



The Regional Civil Society Observatory
المركز الإقليمي لمؤسسات المجتمع المدني

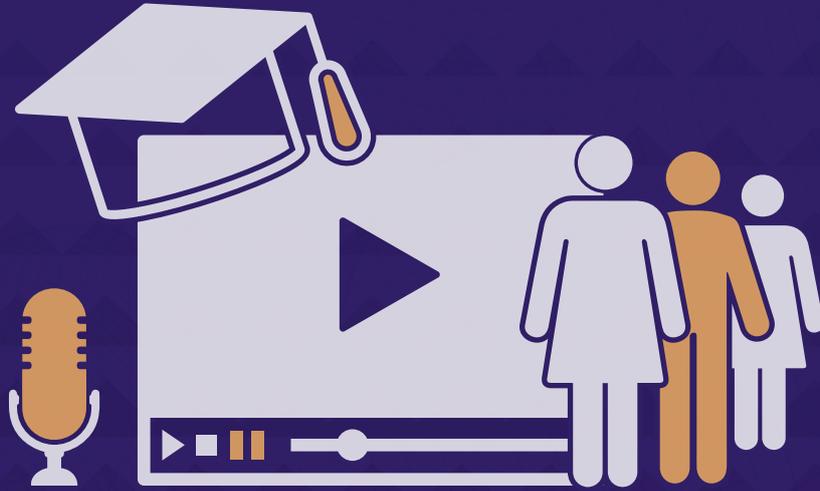


EuroMed Feminist Initiative
المبادرة النسوية الأورومتوسطية
Initiative Féministe EuroMed

POLICY BRIEF

Governmental Programs to Prevent VAWG in the South Mediterranean

Regional Civil Society Observatory on VAWG (RCSO)



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Governmental Programs to Prevent VAWG in the South Mediterranean

Regional Civil Society Observatory on VAWG (RCSO)

Regional Civil Society Observatory (RCSO)
is hosted by EuroMed Feminist Initiative EFI
Regional Office
Building No. 5
Abdullah Ben Rawahah Street
Al Rabiyyeh, Amman, Jordan
Tel: +9626265521782
Fax: +9626226554956

Email: ife@efi-euromed.org
Regional Civil Society Observatory: www.efi-rcso.org
EuroMed Feminist Initiative: www.efi-ife.org
Regional Campaign: www.Ostik.org

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SUMMARY

For combating Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG), interventions fall along a spectrum of prevention and response. While VAWG response efforts typically focus on securing services, resources, and support for women victims of VAWG, prevention interventions focus on transforming the power dynamics and gender inequality leading to VAWG. This brief deals with governmental preventive programs that are meant to change the gender stereotypes, people's awareness towards VAWG and towards blaming perpetrators.

The analysis provided in this brief is mainly based on the Policy Assessment Report¹ and the 2021 Regional Index on VAWG². The brief summarises the assessment and its findings regarding preventive programs. The brief is intended to highlight the situation of preventive programs in the South Mediterranean countries and provide recommendations to governments on how to improve preventive programming and contribute to achieving the desired change.

The brief recommends institutionalising prevention measures in the relevant ministries and institutions to combat VAWG, especially Ministries of Health and Education and police. These measures primarily take the form of awareness raising, education, trainings, and community intervention programs. For compulsory education at all levels of schools and universities, curricula and textbooks should promote equality between women and men and the right of women and girls to be free from violence. Moreover, teachers should receive trainings on how to educate children on the principles of equality. Media and community awareness raising activities are essential and should not be limited only to the 16 days of activism against VAWG as it is mostly the case in the South Mediterranean countries.

While underlying the importance of preventive programs, the brief also stressed that they alone cannot be effective tool without addressing the factors that perpetuate VAWG such as discriminatory laws, and unequal access to economic participation. Having said that, laws should be strengthened and effectively implemented to balance power relations between women and men by eliminating discrimination and improving access to decision-making power in all fields. Promoting women's equal access to education and employment are also key factors that prevent VAWG.

¹ Policy Assessment Report, RCSO, 2022.

