



Egyptian Feminist Union

MENA REGIONAL PARALLEL REPORT BEIJING + 25

By:

- Egyptian Feminist Union**
- Alliance of Arab Women**
- Arab Women Network for Parity and Solidarity (Tha'era)**
- Coalition of Arab Women Parliamentarians for equality**
- Gender Expert Group of South Mediterranean**

Compiled and edited by: Fatema Khafagy, Ph.D

ABBREVIATION

CAPMAS	Central Agency for Public Mobilization & Statistics
CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
FGC	Female Genital Mutilation
GBV	Gender- Based Violence
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Countries
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICPD	International Conference on Population & Development
ID	Identity Card
ILO	International Labour Organization
LDC	Less Development Countries
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
OPHI	Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VAW	Violence against Women

Outline of Issues

No	Topic	Critical Areas
1	Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Women and poverty ✓ Women and the economy ✓ Human rights of women ✓ The girl child
2	Poverty eradication, social protection and social services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Women and poverty ✓ Education and training of women ✓ Women and health ✓ Human rights of women ✓ The girl child
3	Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Violence against women ✓ Human rights of women ✓ Women and the media ✓ The girl child
4	Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Women in power and decision-making ✓ Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women ✓ Human rights of women ✓ Women and the media ✓ The girl child
5	Peaceful and inclusive societies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Women and armed conflict ✓ Human rights of women ✓ The girl child
6	Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Human rights of women ✓ Women and the environment ✓ The girl child

INTRODUCTION:

The “parallel” report for the Arab region Beijing +25 combines views from civil society organizations in the several countries on women advancement and challenges facing gender equality in the last five years. It has greatly benefitted from international, regional and national literature on women. The report builds on the Arab parallel Report of 2015 and discusses achievements and challenges met, and complement LAS/ ESCWA/UN Women regional report of 2020, which was prepared on the basis of national reports, regional consultations and participation of few NGOs. It also includes priority issues arrived at and to be included in the regional feminist agenda

The Egyptian Feminist Union, Alliance for Arab Women, the Arab Women Network for Parity and Solidarity, the Gender Expert Group of South Mediterranean and the Arab Women Parliamentarians network collaborated in producing this report.

It is worth noting that the Arab region is not homogenous because of different economic levels, demography and other social and cultural specific traits and conditions, yet, there are several commonalities that call for similar handling. The parallel Report will probe into issues still affecting women in the region, despite their progress, or issues that have emerged since the last reporting exercise in 2015. It will define what are believed to be priorities for action based on their triggering effects, and will also point to certain domains requiring further inquiry.

The Post-2015 sustainable development agenda proposed by the UN, opens avenues for innovative thinking, hoping that this report will contribute to this effect. In this respect, it is hoped that the Beijing Platform of Action adopted 25 years ago, and implicitly included in the Sustainable Development Goals agenda, would undergo a similar revisiting to continue being relevant in the face of the immense new global challenges, especially those affecting the region. The sweeping advancement of high technology requires pondering on its impact on women. If education, for instance including digital literacy is not availed to women equitably, the gender gap will cause many divides, but with proper interventions, women can have good chances for accelerated advancement. Inviting civil society to lead the preparation of Beijing + 25 and its forums is a good practice. However, even though civil society carries the voice of the people, they remain an adjunct accessory and are treated unequally. It is strongly believed that this situation needs to be rectified. Representatives of the civil society do merit the same treatment given to government representatives, and should be treated with the same consideration by all international organizations.

It is also worth noting that the business sector has been totally absent from international debates though its effect as a main player in economy is increasing, and as a result, it can have a great impact on women’s life especially with regards to employment. It is worth noting that in the preparation of Beijing + 25 and the generation equality forums, the private sector will play a major role in collaborating with governments and Civil Society in being accountable to participate in achieving the global feminist agenda for gender equality

Twenty five years after Beijing (Beijing+25):

UN ESCWA and the League of Arab States with UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States organized several meetings on Beijing + 25. UN Women Regional Office has supported a youth meeting in Cairo. Some representatives of civil society organizations were also invited to The ESCWA/League of Arab States regional meetings in Beirut Lebanon. The NGOs invited were selected based on criteria that are restrictive. Such criteria include regional NGOs and NGOs with UN consultative status only, and NGOs that are accepted by governments. Therefore civil society in the Arab region has organized more inclusive consultations in which they had the time and space to discuss achievements, challenges and come up with recommendations and priority issues to be addressed.

The government of Tunisia in collaboration with the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), UN Women and UNDP organized the Tunis Forum on Gender Equality which was held in April 2019 and gathered more than 597 participants from all over the world. 40% of participants were under 35 years old.

The Forum was structured around four focus areas including: Beijing to Beijing + 25; Gender Equality for Local Governance Transformation; Women, Peace and Security; and Innovation, Technology and Economic Empowerment.

Themes recommended to be addressed were the broaden inequalities, economic empowerment, approaches to women's transformative leadership, de-monopolizing data collection and analysis, connecting to other solidarity movements, and enhancing the work with masculinities and men and boys

The situation of Arab Women:

The Arab region is still witnessing many political changes since 2015. Almost all Arab countries suffered and still suffer clashes and armed conflicts, and women were, and still are, impacted by all these changes. They have participated in the revolutions and uprisings side by side with men. However, women's groups face a number of challenges in adapting to the new politics. The old regimes had made some progress on women's rights at the level of policy. Some countries in the region had new constitutions that stated gender equality and some stated parity, changed some gender discriminatory laws, and increased women's participation in parliament. But these changes failed to influence the deeply patriarchal nature of Arab politics and society.

The Arab revolutions were expected to open a window of hope for democratic change and unprecedented reform for women. But this requires different policies and more progressive legislations to enable women to overcome obstacles based on prevailing gender discrimination. There are still needs to make change in policies, legislations, procedures and cultural discourses to enhance equality and end gender discrimination, to guarantee women's economic, social and political participation and to enable them to benefit from any chances to improve their situation and enable them to reach decision making positions

There are still many trials to marginalize women and freeze their chances to practice their human rights in both the private and public spheres. Some women`s and feminist movements worry about backlash and retreat with regards to the rights women gained as a result of their previous struggles.

With some differences among the different Arab countries, majority of women face significantly higher discrimination in MENA countries compared to any other global region. Although women have recently increased efforts to improve gender equality through protests, domestic efforts in oppressive countries, they need the support of many including governments and international organizations, to uproot the traditional gender norms of the region

For example, two-thirds to more than three-quarters of men support the notion that a woman`s most important role is to care for the household. Women often internalize these same inequitable views. Strong majorities of men believe it is their role to monitor and control the movements of the women and girls in their households, a practice most men recalled starting in childhood. In some countries, majorities of women not only affirm but also appear to accept male guardianship; in others, they challenge the idea, in theory if not in practice

According to UN regional report on Masculinities (2018), in Morocco, Palestine, and Egypt, younger men`s views on gender equality do not differ substantially from those of older men. Younger men in the IMAGES MENA countries are not showing the same movement toward supporting women`s equality as younger men in many other parts of the world because of several reasons among which is that many young men in many Arab countries encounter difficulties finding a job, and as such, they struggle to achieve the socially recognized sense of a man as financial provider. This struggle may be producing a backlash against gender equality. Another reason is the religious conservatism under which the younger generation is socialized.

It is commended that Generation Equality and Beijing + 25 are focusing on the participation of youth on parity basis with the elder to address all issues concerning women`s empowerment and gender equality.

(1) Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work

Though the Arab Region has witnessed major advancements in women's health and education, women's share of the labor force are among the lowest in the world several factors, including sluggish economic growth rates, the poor absorptive capacity of the labor market, legal frameworks, social and cultural norms.

In the Gulf countries more than one-third of women aged 15 years plus are economically active with Qatar and the United Arab Emirates currently having the highest female labor force participation rate in the Region, due the large number of female migrants.

In Lebanon and Morocco the percentages of economically active women are 27-29% each during the period 2015-2017 versus 77% for men. Employment in the agricultural sector represents a particularly large share of women's jobs in Morocco (59 per cent) and Iraq (51 per cent). In some countries like Egypt and Morocco women have entered into agribusiness. The share of women participating in the workforce is relatively high in some of the Arab LDCs, reaching over one third in Comoros, Djibouti, and Somalia while Yemen has a very low percentage of women in the workforce, demonstrating that gender discrimination may be stronger than economic needs. The public sector is a major employer for women in the Arab Region, female employees comprise between 40 and 50 per cent of public employees in Qatar, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates, 26 per cent in Egypt (2017), 35 per cent in Jordan (2017) and 22 per cent in Palestine. Women in this sector enjoy job stability, and suitable working hours, which allow them to balance their paid work with their family responsibilities.

Achievements/Progress:

1-At the national (macro) level:

Arab countries have continued efforts to combat poverty. Extreme poverty has been reduced by half in this century and it scored the second lowest poverty reduction rate of 42% (after sub-Saharan Africa (72%). Priority has been given to empowering rural women and female headed households. Most significant initiatives include small credit programs and projects to generate income for poor women and their families. Conditional cash assistance to poor families increased in several countries such as Egypt, Tunisia and Jordan. Some countries improved infrastructure in isolated rural areas. And other Arab countries have created lending facilities that provide services to specific groups of women (Algeria, Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman and the UAE). Women comprise more than half of the beneficiaries of microcredit in Comoros, Djibouti and Yemen. In Jordan, the share of female borrowers has approached 80% in 2015. In Syria, a National Project to Reduce Poverty and Empower Women provided many loans to village women. Sudan increased the number of banks focusing on poor people and commercial banks have established specialized branches in lending to women and female new graduates.

