

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



The Anna Lindh Foundation
VIRTUAL MARATHON
FOR DIALOGUE IN THE EUROMED

VIRTUAL MARATHON FOR DIALOGUE

*Promoting Cultural and Social Cooperation in the EuroMed Region
May-June 2021*

FIGHTING GENDER STEREOTYPES: EUROMED WOMEN FOR DIALOGUE

JUNE 23, 2021

DISCUSSION TOPIC

*The role of intercultural dialogue in
dismantling stereotypes and creating
policies for gender equality*



TEN HIGH-LEVEL GUESTS AND PARTICIPANTS

NAME	AFFILIATION
AISSAM BENAÏSSA	<i>Intercultural Debates Expert</i>
ELEONORA INSALACO	<i>Head of Operations & Intercultural Research at ALF</i>
OUIDED BOUCHAMAOUÏ	<i>Peace Nobel Prize Laureate 2015 Tunisia</i>
JOSIE CHRISTODOULOU	<i>Gender Advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Cyprus</i>
GABRIEL BREZOIU	<i>President of GEYC & PRISMA European Network Romania</i>
NOOR SWIRKI	<i>Journalist & human rights defender Palestine</i>
AZIZA NAIT SIBAHA	<i>Editor-in-Chief France24 France</i>
LATIFA BOUHSINI	<i>History Teacher & Feminist Activist Morocco</i>
EMAD KARIM	<i>Innovation & Advocacy Specialist, UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States Egypt</i>
ESTHER FOUCHIER	<i>Founder of Femmes Méditerranée & Head of French Network France</i>

FIGHTING GENDER STEREOTYPES: EUROMED WOMEN FOR DIALOGUE

THREE PILLARS

①

COOPERATION BETWEEN MEN & WOMEN IN FIGHTING GENDER STEREOTYPES

How can men and women collaborate?
How do certain initiatives create new legislation?

②

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE, THE MEDIA, AND FEMALE SPORTS

How can the media provide new narratives of women?
How can sports be liberating?

③

THE ROLE OF EARLY EDUCATION, HISTORY, AND RELIGION IN SHIFTING PREJUDICES

How can education, history, and religion be revised to include the female perspective?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Main Recommendations emerging from the Virtual Marathon for Dialogue on Arts and Education for Intercultural Cities: Local Platforms for Dialogue, tackling the importance of art and non-formal forms of education, bringing together groups of different cultures, the role of NGOs in facilitating intercultural exchange, and the implications of the current digital transformation.

①

TO INVOLVE BOTH MEN AND WOMEN IN THE BATTLE AGAINST GENDER STEREOTYPES

since gender equality entails full involvement and acknowledgement of men to live within a renewed cultural paradigm based on equality.

②

TO EMPOWER WOMEN WITH THE NECESSARY SKILLS TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE AND FIGHT FOR CHANGE

towards a reality in which their involvement is equal to that of men.

③

TO INVEST IN RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS OF CURRENT INITIATIVES AND PRACTICES in order to identify initiatives to be scaled up, areas that need main investment and advocate to decision-makers for policy changes.

④

TO PROMOTE INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE AND EUROMED COOPERATION REVOLVING AROUND GENDER EQUALITY in order share practices, enhance cooperation, and reach unified international policies.

⑤

TO ENCOURAGE YOUNG WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS AND OTHER SECTORS PREVIOUSLY CONSIDERED OFF-LIMITS TO WOMEN BY SHARING STORIES ON THE SUCCESSES OF FEMALE SPORTS FIGURES AND ROLE MODELS in order to dismantle stereotypes.

⑥

TO EDUCATE THE YOUTH FROM AN EARLY AGE ON GENDER EQUALITY USING NON-FORMAL FORMS OF EDUCATION in order to complement policy changes and create sustainable change.

⑦

TO REVISIT HISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS TEXTS FROM A FEMALE PERSPECTIVE in order to acknowledge the role of women throughout history and protect them from negative interpretations that feed into gender stereotypes.

CONTEXT

In the framework of the Celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona Process and the “Renewed Partnerships with the Southern Neighbourhood: a new agenda for the Mediterranean”, the *Anna Lindh Foundation* and its EuroMed civil society Network organised the Anna Lindh Foundation Virtual Marathon for Dialogue in the EuroMed region (VM).

The Virtual Marathon gathered activities of ALF civil society Network and partner organisations were set to take place during 42 days from the 19th of May to the 29th of June.

MAIN AIMS OF THE VIRTUAL MARATHON FOR DIALOGUE

The first aim of the Virtual Marathon for Dialogue is to **highlight the importance of the Intercultural Dialogue to build sustainable societies in the EuroMed Region**, taking into consideration the challenges and opportunities brought about by the Covid19 pandemic.

