

Female Employment in Mediterranean Arab countries: Much More than an Economic Issue

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In the Euro-Mediterranean Summit of November 2005, the Chairman's Statement claimed that "only determined action will enable the region's young people to fulfil their aspirations of a better future." Half of those youngsters are women, and their aspirations for a better future presuppose their access to a job. Amongst the twelve objectives established in the Five-Year Work Programme approved jointly by the participants in the above-mentioned Euro-Mediterranean Conference regarding "Sustainable Socio-Economic Development and Reform," after proclaiming that "Euro-Mediterranean partners will take measures to achieve gender equality, preventing all forms of discrimination and ensuring the protection of the rights of women", they proposed (letter h) "a significant increase in the percentage of women in employment in all of Euro-Mediterranean partner countries." However, as far as the specific actions provided for with a view to contributing to the above objectives are concerned, they reiterated the need to design and implement a road map to complete the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area by 2010, to assess the possibility of the incorporation of a Euro-Mediterranean subsidiary of the EIB or develop a regional transport and energy infrastructure network and promote environment sustainability, amongst others, as well as strengthen impact analysis of economic reform and cooperation in the region, but it did not make any specific reference to female employment (in

contrast, as far as education is concerned, they did mention specific actions to "expand and improve education opportunities for girls and women, as a basic right").

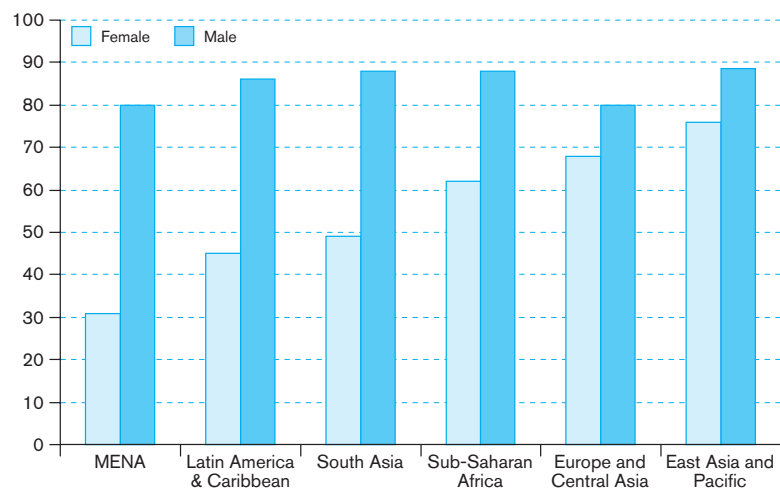
In the Arab Mediterranean countries, there are 50 million women in working age (between 15 and 64 years old). They form half of the working age population, but less than a third of the labour force and less than a fourth of the employed population. Almost three quarters of working age women are excluded from the labour market, confined to under-valued domestic tasks, banned from the job market – and from any possibility of financial emancipation –, doomed to join the informal economy or unemployment or simply discouraged by the scarce job opportunities available to them in the market. It is common to address this question as a consequence of cultural, religious and even deeply-rooted legal discrimination against

women, but in reality, it is the main cause of such discrimination.

Although more and more Arab women are accessing not only primary education but also higher education (with black spots like a rate of illiteracy of 62% among Moroccan women of more than 15 years of age and 56% in Egypt), their employment perspectives are not improving accordingly. Arab women barely participate in the job market (their rate of activity, that is to say, the percentage of working age women who belong to the labour force, is extremely low, barely above 30%, the lowest rate of all the regions in the world and more than ten points below the average of the less developed countries, 41%, as opposed to close to 80% of men; see Graph 7 and Table 2).

But furthermore, those women that participate in the job market suffer from a 60% higher rate of unemployment than men (see Graph 8) and, unlike the men,

GRAPHIC 7 Male and female rate of activity by regions of the world



Source: World Bank, 2004.

THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN SUMMIT OF LEADERS OF THE BUSINESS WORLD

As part of the celebrations organised for the anniversary of the Declaration of Barcelona, the business world and the private sector also took part in a debate on the record of these last years of partnership, with a meeting between the leaders of the business world and representatives from the private sector. This was the first official meeting of its kind, which brought together on the same platform private sector delegations from Mediterranean EU countries, organised by the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Navigation of Barcelona, the Association of Chambers of Commerce of the Mediterranean (ASCAME), and Eurochambers, among others. The meeting took place in Barcelona, 21-22 November 2005 and had been inserted in the official agenda of the European Commission. It was not solely aimed at analysing Euro-Mediterranean politics during the ten years of partnership, but also at debating obtained results, future prospects and challenges, whilst at the same time offering a new international viewpoint in order to create a favourable environment for economic relations in the region.

The meeting served as a platform for comparing opinions, and for exchanging ideas and information. The participants put forward a series of propositions and recommendations which formed the basis of the final document issued at the conclusion of the proceedings. This took the form of a General Declaration, which was addressed and presented to Heads of State at the Summit of 27-28 November 2005. The recommendations aimed at improving the current situation and promoting the necessary future action to develop cooperation in the region, from a private sector perspective. Within the Declaration it is stated that "the involvement of the private sector in the debate has become, more than ever before, a necessity. The world of business has indeed proved its capacity to create wealth, to guarantee stability, security, peace and solidarity amongst the nations."

The following are quoted from among the recommendations found in the Declaration:

- Increase the involvement of the private sector in defining the politics of the Process. This sector would like to play an active role in the decision-making process, rather than simply

implementing existing decisions, given its status as a fundamental element for economic growth, job creation and development;

- Give more support to the private sector through political backup, promoting direct investment in order to facilitate also South-South economic integration;
- Provide small and medium-sized companies with access to finance, new technologies and innovation;
- Improve the region's financial sector by establishing a homogeneous framework for legislation and taxation policy, the reform of banking institutions and the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Development Bank;
- Give more support to Research and Development;
- Increase the region's competitiveness, via the liberalisation of product and service markets, economic and structural reforms in associated countries, the creation of a Pan-Euro-Mediterranean protocol on the rules for the denomination of regions of origin, investment in infrastructure and encouraging the propagation of new technology, expertise and good business practices;
- Provide support for women employers;
- Create an integrated economic regional space;
- And finally, allocate extra resources to the MEDA III programme.

Final Declaration:

www.iemed.org/documents/decBCN.pdf

VI Euro-Mediterranean Business Summit

The worlds of Mediterranean industry and enterprise came together in Valencia on 23 November 2005, to celebrate their sixth reunion and to take stock of the ten years of Euro-Mediterranean partnership from the point of view of economic growth. The summit, which followed on from those of past years in Marrakech, Athens, Tunis and Istanbul, was organised by the Spanish Confederation of Employers' Associations (CEOE) in collaboration with the Mediterranean Union of Enterprise Confederation (UMCE) and the Union of Industrial Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE). The meeting evaluated the partnership's impact on economic growth and job creation and fine-tuned the recommendations for presentation

to Heads of State who met in Barcelona. The discussions of the three working sessions followed three main arguments: the choice of resources to increase economic growth and employment, the establishment of the free trade area in 2010, and technological and industrial cooperation.

With regard to the ten years of partnership, all those invited were in agreement in emphasizing that the Barcelona Process has still not achieved the results hoped for, at the very least from an economic point of view. In this regard, those representing industry called upon political leaders to refocus the Euro-Mediterranean strategy with a stronger and true political determination and appealed to the Southern Mediterranean countries to implement the initiated economic reforms. Among the key recommendations issued at the meeting, intended for the authorities, the following are especially noteworthy:

- Support for structural reforms in the South, directed towards private initiative and a market economy;
- Improvement of the banking system and financial markets in the South;
- Promotion of South-South economic integration;
- Harmonisation of standards and technical conditions in order to clear non-tariff barriers;
- Support for the launch of negotiations to liberalise the trade in services in the free trade area of 2010.
- Implementation of the Pan-Euro-Mediterranean protocol of cumulation of origin;
- Implementation of the regional infrastructure action plan;
- Strengthen the activities of the Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership Facility (FEMIP) of the European Investment Bank to create a Euro-Mediterranean Investment Bank.

