed in battle, women also suffer in their role as caregivers, when social structures break down.<sup>171</sup> The realities that women may also be combatants and men are also victims often remain unnoticed.<sup>172</sup>

Gender-based violence and forced displacement are two examples of impacts that can be deliberate strategies of war to destabilise families and communities.<sup>173</sup> War is a burden for women, girls and children, in such forms as gender-based, physical, psychological and sexual violence (such as rape and forced pregnancy), the spread of HIV/AIDS, increased vulnerability, lack of mobility and the use of women as sexual slaves by soldiers.<sup>174</sup>

Forced displacement, which may lead to social exclusion and poverty, targets gender relations through family breakdown and social destabilisation, and disproportionately disadvantages women, because it results in reduced access to resources to cope with household responsibility and increased physical and emotional violence.<sup>175</sup> Moreover,



the mere engagement of women in peace-building efforts does not necessarily mean that women's rights are mainstreamed or integrated into the peace process. More often, women's and girls' needs are not recognised or given priority after an armed conflict.<sup>176</sup>

### Jerusalem Link

This partnership between the Israeli organisation Bat Shalom and the Palestinian Jerusalem Centre for Women is one example of women bridging the divides between politics, armed conflict and gender equality. Whilst the two organisations work principally to address the concerns of women in their own societies, Jerusalem Link also prioritises women's human rights as an important element of any lasting peace settlement. The two organisations jointly run programmes promoting peace, democracy, human rights and women's leadership.<sup>177</sup>

## 6.6 Gender equality in and through Euro-Mediterranean youth work

An important aspect of gender equality is that it is a horizontal issue and a field of struggle cutting across all aspects of everybody's lives everywhere in the world. Youth work is a space where gender inequalities not only are faced, but can be challenged. In any educational activity where young people get together, questions and issues on gender, sexuality and power are present.<sup>178</sup> This means that youth work is also a very good opportunity to challenge and overcome gender inequalities, either by focusing on gender as a theme for an activity or mainstreaming it in any kind of youth work activity.

Zoom in, Zoom out is an educational game about the situation of women worldwide. Based on 12 women's life and stories, the game looks at several aspects of women's situation, such as health, development, the economy and history. The game has been produced by Ungdomsstyrelsen, Nykterhetsrådens Bildningsverksamhet, Landes Jugendwerk der awo Thüringen, the Sustainable Development Association and Kafa.

There is always a gender dimension to activities, so ignoring it in the planning and implementation may leave out part of the target group, reinforce stereotypes or simply miss an opportunity to address a central aspect of human rights and participation.<sup>179</sup> The dilemma in talking about gender difference is that one can end up widening the gap instead of decreasing it if the issue is not handled properly.<sup>180</sup> For example, female participants may not realise what discrimination is if they are used to being treated in a discriminatory manner, while male participants may feel uncomfortable with dominant masculine norms and wonder if something is wrong with them.<sup>181</sup> In some contexts, talking about sensitive issues such as headscarves or female genital mutilation may also create tensions among participants. Keeping these sensitivities in mind, below are some non-exhaustive and mutually supportive ideas on how gender equality can be integrated into youth work activities in general and those of Euro-Mediterranean youth work in particular.

### **Focusing on specific gender issues**

Youth work activities on issues related to gender – such as gender-based violence, challenging gender stereotypes and roles, immigrant women, women’s representation in the media or women’s employment, as well as gender equality in youth work and youth policy – can increase the visibility of gender inequalities, create awareness of them and help youth workers overcome some of these inequalities in their target group: young people. In addition, co-operation between those active in youth work, women’s rights and human rights education makes youth work activities more effective in improving the welfare of young people.

### **Gender and intercultural learning**

Intercultural dialogue helps young people to appreciate pluralism and diversity, and see reality from different perspectives in order to reinterpret and adopt a neutral approach to the determination of gender; it also helps establish the right to be different as a right that must be respected by all.<sup>182</sup> The transfer of good practice in intercultural dialogue to gender relations is possible, and vice versa. Key qualifications for intercultural dialogue like empathy, new perspectives and an appreciation of pluralism and diversity can also be used to overcome gender inequalities in and through youth work.<sup>183</sup> The development and use of non-sexist language through youth activities is a good example.

