

## POLICY PAPER

### UCLG-MEWA COMMITTEE ON GENDER EQUALITY

Despite continued progress in the Middle East and West Asia, women still face bigger economic, social and political barriers than women in other regions. According to the 2018 World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report<sup>1</sup>, at the current rates of change it will be another 153 years before we close the gender gaps in education, employment and politics. In light of this stagnation and recent developments, UCLG-MEWA Committee on Gender Equality is motivated to ramp up its commitment to gender equality and adopt this position paper. The policy paper aims to:

- strengthen gender equality and gender mainstreaming within UCLG-MEWA;
- and to increase awareness of and support for UCLG-MEWA's "Commitment on Localization of Sustainable Development Goal 5" and the pivotal role local and regional governments play in advancing gender equality.

### Global Agenda

*"Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life." (SDG5, Indicator 5.5.1)*

The United Nations is now focusing its global development work on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Women have a critical role to play in all of the SDGs, with many targets specifically recognizing women's equality and empowerment as both the objective, and as part of the solution.

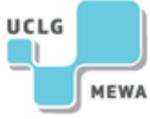
Goal 5, to "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" is known as the stand-alone gender goal, because it is dedicated to achieving these ends. Deep legal and legislative changes are needed to ensure women's rights around the world. The Agenda, unlike the MDGs, has its own Goal on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. In addition, there are gender equality targets in other Goals, and a more consistent call for sex disaggregation of data across many indicators.<sup>2</sup>

### UCLG-MEWA Approach to the issue

Just as regions are at different stages of economic development, they also have different contexts and challenges concerning equality between women and men. However, there are some common trends reflecting the status of men and women and their expected roles, based on values and traditions in society and within the family.

<sup>1</sup><http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2018/middle-east-and-north-africa/>

<sup>2</sup><https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2322UN%20Women%20Analysis%20on%20Women%20and%20SDGs.pdf>



UCLG-MEWA notes that change is strongly needed today in most areas and wishes to contribute to the positive social transformation of the MEWA region so that every girl, boy, woman and man can enjoy equal human rights and equal opportunities in all spheres of life.

That is why UCLG-MEWA launched the Committee on Gender Equality at the UCLG-MEWA Executive Bureau and Council Joint Meeting held in 19 December 2014. UCLG-MEWA Committee on Gender Equality aims at working on the issues of gender mainstreaming and developing policies on the same topic by creating a platform between local authorities, and taking solid steps against gender inequality which is among the most important issues of today's world, through the campaigns that it will support, and to be among the key actors that are working on eradication of this inequality. Moreover, the Committee supports the participation by increasing investments in women and involving them in the political process. In recognizing women as an untapped reservoir of human potential, gender equality becomes a critical issue to be championed as a catalyst for economic progress and will be the key to achieving positive change. The Committee also follows up the developments in the global agenda through operating in parallel with the activities of UCLG World Organizations' Standing Committee on Gender Equality and UN Women.

One of the priorities of the UCLG-MEWA Committee on Gender Equality is the dissemination and the implementation of the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) among local governments in the MEWA region.

### **Region-specific challenges**

This paper presents a brief discussion of region-specific challenges experienced by women. When speaking about this specific region, we speak about a region that is heterogeneous and comprises of numerous ethnic, national, religious and linguistic societies and groups. Furthermore, recommendations are given on how local governments can contribute to the positive social transformation of the MEWA region, so that every girl, boy, woman and man can enjoy equal human rights and equal opportunities in all spheres of life.

#### **1. Economic Participation and Opportunity**

The MEWA region is a diverse region, affected by economic and political transformations, but with a potential for more and better growth. Gender equality is a critical concern to improve the labour market situation of women and men in the MEWA region.

#### ***UCLG-MEWA Committee on Gender Equality recommends:***

- To address the availability and affordability of quality childcare as an important issue impacting labour market participation.
- Reductions in gender pay and pension gaps.
- Sharing and dissemination of good practices of local governments in the field of gender equality issue.

- Local governments to develop social, political and economic regulations for enhancing access of women to all types of services.

## **2. Education**

Most countries in the Middle East and West Asia have made significant progress toward increasing children's school enrolment, attendance and completion. However, access remains unequal.<sup>3</sup> Although most of local governments in the region are not in charge of education, they can develop activities and projects to raise awareness.

### ***UCLG-MEWA Committee on Gender Equality recommends:***

- Local governments to organize education supported activities, women's vocational courses and cultural activities.
- Local governments to investment and develop programs to reach gender equality of opportunity in educational achievement.
- Local governments to develop awareness raising campaigns in order to eliminate gender-oriented prejudices in society.

## **3. Political Participation**

Political revolutions and instability in the MEWA Region have mobilized women in new ways. Against political unrest and explicit threats to their rights, many women are increasing their activism to make their voices heard.<sup>4</sup> The Committee relies on the efforts to fulfill SDG indicator 5.5.1 on the representation of women in local government. Gender equality needs to be at the centre of the political agenda and mainstreamed into policies, legislation, services, activities, and budgets.

### ***UCLG-MEWA Committee on Gender Equality recommends:***

- A quota system for greater political participation of women.
- Local governments to sign the Commitment on Localization of Sustainable Development Goal 5 and the European Charter for Equality.
- Involvement of local and regional representatives to support local elected women.
- Putting the goal of gender equality at the center of the agenda of local governments.
- Local governments to increase cooperation with UCLG-MEWA, UCLG and UN Women to ensure the successful implementation of the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda.

## **4. Women and the Refugee Crisis**

Today, around the world, people are on the move. The majority of the refugees are women and girls, and they face different challenges. The MEWA region should raise awareness of the differing, specific needs that women and men migrants, refugees and

<sup>3</sup><https://www.unicef.org/mena/education>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.globalfundforwomen.org/political-empowerment-for-women-in-the-middle-east/>



asylum seekers face. Long term, gender-sensitive responses must be designed and implemented at all levels of government.

***UCLG-MEWA Committee on Gender Equality recommends:***

- Increased access for refugee and migrant women to language courses and professional training as well as subsidized childcare at local levels.
- Coordinated actions by local governments, supported by regional and central governments, to promote diversity and greater social cohesion in municipal life through outreach to refugee and migrant women and men.

## **Conclusion**

Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 5 is a major step to build sustainable, inclusive and equitable cities. As the sphere of governance closest to the people, local governments in the MEWA region should take gender equality initiatives in cities and present the perspectives of female leaders. Because development and equality starts at the local level, municipal services should be carried out on the basis of "participation." Local governments in the region should support specific projects and works towards women and children.

UCLG-MEWA's "Commitment on Localization of Sustainable Development Goal 5" is a major step for equality. Developing new models including differences for gender equality policies; collaboration with nongovernmental organizations and involving all stakeholders for solving problems is of great importance. The real gender equality will be ensured together through the practice of implementing common policies by taking different needs into account.

Despite the challenges, women's groups in the region are resilient. Change is possible but will require increased research, coalition building, and intervention efforts.

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