Arab constitutions and labor laws in the Region (Syria, Egypt, Bahrain, Oman, and Tunisia) state gender equality in their constitutions. National women machineries as well as the Parliament and social ministries adopted the Agenda for women economic empowerment as a social right. Serious changes occurred in the labor law in Jordan to stop any discrimination or harassment against women in the workplace and partial work was introduced in Algeria and Qatar prohibiting any elimination of work contracts for married women. Jordan has recently initiated a reform in social insurance, which finances maternity benefits through payroll contributions mandatory for all workers.

At the beneficiary (micro level):

Several countries in the region, including Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and the Syrian Arab Republic, have established training centers to support women in their business. In Morocco, business training had positive impacts on existing self-employment activities of households (sales and profits), for both non-livestock agriculture and livestock activities. Employment services combined with skills training in Tunisia showed positive impacts on women entrepreneurs.

In the Arab Region, the promotion of women’s entrepreneurship has been flourishing over the past decade, and it is often seen as a valuable strategy for creating jobs for women diversifying economic participation away from their traditional employment sectors. Some women owned enterprises in some Arab countries are export-oriented.

Percentage of adult population (18-64 yrs.) starting a business exceeds the third in Algeria, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, Morocco, Kuwait, Oman, while the percentage in Egypt and most GCC countries range from 20% to 25%; the lowest rate is in Yemen (10%).

The General Arab Women Feminist Federation developed a regional index, the first of its kind in the region which provides a culture-specific better understanding of the factors that impact the economic empowerment of Arab women in 6 countries of the region. It identifies the factors that influence the economic and social decisions made by women in the private and public spheres

Challenges:

Women unpaid work whether at home or in agriculture is not yet recognized at the national level in most of the Arab countries

According to ILO (2015) around 19 per cent of the world’s domestic workers live in the Arab States and the region hosts the largest number of women migrant domestic workers in the world, estimated at 1.6 million. Female domestic workers play a pivotal role in Arab societies. They support the upbringing of children during critical stages of development, support the elderly to live with dignity, and by relieving nationals of their domestic responsibilities enable greater female labour participation. However, migrant domestic workers living isolated in a house with limited mobility and no community, many domestic workers, especially women, are vulnerable to abuse. Afraid to lose their right to work, employees can endure a lot before running away, including serious sexual assault. Legal provisions do exist now– in

many countries, workers can file a criminal complaint against their employers, or approach labour courts for help. But often they are unaware of, or unable to access, the existing labor protections and resources.

Poverty is higher than the global average once we apply higher poverty lines – above \$4.0 per day - which are closer to the level of national poverty lines in middle income Arab countries. The recent global report on multidimensional poverty by UNDP and OPHI (2018) suggests that nearly one fifth of the Arab region's population is extremely poor (65 million). In spite of many efforts to combat poverty, many obstacles remain, including: uneven growth across regions; barriers to service access for rural and poor women; lack of health insurance for women in unpaid work and in rural areas, administrative complications to receive financial and health insurance; delays in amendments of laws on women's economic independence; the negative impact of certain economic policies ; armed conflicts; the limited access of women to production tools, property ownership and resources; and the undervaluation of women unpaid work. Still the mechanisms in terms of loan provision and vocational training to poor women are limited and lack resources.

Lack of gender based statistics is an obstacle in measuring women's participation in economic life and their vulnerability. Data on female poverty in the Arab Region is inadequate because surveys rarely measure intra-household poverty.

LDCs in the Arab Region (Yemen, Djibouti) are often caught in a vicious circle of high rates of illiteracy among rural women, increasing environmental degradation, natural resource depletion, increasing poverty and the destabilization of the social and political order.

Many countries do not have social protection floors and traditional norms determine the support that women receive from the charitable community organizations and private religious charities.

Traditional gender paradigm constrains female labor supply: Throughout the region, married women, especially those with children, are less active in the workforce, which emphasize women's domestic and reproductive roles and portray men as the main bread-winner. Women in the agricultural sector work on a daily or seasonal basis for a very low pay, and informally with lack of social insurance. Gender stereotyping provides the basis for women's representation in care oriented positions such as nurses, teachers and social workers. The labour market is highly segmented by sex, women do not usually do the same types of jobs as men (horizontal segregation), and tend to have lower status than men (vertical segregation). Share of females in vulnerable employment (unpaid jobs) is currently the highest in the world.

Certain macro-economic obstacles prevail such as overall lack of job creation in the region, slow down economic growth in some countries like Lebanon, Syria and Tunisia, decreasing private foreign and domestic investment. Economic reform policies adopted in several countries (Egypt, Tunis) are male-biased and fail to take into account the specific conditions of women and in particular in the labor market.

Labor market obstacles constrain the economic participation of women due to several factors such as the declining role of government in employment reduces opportunities for educated women, the retreat of the private sector to employ to married women and to accommodate women reproductive roles, the weak supporting services (transport and child care) and the discrimination in recruitment, promotion and wages and laws designed for women's protections end up hindering their employment

Legal aspects show that the region recorded the lowest levels in the field of protection for working women, ranging from maternity leave and flexible work arrangements. Most economic rights of women exist but unenforced such as equal pay provisions. Several Arab countries currently do not meet the international standard of 14 weeks of maternity leave (Jordan, Bahrain, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Yemen, and Tunisia. Only Egypt, Morocco and Syria meet the international standard in maternity leave, Costs of maternity leave are borne by the employer in the majority of Arab countries; which strongly discourage employers from recruiting women of child-bearing age. Rules imposed by the 'guardianship system' in some countries of the GCC limit women's access to employment and some laws limit their access to certain professions as well as their ability to work at night.

The Region has the highest youth unemployment rate worldwide, especially among young women exceeding that of young men by around 20 percentage points

There is little coordination and limited monitoring and evaluation of the programs enhancing women economic empowerment. Shortage in funding for gender sensitized studies and dependence on international financing lead to unsustainability of projects enhancing women status.

Recommendations:

1-At the national level (macro):

Joining all the four key ILO gender equality Conventions which are the Equal Remuneration Convention, Convention on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation), Convention on Workers with Family Responsibilities, and Maternity Protection Convention and also the new Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 is required.

Better and more regular monitoring of Arab poverty status is required – for example, through the establishment of a poverty observatory similar to those in China and Latin America to better understand the factors that are mainly responsible for rising poverty.

Governments should address antipoverty and inequality measures (social transfers, unemployment benefits and pensions) and coordinates the implementation of specific economic, social, agricultural and related policies in support of female-headed households with the main stakeholders, NGOs, donors and the private sector.

Governments should also ensure women's right to decent working conditions, including equal pay for equal work, access to employment, appropriate working conditions, eliminate occupation segregation and control over economic resources in particular in rural areas, to take into account women's unremunerated work and promote a balance between life and work

Governments should adopt economic policies that do not discriminate against sectors that hire women intensively, encourage more flexible working hours, improve access to transportation and private sector and state-subsidized child care, provide tax breaks to employers that employ women

2- At the beneficiary (micro level)

- a-- Gender equality policies and practices should be obligatory at both the private and public sectors establishments including protecting women from sexual harassment in the work place
- b- Financial inclusion policies and practices should be treating women equally
- c- National Women Machineries and NGOs should lobby for new legislations that ensure the ability to combine life and work for both women and men.
- d- Plan and implement programs through media and educational curriculum that promote the reproductive role of men and the sharing of home and children responsibilities
- e- Ensure women's ability to access necessary resources that enable them to start their own business. (Access to inheritance, access to loans...etc)..
- f- Generate and analyze gender disaggregated data related to work and economic activities

(2) Poverty eradication, social protection and social services:

The emphasis after the Arab Spring remains on targeted systems of social protection mainly earnings-related. The evident shortcoming is that governments are spending too much on short-term poverty alleviation policies, including subsidies that are neither conducive to long-term economic and social investment nor address the structural causes of poverty and social disharmony.

Education is a critical factor in addressing sustainability issues and ensuring human well-being. UNESCO recognizes that educational attainment helps transform lives by reducing poverty and vulnerability, improving health outcomes, advancing technology and increasing social cohesion. Better education leads to greater prosperity, better health outcomes, less violence, more gender equality, higher social capital and an improved natural environment. Education provides the key tools –that help in achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Sexual and reproductive health is affected by sociocultural factors, including gender disparities, taboos, and strongly held behavioral norms. Moreover, the delivery of sexual and reproductive healthcare is deeply influenced by the laws and policies in place within specific national contexts.

The ICPD recognized the centrality of SRHR to health and development. The impact of SRHR spans the life-cycle of both women and men, offering individuals and couples the right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their SRH and to do so free from violence and coercion

Achievements/progress:

The educational gender gap in the region has improved at a rate of 93%, which is a great improvement. Access to education has dramatically increased in the past few decades in the Arab world. Almost all governments in the region, especially those that possess oil wealth, have made massive investments in education over the past decade and several governments in the region have stressed the importance of improving female access to education and succeeded in reducing gender gaps at different educational levels.