Websites:

Text of the Final Declaration: www.umce-med.org/site/eng/doc_detai.php?doc_id=64

For more information on the participating organisations:

www.umce-med.org/site/eng/
www.unice.org/Content/Default.asp

growing rates of unemployment as their level of studies increases, although this largely reflects their increasing rate of participation in labour force as they become more educated (see Graph 9 for Morocco and Tunisia). Notwithstanding, young women in particular are not conforming to this state of affairs, and since the mid-1980s it is possible to observe a sustainable increase in the rates of participation in the labour force amongst young women between the ages of 15 and 29. The demographic projections anticipate that for 2020, the rate of activity amongst women will increase by more than ten points reaching up to 43%, which will make it necessary to create close to 8 million jobs in addition to the 34 which are necessary as a consequence of the general increase in the working age population at current activity rates (see Med.2003, Mediterranean Yearbook, p.151).

However, the current economic and political trends do not favour female integration into economic life. The two main sources of female employment in the majority of countries of the region, obviously apart from agriculture, are the State sector (where there is an almost equal participation of women, at least concerning the number of employees, although wage and promotion discrimination persists) and the manufacturing industry, especially in the textile and garment industry (for example, in Morocco, 68% of the workforce in the textile industry are women). Both of these sectors are suffering a decrease in jobs as a consequence of privatisation policies and the reduction of public expenditures in the former and a loss in competitiveness in European markets due to the expiring of the Multifibre Agreement as from the 1st January 2005 in the case of the textile industry, and the higher rate of temporary contract work prevailing amongst women as compared to men in the manufacturing industry makes women more vulnerable to this phenomenon.

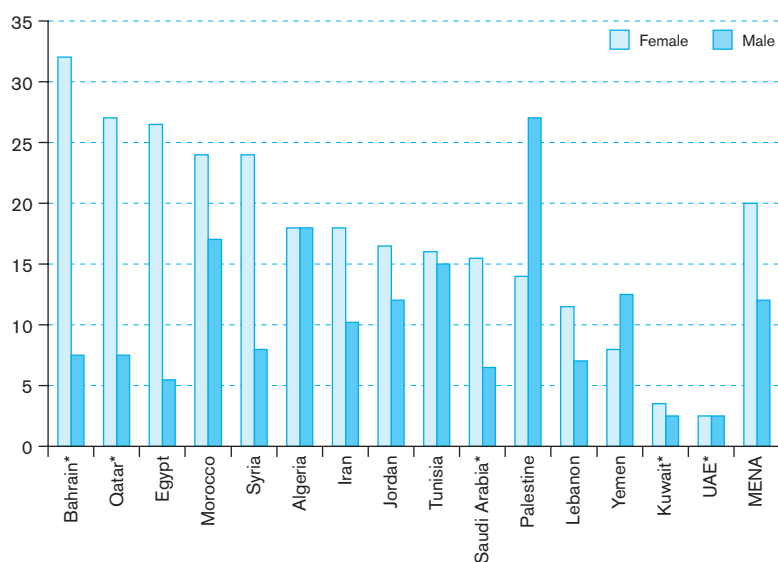
On the other hand, as shown by various studies commissioned by the German GTZ (Agency for Technical Cooperation) on the gender impact of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and on the economic and social situation of women in Maghreb countries, the progressive implementation of Euro-Mediterranean

TABLE 2 Rate of activity by gender

	Rate of activity	
	Women	Men
Morocco	41.8%	78.9%
Algeria	30.9%	73.4%
Tunisia	37.5%	78.1%
Egypt	35.7%	79.3%
Jordan	27.6%	76.7%
Syria	29.2%	76.8%
Lebanon	30.9%	77.7%
Palestine	9.5%	67.9%
Turkey	50.8%	81.9%

Source: Human Development Report 2004, UNDP/ILO.