² The 2021 Regional Index on VAWG, RCSO, at <https://www.efi-rcso.org/2021-regional-index-vawg-countries>

³ Preventing Violence against Women, a Primer for African Women, at:

https://raisingvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/VAWPrimer.RaisingVoices.AWDF_English.FINAL_aug2019.pdf

1. WHAT DOES EVIDENCE SAY FOR PREVENTING VAWG?

VAWG is considered to be the most pressing issue confronting women. The statistics are staggering, with one in three women having experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime³. Within the patriarchal structures of power, women and men are given different roles and allowed to enjoy different rights. Traditional mentalities and stereotypes are reproduced by both men and women.

One of the major findings of international research on the causes of VAWG is that, although individual risk factors such as witnessing violence as a child or use of alcohol may increase a specific individual's likelihood to use violence, cultural norms play a large role in overall levels of violence in a community⁴. Gender inequality, including cultural norms on power relations between women and men, is considered as the main cause of VAWG.

Evidences revealed that preventive interventions by the State are required at the national level to disrupt existing social structures and make changes in attitudes that contribute to the perpetuation of VAWG. Governments should be aware of the impact of VAWG on society and

adopt the appropriate mechanisms and approaches for dealing with such a global issue in order to effect change through their authoritative roles.

The World Health Organization (WHO) and UN Women, in collaboration with other UN agencies, have developed "RESPECT Women: Preventing violence against women". The framework provides a comprehensive approach to inform policy makers and implementers about designing, planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating programmes on preventing and responding to violence against women. The framework outlines seven inter-related intervention strategies derived from the word "respect"⁵:

- ▶ Relationships skills strengthened
- ▶ Empowerment of women
- ▶ Services ensured
- ▶ Poverty reduced
- ▶ Environments made safe
- ▶ Child and adolescent abuse prevented
- ▶ Transformed attitudes, beliefs and norms

This policy brief focuses on the interventions that directly deal with preventing VAWG and changing beliefs and norms. Media and educational systems play significant role in increasing levels of knowledge and awareness of VAWG, and can reach many different social groups, and therefore influencing the dominant culture. They could educate people about women's rights and spread values supporting equality between women and men throughout society.

The Handbook for Legislation on Violence against Women developed by the UN included that legislation should provide for compulsory education at all levels of schooling, from kindergarten to the tertiary level, on human rights of women and girls, the promotion of gender equality and, in particular on the right of women and girls to be free from violence. It also includes that such education should be gender-sensitive and contain appropriate information regarding existing laws that promote women's human rights and address violence against women and girls.

⁴ Addressing Gender-Based Violence in the Latin American and Caribbean Region: A Critical Review of Intervention, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3438.

⁵ RESPECT Women, Preventing Violence against Women, at:

The Regional Campaign on Zero Tolerance for VAWG in the South Mediterranean organised by the EuroMed Feminist Initiative and the Regional Civil Society Observatory (RCSO) on VAWG underlined that **public awareness-raising campaigns** are critical to expose and convey the unacceptability of VAWG. They should convey coordinated message of zero tolerance for VAWG, include the promotion of women's human rights, and emphasize societal condemnation of victim-blaming and discriminatory attitudes which perpetuate VAWG.

The Regional Campaign also stressed the instrumental role media is playing in breaking the taboo and stereotyping and in raising awareness around VAWG. The **media** can contribute to promote zero tolerance of VAWG by raising awareness about VAWG and about ways in which different sectors of society can act to prevent this violence and support women victims.

The Istanbul Convention emphasizes that the State "shall take the necessary measures to promote changes in the social and cultural patterns of behaviour of women and men with a view to eradicating prejudices, customs, traditions and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women or on stereotyped roles for women and men."

The Convention also mentions that the State "shall take the necessary legislative and other measures to prevent all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention by any natural or legal person."

*Preventing Violence Against Women:
Article 12 of the Istanbul Convention*

As international best practices at the **legal level**, the Brazilian Maria da Penha Law (2006) calls in article 8 for the communications media to avoid stereotyped roles that legitimize or encourage domestic and family violence. Article 3 of the Spanish Organic Act on Integrated Protection Measures against Gender Violence (2004) provides for the launch of a National Sensitization and Prevention Plan regarding Violence against Women targeting both men and women in order to raise awareness of values based on respect for human rights and the equality between women and men. The Tunisian law on eliminating violence against women (2017) stipulates on the adoption of prevention measures and raising the awareness about VAWG through education, as well as official and private media.