In several countries, girls seem to outperform boys academically. This shift has also occurred for women in higher education. The ratio of female to male higher education enrollment in the region is 108%. In Qatar, this ratio reached 676%. In the United Arab Emirates, women enroll in university at three times the rate of men and in Saudi Arabia; the university gender gap was closed a decade ago. In Bahrain, the majority of the top 10 per cent of high school graduates are girls, and more women attend university than men. Bahrain, along with Jordan and Tunisia, has made significant political and financial commitments to boosting education, resulting in remarkable progress toward reducing illiteracy and closing the gender gap.

60% of the countries in the region have ensured universal primary education by 2015 and that percentage keeps on growing. However, there is still much to be done in some countries especially with regards to the high female illiteracy rates.

Although young women seek and succeed in education at higher rates than young men, they are far less likely to enter and remain in the job market. About three out of four Arab women remain outside the active labor force

A key area of success in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action over the last twenty years is the improvement in women's health. Female life expectancy at birth has increased in all countries of the Arab region, to an average of 72.5 years in 2015. Major investments in health care and infrastructure resulted in a significant reduction in maternal mortality. With respect to maternal mortality, the region registered a decline in maternal deaths of approximately 45 per cent since 1995. Maternal mortality ratios in the GCC countries are among the lowest in the world. In almost all Arab countries, over 80 per cent of births are assisted by a skilled attendant, ensuring safe deliveries and preventing many causes of neonatal and maternal mortality. Antenatal care coverage has also significantly improved. In the GCC countries, the proportion of women benefitting from antenatal care has reached, or is close to reaching, 100 per cent.

Challenges:

There is much need to focus on sustained improvement of education and learning especially with regards to women. Arabs have spent more of their GDP on education than any other developing region but these resources can be spent in a more effective manner. Educational content and technology, quality of education can be improved.

The difference in gender gap size between the region's best-performing and lowest-performing countries is substantial; 28% for the educational attainment

It seems that schools in many MENA countries will increasingly be split into public and private all the more worrying. Such a split, as is happening in Morocco and Egypt, exacerbates inequality across the board, as the wealthy minority has access to very expensive private schools, while the rest are left to attend lower-quality government schools. It is likely to hurt girls the most.

Women in the Middle East have higher illiteracy rates compared to the rest of the world. When women are deprived of education it affects them and the countries they live in tend to be less economically developed. In comparison to the global average, women's lack of education in the Middle East is a major, consequential concern. While women's education in the region has undergone major reforms, there is still much to be done.

The progress in women's health conceals some significant disparities both across and within countries. In countries like Egypt, Sudan and Yemen skilled health personnel only attend fewer births in the poorest households, than in the richest households. In addition the least developed countries of the region continue to face a range of challenges in ensuring mothers' access to health care. Women and girls living in the Arab region continue to face many barriers in obtaining necessary care because of long travel distances to health-care facilities and challenges related to transportation.

The lack of financial resources is another major barrier. Public health insurance in the Arab region, except for nationals in the Gulf countries, usually covers only between 30 and 40 per cent of the population, leaving the remaining individuals or their employers to subscribe to private insurance schemes. Out-of-pocket health expenditures are usually high for women in the Arab region with the exception of some countries that provide free health care.

Mental health services remain extremely limited in the region, despite a steady increase in mental health disorders. In many countries of the Arab region, recent armed conflicts have had an impact on increasing number of women suffering from mental disorder.

In the Arab LDCs, almost one third of women who are fecund and sexually active are not using any method of contraception, though they report not wanting children or wanting to delay the next child. A significant share of women lack knowledge about methods of fertility regulation and of HIV/AIDS prevention

In Gaza, health infrastructure has been seriously affected by Israel's frequent military operations. Many hospitals were damaged and as a result, an estimated 40,000 pregnant women could not access basic reproductive health care, leading to a surge in neonatal mortality from 7 to 14 per cent in the wake of any conflict. Moreover, years of blockade have led to a chronic shortage of essential medical supplies, and there are countless reports of patients from Gaza being delayed or denied access to hospitals at military checkpoints.

The Beijing Platform for Action affirms that “the right of all women to control all aspects of their health, in particular their own fertility, is basic to their empowerment”. Such right is closely linked to women’s right to reproductive health services, as well as to women’s autonomy in family planning and their ability to influence decision-making at the household level. A lack of choice regarding the number, spacing and timing of children is a violation of women’s rights

Access to post-abortion care and post-abortion contraception, can prevent unsafe abortions. However, Infertility and abortion remain outside of Ministry of Health policies in several countries.

Full integration of maternal and neonatal health remains an enormous challenge. Women’s SRH during menopause and beyond the reproductive health age is also important but is minimally addressed in services, programs, and public education.

Furthermore, the role of men is not well studied in most of the work on SRHR, and the region has made insufficient efforts to include men in available services and to engage them in public education about SRHR.

Abortion is illegal in all countries of the region except Tunisia, which is the only Arab country to have legalized abortion on demand. In most countries, post-abortion care, including the provision of contraception to prevent further unwanted pregnancy, is inadequate.

In the Arab world, there are few if any safe ways to have an abortion if a woman wants to terminate a pregnancy, even if this is the result of rape. In many cases, all she can do is resort to unqualified practitioners, unsafe clinics, or traditional remedies, all of which may put her at risk of death or prosecution

Arab countries typically fall within three categories when it comes to abortion: countries such as Iraq, as well as the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza Strip, prohibit the procedure altogether, while Bahrain, Iran, Lebanon, Oman, Syria, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen permit abortion only to save the life of the woman. In Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, abortions are permitted in cases of possible health complications

Poverty and conflict are contextual factors in the region that require special attention. All countries reported that inequalities persist in provision, access, and quality of SRH care based on rural/urban residence, geographic area, and socioeconomic status. Conflict, particularly in those countries such as Syria that are currently experiencing massive forced displacement, and the subsequent influx of refugees to neighboring countries, creates new vulnerabilities, strains health systems’ capacity to respond, and creates new SRH problems that call for new approaches and urgent attention.

Recommendations:

In the area of education, policies that would address efficiency are required, the quality of education has to be a prime concern and also the relevance of education to labour market demands has to be increased.

Women's high illiteracy rates in many of the Arab countries have to be treated urgently with adequate policies and investments.

There is a need for better integration of SRHR services within existing services such as with mental health and non-communicable diseases, taking advantage of women's contacts with the health system to maximize prevention and treatment opportunities.

There is a need to improve health information systems in countries of the region that allow access to quality information on all aspects of RH services. Without comprehensive systems, it is difficult to obtain the most complete and reliable picture of health needs to inform evidence-based interventions.

RH services need improvement to guarantee privacy, confidentiality, and informed decision-making, and, importantly, to guarantee the quality of services. Sexual health services are still stigmatized in many settings of the Arab world. All effort should be made to advance the agenda of sexual health as per the ICPD definition and in accordance with cultural norms and national legislations.

Access to information and education relating to sexuality and sexual health including comprehensive sexuality education is essential to enable people to protect their health and make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive lives. All countries of the region should review their national strategies on population, youth, women, and SRH to ensure that they respect the human rights principles to which these countries have committed to.

CSOs should continue to launch advocacy campaigns using evidence from public health research to advocate for the change of national laws that impede the advancement of SRH. They should expand their legal and health aid services for women and should assist in educating women about their rights and should partner with the broader community.

Arab countries should join The Maputo Protocol which is considered one of the most progressive documents on women's rights. Its provisions span personal, economic, civic and political rights, including health and reproduction, harmful traditional practices, non-discrimination, education and the right to participation. It includes important articles on Health and reproductive rights.

(3) Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes

Gender based violence is deeply rooted in the unequal gender power-relations, which had been historically positioning women in a relatively subordinate status compared to men in the Arab region. Violence is seen as a tool to "control" women in order to maintain their subordination in public and private spheres.

According to UN Women data, 37% of Arab women have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime. In Jordan, 21% of ever married women experienced physical violence and 3 crimes were committed in the name of so-called "honor" and 2 crimes of moral degradation in 2018. In Egypt, 87% of women and girls between 15 and 49 years of age still experience female genital mutilation, and 30% of ever married women experience domestic violence. In Lebanon, 27 crimes were committed against

women in domestic violence incidences in 2018. Somalia, Egypt and Sudan have the highest percentage of women between 15 and 49 years of age who have undergone FGM. In Morocco, 12.4% of women experienced violence in public space

Women with physical disabilities and injuries are not only direct victims of violence, but they also face additional form of violence when they are discriminated against in accessing essential entitlements such as education and employment. The Arab national laws do not protect refugee and displaced women and at the same time there are no special national frameworks that protect them from violence

In the Arab region, around one in five young women were married before their 18th birthday. Around 40 million child brides are currently married girls and women who were first married in childhood. The prevalence varies across the region, from a high of one in three in the Sudan and Yemen, to a low of one in fifty in Tunisia (UNICEF, 2018b) and in Egypt 1 in every 10 (11%) between 15-19 years (National Council of Childhood and Motherhood, 2018).

Progress/Achievements:

In the last two years, three countries in the region; Tunisia (2017) , Morocco (2018) and Lebanon legislated national laws combating all forms of violence against women in Tunisia and Morocco and against domestic violence in Lebanon.

Six governments have repealed totally or partially laws that allowed a rapist to escape prosecution by marrying his victim and thus preserve the “honor” of her family.