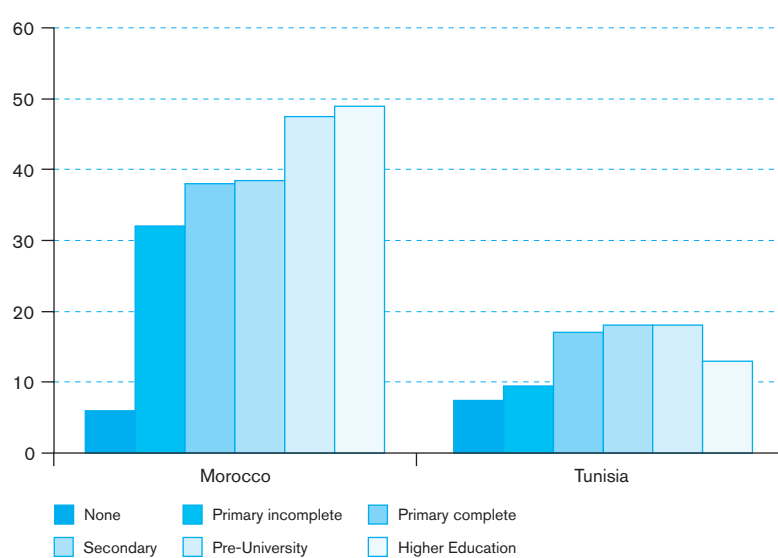
GRAPHIC 8 Unemployment rates by gender (most recent year available)



Source: World Bank 2004.

* Data for CCG countries referred only to nationals.

GRAPHIC 9 Rates of female unemployment by level of education



Source: World Bank.

**THE THIRD CONFERENCE OF THE EUROMED TRADE UNION FORUM, 6-7 NOVEMBER 2005, BARCELONA:
"TOWARDS PEACE, DEMOCRACY, ECONOMIC PROGRESS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE"**

The Euromed Trade Union Forum, created in 1999, groups together trade unions affiliated to the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), to the Trade Union Confederation of Arab Maghreb Workers (USTMA) and to the Confederation of Arab Trade Unions (CISA). This institution was created with the aim of defending and developing the social dimension of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, giving particular attention to issues related to economic and social rights and democracy.

The Forum met for the third time in Barcelona on 6th and 7th November, 2005 in order to take stock of the tenth anniversary of the Partnership and analyse the future prospects for the development of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The conclusions of this analysis, which were published in a concerted Final Declaration, are neither positive nor heart-warming in terms of the objectives fixed in 1995. The following comments can be read in the Declaration: *"The Forum notes that the Mediterranean has not become a peace zone; the economic situation has not improved; the Partnership has not made an effective contribution to the creation of employment; the question of migration continues to be a fundamental problem (...); little democratic progress has been observed and social dialogue continues to be non-existent"*. Nevertheless participants also reaffirmed that the Partnership remains the only path to follow in an economic and political climate as sensitive as that of the Euro-Mediterranean area and that democracy is an indispensable pre-condition for the development of workers' rights, social rights and social dialogue. The comments about renewal of the Partnership

which emerged from the meeting concentrated especially on making an appeal to the authorities for the following actions: a more global and coherent development of the Partnership, by avoiding a confusing multiplicity of political initiatives; a reinforcement of the multilateral dimension and of regional integration, especially in the context of the new European Neighbourhood Policy, within which it is necessary to promote the logic of cooperation on an inter-regional and sub-regional (i.e., South-South) basis; co-development, while at the same time criticizing the creation of a Free Exchange Zone as the sole exclusive measure in relation to development, for this should be accompanied by other shared and complementary institutional solutions; the rights of migrants, on behalf of whom the Forum asks national governments to ratify the United Nations Conventions for the Protection of the Rights of migrant workers and their families. The Forum did not however merely confine itself to analysing the Partnership's record, but also proposed specific solutions and guidelines addressed to politicians in the field of employment and social rights. According to the Trade Unions, the most important actions to be undertaken in the near future are the following:

- To ensure economic and social rights, and guarantee good-quality employment on both the Northern and Southern shores of the Mediterranean;
- To include the creation of employment and the improvement of economic and social rights in the Mediterranean countries as one of the explicit objectives of the Partnership;
- To convene a grand Euro-Mediterranean Conference on Employment during 2006;

