

KVINFO

INTERNATIONAL



PARTNERSHIPS, GENDER NORMS AND LAW REFORM FOR

Gender Justice and Democratic Participation

Contents

KVINFO works for change in norms, cultures, power structures and policies	3
Seizing opportunities with KVINFO and partners	4
In Denmark, KVINFO is engaged in policy activities tied to its international work	6
Challenging the Moroccan government to act against child marriages	7
Caring for girls neglected by the law	10
A safe space for dialogue and reflection on change	12
Battling with masculinity stereotypes	14
After advocacy campaign, female candidates hold 47% of the municipal council seats	16
Empowering women to become masters of technology	18
KVINFO supports organisations to become strong voices for human rights and gender justice	20

Photo: Emma Ellegaard



KVINFO
GENDER ■ DIVERSITY
INFORMATION
EQUALITY

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KVINFO works for change in norms, cultures, power structures and policies



Gender equality is a fundamental human right and a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world, as stated in the United Nations' introduction to Sustainable

Development Goal 5 on achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.

The Danish Centre for Gender and Equality, KVINFO, and our partners often face fierce resistance when we work for change in age-old practices and norms, cultures, power structures and policies.

Our long-term commitment and persistence have contributed to a number of results; some of them breakthroughs. Among these are the removal of marry-your-rapist laws that allowed perpetrators of rape to escape prosecution if they married their victim. Such laws were removed between 2014 and 2018 in Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan, and Palestine.

It was also a breakthrough when Tunisian election law was changed to ensure gender parity in local elections. A Tunisian KVINFO partner trained 400 female candidates on political communication, advocacy, financial management of electoral campaigning, the electoral process, and gender sensitive budgets. Women now hold 47% of municipal council seats.

Improved legislation to prevent gender based violence was passed in Tunisia in 2017 and in Morocco in 2018. In Tunisia this also included political violence.

A lack of data makes it difficult not only to inform people about the actual situation but also to advocate for change in policy and practices. In Morocco, our partner went door to door to gauge the number of underage marriages. Despite resistance in some regions the study was conducted and launched, and child marriages are now high on the policy agenda in Morocco.

In Jordan, youth have been supported in analysing their own life stories, in fighting inequalities in their societies and in organising to solve their own problems, such as a lack of access to tertiary education.

KVINFO also supports local organisations in Egypt, albeit more subtly, as the civic space is extremely limited. For example, KVINFO supports women in the tech sector.

To expand our regional reach KVINFO and partners are developing a game on masculinities to challenge and change gender stereotypes and advance equal opportunities.

Some of our international work takes place in Denmark, where we are part of a working group to counteract the shrinking civic space internationally. We also work to end digital violence.

We advocate that the government of Denmark continue pushing for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security.

To be able to carry out these activities and many more, we have received funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, the European Union (EU), and Novo Nordisk Foundation.

Our partners are vital to our achievements because they implement the projects and ensure that our work remains sustainable. We are delighted to present this booklet, which contains snapshots of some of our activities.

Sincerely

Lene Steffen
International Director,
KVINFO



Photo: KVINFO

Seizing opportunities with KVINFO and partners

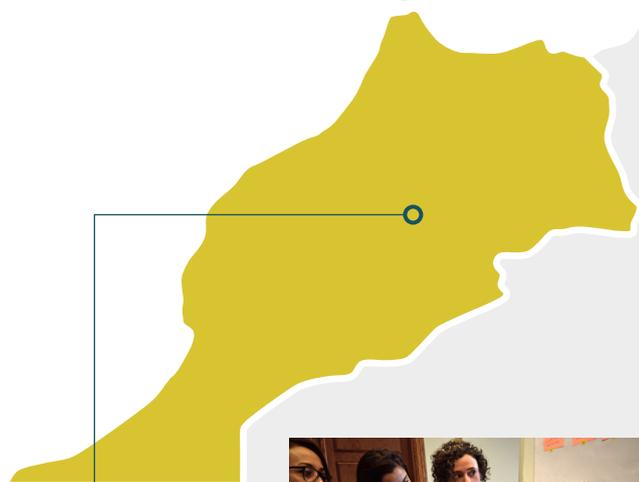


Photo: Emma Ellegaard

MOROCCO: A 2019 Moroccan law on gender based violence fails to define marital rape and domestic violence. Despite its shortcomings, the law is a step forward and an opportunity for women’s rights organisations to initiate debate about violence against women and to advocate for duty bearers to make significant progress to eliminate the violence.