During the past few decades and especially after the Arab revolutions, the region has witnessed a relatively improved data collection on GBV as a result of concerted efforts of NGOs that challenged gender norms, initiated raising awareness activities about VAW and encouraged women victims to report. It is also due to including data on GBV in Demographic Health Surveys, in Household Surveys and other research studies. But data on GBV is still mostly quantitative and does not provide rich contextual information about what women experience and about shifts in social and gender norms. There is also a lack of data protection mechanisms to ensure the safety, security, confidentiality and anonymity of case information

Across the region, CSOs are playing an active role in addressing GBV, by providing various services to survivors while also implementing advocacy and sensitization programs. CSOs are generally the first line responders to the needs of GBV survivors, both in emergency situations and in other support. They succeed in providing evidence and convincing governments and society to address all forms of violence. They have provided plans on establishing coordination mechanisms that can work effectively with the police, justice, and health sectors. CSOs have also been active in opening few GBV shelters and supporting survivors with skills-training to work. CSOs provide several other services including counseling, legal aid and rehabilitation. CSOs have also launched innovative interventions, such as those to prevent sexual harassment in public spaces.

The following are examples of some of the innovative interventions NGOs have developed to serve and protect victims of violence in the different Arab countries.

In Palestine, Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling (WCLAC) and Juzoor for Health and Social Development developed a National Palestinian Referral System for cases of GBV as well as new standard operating procedures for police, health and social service sectors on how to work with survivors of GBV for all participating organizations

In Morocco, survivors of violence marched hand in hand with their families and with the coalition of women's organizations to repeal article 475 that allowed perpetrator/rapist to marry his victim after a teenage victim of rape killed herself after being forced to marry her rapist. The march was crowned in 2014 by the amendment of the article and more protection to the victims

In Algeria, The Foundation for Equality (CIFFEF) engaged in advocacy activities for setting a minimum age for the marriage of minors in Algeria. As a result, the marital guardian has no right to force his daughter to marry, especially when she is a minor.

In Jordan, 63 women's rights organizations launched a public awareness campaign via social media to lobby members of the Parliament to repeal article 308 of the Jordanian Penal code providing mitigating measures in 13 different sexual crimes and allowing rapists to escape legal accusations and a jail term if he marries his victim.

Challenges:

Legislations in the region (except in Tunisia, Morocco and Lebanon. (The later has a law covering domestic violence) often fall short from covering all forms of violence against women and the majority lack effective enforcement mechanisms in many cases. Public servants including law enforcement and healthcare practitioners often lack the training required to deal with cases of violence against women

Inadequate legislation is one of the key factors perpetuating gender-based violence and the need for taking action towards change in legislation is one of the critical strategies. In many countries even where the legal age of marriage is defined as 18 or older, many exceptions exist that effectively void any minimum age requirement. For example, the judges in many Arab countries can grant exceptions that allow for children to be married (with or without defining a minimum age) if it is judged as being in the child's best interest—with no clear legal guidance defining "best interest."

Sustainable Development Goal 5 calls for "achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls" includes a sub-target to eliminate child and forced marriage, a violation of human rights and harmful practice that disproportionately affects girls

The Middle East adds 700,000 child brides every year to its 40 million child brides, including currently married women wed as children. There has been progress over the past 25 years: Child marriages have gone from one in three marriages to one in five. However, progress has stalled and significantly reversed in some countries, mostly due to conflicts in the Mashriq, Yemen, and Libya. For these countries, it could take decades to recoup their losses and resume progress.

In Lebanon, 2016 study noted that the prevalence of child marriage among its over 1 million Syrian refugees had reached 39 percent. Nikah 'urfi, traditional marriages according to Islamic precepts in Lebanon and Jordan, also leave child brides with little protection, facilitating divorce for husbands and abandonment for girls.

In forced displacement and conflict, child marriages, while building on existing practices, reflect negative coping mechanisms. Parents are fearful for girls' safety and their "honor" and use marriages to provide for and safeguard their daughters. Marriage to local men is sought for host community acceptance, while dowries present another incentive to poor families. Child and forced marriages, as well as sexual violence, have also been used to panic, intimidate, and displace populations.

Where child marriage laws exist, evidence shows that they will only be effective in reducing prevalence where resources are invested in enforcement, like through capacity development of law enforcement public and judicial officials and only when the law is applied to all without impunity. Since the legal framework and its enforcement are inextricably embedded within socio-cultural norms, work towards strengthening the legal framework must be accompanied by changing gender norms and by work and procedures ensuring access to justice for all women.

Countries where Female Genital Cutting is prevalent are Egypt and Sudan and to a lesser extent in Yemen, Iraq, and Palestine. In Egypt prevalence among women (15-49) reached 90 % (CAPMAS 2017). In Egypt the penal code criminalizes FGC, but the provision can be circumvented by making reference to another article, which allows for harmful actions in case of necessity to protect oneself or others. Sudan has developed national strategy for abandonment of all types of FGC (2008-2018).

There are no legal codes addressing sexual harassment at the work place in most of the Arab countries. None of the Arab countries has joined ILO convention on combating violence in the work place

Political violence is also exercised in the form of preventing women from voting for lack of having IDs, discouraging women candidates from campaigning and making it difficult to run as candidates because of restrictive electoral laws.

Cases of murder against women in the name of family honor (so-called "honor killings") are noted across the region. In many of the countries, full sanctions against these crimes tend to be absent. Forced marriage may be imposed upon girls who have been raped or are suspected of any sexual activity outside of marriage. These marriages are similarly justified as preserving family honor

Legislative reforms in the Arab countries do not ensure sufficient and effective protection against GBV, despite certain recent improvements. Beyond the immediate physical danger of retaliation by husbands and gaps in legal protections, many women find it difficult to pursue litigation due to social customs and traditions that protect perpetrators rather than survivors and due to difficulty to access justice.

There still is scarcity of data on the different forms of violence inflicted on Arab women due to under-reporting of violence especially domestic violence. Police data are often incomplete and limited. Many women do not report sexual violence to police because they are ashamed, or fear of being blamed or

not believed or would be mistreated. Data from medico-legal clinics, on the other hand, could be biased towards the more violent incidents of sexual abuse

Few Arab States have initiated efforts to afford better protection and various forms of assistance to women survivors of violence. Such measures include the provision of health services including forensic services and psycho-social services, free legal advice and representation in court, temporary housing in special shelters, and small loans or financial support for education and training. However, these services remain limited, and often leave civil society to fill the gaps

The weakness of services provision in the different governmental sectors is due to the relatively recent experience of the Arab governments in this sphere. It is also due to the lack of political will and to ignoring gender-based violence as a priority that needs adequate financial and human investments

Recommendations:

Legislating comprehensive laws that adhere to international standards of legislations to combat all forms of violence against women are very much needed in the majority of Arab countries. Penal codes that only focus on punishment of perpetrators of violence are not sufficient. The comprehensive laws should address prevention, protection, and services for survivors of violence, punishment, reparation and financial compensation to victims

Commitment from decision-makers including politicians, policy makers, heads of institutions, service providers, the media, and community and religious leaders is vital for making the elimination of gender-based violence a high profile development and human rights issue. Sustaining high profile advocacy and awareness creation and mobilisation campaigns is critical to ensuring increased and sustained support to enacting and implementation of legislations banning violence against women. This requires the prioritization and allocation of financial resources to end VAW and stronger legal protection must be made available to women and children to end child marriage

Arab countries should allocate enough financial resources as well as human resources to provide protection services to victims of violence such as shelters, help line and free legal aid

Arab governments should join ILO convention on combating sexual harassment at work place. CSOs should play an effective role in advocating and raising awareness of women workers to lobby for such ratification

Arab governments should consider the possibility of joining Istanbul convention to combat all forms of domestic violence which is useful in describing the type of support services that should be available for women victims of GBV and also sets standards for how such support services should be provided.

All services for survivors of violence should be based on a gendered understanding of violence against women, be focused on the human rights and safety of the victim, be based on an integrated approach which takes into account the relationship between victims, perpetrators, children, and their wider social environment; aim at avoiding secondary victimization; aim at the empowerment and economic independence of women victims of violence.

Coordination among all official duty-bearers, ministries, agencies through an effective referral system should be in place. Besides governments should ensure the training of the police, prosecution, judges and service providers in the different ministries

An official Observatory on Violence should be established in each country to monitor the effectiveness of dealing and eliminating crimes of GBV

Governments should be responsible for collecting, and availing to CSOs periodic data on all forms of violence against women to make it able to monitor trends on committing violence and to plan their activities of awareness and provision of services on the ground.

Arab Women and Media

New technologies, particularly social media, enabled women to participate in the Arab Spring as organizers, journalists, and activists. Arab society rapidly accelerated in using the diverse technological tools within the last ten years after the socio-political uprising throughout the region. The expansion of the social media tools facilitated new paths for Arab women to position their contributions and create new digital platforms to voice their rights, to discuss their problems openly and to find new tools to promote their efforts on local, regional and international level. In Lebanon for example women media reporters played an important role in covering the protests even when violence took place.

Achievements/Progress:

The digital media and the increasing usages of smart phones facilitated the access to information for the majority of women in rural and urban areas.

Since Arab men usually dominate most conventional media networks in the majority of Arab countries, cyber-activism gave women their own voice, both domestically and abroad. Younger women, generally the most excluded from traditional news outlets, benefited the most from the rise of social media.

The political and socio-economic role of the online and social media that are extending in the region promoted new format of Arab women's participation in the virtual and real life.

Arab women during the social movements in Sudan, Algeria, and Lebanon among other countries proved the new wave of the effective role of the online/social media factors to reveal the confirmation of women's presence on all levels. Their permanent participation in different topics, groups and the publicizing of their opinion demonstrated that social media could help in addressing new horizons for gender equality in the Arab world. The digital media is opening new windows for women's narratives spaces to explore new personal experiences on social media.