The second aim of the Virtual Marathon for Dialogue is to **develop and promote new ideas and policies towards better cultural and social cooperation in the EuroMed region**.

The Public Virtual Dialogues will involve participants and panelists who play a major role in the economic, ecological, social, and cultural development of the region. Those include high-level policymakers, journalists, decision makers, young people, business & private sector, gender pioneers, academics, CSO representatives. The challenge is to create synergies with the civil society, especially the Youth and the Women, to create the conditions for positive social change.

ABOUT DIALOGUE 6

Intercultural dialogue aids in the dismantling of traditional oppressive prejudices against women by constructing new images of them as agents for the promotion of intercultural dialogue and change in the

region. Dialogue 6 focuses on the stereotypes which hinder women’s full integration within their respective societies.

The Anna Lindh Foundation has worked extensively against gender stereotypes, springing from the belief that a change in the narrative about women and images of women can shift the prevalent cultural paradigm. Ms. Eleonora Insalaco shared insightful results from recent research by ALF on views regarding the involvement of women in certain spheres of life. A large majority of the EuroMed population concurs that women should participate more in **fields of Technology, Science, and Business**. In contrast, only 39% of the SEM population agrees that women should be more involved in **politics**, as opposed to 53% of the European population. Moreover, while a majority of SEM population (68%) believes that women should be more involved in the **education** sector and encourage women’s participation in the **media** (49%), still a vast majority insist that women should look after **children and the house** (80%) as opposed to 22% of the European population. Ms. Insalaco pointed out that although the percentage is much smaller for Europeans, overall, 58% of the population are still satisfied with the current role women play within the family.



Eleonora Insalaco
Head of Operations &
Intercultural Research at ALF

A legal framework is necessary for change to be implemented effectively. Nobel Prize Laureate Ms. Ouided Bouchamaoui pointed out *the value of education as an effective way to reshape mentalities*, especially in the context of mixed schools in the Arab region. She explained that in simply attending mixed schools, boys and girls have the chance to interact with the opposite sex, and that would alter their perceptions of gender roles. Moreover, *the media should serve as a platform* where younger girls stay updated on the achievements of older women who have succeeded professionally, ultimately helping dismantle internalised stereotypes on gendered professions. Finally, Ms. Ouided Bouchamaoui stressed *the role of men* in sharing family responsibilities and creating space for women to pursue their personal aspirations, highlighting the need for young children to observe their parents set a model for collaborative work.



Ouided Bouchamaoui
Peace Nobel Prize Laureate
2015
Tunisia

Pillar ①: THE ROLE OF BOTH MEN AND WOMEN IN THE BATTLE AGAINST GENDER STEREOTYPES AND THE IMPORTANCE OF INITIATIVES THAT AIM AT REACHING GENDER EQUALITY

How can women and men proactively contribute to the formation of a fair system? How can initiatives help in issuing new international legislation?

Catching up with changing times and involving women in the decision-making process



Emad Karim
UN Women Regional Office
for the Arab States
Egypt

Women have been fighting for their rights for a long time, and it is now time for men to do their part. The findings of ALF research show the disparity between the contribution of men and women. Panelist Emad Karim highlighted the phenomenon known as *the superwoman spectrum*, where women have high expectations regarding their own involvement in certain fields and leadership roles in certain sectors while men and society still expect them to carry more of the domestic work. Research conducted by *UN Women Regional Office of the Arab States* suggests that young men in certain SEM regions still hold the views and stereotypes of previous generations of men, while young women have changed their values and perspectives. Men have taken for granted the privileges they have had, and are not catching up with the change that is taking place, refusing to accept what women are demanding as basic rights. More effort is necessary to balance male dominated institutions, and so, **women must be involved in the decision-making process and given the space to take on leadership roles.**

The role of men in fighting the battle



Latifa Bouhsini
History Teacher & Feminist
Morocco

In Morocco, feminist activists from previous generations have made significant achievements in their fight for women's rights, changing the image of women from a negative to a positive one, and scoring legal and tangible successes. However, current generations have not had the chance to experience those achievements due to novel challenges of building democracy, respect of human right and individual liberties, all exasperated in the era of the pandemic. Panelist Latifa Bouhsini emphasised **the role that young men must play in fighting gender stereotypes. It is young men that need to revisit concepts of masculinity and acknowledge the struggle women face against violence and sexual harassment.** This can be done using modern technological tools.

RECOMMENDATION 1

To involve both men and women in the battle against gender stereotypes since gender equality entails full involvement and acknowledgement of men to live within a renewed cultural paradigm based on equality.

Empowering women through gained skills and courage

ALF networks in Cyprus, Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt have implemented a training project funded by the Cypriot Ministry of Foreign Affairs, targeting women of ages 18-30, on the subject of empowerment and body autonomy. They have worked on ensuring that young girls feel safe in acquiring the skills needed to compete in the labour market. **Through teaching them the life skills necessary to adapt to a changing world, the project empowered young girls and women to contribute to their community and become agents of change** said panelist Josie Chirstodoulou.