Legislation should prioritize prevention of violence against women, should include provisions and refer to measures to prevent violence against women, through :

- ▶ Implementation of awareness-raising activities regarding gender equality and the right of women to be free from violence.
- ▶ Use of educational curricula to modify discriminatory social and cultural patterns of behaviour, as well as derogatory gender stereotypes.
- ▶ Sensitization of the media regarding VAWG.

⁶ IBID.

Education	Awareness raising activities	Engage official media to combat VAWG
<p>Preventive programmes at all educational levels should include teaching material about subjects such as equality between women and men and combating VAWG.</p> <p>The preventive programs should target both students through school curricula and text books, and teachers through trainings programs.</p>	<p>These include mainly community mobilisation activities and trainings of men and women.</p> <p>Community mobilisation approaches are typically interventions that engage many stakeholders at different levels (eg, community men and women, youth, religious leaders, police, teachers, and political leaders). By contrast with community campaigns, which seek to reduce VAWG at the population level, trainings of men and women reduce violence in a targeted group of individuals. There is a diverse range of interventions involving boys and men in violence prevention.</p>	<p>Media awareness raising efforts should target both women and men along with the inclusion of all groups of society reaching rural and remote areas where there is less awareness.</p> <p>It is crucial to engage both traditional and social media channels in disseminating findings on VAWG and highlighting recent legal reforms on VAWG.</p>

2.SITUATION OF PREVENTIVE ACTIONS IN THE SOUTH MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRIES

The majority of VAWG responses have focused on assisting victims of VAWG and protection measures. Such approaches are critical for mitigating the devastating emotional, physical, social, and economic consequences of violence against women, as well as ensuring justice and accountability and preventing recurrences, and it is therefore critical to continue improving these responses. Simultaneously, there is an increasing need to address the larger causes that increase the prevalence of VAWG, as well as to develop programs that prevent such violence from occurring in the first place.

Unfortunately, the media and education system do not currently uphold this responsibility. According to many interviewees in the regional policy assessment study (RCSO, 2022), media in the South Mediterranean countries broadcast programmes encourage VAWG, and drama and talk

shows reproduce stereotypical images of women, instead of exposing and questioning them.

The 2021 Regional Index on VAWG explored the existing preventive programs and measures in the South Mediterranean countries. The regional result for the preventive programs reached to 54% as level of achievement. This means that 46% is the remaining gap to adopt full preventive measures and tools.

The 2021 EuroMed Feminist Initiative Policy Assessment Report looked into the availability of government-provided preventive programs. Out of all participants, 29.14% said “they do not know”. Overall, 29.43% said “they are not available” and 41.43% said “they are available”. In contrast, according to the same assessment, 69% do believe that preventive programs are being delivered by NGOs.

Figure 2: Perception on the availability of prevention programs provided by the government