There is a wide diversity in the social media of social communities; groups, initiatives and personal pages on the social media that establish new media content related to discuss social problems, gender balanced messages to promote equality in the society, etc. Women introduce the representation of the gender topics from different social categories and various ethnicities.

Some groups of women create new contents of media in relation to their start up projects, business and e-commerce pages and have helped in attracting different Arab women from rural and marginalized areas to participate in this new social environment to reach profits, self-confidence, and shared experiences from different women in the region or on international level. The easy access of information also enables the creation of independent jobs.

The Arab women on social media now are becoming “prosumers” (producers and consumers of media content). They focus on gender parity in various related fields, on gender-fair arts festivals and on the status of women artists, including modalities of improving their professional career development.

Challenges:

Beijing Platform for Action calls for the development of legislation and self-regulatory mechanisms within the media and advertising industry to promote a more balanced representation of women and to limit violent or degrading materials. Unfortunately, despite the existence of media laws and State regulatory bodies in several countries of the Arab region, there is little evidence of the implementation of those recommendations beyond mechanisms to censor pornography for instance.

Women comprise a small percentage of the speakers interviewed on the news in many Arab countries. Female experts are mostly absent from the news segments that receive the greatest coverage, including politics and the economy. When their views were solicited, it was usually to comment on themes associated with stereotypical female roles, such as education or health.

The Arab Cinema and the mass media tools still transmit programs and movies that support inequality content. There are seldom strong and interesting materials in the media that promote gender equality and women’s rights. Decision making positions in the media remain in the hand of men in most of the online and traditional media.

There is an abundant advertising material on the physical beauty of women in the Arab media. This content only feeds the superficial worth of Arab women.

Recommendations:

There is a need for extending the knowledge on gender equality themes in the media and gender sensitizing journalists and other professionals in the media.

Media should play a better role in advocating the digital literacy for all women in the Arab state. Media should build visibility of women’s efforts in all fields such as science, sports, business, entrepreneurship, medicine, etc....

Media should address better contexts regarding the issues and concerns of Arab women such as, early marriage, sexual education, prevention of health problems, rights for acquiring nationality for women’s children, changing laws for more economic rights, etc...

With the growth in the number of the satellite channels in the Arab countries — now over 400 — it is necessary to have a Pan Arab media watch to serve the Arab world to monitor the dissemination of images of Arab women and can increase the awareness of the media about the social, legislative, economic, cultural and political discrimination against women in the media.

(4) Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institution

Women's full and effective political participation is a matter of human rights, inclusive growth and sustainable development. Women's political empowerment is an essential requirement of democratic governance and can be measured in terms of both the legal rights granted to women to vote, express their opinion, and run for elected office, as well as the practical exercise of these legal rights.

Participating in public institutions – such as parliaments, local councils or government – allows women to contribute to the decision-making and law making that impact on people's rights, behaviours and lives. Women bring a particular perspective to decision-making. Political parties are the primary and most direct vehicle through which women can access elected office and political leadership.

Arab women play a major role during the revolutions. Lately in Algeria, Sudan and Lebanon they lead the protests, organize sit-ins, and they confront bravely the police and the army. They take advantage of the protestations and sit ins to raise women demands such as the nationality demands for their children their right to custody and calling for a civil personal status law. These women were not linked to a particular political party but they came together asking for their rights.

The structures, policies, practices and values of political parties have a profound impact on the level of women's participation in political life of their country. Ensuring women's equal participation in the decision-making structures of parties is therefore essential for promoting gender in parties and in the whole society.

Achievements/Progress:

Five of the countries in the North African region have constitutions that include gender parity provisions. Article 46 of the new Tunisian Constitution guarantees equality between women and men to have access to opportunities at all levels of responsibility and in all fields. Furthermore, the constitution stipulates that the state will strive to achieve equal representation for women and men in elected councils.

In the legislative elections of 2014 in Tunisia, 68 (31%) out of the 217 seats in the Assembly of People's Representatives were occupied by women. In 2018 the parliament adopted an electoral law which imposed both vertical and horizontal parity for the local elections resulted in a drastic increase in the number of women in the city councils

In several Arab countries, women have taken over non-traditional ministries such as the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Energy and Mines, the Ministry of Water and Environment, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Planning

Countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region experienced few gains in women's representation in 2018, attaining a regional average of 18.1 per cent. The average proportion of women elected was of 19.4 per cent in lower and single chambers, but was a mere 10.5 per cent in upper chambers. This resulted in an overall proportion of 17.5 per cent of women gaining seats in the region in the 2018 elections. The standout countries in the region are Algeria, Mauritania and Tunisia where women's participation in parliament is above 25%.

The gender quota has been applied in many Arab countries, which has led to a significant increase in the number of women in parliaments and in local councils.

Egypt, within the framework of achieving women's empowerment and women's access to political participation, the percentage of women in the Egyptian parliament rose to 15%, The UAE is currently ranked first as 50% of the parliament seats are assigned to women, and the parliament is headed currently by a woman. Djibouti's elections in 2018, increased the share of women in parliament rising from 10.8 per cent to 26.2 per cent

A further milestone was achieved in late 2018, when a Bahraini woman became the first woman to serve as the speaker of a parliamentary chamber in the country. In 2018 the upper chamber in Bahrain had a 22.5 per cent representation of women. In January 2019, United Arab Emirates had also a woman speaker of parliament.

Women played an important role in initiating policies and legislation that enhance women's rights. The advocacy work by female members of parliament and women's rights organizations and activists has resulted in positive changes for women's participation in decision-making and women's human rights activities. This includes increasing numbers of women judges, preventing legislation that would negatively impact women's human rights and increasing access to education. Vibrant civil society organizations are working hard both to attain more gains for women and to preserve the rights that they acquired and which seem to be threatened by extremist movements especially in the areas of conflict.

Several of the Arab countries especially those who have witnessed revolutions have new constitutions and new laws in favor of equality and parity. Feminist movements and organizations have helped through their lobbying and advocacy to increase the participation of women in the public domain.

National women machineries, donor agencies and feminist NGOs in several countries have been providing training to women candidates on how to plan and implement their campaigns and how to reach the media

Challenges:

In spite of the fact that there has been a noted progress in the representation of Arab women in parliaments, however their political representation in elected institutions remains low compared to the

international level. Percentage of Women in parliaments worldwide is 22.7% which is higher than the proportion of women in Arab parliaments of 17.5% in 2018. The participation rate of women in parliaments decreases in countries that do not apply the quota systems

Causes for the low political participation of women are several including electoral systems and laws, as well as legal, structural, customs and traditions and the prevalence of patriarchal society that prefers men in the political arena than women.

Arab women are usually marginalized in political parties, and a few occupy leadership positions. There was, for example, one woman who headed a new political party in Egypt (the Constitution Party) but left the party. In Tunisia, two women headed two parties, while in Sudan; the Socialist Union Party is chaired by a woman. In Palestine, meanwhile, a woman chaired the Palestine Democratic Union (FIDA) party. The number of women members in political parties has increased in some countries especially those that have witnessed revolutions or reforms.

Arab countries have differed in the percentage of women's participation in the judiciary. While the percentage has gone high in some countries, such as Lebanon and Morocco, it remained very low or has declined significantly in other countries, as in Egypt and Iraq. It is also noted that in some countries where a few number of women held judicial posts, their work sphere is confined to only some courts such as courts of first instance, family courts and juvenile courts. This reflects the male dominance over the judiciary, with a clear discrimination against women.

However, not all countries saw an increase in women's representation in the judiciary. The lowest representation of women is found in Egypt, where women judges represent only 0.6%

With respect to women in ministerial positions, across North African women's representation remains significantly lower than in parliament. However, Mauritania is a notable exception with women holding 30.8% of the ministerial positions in 2017.

Women also face gender based violence when involved in politics. As a consequence of the high level of insecurity and unsafe environments in many countries of the region, women's ability to fully and equally participate is greatly reduced and the space for women to participate in decision-making is shrinking. Libyan women for example who are active in politics and peace-building face not only harassment but also threats to their lives and the lives of family members due to conflicts and rising radicalism. Women are also facing in several countries slander and defamation, character attacks, harassment (including by the media), gendered insults, hate speech, and they are sometime blocked or restricted from accessing resources available to men and so are prevented from their own political viewpoints or priorities

Access to financial support is a common challenge for female candidates and women activists in the region. Many countries such as Egypt and Tunisia put a ban on private donations and donor agencies assistance and also limit funds received from public resources. As a result female candidates received less support within political parties and faced greater challenges in fundraising.

Arab women's access to education and literacy impact their political participation. In order to compete for any seat in government or parliament, literacy is required; lack of education represents a serious obstacle for potential female candidates. In addition, political parties are still reluctant to institutionalize gender equality within their structures, processes and practices

Recommendations

CSOs should be able to obtain enough funds to undertake initiatives to support women candidates and ensure they have the resources necessary for waging successful campaigns. Feminist and women's pressure groups should be enabled to provide women both in the cities and in the rural areas with training in public speaking and campaign management, and mobilizing broader sections of society to support women candidates

There is a need to provide those working in the Media with gender sensitization/training which will allow them to shape positive public attitudes and challenge gender based stereotypes, and patriarchal attitudes and mindsets. There should be more research on media analysis with regards coverage of activities of female candidates

More of awareness raising work has to be done within the political parties aiming at changing the men club mentality. There needs to be a monitoring of political parties in implementing gender-equality campaigns.