*Josie Chirstodoulou
Republic of Cyprus
Cyprus*

In the context of sports, the media does not always properly cover women sporting events. However, women should not simply blame the media for not doing enough, explained panelist Aziza Nait Sibaha. **They must initiate change themselves, take initiatives as entrepreneurs in the private sector, create networks and act.**



*Aziza Nait Sibaha
France24 & TAJA
France*

Even though civil society members do play a crucial role in fighting for change, women themselves must also be braver, act for themselves, and not wait for someone else to lead them and act on their behalf. Of course, that does not mean that women have to act alone, explained Ms. Ouided Bouchamaoui. Men also have a responsibility to help women in their endeavor to shift mentalities and policies, and must also become more sensitive towards the position of women around the world.



*Ouided Bouchamaoui
Peace Nobel Prize Laureate
2015
Tunisia*

RECOMMENDATION 2

To empower women with the necessary skills to take the initiative to fight for change towards a reality in which their involvement is equal to that of men.

Compiling results and suggestions gained through initiatives



*Josie Chirstodoulou
Republic of Cyprus
Cyprus*

Since 2019, gender equality has become a priority at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus. A plethora of regional and national initiatives that promote intercultural dialogue and in turn strengthen the relationship between Cyprus and other states have been organised, with the overall aim of advancing women's rights and promoting gender equality.

The Ministry has been funding projects in neighboring countries like Jordan and Palestine. These projects have raised awareness regarding gender stereotypes within the labour market, combated violence against women and refugees, and advanced women's active participation in public life. One training programme

implemented by *UNITAR* and funded by the Ministry highlighted gender mainstreaming as a tool that can be utilised horizontally across the governments of Lebanon and Jordan, enhancing dialogue and promoting women's rights on the policy level. **The results of projects as well as the suggestions of participants should be compiled and taken to the decision makers in order to inspire change. By implementing new projects, participants gain experience and knowledge contributing to policy making at the multilateral fora.** Just as the policies that are designed on an international or regional level affect people locally, **local concerns and practices could be taken up the ladder to elicit change.**

Contribution of organisations as mentalities slowly evolve



Panelist Noor Swirki explained that despite difficulties in changing the mentalities of the population, a necessary step is **to engage in dialogue within organisations that fight against domestic violence and prejudices**. One example of such dialogues is the current ALF Virtual Marathon where new ideas regarding women empowerment are being exchanged. Coming from speakers with different backgrounds and perspectives, **these ideas can inspire change at the social and policy levels**.

RECOMMENDATION 3

To invest in research and analysis of current initiatives and practices in order to identify initiatives to be scaled up, areas that need main investment and advocate to decision-makers for policy changes.

Pillar ②: THE ROLE OF INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE, THE MEDIA, AND SPORTS IN DISMANTLING GENDER STEREOTYPES

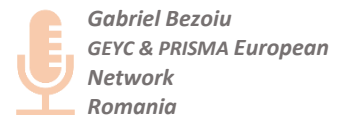
How can intercultural dialogue and the media provide new images and stories of women that empower them? How can women liberate themselves from limiting prejudices and reclaim their space?

Obstacles hindering gender equality in the Palestinian context



Enhancing gender equality especially through journalism faces several obstacles. First, countries are subject to different regulations regarding freedom of speech so what works in one country does not necessarily work in another. Second, some political systems explicitly or implicitly oppose gender equality. And finally, populations of some countries have to deal with problems of lack of security so that gender equality is low on their list of priorities. While **intercultural dialogue can help identify and tackle these obstacles**, the pace of change remains frustratingly slow.

Exchanging positive practices through intercultural dialogue



Together with their partners, GEYC have been running a series of webinars that tackle the following gender-related themes: **the role of intercultural dialogue in dismantling gender stereotypes; the recognition of innovative and successful female social entrepreneurs who have had a profound impact on their local communities; the Media and the influence of advertising on the mentality of the population**. Panelist Gabriel Bezoiu explained that the EuroMed region comprises of groups with different languages, religions, and social contexts who relate to gender in different ways. **Through regional cooperation, positive practices can be transferred, and experiences of different organisations can be built upon**.

An international policy

The media can play a crucial role in either combating or promoting stereotypes and sexism. For this reason, **Cyprus is attempting to initiate a dialogue on an international level in order to create a united policy regarding the use of the media.** Despite the difficulty in implementing such a policy, having various suggestions and legislations is helpful for civil society members to pressure policy makers, explained panelist Josie Chirstodoulou.