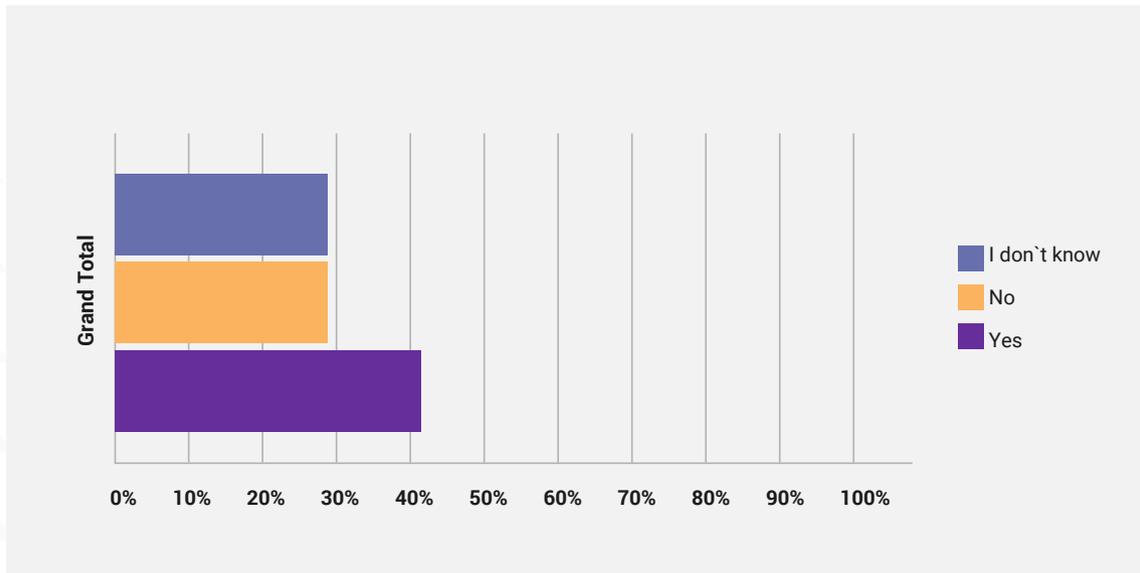
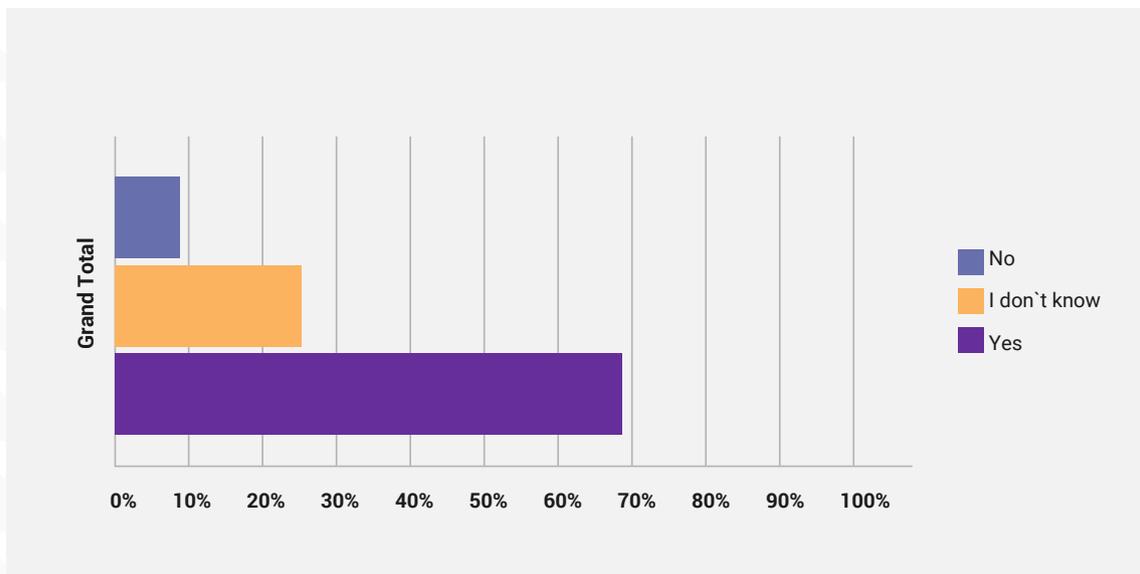


Figure 3: Perception on the availability of prevention programs provided by NGOs



2.1 EDUCATION

Equality is not embedded in students' learning yet. Instead, the curricula in all South Mediterranean countries contain stereotypical discriminatory norms and models that feed discrimination and VAWG. Young people are not taught that violence is unacceptable, and educators lack trainings on VAWG, on the consequences for women and then on the whole of society. Moreover, textbooks and curricula do not enhance gender equality but rather in many cases they spread harmful stereotypes and embed discriminatory attitudes towards women.

The South Mediterranean countries conduct minor efforts, programs, and activities to educate children, teachers, youth, and communities, and there is little proof of their efficacy or influence. Despite that, it should be noted that there had been positive attempts by few countries in the region to revise the textbook images to reflect more equality between women and men.

The government of Palestine launched new school curricula and new textbooks which incorporated a new concept pertaining to health, including sexual and reproductive health. It represented an attempt to remove stereotypes and prejudices in the language and content. A complete overhaul of the school programmes was being planned to ensure they were aligned with international standards and treaties. Training programmes for teachers on gender equality and VAWG were also set in all regions, according to the National Gender Strategy (2017-2022) that targets schools and teachers and mobilise their energies to combat VAWG. The Ministry of Education also implemented a program to spread

awareness on early marriage of girls and how to deal with this phenomenon within context of training manual targeting school counselors.