Working with parliaments and government bodies is needed to promote gender-friendly institutional reforms.

There should be a complete separation of religion from the State authority. All laws should be civil laws and not religious laws in order to guarantee women's rights in both private and public spheres.

Women from political parties, civil society and local communities should coordinate together to advance women's issues on the political agenda and to advocate for the enacting laws that ensure gender equality at all levels.

Quotas and vertical and horizontal parity in electoral laws should be established. The laws must contain articles which make it mandatory for political parties to ensure clearly defined proportions of female representation in leadership bodies.

National women's machineries should be replaced by equal opportunity ministries whose role is to promote equality of men and women in all areas and levels of society. National women machinery board members should be selected through democratic mechanisms such as elections and granting them executive powers. Accountability mechanisms from civil society should be also established to monitor the work of the governmental women machinery. Ombuds offices to receive women's complaints related to gender discrimination should be established and strengthened as well as the role of gender focal points. Gender budgeting should be also implemented.

(5) Peaceful and inclusive societies

Today 50% of the world's refugees are women and girls. 60% of prenatal and maternal deaths take place in humanitarian settings and at least 1 in 5 refugees or displaced women are estimated to have experienced sexual violence.

The Arab region is home to more than 17 million refugees and displaced persons forced to leave their homes due to violent conflict. There are 10 million internally displaced persons in Sudan, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen, as well as 7.5 million refugees from the occupied Palestinian territories. Some 4.6 million Palestinians live in displaced camps in neighbouring countries

As a result of the armed conflict in Syria, the number of registered refugees has surpassed five million. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan host the largest numbers of refugees among the Arab states.

The "Arab Human Development Report" on youth issues (2016) states that although the Arab world comprise only 5% of the world population, yet, since 2014, it represented 45% of terrorism all over the world, 68% of deaths resulting from terrorism, 47% of internally displaced and 58% of refugees.

All this resulted in economic problems e.g. unprecedented unemployment particularly among youth. Nearly half of young Arab women failed to find work opportunities compared to the international standard 16%.

Achievements/Progress:

Government, International and national NGOs exert efforts to help and protect women refugees. In Egypt UNHCR prints and distributes referral guide for refugees and refugee service providers annually. The guide includes all information they could need. The National Council for Motherhood and Childhood assists refugee women who become pregnant as a result of rape. Plan international with other local NGOs provide to Syrian women refugees life skill training, financial literacy and entrepreneurship capacity building. They also provide cash assistance through different types of conditional and unconditional cash assistance

UNHCR gives priority to children, it is concerned with challenges of legislation such as lack of nationality rights and they work to allow children to apply for nationality, it is concerned with gender justice such as the right of birth registration for those who lack IDs and registration of children who were born in ISIS controlled places in Syria. UNHCR is also concerned about girls' education and about early marriage.

Despite Jordan's own economic crisis, it has managed to increase the enrollment of Syrian refugee children in public schools by offering double shift schools across the country, provided out-of-school children with certified non-formal education, and the government has set up in 2017 a grace period enabling all children to enroll in schools, regardless of their nationality and documentation status. It also accepted refugee children who had missed the beginning of the 2016-2017 school years to enroll in the following semester.

In Libya the Italian NGO CESVI worked with refugees and migrants living in Libya, and it focuses on protection of victims of GBV. It provides services for survivors including access to health care and psychosocial support; mental health, safety and security measures. CESVI arranges for moving victims, upon their request, to a safe place outside Libya, as staying in Libyan shelters constitute a risk for their lives.

KAFA non-governmental organization in Lebanon provides SGBV support services to all women and girls victims of violence who reside in Lebanon including refugees. It also implements specific psycho-social support services such as drama therapy sessions, puppetry sessions...etc as a form of healing art for children as well as for adults from local and refugee communities. Through its community mobilizers, KAFA provides awareness sessions within the refugee camps on gender based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights, including early marriage, sexual harassment and abuse...etc.

Egypt has a national coordinating committee which networks among government entities, NGOs and international organizations. It was engaged in preparing a law defining smuggling of migrants based on Palermo Protocol, and based on respecting the human rights of migrants. The committee succeeded in mapping the main sending governorates in Egypt in order to initiate development projects that can involve the youth. It developed a strategy 2016-2026 and an action plan for two years which covers three main pillars: institutional mechanism, legislation and operations. The committee works on discouraging migration from Egypt by supporting the implementation of developmental projects for the youth and women. It focuses on a developmental approach more than on security approach.

Other services are provided by NGOs such as vocational trainings by different local and international NGOs in coordination with key ministries, which allows professional integration and improves the employability of vulnerable youth living in poor areas. These training programs are combined with a personal development component, which includes community activities and the general improvement of personal skills. This will contribute to lowering community tensions by promoting the coexistence of different populations. There is also support from UNHCR and some INGOs in providing conditional and non-conditional cash assistance for women found in vulnerable situations (GBV cases, widowed, divorced mothers...)

Challenges:

Most Arab penal codes do not include specific articles to protect women victims of armed conflicts or safeguard their rights. There is also lack of specific measures and institutions to guarantee law and order during conflict, and women are exposed regularly to physical and psychological threats. Spread of crimes, severe conflicts and the plethora of arms create an insecure environment where many women feel unsafe to move around or the freedom to be in public spaces. Many women endure violations of their personal freedom, inability to work and participate in politics

Moreover, a growing body of evidence suggests that, in times of conflict, all forms of violence against women are exacerbated, especially rape, forced marriage, and physical violence.

Most Arab countries have not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. But they are party to CEDAW that has general recommendation on refugee women which states that States parties bear the primary responsibility for ensuring that asylum-seeking women, refugee women, women nationality applicants and stateless women within their territory or under their effective control or jurisdiction, even if not situated within their territory, are not exposed to violations of their rights under the Convention, including when such violations are committed by private persons and non-State actors.

In majority of receiving Arab countries, there is a lack of accurate statistics on migration flows. In countries, where the refugee community does not live in camps like in Egypt can offer a positive sense of refugees blending into local society, it can also be problematic, considering that many of these refugees have no recognized passports or IDs except that issued by UNHCR giving them refugee status. It presents problems for women who seek health, education and social services for themselves and their children.

The international community worked with the government of Jordan to create the Jordan Compact, a ground-breaking deal that aims to provide 200,000 work permits for Syrian refugees in exchange for preferential access to the European market as well as access to conditional financing from the World Bank. However, the needs of Syrian refugees in Jordan remain staggering. The economic hardship which is affecting Jordan has significantly impeded the implementation of the Jordan Compact.

Domestic violence is one of the major problems facing migrant and refugee women in many countries. Several women who had migrated with their partners the onset of abuse had preceded migration, took place in the homeland, and continued during migration. Some have been raped in their countries of origin, especially if they come from conflict zones. In many cases, migrant and refugee women victims of violence hesitate to make a complaint to the police for fear of deportation.

Escalation of conflict in the region resulted in enslaving girls such as Yazidi girls by ISIS. Detention of children, irregular migration has also devastating effects

Due to dire economic situation for migrants and refugees, wives and daughters are forced by husbands to do unprotected domestic work or to go for prostitution. Some young Syrian refugee women are forced to early marriage in countries like Egypt. Some also had their genitals mutilated, a spread practice in Egypt.

40 % of the Syrian school-aged children remain out of school in Jordan because of the need for children to work; early marriage; cost associated with schooling; distance to school and limited transportation options and the lack of documentation needed for registration.

The suffering of Palestinian and Syrian women refugees is clear in Lebanon, Inability of the Palestinian woman married to a Lebanese to obtain a citizenship, problems affecting the right of movement especially for the Palestinian women coming from Syria where their husbands and children from Syria are banned from entering Lebanon like the Palestinian refugee husbands in Lebanon. Other problems include the inability to enjoy the right to social security, the right to own property and the right to protection from domestic violence

In the absence of shelters and adequate facilities, women and their children ran enormous risks of rape and human trafficking. In addition to that, the situation of domestic workers from Asian countries is very alarming as the majority of them suffer from sexual exploitation and physical abuse. Unfortunately, only few of them manage to access justice with the help of the very few concerned NGOs

The current use of Security Council's resolution 1325 regarding security, protection and participation of women -before, during and after conflict- fail to solve many problems. It deals with women and children as victims. It seems that the only way it acknowledges to ward off the malice of conflicts and fights is to call for providing victims with some services. Though the resolution is also concerned with trying to bring women to negotiation tables, yet it lacks the power to call upon the international community to carry its responsibility to end existing armed conflicts in the Arab region, which should include efforts to stop exporting arms to the conflicting countries and ending the Israeli occupation lasting for more than 70 years now.

The political and economic destabilization of several Arab and African countries as well as the abuse of human rights has resulted in huge income disparities creating pools of unemployed youth and poor families who are desperate and who decide to migrate regardless of all the danger and risks they face.

There is lack of clear, rights-based strategies with vision from the part of the UN agencies and the European organizations that deal with migrants and refugees and which result in lack of coordination in providing services to women, lack of sharing information, changing priorities in the middle of implementation, and funds that can create in many cases tension between national communities and migrant and refugee communities. On the other hand reducing funds offered to Palestinian settlers has resulted in preventing women from health care, safety and mobility rights.