- To organize regular periodic meetings of the Employment Ministers of the region;
- To envisage mechanisms to be applied throughout the region intended to monitor and survey the economic, social and employment situation, and at the same time to promote training programmes particularly for young people and women;
- To include studies of the impact that reforms and all other decision-making processes have on employment and the social situation;
- To progress towards the definition of a Euro-Mediterranean Strategy of Employment, fixing common objectives;
- To establish official safeguard and compensation mechanisms to protect against the consequences of political and economic reforms;
- With regard to the Neighbourhood Action Plan and the European Neighbourhood Policy, to take specific action to promote social dialogue, to reinforce trade union freedom or to respect the rights enshrined in the principal conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO);

Finally, the Forum asked to be fully involved and consulted in any existing or future initiatives concerning employment, and renewed its invitation to the ILO and in particular to ACTRAV (the Workers' Activities Office of the ILO) to attend the Forum.

ETUC: www.etuc.org/
ICFTU: www.icftu.org/default.asp?Language=FR

For the Forum and related documents: www.etuc.org/a/1649

Free Trade Areas, which in the following years will enter into the last phase of its transitional period in which customs duties will be dismantled on European products which compete directly with local industrial production (Tunisia in 2006, Morocco in 2008, Jordan 2010, Lebanon 2011), runs the risk of having more than a proportionate effect on women, causing massive job losses in those sectors where there is a larger female workforce representation. These are precisely the sectors where progress of participation of women in the labour force has concentrated over the last

decade. Interestingly, the question of female employment is notoriously missing within the framework of the *mise-à-niveau* or industrial modernization programmes financed throughout the region by the MEDA funds. All of this runs the risk of increasing the already more than proportional high vulnerability of active women to falling into the informal economy, agricultural underemployment or the precariousness of unpaid family support.

In view of this situation, in the year 2005 the initiatives, forums and studies on women's employment in the Arab world

have proliferated, from the fourth and last *Arab Human Development Report 2005*, especially dedicated to the question of female Arab participation in social and economic life (UNDP, 2005), up to the conference organized by the Arab Women's Forum on "Women as Engines of Economic Growth in the Arab World. Ten Years After the Barcelona Process: Empowering Women as a Catalyst for Economic Development" (in July 2001 a regional forum of governmental experts had already been held on this question) and the EuroMed Women's Conference held in Barcelona on 24th

and 25th November 2005. Ten years after the Barcelona's Declaration which recognized "the key role of women in development" and engaged the Partner countries to "promote their active participation in economic and social life and in the creation of employment", the first report by FEMISE, the Euro-Mediterranean Forum of Economic Institutes, on "Women and Economic Development in the Mediterranean" has been published. The report concludes that, without the women's contribution, mainly through their work, there can be no development in the Arab Mediterranean countries [Radwan, S., and Reiffers, J.-Louis (cords.), 2006].

According to World Bank estimates published in the first big study on this question carried out in the region, the lower participation rate of women in the labour force recorded in Arab Mediterranean countries taking into consideration their age structure, level of education and fertility rates (the main factors determining the rate of female labour force participation throughout the world)

results in a loss of 25% of the average family revenues and, on a macroeconomic level, results in a smaller rate of economic growth of 0.7 percentage points a year. Thus, we are facing one of the main explanatory factors for relative Arab economic backwardness (World Bank, 2004).

All of this will culminate in the organization of a Euro-Mediterranean Women Ministerial Conference to be held in Ankara, Turkey, on 13th and 14th November 2006, which has been preceded by a preparatory conference held in Rabat on 14th and 16th June 2006, and which should lead to a Euro-Mediterranean Plan of Action on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society. The big questions dealt with in these forums and conferences are logically girls' and women's access to education, women's political participation or the elimination of persisting legal discriminations contained in the legislation of too many States in the region. But there is no other policy that could have a bigger impact on women's life's prospects, and on their contribution

to economic development in their countries, than simply offering them decent job opportunities which are compatible with their family life. And the MEDA Programmes, barely *gendered* so far, should be a spearhead in that direction.

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