Despite the 2004 reform of the Family Code, thousands of girls – some of them as young as 13 years of age – are married every year in Morocco. KVINFO’s partner Droits & Justice has done a tremendous job of raising awareness on and combatting underage marriage, which you can read more about on page 7.

However, like other countries in the region, the civic space is under pressure and KVINFO’s partners are facing resistance to their work. Governments, for instance considerably delay projects by postponing permissions to carry out activities.

TUNISIA: In 2017, Tunisia’s parliament approved a landmark bill seeking to eliminate all forms of economic, physical, mental, and political violence against women. This is a breakthrough that can serve as an exceptionally solid foundation for further activities against gender based violence. With increased harassment against female politicians during the COVID-19 pandemic, partners are collecting data on the increase in political violence and have carried out gender based election audits.

A progressive local election law ensuring that women have greater representation in local politics has also been adopted. KVINFO’s partner Ligue des Électriciennes Tunisiennes played a strong role in enabling women to now hold an impressive 47% of the municipal council seats in Tunisia. Much more about that on page 16.

Although approved by the late President Beji Caid Essebsi, a draft law ensuring equal rights to inheritance in Tunisia is pending parliamentary approval. Unfortunately, the draft law is not supported by the new president. The same applies to a new law on parental leave for fathers and improved conditions for maternity leave in the private sector.

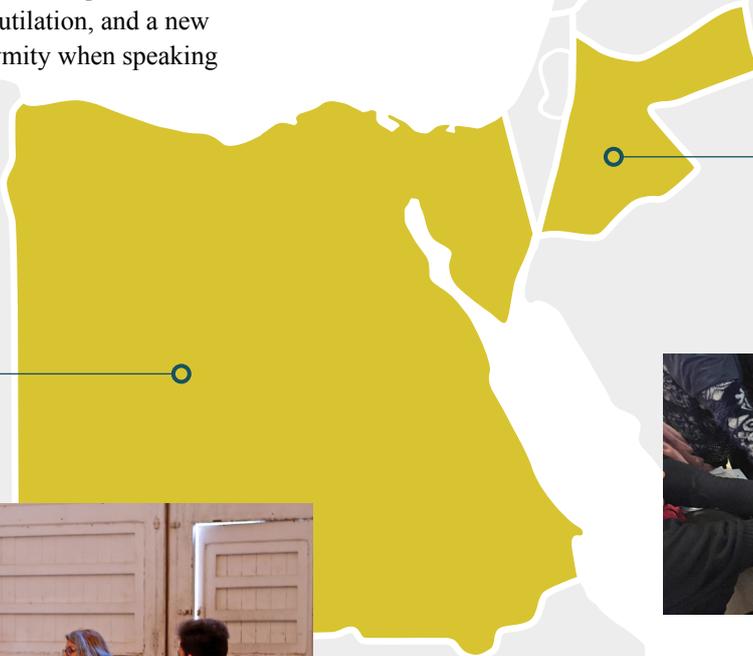
While Tunisia appears very progressive on the surface, the country has also experienced terror attacks, religious extremism, and economic crises compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic.

EGYPT: With imprisonments, trials, travel bans, frozen assets, and termination of employment imposed on civic space actors in Egypt, civil society is struggling to survive. People who advocate for human rights and gender justice are literally risking their lives. In that context, the fact that an independent civil society still exists counts as a success.

Egypt propagates what can be called state feminism, which includes quotas for women in parliament, law against female genital mutilation, and a new law securing women's anonymity when speaking out against sexual harassment and assault. While these laws exist on paper, their enforcement is weak and the closed civic space puts the feminist movement

under pressure. Egypt has nevertheless also seen a MeToo wave of courageous women lining up to share their stories of sexual assault and harassment that affect almost all girls and women.

Among KVINFO's activities are interventions to challenge gender stereotypes, including the education of female film directors, editors, and camerawomen as well as support to women in the tech sector, which you can learn more about on page 18.



Civic space under pressure

Civic space is the environment that enables civil society to play a role in the political, economic, and social life of society and to hold those in power accountable.

An open and pluralistic civic space that guarantees human rights, gender justice, and accountable governance is a prerequisite for making development and peace sustainable.

Civil society actors are facing a pushback across the world. Online and offline attacks on human rights defenders, including women's rights activists, journalists, and environmental activists, continue and in many places are worsening.



Photo: KVINFO

JORDAN: The Jordanian Women's Union conducted a study on sexual harassment that documents how widespread sexism is as a barrier to women's political participation. This KVINFO partner is working to change family law, the only law governed by Islamic law.