Josie Chirstodoulou
Republic of Cyprus
Cyprus

Panelist Noor Swirki highlighted the importance of such international policies that are reached through collaboration, because **international policies have greater power and authority locally.**



Noor Swirki
Journalist
Palestine

Giving successful female athletes proper exposure through the platform of TAJA SPORT magazine



Aziza Nait Sibaha
France24 & TAJA
France

Sponsors seem to assume that a female athlete is bound to fail, and companies believe that people are less interested in media coverage about women sports. However, during the women football world cup in France, the massive crowds that attended the games proved these misconceptions wrong. In response, Panelist Aziza Nait Sibaha launched her platform TAJA SPORT to promote sports for women, a field where it is easier for women to be conscious of their own bodies and to take up space. Through this platform, Ms. Nait Sibaha also highlights achievements of women as well of people with disabilities, inspiring younger girls and

individuals. One section within TAJA SPORT features young girls who excel at certain sports as well as interviews with parents. These speak both to other young girls and to other parents in a way that normalises the engagement of young girls in sports. Ms. Nait Sibaha stressed the importance of incorporating sports in schools and encouraging girls to reclaim their space by participating. There is no such thing as masculine or feminine sports. Sports are gender neutral

RECOMMENDATION 4

To promote intercultural dialogue and EuroMed cooperation revolving around gender equality in order share practices, enhance cooperation, and reach unified international policies.

The role of sports in changing the way the female body is perceived



Latifa Bouhsini
History Teacher & Feminist
Morocco

Panelist Latifa Bouhsini emphasised the importance of sports in fighting the stereotypical view that the woman's body is restricted and unliberated. Focusing on the presence of young women in sports could shift the perception of a woman's body from that of *a source of lust* to that of *a vessel of strength*. **Societies must therefore share the experiences of women who have managed to enter and excel in professions that were previously considered inappropriate or off limits,** in order to show that mentalities are slowly changing.

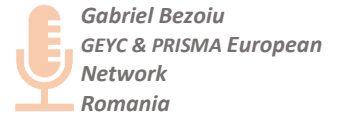
RECOMMENDATION 5

To encourage young women participation in sports and other sectors previously considered off-limits to women by sharing stories on the successes of female sports figures and role models in order to dismantle stereotypes.

Pillar ③: THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY EDUCATION, HISTORY, AND RELIGION IN SHIFTING STEREOTYPES

How can mentalities be changed from an early age through the revision of certain historical texts and religious interpretations?

Youth work and non-formal education



Panelist Gabriel Brezoiu highlighted the importance of youth work as well as non-formal education methods in reversing stereotypical views. **Engaging young people in digital youth work** was very crucial during the pandemic and in their interaction with other youth around the world, issues relating to gender equality were brought up, discussed and tackled. Unfortunately, the success of this work is dependent on having equal access to the internet which differed from country to country.

Reshaping mentalities starting from a young age



Panelist Esther Fouchier highlighted the work done at *Voix de Femme* in partnership with ALF where a collection of **non-formal pedagogical tools that combat sexism was compiled into an anti-sexism toolkit**. This toolkit was translated into several languages and used to train young children from secondary schools and social centers to identify and resist sexism. Moreover, in the east of Algeria, *Voix de Femmes* trained young boys who wanted to change mentalities regarding girls in sports. These young boys eventually worked with parents and other boys on raising awareness on that issue. Ms. Fouchier concluded that foundations are extremely important non-formal educational centers, helping mutualise resources and good practices as well as share competencies and experiences. There are over 500 associations within the *Forum Femmes Méditerranée*, all of which amplify the voices of women.

RECOMMENDATION 6

To educate the youth from an early age on gender equality using non-formal forms of education in order to complement policy changes and create sustainable change.

Revising historical texts and religious interpretations



History has been written by the men who were in power, leaving out the role of women and not allowing them to tell their own stories. Panelist Emad Karim stressed the **importance of rewriting history by incorporating biographies of women in order to create a sense of identity and solidarity for them**. Additionally, **religious texts must be revised and alternative interpretations offered**, since religious scriptures have often been used by men as a male serving tool that sustains their privileges and oppresses women. To that end, *The UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States* initiated a project that brought together thousands of women volunteers who have been incorporating biographies of women within the historical timeline.

RECOMMENDATION 7

To revisit historical and religious texts from a female perspective in order to acknowledge the role of women throughout history and protect them from interpretations that feed into gender stereotypes.

The Anna Lindh Foundation aims to promote equality using a systemic approach on the legal, cultural, and grassroots levels, with collaboration from both men and women. Ms. Eleonora Insalaco acknowledged the need to work with young people, using innovative tools and digital technology. By providing all societies access to the media, girls are exposed to and learn from the success stories of other women, while allowing all societies to share practices and ideas. The stereotype that some fields are exclusive to men must be dismantled, and only by working together can prejudices be overcome. **International gender equality can be promoted by international cooperation.**



Eleonora Insalaco
Head of Operations &
Intercultural Research at ALF