

Cities and regions “central” to women’s progress in Mediterranean region

Euro-Mediterranean local leaders support policies to reduce violence against women and to increase their access to education, employment and leadership.

Local and regional administrations should catalyse improvements in the position of women in the southern and eastern Mediterranean by taking a central role in extending access to education for women, promoting women to public office, and easing their entry to the labour market, the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) argues in a set of recommendations adopted on 21 February.

The ten recommendations, which will be circulated to governments and supranational bodies in the region and in the European Union, also urge national governments to sign the Istanbul Convention, which was drawn up by the Council of Europe in 2011 with the aim of curbing domestic violence against women in the Mediterranean region. The ARLEM report, which was adopted in Giza, Egypt, at the assembly’s annual plenary meeting, concludes that violence against women is both “endemic” and under-reported, with female genital mutilation common in Egypt and Mauritania, rates of child marriage increasing in some countries, and rape by husbands remaining unpunishable in many countries.

Mary Freehill (IE/PES), a city councillor from Dublin, Ireland and ARLEM’s rapporteur on “[Women’s empowerment in the Mediterranean region](#)”, said: “There has been significant progress for women in the southern and eastern Mediterranean in law and there are encouraging signs that women are entering local and national politics in greater numbers. But, very clearly, meeting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal of achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls is a huge challenge for the region.”

She continued: “Local and regional administrations can be catalysts for change. They can use their central role in the provision of education to ensure that more girls finish school and enter university. They can help women find work, by offering targeted vocational training, providing child-care services, and by making public transport safer and more reliable. They can roll out public-awareness campaigns against violence. And they can lead by example, by encouraging women to enter politics. I hope that, in future, International Women’s Day – on 8 March – will be an annual opportunity to celebrate the progress of women in the southern and eastern Mediterranean.”

The report emphasises that women in the European Union, as in the countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean, are held back by many socio-economic, ideological and psychological obstacles. However, the report notes

a range of specific problems related to education, leadership, violence, and stereotyping for women in the region, from Albania and Turkey in the east to Morocco in the western Mediterranean. It also points to international studies that enumerate the economic effects. A below-average percentage of employers are women (6%, compared with a global average of around 24%); the same is true for the percentage of self-employed people who are women (13%, compared to 31%-38% globally).

This report develops on a position paper adopted in June 2013 in which ARLEM underlined the need for women in political decision-making at the local and national level. In a separate report adopted on 21 February, ARLEM argued that the threat of violent radicalisation necessitates the integration of women “at all levels” and the training of female teachers. The report – entitled “ [The role of the sub-national authorities from the Mediterranean region in addressing radicalisation and violent extremism of young people](#) ” – was drafted by **Mohamed Kamal El Daly**, the Governor of Giza and host of the meeting.

ARLEM brings together representatives of local and regional government in the EU – most of them members of the European Committee of the Regions – and their counterparts from Mediterranean states from the western Balkans, the Middle East and North Africa.

Note to editors

- The European Committee of the Regions created the [Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly](#) (ARLEM) in 2010 to provide a local and regional perspective on Mediterranean issues. It complements efforts made by the EU and non-EU Mediterranean states in the region to develop more channels and levels of dialogue and cooperation, including the [Union for the Mediterranean](#). The EU delegation in [ARLEM](#) is comprised of 32 members of the European Committee of the Regions and eight representatives of EU associations of local authorities.
- ARLEM met on 20-21 February in Giza, Egypt, at the invitation of **Mohamed Kamal El Daly**, the Governor of Giza. Ahead of their meeting, ARLEM members visited an urban project in Giza.
- The reports – “ [Women’s empowerment in the Mediterranean region](#) ” and “ [The role of the sub-national authorities from the Mediterranean region in addressing radicalisation and violent extremism of young people](#) ” – are the latest in a series of recommendations adopted by ARLEM on issues that are critical to the sustainable development of the southern and eastern Mediterranean. In recent years, ARLEM has also adopted reports on, for example, [climate change](#), the [energy transformation](#), [water management](#) and [waste management](#).
- **Photos** are available via [Flickr](#). [Background information](#) on **Egypt** is available from the European Parliament.

Contact:

Andrew Gardner

Tel. +32 473 843 981

andrew.gardner@cor.europa.eu