In Morocco, the Ministry of National Education, Vocational Training, Higher Education and Scientific Research committed to combating violence against women through the Marrakesh Declaration 2020, by committing to invest in curricula, programs, schoolbooks and mechanisms to promote women right to equality, and combating VAWG. However, there had been a lot of criticism from interviewed experts on the curricula and the textbooks that encourage stereotypes. Interviewed experts were shedding light on the importance of improving these curricula and making sure that they are gender mainstreamed and do not discriminate or reinforce gender stereotyping.

Article 7 of the Tunisian law no 58/2017 states that the ministries in charge of education and higher education, vocational training, culture, health, youth, sports and childhood, women and religious affairs shall take all necessary measures to protect women from violence and combating it in the institutions under its jurisdiction, by developing educational and cultural programs aimed at rejecting and combating violence and discrimination against women and the consolidation of human rights, the principles gender equality, health and sexual education. The Ministry of Education also reviewed the textbooks to remove the stereotype images of women and to address violence.

⁸According to speech delivered by Minister of Education and Higher Education of Lebanon in the Regional Forum on Equality in Education in the Southern Mediterranean, held in Amman, on 11 and 12 October 2022.

⁹According to speech delivered on behalf of the Egyptian Ministry of Education in the Regional Forum on Equality in Education in the Southern Mediterranean, IBID.

¹⁰EuroMed Rights. 2018. JORDAN Situation Report on Violence against Women.

<https://euromedrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Factsheet-VAW-Jordan-EN.pdf>

¹¹UNESCO. (2020, February 5). MoE implements gender equality in education strategy with support from Canada, Norway & UNESCO. Amman, Jordan: UNESCO.

Retrieved from <https://en.unesco.org/news/moe-implements-gender-equality-education-strategy-support-canada-norway-unesco-0>

¹²OHCHR. 2018. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women considers the Report of the State of Palestine.

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23377&LangID=E>

2.2 COMMUNITY AWARENESS RAISING CAMPAIGNS

The community awareness raising campaigns are mostly linked in all South Mediterranean countries to the 16 days activism against Gender based Violence (GBV). Even if the campaigns are implemented by different governmental institutions, they are generally not sufficient and not systemised.

During the 16 Days of Activism, the Ministry of National Solidarity, Family and Women's Affairs in Algeria conducts annual awareness campaigns. The National Council for Women in Egypt (NCW) in Egypt launches a number of awareness campaigns on social media, to raise awareness of the dangers of cyber bullying (extortion), cyber harassment, cybercrime, cybersecurity. Additionally, information on available services is disseminated via radio, television, and social media channels in different languages. Raising awareness on the possible impact of the COVID-19 on VAWG was also broadcasted and posted on social media.

The Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) implements awareness-raising programs, addressing gender stereotypes and shift the blame to perpetrators.

In Lebanon, several campaigns have been advertised through media and advertising by the National Commission for Lebanese women (NCLW). These include prohibition of child marriage, drafting a law setting the minimum age for marriage at 18, and 16-days campaign to stop violence against women and girls. Recently, government awareness programmes and campaigns calling to confront stereotypes and VAWG in the public and private spheres were intensified.

The Ministry of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social Development in Morocco broadcasts awareness-raising spots via the mass media and organizing regional meetings. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 campaign was entirely digital. Throughout the 16 days of activism, a huge number of instructive awareness-raising communication tools are produced and distributed through social media.

In Palestine, certain governmental awareness activities were set to address stereotypes and VAWG in the public and private spheres, against perpetrators and amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Tunisia launched a website during an online event on 16 July 2021 entitled "Toutes et tous Uni.e.s" ("All United") developed by the Ministry of Women, Family, Childhood and Seniors. It is a public information site that explains the concepts of gender, equality between men and women, discriminations. The site gathers all applications, portals and supports available at national level on equality between women and men, VAWG, and protection of women. In addition, a practical toolkit to combat all forms of violence against women in Tunisia was developed by the Ministry in 2021. The toolkit aims to ensure access of women to the rights guaranteed to them by the law on the elimination of violence against women (2017).

¹³ According to speech delivered on behalf of the Palestinian Ministry of Education in the Regional Forum on Equality in Education in the Southern Mediterranean, IBID.

¹⁴ The 2020 Marrakech Declaration on Women's Rights was announced during a ceremony celebrating International Women's Day held in Marrakech under the chairmanship of Princess Lalla Meryem. The Declaration focuses on the issue of violence against women, providing care for women victims of violence, and promoting the culture of non-violence through all levels of schooling. Seven departments signed the declaration, which are: education & higher education; health; culture; social development, equality & Family; President of the Public Prosecutor's Office; and President of the High Authority for Audiovisual Communication.