### **Ensuring gender balance**

Balance in the number of male and female participants, and among the members of the trainers’ team, can be a first step to ensuring equal participation of both sexes in a youth activity.

### **Raising gender awareness**

The understanding that there are socially determined differences between women and men based on learned behaviour, which affect their ability to access and control resources, can be applied to projects, programmes and ultimately to policies.<sup>184</sup> Raising awareness can take many forms, but it aims to address people’s attitudes and knowledge. Although sexism, discrimination and gender-based violence cannot be addressed by knowledge alone, accurate and relevant information and the possibility of engaging with a range of perspectives on these issues is very important.<sup>185</sup>

To start talking about gender roles may help people to move out of restrictive roles and to define who they are for themselves. Raising awareness of violence and discrimination can mobilise people to take action. Campaigns, projects, training courses, demonstrations or other instruments can be tools for raising awareness.<sup>186</sup> Trainers who are aware of this can, for example, introduce a gender perspective into a session through questions in an exercise debriefing. Gender awareness in project planning and project management may encourage an analysis of how the project and activities may apply to and affect young women and men in the target group. An initial needs analysis for a project can also feature a gender aspect.<sup>187</sup>

### **Using gender-sensitive methods**

Gender neutrality is the attempt not to reinforce existing gender inequalities, whereas gender sensitivity is the attempt to redress existing gender inequalities.<sup>188</sup> If youth workers cannot attempt to redefine women’s and men’s gender roles and relations (gender transformative actions: being gender-positive),<sup>189</sup> they can still use gender-sensitive methods throughout youth activities. These can complement the activities

and raise the awareness of gender inequalities one step higher. Some of these gender-sensitive methods can be: using both female and male trainers; working in single-sex groups; using examples from female and male “worlds”; being aware of suppression techniques and being conscious of them; and sharing the time equally between participants of both sexes.<sup>190</sup>

### **Mainstreaming gender<sup>191</sup>**

Any kind of training course or learning activity can apply a gender mainstreaming approach, whatever the subject is. Leaders and participants can observe patterns of behaviour among men and women, and these can be addressed. The trainers’ or youth leaders’ own actions and attitudes can create awareness about the equality in value of women and men. Unequal and biased assumptions and norms can be challenged by being conscious, for example, of the language used, examples chosen and the role models referred to. This means that the gender aspect becomes explicit in each and every part of a youth activity at each stage from preparation to evaluation.

Youth organisations can be active players in overcoming gender inequalities if they are encouraged to take on board seriously the issues of gender equality, women’s rights and minority rights as a matter of fundamental relevance for the well-being of all young people in society.<sup>192</sup> For example, they can: develop strategies on project management, funding and realistic planning aimed at young women and other under-represented groups; always consider the gender balance in their programmes and attitudes; and promote direct exchanges to overcome distance and to avoid misunderstandings and stereotypes in the Euro-Mediterranean region.<sup>193</sup>

#### **Follow the Women (FTW)<sup>194</sup>**

This is an international organisation of about 500 women, from 40 different countries, who support peace and an end to violence in the Middle East. The best-known activity of Follow the Women is Pedal for Peace in the Middle East, a unique event organised by a group of women to cycle across a number of countries in the Middle East to raise awareness of how the current situation in the Middle East affects the lives of women (and children) as well as to raise support for a move towards peace. Follow The Women gives women the opportunity to have a say, be in control and have a powerful and influential impact on those around them by hundreds of women all cycling at the same time.

The organisation and its representatives continue to work, between rides, on various related projects. In addition to the conferences run by FTW, supporters promote the organisation’s aims in their local communities among their families and friends, with talks and presentations to local groups. The organisation already has a number of projects and offers grants to other organisations and projects whose objectives complement those of Follow the Women. All of Follow the Women’s activities focus on women and children, and use sport as a vehicle to enable the coming together and better understanding of different cultures and people.

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