There is little focus on problems faced by women refugees and migrants who suffer from many forms of gender based violence including sexual assault, rape, early and forced marriage, trafficking, female genital mutilation, and economic exploitation....etc. Children also suffer from lack of adequate education. Women are usually looked upon as victims of violence and not as women who have voice that should be listened to by all stakeholders.

Recommendations:

The international community should play a responsible role in attempting to end conflicts in the Arab region. This role varies; starting from halting arms exports to the region, to negotiations and mediations with governments to providing adequate services for refugees and displaced persons. There is a need to focus on prevention and on human security versus border security

Arab governments should also include women in all peace making negotiations forums and tables, as women are the ones most adversely affected by decisions made by men. Each country should have a plan of action to implement Security Council resolutions on Women, Peace and Security.

Armed conflict detrimentally impacts women as they lack resources to protect themselves compared to men. Thus women and their children comprise the majority of the refugees and homeless. Women also

are exposed to the worst forms of violence including rape, trafficking, enslaving and exacerbation of early marriage. Women also suffer from lack of basic or compensatory services in areas of armed conflict, while the aggressors are not punished or held accountable

Governments should be more inclusive and more accountable, extend social and economic freedoms, and increase employment opportunities. Young women and men have been at the forefront of these calls for change, reflecting their desire to participate actively in the economic, social and political spheres.

Negotiations of the different agencies involved in migration and refugee crisis with governments should include civil society especially feminist organizations who should be main stakeholders who can talk freely about the problems faced by women on the ground.

Governments in receiving countries should offer enough protection to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers women. For example, they should provide enough shelters that can protect women from gender based violence. There is also a need for national legal instruments that can protect the rights of refugee and migrant women.

The importance of addressing root causes of migration and displacement is very much needed. A feminist approach versus a gender approach can look at change in power dynamics such as in the distribution of resources. A feminist approach is a comprehensive approach looking at the root causes and looking at the impact on women in their daily life whether the impact of laws or impact of provision of services. It is an approach concerned with looking at who develops policies affecting women, and if such policies empower migrant refugee and asylum seeker women or not. It looks at who takes the decisions. In addition it addresses accountability and focuses on women's power.

In dealing with root causes, restructuring of international cooperation should take place dealing more with prevention, internal stability and peace building. The relationships between North and South should be restructured. For example, it should look at keeping families together rather than destroying families in camps. It is important to think beyond the national interest.

The issue of data on migrant and refugee women is important as there is not enough data on women and their movements. There is no data for example on adolescent girls who grow up in camps. The need to generate more data on women and girls should be a priority in order to assess their situation and their future.

The discriminatory laws already exist in MENA region such as the personal status law, the inheritance and property laws make migrant and refugee women more vulnerable to gender based violence.

A gender sensitive perspective is essential in developing and implementing measures and policies aimed at protecting and empowering refugee and asylum seeking women in order to allow them to become active contributors to the host society. However, their needs have to be recognised and fulfilled with reference to their background conditions. Based on their individual life paths, the needs of female

migrants, refugees and asylum seekers could be developed by directly involving them in the planning, implementing, and monitoring phases.

(6) Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation

Climate change poses a great threat to the future of development in the Arab region. The Arab region has 14 of the world's 20 most water-stressed countries. Over exploitation of natural resources in the region has also led to severe ecosystem degradation. Poor land and water management are reducing the potential provision of already limited ecosystem services. Annual deforestation rates are high.

Current climate change projections show that by the year 2025, the water supply in the Arab region will be only 15 percent of levels in 1960. By 2030 the predominant effects of climate change will include a decrease in precipitation, a drastic rise in average temperatures and an increase in seawater intrusion into coastal aquifers as sea levels rise and ground water overexploitation continues. With increased urbanization, the urban heat island effect is projected.

Urbanization and population growth are putting severe strains on dwindling natural resources. Almost one fourth of the Arab population is considered to be in poverty.

Climate change threatens progress in achieving gender equity in the Arab region. Men and women possess unique vulnerabilities to climate change impacts, which are largely based on their respective roles in society. In the majority of cases, women tend to be vulnerable in more ways than men.

Achievements/Progress:

Climate change can present an opportunity to innovate and transition to a more resilient future in line with the vision set forth in the 2030 Agenda. There are innovative bottom up solutions tried in some of the Arab countries which if scaled up, can help sustain communities and ecosystems towards 2030 and beyond.

Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen for example are contributing towards building the resilience of rural communities by mobilizing, capturing and diverting water resources, and by conducting on-the-farm and on the-pasture training to facilitate sustainable land and water management. Egypt and Tunisia are reinforcing capacities to implement sustainable coastal zone management by focusing on ecosystem-centric approaches for building resilience.

Sudan implemented an innovative adaptation measures to increase robustness and resilience of highly vulnerable rain fed farming and pastoralist systems to climate change risks, especially women headed households that are most resource deficient. This can result in improved yield and livelihoods of farmers and pastoralists using tested watershed-based water harvesting models and ground-water based on small scale seasonal irrigation; in improved community-based ecosystem conservation practices through awareness campaigns, introduction of alternative household energy options and other land management & agronomic techniques; and improved capacities of women groups in the face of climate change hazards.

Challenges:

There is a great disparity between the situations of men and women across the region as a whole. In some countries, rural poverty, rigid social expectations, and limited education and skills remain a problem, higher illiteracy rates contribute to little voice of women in decision making.

Climate change will accelerate the work and time burdens of women and will continue to cause men to migrate to seek alternative productive means and leave the management of the land in the hands of extended families. This increases the responsibilities of women.

Women play an important role in farm activities, such as stock tending, harvesting, and water collection. They take their responsibilities in addition to their other familial and household responsibilities. Left alone, they will have greater management role in farming. But they are often faced with significant barriers such as less education; travel is difficult for them because of cultural norms, pregnancy, and child care; and they often lack the cultural and legal authority to assert their rights.

Women are the most affected by the consequences of climate change compared to men. Women, especially rural women, have many responsibilities in agricultural work which is more affected by climate change factors that negatively affects the lives of their families. Women are also the main contributors to the management of forests through planting and protecting trees. They are the main and direct users of water for domestic consumption in the Arab region as house wives and household managers. As they are responsible for feeding the family in most countries, they feel more than men about what water shortages, droughts and natural disasters can bring. In addition to domestic waste management, rural and mountainous women devote much of their time to collecting firewood.

Women are exposed to many diseases as a result of climate change caused by drought and due to excessive use of pesticides and chemicals and because of lack of drinking water. They can suffer from respiratory diseases such as asthma, allergies and skin diseases of all kinds. Climate change will also increase mosquito-borne diseases affecting water, air quality and food quality. Malaria, which affects three million people a year in the Arab world, including many pregnant women, will increase in prevalence and cause a rise in maternal mortality, which is still high in some Arab countries

At the time that all international human rights standards and conventions protect women and commit to ensure the effective participation of women in all decisions including those related to the environment at all levels, we find only that the participation of women in (climate summits) from Paris till now is still very weak, especially in the participation of women in the bodies of negotiations and decision making.

Limited systematic observation and monitoring of climate variables: weather forecasts and climate projections are currently constrained by insufficient monitoring of climate. Poor awareness or understanding of effective measures to build resilience against climate change among national leaders and the public including women is also a challenge

In the Arab region, disruptions to existing agricultural practices will lead to more widespread malnutrition, because of higher food prices, and greater exposure to diseases and other health problems, especially if greater migration to unsanitary, informal settlements is triggered. The impacts of malnutrition on children are particularly troublesome because they lead not only to increased child mortality, but also to developmental and long-term physical and mental impediments

In the Arab region, there are minimal fiscal incentives and direct financing mechanisms to support climate change resilience. The lack of prioritization of climate change and resilience at national levels has also deterred the creation of an enabling environment for investment in adaptation and mitigation technologies and practices.

Recommendations:

To increase and strengthen the role of women in mitigating the effects of the climate change, several steps can be taken. These include addressing formal and informal practices that create inequalities in health, education, economic participation, agency, civil rights, autonomy, and participation at all levels. Climate change makes it more urgent to tackle specific drivers of gender-based vulnerability, such as barriers to women's land ownership, low awareness of climate change, and limited skills for livelihood diversification.

Women should not be seen as victims of climate change; because of their central role in family, household, and rural activities, they can be primary agents in changing the attitudes and behaviors needed for successful adaptation. A focus on gender is an essential part of any development strategy. Effective adaptation can only be achieved if the many barriers to gender equity are removed, and women are empowered to contribute.

In rural areas with high out-migration rates of men, social protection is critical especially for the women, the elderly, and the children left behind. Social protection can take the form of rural pension schemes or conditional cash transfer programs. Assistance to enhance productivity can include the facilitated access to credit or markets for agricultural and other rural products. In urban areas, social services can include the provision of affordable housing away from locations at risk of climate impacts or the provision of energy, water, and public transport services. The poor and most vulnerable are particularly in need of assistance when an extreme weather event hits. This includes emergency response provisions of basic needs such as adequate shelter and access to food, water, and clothing.

Institutional structures with a mandate to address climate change concerns are required to effectively coordinate efforts in the Arab region. Climate information data collection and analysis should be improved and the implementation of Early Warning Systems is required.

CSOs should be encouraged to experiment models to mitigate negative impact of climate change and CSOs should be allowed to monitor progress of achievements

More work is needed to ensure that gender disaggregated vulnerability is mainstreamed into development plans, trainings and in capacity assessments. Women must be perceived as key agents to

adapt to climate change due to their dependence on natural resources. Local communities must also become empowered to participate in the incorporation of adaptation and disaster risk preparedness practices.