¹⁵ (2017). 2017 مؤرخ في 11 أوت 2017 لسنة 58 عدد أساسي عدد 58 لسنة 2017 مؤرخ في 11 أوت 2017. Organic Law No. 58 of 2017 dated August 11, 2017. Tunisian Government.

¹⁶ CEDAW. Committee of Discrimination Against Women. 2021. Replies of Egypt to the list of issues and questions in relation to its combined eighth to tenth periodic reports. https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fEGY%2fRQ%2f8-10&Lang=en

¹⁷ UN Women. 2017. Ta'a Marbouta: The Secret of Your Power": A National Campaign on Women's Empowerment.

<https://egypt.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2017/09/taa-marbouta>

2.3 MEDIA

Media is relatively silent on issues related to VAWG, and even there are some programmes that incite it. The regional study on VAWG (RCSO, 2020) concluded that media in all South Mediterranean countries plays a negative role in combating VAWG, as media platforms (whether visual or written) frequently use stereotypes and broadcast violent speech against women. Most of interviewed observers indicated that media outlets reproduce cultural and social stereotypes that support justification of VAWG. Moreover, journalists and media practitioners are not aware about the social stereotypes they produce as they do not have awareness about discrimination and combating VAWG.

Many national studies indicated that the Jordanian official and private media disregards covering women's issues and combating VAWG. A study for the assessment of media coverage in Lebanon revealed the gender based violence (GBV) issue was sidelined or given limited scope in terms of place and time. The sequence of GBV coverage, focusing first on the victim and then on the actual act of violence, while somehow ignoring the perpetrator.

The situation is similar in Egypt, where according to many studies, the mainstream media coverage of VAWG has always been biased against women, holding them responsible for this violence in direct and indirect ways.

Providing some good examples from the region are the Moroccan and Tunisian laws that recognize the important role of the media in preventing VAW by avoiding gender stereotyping. The media aspect is addressed in Tunisia's law on elimination of VAWG, while Morocco addresses this aspect in its law on audio-visual communication.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs in Palestine formed Gender Sensitive Media Network consisted of official and non-official media outlets. The goals of the Network include developing a media affiliation with women's issues that seek to convey messages to society through continuous communication and intensive coordination between the Media Network and the Ministry. The Network also aims to create clear and well-defined media messages in support of women and combating VAWG.

¹⁸ NCLW. 2019. Details on some of CEDAW recommendations.

¹⁹ EuroMed Rights. 2018. Morocco: Situation Report on Violence against Women. <https://euromedrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Factsheet-VAW-Morocco-EN-Mar-2018.pdf>

²⁰ "Toutes et tous Uni.e.s." Website. <https://www.contre-violences-femmes-tunisie.com/>

²¹ Council of Europe. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/toolkit-to-combat-violence-against-women-in-tunisia>

²² Regional Study on VAWG, RCSO, 2020, at <https://www.efi-rcso.org/publications/studies/regional-study-violence-against-women-and-girls-south-mediterranean>

²³ The Role of Jordanian Media in Supporting Women's Issues, Middle East University, 2021.

BEST PRACTICES

Door-to-Door Campaigns - Egypt

The NCW had carried out a door-to-door campaigns to educate women from marginalized groups in villages and hamlets. Those campaigns have reached over 17,000,000 people in 3,000 villages through local community leaders and rural women entrepreneurs. The campaigns address awareness legal rights, women's issues, violence against women, harassment, and female genital mutilation. Some 2,500 women entrepreneurs and personnel been provided with capacity-building.

Gender Unit in MEHE Lebanon

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) works with NGOs and others to ensure it has gender inclusive policies. There's also a committee from the MEHE that monitors schools and checks if the schools are being gender inclusive, if the teachers are being trained, if the programs are being modified etc.

