

Final Conference Towards Greater Gender Equality: The Role and Image of Women in the Southern Mediterranean Audiovisual Sector

Concept Note

I. The context

SouthMed WiA (2017-2019) is a project co-funded by the European Union that addresses issues related to the perpetuation of gender-based stereotypes and the under-representation of women in the audio-visual sector of seven Southern Mediterranean countries: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia.

The project emerged from the observation of persistent gender inequality and under-representation of women in the film sector - both on screen and behind the camera - in Arab societies. The main goal of SouthMed WiA is to strengthen the capacities of local stakeholders and to contribute to sustainable development and cultural diversity by enhancing the image of women in audiovisual products and by increasing the participation of women in the audio-visual and cinema industry, with the ultimate aim of positively influencing widespread cultural attitudes and public opinion. The SouthMed WiA activities have included:

- Support to **8 co-operation projects** developed by CSOs and SMEs based in the Southern Mediterranean.
- **Coaching and training** of sub-grantees and other audiovisual professionals, in particular women, to help them increase their skills in different relevant areas, such as pitching, access to funding and co-production, marketing and distribution.
- **Research** on the current situation in the Southern Mediterranean about women's role in the audiovisual sector, to collect reliable figures and data regarding creation, production and distribution.
- **Outreach activities** on gender equality among audiovisual professionals on the role of women in the sector in the Southern Mediterranean to raise the awareness both of pertinent stakeholders and the general public.
- Launch of a **SouthMed WiA network** of women professionals in the audiovisual sector.
- Publications such as an **informative handbook** on gender-related opportunities in the audiovisual sector, **curricula development guidelines** addressed to film schools and curriculum developers, a **collection of evidence** about women's role in the film sector.

II. Objectives and overview of the Conference

The SouthMed WiA Final Conference will take place in Casablanca on 11 and 12 July 2019, hosted by the Instituto Cervantes. The event will present the project's results and **the 8 sub-granted projects** that have contributed to achieve its objectives in the Southern Mediterranean.

The audiovisual sector plays a key role in contributing to build more gender-equal societies. It represents not only an essential factor for economic growth and women's inclusion in the labour market but also a primary source for information and entertainment, with the ability to influence and potentially change family life, social attitudes and cultural beliefs.

III. Content of the panels and working groups

The SouthMed WiA Final Conference has been conceived to tackle this dual role, designing a programme that includes two panels: the first addresses the issue of gender equality in the audiovisual industry from a professional point of view; the second, focuses on the image of women that the sector conveys and its influence in shaping cultural and social representations. Each panel will be followed by two working groups, with both the panellists and the sub-grantees, to discuss the topics tackled in the plenary sessions. The working groups will also give sub-grantees the opportunity to discuss with the invited speakers the results of their own projects, to share opinions on the challenges faced and to network for possible future collaborations. Each working group will appoint a spokesperson who will be in charge of collecting the main points discussed and writing a résumé document to be shared with all the participants after the Conference.

The SouthMed WiA Final Conference structure is as follows:

PANEL 1 | “Gender equality in the audiovisual sector in the Southern Mediterranean: a pending issue for the profession”

Addressing the inequalities that women face in the audiovisual sector is an issue for concern. Indeed, these inequalities not only mirror the challenging social and political environment in which women evolve but also contribute to sustain and reproduce it. Although there is a widespread commitment towards achieving gender equality in the audiovisual sector, there is still a significant under-representation of women at all levels of the industry, especially in the Southern Mediterranean region, despite the fact that women and men graduate from film schools in almost equal percentages and that women's films perform well in festivals and awards. **What are, therefore, the barriers, challenges and hurdles that still affect women working in the audiovisual sector in the Southern Mediterranean?** The experts in this panel are invited to address this question, bringing about their professional experience both in Europe and in the Southern Mediterranean countries, and engaging in a discussion on how greater representation of women in the sector would impact on the promotion of equality and tolerance in SouthMed societies.

The two Working Groups will focus on the following themes:

- **Working group Theme 1:** *Women in the audiovisual sector: opportunities, challenges and hurdles for the professional development of women.* Existing measures or tools (how to adopt them?), existing policies and regulatory bodies, training and educational opportunities, capacity building programs (where to find them?), strategic approach (international organizations).

- **Working group Theme 2:** *Opportunities for professional cooperation and development with and by women.*

The added value of international cooperation (how to enhance it), funding opportunities, co-production initiatives, distribution frameworks (film festivals, audiovisual markets...)

PANEL 2 | “Enhancing the image of women in audiovisual products to guarantee sustainable development”

The media, both traditional and new, have a crucial influence in society because they contribute to shaping social beliefs and can potentially play an essential role in promoting gender equality. At the same time, media have a considerable responsibility in disseminating and reinforcing gender stereotypes. There is an on-going perception that, despite progress made in recent years, broadcasting media do not always provide a fair and balanced representation of men and women. Gender stereotypes influence the public’s perception of gender roles and the absence of gender balance reduces the role and experience of both genders and can be a real obstacle to equal opportunities. **How to avoid them? How to show diversity?** Experts in this panel will analyse how the media can contribute to change the audiences’ social and cultural attitudes and perceptions, by portraying reality with its “diversities” as enriching factors and thus challenge traditional gender roles and break down cultural barriers.

The two Working Groups will focus on the following themes:

- **Working group Theme 3:** *The image of women in audiovisual industry: the necessary fight against stereotypes.*
Storytelling and creative process, gender-based roles (how to counter them?), the role of audiences (answering their needs or trying to change their attitudes?)
- **Working groups Theme 4:** *Women in Audiovisual in the Southern Mediterranean. An opportunity for networking.*
What the network should offer (action plan and future activities), sustainability of the network (how to build a strong basis; need to have a legal structure).

Final Conference

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Draft Programme

Day I

08:45	Registration
09:00 - 10:15	Official opening
10:15 - 11:30	PANEL 1: Gender equality in the audiovisual sector in the Southern Mediterranean: a pending issue for the profession
11:30 - 12:00	Transitions to workshops (coffee available)
12:00 - 13:30	Working group Theme 1: Women in the audiovisual sector: opportunities, challenges and hurdles for the professional development of women.
	Working group Theme 2: Opportunities for professional cooperation and development with and by women.
13:30 - 14:30	Lunch
14:30 - 15:45	PANEL 2: Enhancing the image of women in audiovisual products to guarantee sustainable development
15:45 - 16:15	Transitions to workshops (coffee available)
16:15 - 17:45	Working group Theme 3: The image of women in audiovisual industry: the necessary fight against stereotypes
	Working groups theme 4: Women in Audiovisual in the Southern Mediterranean. An opportunity for networking.
17:45 - 18:00	End of day 1

Day II

09:00	Opening
09:30 - 10:30	Recto Verso – the SouthMed WiA documentary - Q&As
10:30 - 12:00	Feedback from the 4 Working groups
12:00 - 12:30	Coffee Break
12:30 - 13:00	Launch of the SouthMed WiA Network: Women in Audiovisual in the Southern Mediterranean
13:00 - 13:30	Conclusions & closing of the conference
Afternoon	Restricted meetings: the SouthMed WiA Network & Evaluation of the sub-granted projects