MENA Feminist priority issues,

Beside the priority issues arrived at in MENA civil society consultations that took place in Amman and in Istanbul and which included eliminating gender based violence, strengthening institutions in order to be gender responsive, improving educational and health services provided to women and girls, ensuring leadership and participation of women in all spheres ,recognizing women's all forms of work and protecting workers with all their diversity and regularly collecting and analyzing data on the situation of women in all spheres, these are additional priority issues in this parallel report.

(1)The need for legal reform

Legal empowerment includes legal reforms and services that improve the bargaining positions of women such as women battling domestic violence or battling to have equal rights in the family and in the workplace.

In general, Arab society is patriarchal, and the family rather than the individual is still considered as the main unit of society that should provide protection, welfare and livelihood for individuals. The society in general still sees that the primary role of women is the reproductive role. Men are regarded in many legal frameworks in the region as the sole breadwinners and heads of the family and may have authority, either through cultural tradition or by law, over what women can do and behave inside and outside the home.

Many Arab countries have introduced positive legislative reforms that promote gender equality and protect women from violence. Yet guaranteeing equality before the law remains a persistent challenge across the region. There are several legislative gaps in many of the Arab countries. The most important are family laws and nationality laws. Both kinds of laws greatly discriminate against tens of millions of Arab women.

Legal gaps panorama in the Arab region shows that although in the majority of Arab countries the new Constitutions guarantee gender equality, however, in five of the countries' penal codes they exonerate a rapist from punishment if he marries his victim. Penal codes in 11 countries also allow for mitigating circumstances, such as adultery, to decrease penalties or acquit perpetrators of so called "honour" killings. None of the countries explicitly criminalizes marital rape. Nationality laws in 10 countries limit the rights of women to pass citizenship to their children and to foreign spouses and Family laws in majority of the countries do not give women equal rights in all aspects of marriage, divorce, guardianship and custody of children. Labour laws in many countries restrict women from engaging in some types of night work.

Family laws:

Family laws or personal status codes play a very serious and important role in determining social relations in the Arab countries. It is the law that is most connected to the daily lives of citizens, and has the greatest impact on the family. Family law controls family affairs and the relations between its members; defining their rights and responsibilities. It also controls issues of marriage, divorce child custody, and all matters arising from divorce including financial matters.

All regimes in Arab countries, throughout all history, resisted the process of secularization of laws. Successive governments were very cautious in their attempts to reform existing family laws, to avoid confrontations with religiosity prevailing in society, or the hegemony of the patriarchal system, or the male ideology entrenched in the official institutions in the Arab countries and hampering the process of modernization in society.

Tunisia and Morocco are the most successful Arab countries in reforming family laws. Many reasons lie behind their position, some of which are related to either enlightened political will, e.g. Tunisia under the rule of President Habib Bourguiba, or as in the case of Morocco, to the presence of community based women's movement endorsed by the current king.

The effect of the family laws affects the situation and the position of women in both the private and public domains in the Arab Region.

Reform family law is necessary to continue to expand women's rights and increase gender equity. For example, there is a need to abolish polygamy altogether; equalize custody and guardianship unconditionally; and make inheritance rights should be equal for men and women.

Women's rights activists have been instrumental in pushing for family reform in many of the Arab countries. Some have used both international and national legal frameworks to advocate reform, and other advocates have used Islamic arguments to counter resistance from conservatives

Arab governments should not take the role individually for deciding the kind of reform of family law they should legislate. Active concerned civil society organizations are well aware that societal support is necessary to enhance and strengthen the desire of change. CSOs should be given the space to present and discuss their vision of the family law reform to a wide range of groups of men and women. There is a need for a civil and not a religious family law that guarantee women's equal rights in marriage and outside marriage without delay.

Nationality laws:

The three laws; the family law, the penal code and the nationality law reflect the effect of a strong patriarchal system that strives to put women under the domination of men

Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, Yemen, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Bahrain, and United Arab Emirates countries deny women the right to pass their nationality to their own children or to their husbands if they marry men of other nationalities

This discrimination results in wide-ranging human rights violations, violating international law and also many of these countries' constitutions. It is also the cause of statelessness globally.

The vast majority of nationality laws that maintain gender-based discrimination in the Arab countries discriminate against women by denying women equal rights to acquire, change, retain and confer nationality to children or spouses. These laws are in contradiction to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which explicitly obliges States to guarantee equal nationality rights to women (Article 9). When a State denies equal nationality rights to women and men, it creates a category of second class citizens. Gender equality cannot be realized in a country that maintains gender-discriminatory nationality laws.

Gender discrimination in nationality laws impedes also a child's access to education because they cannot have access to state-sponsored education. Later they cannot also have access to job opportunities. This is in contradiction to State obligations to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), in addition to other human rights conventions. Individuals who lack citizenship due to sex-discriminatory nationality laws are also frequently denied access to social services including national healthcare. The marginalization and hardships faced by these individuals can also lead to social alienation and psychological distress.

Additionally, there is a higher risk of human trafficking among statelessness women and girls. Gender discrimination in nationality laws contributes to child and forced marriages. Girls who are without nationality in their home country may be forced into early marriage in hopes of obtaining greater security and access to the benefits of citizenship. Women who become pregnant as a result of rape have an increased risk of having stateless children when a State's nationality is based on paternity.

MENA nationality laws discriminate not only against women. Another frequent criterion found in naturalization requirements across the region is that an individual should be mentally, and sometimes also physically, fit. Some legislation discriminates thus against the mentally and/or physically disabled. In Syria for example it states that anyone who has "any diseases or disabilities" is excluded from naturalization. A similar criterion is found in Mauritania. In Kuwait, naturalization requirements can be based on religious grounds as applicants must be Muslim in order to naturalize and non-Muslims will not be able to apply. The same exclusion exists in Yemen, where the criteria require that an applicant for naturalization must be either Arab or Muslim. Age discrimination is found in Libya, where the applicant has to be less than 50 years according to section 9 of the law

(2)Stretching the space available for Civil Society in the Arab Region

Women's organizations focus on consciousness-raising, coalition-building, and advocacy can bring the kind of systemic change that women the world over need. However, many foundations have actually decreased their general operating support for these kinds of women's rights organizations, preferring time-bound, project-specific funding aimed at "women's empowerment." This trend has negative consequences. Funding for individual projects that "empower women" can actually be

counterproductive, as project-based service delivery grants can leave activists without the time and resources to push for broader systemic change.

Civil society organizations have been playing a major role in the majority of Arab countries. They include women and feminist NGOs and movements that help in lobbying for redressing gender discrimination and call for granting women their human rights. Their activities ranged between raising awareness, monitoring government programs and complementing them, as well as, providing model projects that can be taken to scale if adopted by governments. They play a major role in representing a strong voice of the disadvantaged groups of women.

Nevertheless, many governments in the region show mistrust in civil society organizations including feminist NGOs. The tedious registration procedures of such organizations as well as, the continuous monitoring of their daily work represent major obstacles. The issue of obtaining funding especially international funding has also been used to discredit feminist and women's organizations. In addition, some of the laws governing the establishment and activities of civil society organizations are quite restrictive. There is a need to establish a more healthy and productive relationships between Arab governments, women and feminist NGOs for the benefit of all women in the region. Such relationship should be built on trust, confidence and mutual respect, where national women machineries can play a major role in establishing and sustaining such relationships.

The violations and limitations practiced on the activists and organizations of the civil society have different shapes and forms, varying from infringements and arrests of activists, the adoption of decisions and procedures disabling the freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, to the preventing of foreign funding and all the other disabling procedures available considering the absence of national funding resources.

This reality reflects the difficulty of work and the continuous shrinking of the environment of the civil society, and efforts should be multiplied in order to face these challenges. Civil society organizations including feminist organization suffer from violations of freedom of association and peaceful assembly, coupled with restrictions of the right to access to information and to mobilizing financial resources.

The restrictions imposed on MENA CSOs to pursue their activities and maintain the existence of civic space has been persistent across the region. Main attacks on CSOs were on the grounds of funding by closing CSOs down or blocking their websites, and by restricting the movements of staff.

The United Nations should incentivize actions against the closure of civic space, and actively engage in national and regional efforts to defy civic space restrictions. Additionally, CSOs should be supported by donor agencies through fostering their ability to access funds and funding opportunities

NGOs in the Arab world must be encouraged to work together to pressure governments into compliance with international conventions and agreements recognizing the right to free civil action. There is also a need for international support to pressure Arab countries into abolishing restrictive laws that prevent the progress, freedom, and effectiveness of civil society. Registration of feminist or women networks should be facilitated.

Civil society including women/feminist NGOs can help governments in planning and implementing local programs. They can play a key role of organising and building consensus among local communities can raise awareness on a specific problem as well as on a potential solution, using a rights-based approach and informing people on their rights. They can mobilize communities to either implement a solution themselves or demand government support.

Civil society including women/feminist NGOs can be key in building a public support base for a specific course of action. They can set-up experiments that prove a solution is feasible (to both the public and the government). For example, they are able to show evidence that social protection mechanisms initiated and run by civil society are integrated in a state-initiated expansion of social protection, or systems developed by CSOs are used as inspiration in the design of a social protection system/mechanism. Tactics used in this stage include formal and informal lobbying, participation in official consultation processes and in social dialogue, as well as mobilization to keep public support.