Practical Toolkit for Raising Awareness in Tunisia

In 2021, the Tunisian Ministry of Women, Family, Children, and Seniors developed a practical toolkit to combat all forms of violence against women with the support of the Council of Europe. This toolkit aims to ensure that women have access to the rights guaranteed to them by Organic Law No. 2017-58 on the abolition of VAWG, which was passed on August 11, 2017. The "Rights of Women Victims of Violence" practical kit consists of a booklet titled "I am not alone" on the rights of women victims of violence, as well as "Rights Cards of Women Victims of Violence" that clearly and succinctly summarize the rights explained in the booklet, with the goal of educating women on their rights and spreading awareness within the community. The booklet is written in clear and simple terms to inform women of their rights as outlined in the law, as well as to provide information on facilities and services available to those in need.

The ministry, in collaboration with the Council of Europe, started disseminating the kit throughout the country.

²⁴ Assessment of media coverage of gender-based violence in Lebanon, the Lebanese Council to Resist Violence against women.

²⁵ See AFOR Journal of Media, Communication & Film, Media Portrayal of Street Violence against Egyptian Women, at: <https://www.readcube.com/articles/10.22492/ijmcf.4.1.04>

²⁶ Council of Europe. (2021, March 8). Toolkit to combat violence against women in Tunisia. Council of Europe. Retrieved from <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/toolkit-to-combat-violence-against-women-in-tunisia>

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Social awareness on combating VAWG should be solidified by changing and developing the national educational curricula and integrating subjects on women's rights and equality. The gender approach must be adopted in education policy-planning and its concepts must be integrated in curricula, textbooks, and teacher training plans.

There have been limited commitment and funding for prevention activities at governmental level. Exerted efforts, programs, and activities to educate in addressing VAWG are not sufficient, and there is little proof of their efficacy or influence.

The third action of the UfM Ministerial Declaration (Cairo, 2017) is focused on combating all forms of violence against women and girls. The Declaration indicates that the State should "Promote funding and allocate budgets towards VAWG programs,

including identifying regional sources of funding where possible to co-ordinate approaches." However, gender equality and VAWG policies are not accompanied by the necessary funding to implement them, which is a serious issue in all South Mediterranean countries.

The greatest impediment to knowledge and implementation development is still a lack of financial resources. Although in many cases the legislative foundation for implementing these policies exists, adequate budgets for capacity building and awareness are extremely limited. The 2021 Regional Index on VAWG revealed that none of the South Mediterranean countries adopts gender responsive budget with allocating specific line for combating VAWG. The majority of awareness raising activities on VAWG depend on funding availability.

The policy brief recommends the following:

- ▶ Review education curricula from a gender perspective and focus to integrate issues related to VAWG. The education curricula must be free from any discriminatory stereotypes against women and most importantly to introduce the concept of combating VAWG. Young people should be taught that VAWG is unacceptable.
- ▶ Develop a policy targeting teachers' capacity building on issues of equality between women and men and combating VAWG. The training should cover all areas in each country and the teachers should be aware about VAWG, the consequences on women, and then on the whole of society.
- ▶ Adopt a detailed media plan to promote women's rights and combat VAWG. Media plays a significant role in increasing levels of knowledge and awareness of VAWG. They can reach many different social groups, therefore influencing the dominant culture. Media should shed light on VAWG through serious coverage rather than producing frivolous programmes. Drama and talk shows should work on changing stereotypical images of women and men.
- ▶ Provide training to journalists about the importance of combating VAWG and challenging stereotypes in the media.
- ▶ Develop and extend the national awareness raising campaigns to cover all areas and public categories. The national awareness campaigns should raise awareness about VAWG and engage the local communities in changing attitudes towards VAWG and in enhancing preventive measures. The campaigns should reach to people who do not have access or use media and/or social media through using brochures, leaflets, and pagers ect.
- ▶ Adopt gender responsive budget with allocated line for combating VAWG in the national general budgets.
- ▶ Amend the national laws to balance power relations between women and men by eliminating legal discrimination and improving access to decision-making power in all fields.
- ▶ Promote women's equal access to education and employment.

Regional Civil Society Observatory (RCSO) on VAWG

The Regional Civil Society Observatory (RCSO) on VAWG was established as an independent mechanism to follow up on VAWG and support the implementation of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Ministerial Declaration (2017, Cairo). The RCSO is established and hosted by EuroMed Feminist Initiative (EFI) in Amman and is funded by the European Union (EU).

EuroMed Feminist Initiative (EFI)

EuroMed Feminist Initiative is a policy network that provides expertise in the field of gender equality and women's rights as inseparable from democracy building and citizenship, and advocates for political solutions to all conflicts, and for the right of people to self-determination.