The Jordanian Women's Union opened the first shelter for female survivors of violence in Jordan. During the COVID-19 lockdown, the organisation stepped up its work to respond to the increase in domestic violence, including expanding the number of hotlines across the country.

Young refugees and youth from Jordanian host communities are analysing their own life stories to collaborate on solving their own problems. Read more about this meaningful journey on page 12.



In Denmark, KVINFO is engaged in policy activities tied to its international work

As part of a policy dialogue, KVINFO provides input to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark. Policy recommendations include subjects such as civic space; women, peace, and security; and on Denmark's engagement in the UN Human Rights Council and UN Commission on the Status of Women.

In collaboration with female veterans, KVINFO advocates that the Danish government push for the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security. KVINFO is amongst those questioning why only a few women are retained in or deployed by the Danish armed forces.

Despite the shame attached to sexual violence, more than 100 women have shared that they have experienced sexual abuse while in the armed forces. The issue is now under investigation.

KVINFO works to give local women a real voice in the peace and security agenda. Part of the work is advocating for long-term sustainable funding to

organisations working for gender justice in their societies – a precondition for women to be able to participate in peacebuilding.

GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN THE CIVIC SPACE DEBATE

KVINFO also works to end digital violence, as it discourages people in favour of gender justice and members of the LGBT+ community from participating in online debate. When groups of citizens are excluded from public debate it generates a democratic deficit.

As a member of a working group organised by the umbrella organisation Globalt Fokus, KVINFO is working to counteract the shrinking civic space abroad and in Denmark.

KVINFO has brought a gender perspective into the civic space debate in Denmark, including drawing attention to people being discouraged from engaging in work and debate on LGBT+ rights and gender justice due to systemic sexism.

The importance of women's equal participation in peace and security

The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on women and peace and security on 31 October 2000.

Stressing the importance of women's equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, the resolution reaffirms the vital role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping,

humanitarian response, and post-conflict reconstruction.

In accordance with the women, peace, and security agenda the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women's Work is guided by a robust set of internationally agreed norms and standards that you can read more about here:

unwomen.org

Challenging the Moroccan government to act against child marriages

Although prohibited by law, 10% of all marriages in Morocco are underage. KVINFO's partner Droits & Justice has collected data revealing the extent of the problem and challenged the Moroccan government to act.



Photo: KVINFO

Child marriage is the result of deep-rooted gender inequality

Child marriage refers to any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 years and an adult or another child. While the prevalence of child marriage worldwide has decreased from one in four girls married a decade ago to one in five today, the practice remains widespread. The prevalence of child marriage among boys is one sixth of that among girls.

Child marriage is often the result of deep-rooted gender inequality. Unless we make significant progress on ending child marriage, we will fall short of UN Sustainable Development Goals on poverty, health, education, gender equality, economic growth, and peace and justice.

› unicef.org

› beta.girlsnotbrides.org

Despite the 2004 reform of the Family Code, thousands of girls, some of them as young as 13 years of age, are married every year in Morocco. Many Moroccans are poor and strongly influenced by tradition. Moreover, due to gaps in the legislation, legitimate child marriages are still possible.

“Loopholes in the Family Code allow judges to authorise marriages below the age of 18 years under certain circumstances,” explains Lene Steffen, International Director, KVINFO.

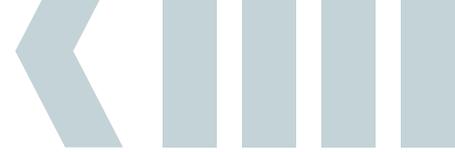
“Without data it is difficult to document the scale and severity of child marriage. In Morocco, no reliable national data on the number of child marriages existed until Droits & Justice went door to door to note the actual numbers of married children,” she explains.

A MOROCCAN CLASS OF POOR LEFT BEHIND

Droits & Justice interviewed 627 persons, including 12 males, who entered into marriage when they were under 18 years of age about the conditions of their marriages. Their responses convey a picture of a Moroccan class of poor left behind by the authorities. Patriarchal values and norms are often strong in these poor communities.

“The national study on child marriage is important because it gives an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of child marriage in Morocco. It also provides figures, including a portion of the religious non-registered child marriages that do not appear in the official statistics published by the Ministry of Justice and which represent 10.78% of all child marriages,” explains consultant Sofia Rais, who worked on the study as executive director of Droits & Justice.

Constituting a solid basis, the study works to strengthen its advocacy through the DOUNIA



Collective, a network of NGOs created in 2020 by Droits & Justice to combat child marriage. The study also showed that child marriage is present in all urban and rural areas of Morocco.

“Poverty, little access to quality education, and lack of security, as well as prohibition against sex before marriage, are all drivers of child marriage. Often, parents wish to reduce the economic burden of having their daughters at home. Without understanding the consequences, some girls are eager to marry to achieve more freedom or status in these conservative communities,” says Lene Steffen.

AT RISK OF SEXUAL, PHYSICAL, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

Unfortunately, the negative consequences of under-age marriages are manifold.

Child marriage accompanies the cycle of poverty across generations. In most cases, child marriage means an end to formal education for girls, as they take on domestic responsibilities and work in the informal sector.

Underage girls who marry are at risk of sexual, physical, and psychological violence; they are particularly at risk of violence from their partners and their partners’ families.

Child brides and their children often suffer a range of harmful health consequences due to early pregnancy. Babies born to girls under the age of 15 are more likely to have low birth weight, suffer from poor nutrition, experience stunting, and are at higher risk of dying before their fifth birthday.

Every child marriage is a human rights violation.

In spite of all the good reasons to prevent child marriages, Droits & Justice’s mission encountered obstacles in obtaining authorisation, while field study interviewers have encountered delays and blockages. And in some regions, confrontations occurred with the local authorities and the family members of some interviewees.

“This was due to the fact that child marriage is still considered a politicised and sensitive topic,” explains Rais.

“Droits & Justice managed to overcome the resistance and go through with the study. It was a major victory. Droits & Justice is now the organisation that the media and politicians turn to when they want information about child marriage,” adds Lene Steffen.

APPRECIATION OF FLEXIBILITY

The Danish Embassy in Morocco and the EU Delegation in Morocco supported the release of the study, and “KVINFO has been flexible like no other partner,” says Sofia Rais.

“The budget was reallocated due to the urgency of the study before Droits & Justice was able to carry out any advocacy efforts. KVINFO was not only a financial partner but also a strategic one in the design, implementation, and dissemination of the study results with partners in the Middle East and North Africa, to the United Nations and to the media,” clarifies Sofia Rais.

CHILD MARRIAGE NOW ON THE POLICY AGENDA

“Droits & Justice has managed to put child marriage on the policy agenda in Morocco. They have made it difficult to refute that the problem exists,” emphasises Lene Steffen.

Photo: KVINFO



Facts on gender equality in Morocco

- The legal age of marriage is 18 years, but exceptions are allowed.
- Improved legislation on violence against women does not include marital rape and it does not criminalise domestic violence.
- There are no equal rights to guardianship of children and inheritance, and women are restricted from working at night and with specific types of work.

› arabstates.unwomen.org



“The national study on child marriage is important because it gives an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of child marriage in Morocco. It also provides figures, including a portion of the religious non-registered child marriages that do not appear in the official statistics published by the Ministry of Justice and which represent 10.78% of all child marriages.

CONSULTANT SOFIA RAIS,
WHO WORKED ON THE STUDY AS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
OF DROITS & JUSTICE

Photo: Emma Ellegaard

Droits & Justice, with the support of KVINFO also raises awareness among adolescents aged 13–18 years, parents, educators, judges, and religious leaders on the consequences of child marriage. Adolescents at risk of child marriage are made aware and act as change agents advocating against child marriage in their communities.

Promoting legislative amendments and proposing new laws, Droits & Justice has pushed for reform through meetings, public debate, and media campaigns with the participation of Moroccan pop stars.

Likely due to external pressure on Morocco to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the government of Morocco has now launched its own study on child marriage.

Facts on child marriage in Morocco

- At least 10% of all marriages are underage in Morocco.
- Droits & Justice documented an increase in applications for underage marriage from 30,312 in 2006 to 32,104 in 2018.
- Judges approved 79% of the requests in 2018.
- Unofficial and unregistered religious marriages, some of which are child marriages, make up an estimated 13% of all marriages in Morocco.

Droits & Justice: The National Study on Child Marriage in Morocco, 2020

Caring for girls neglected

Seema from Jordan was just an adolescent when she was raped and got pregnant. The perpetrator denied the incident and the crime was reported to the Major Criminal Court.

The Jordanian Women's Union shelter, a KVINFO partner, gave Seema psychological, social, and legal support, as well as medical care until she delivered her baby girl.

The Juvenile Court registered the newborn as having unknown parentage. In keeping with Jordanian Personal Status Law, a child's parentage is only listed when a certified marriage contract is available. Consequently, the baby was to be taken from Seema and placed in a special care home.

The Jordanian Women's Union managed to persuade the court that the baby would be safe with Seema and that it would be in the best interest of the child to stay with her mother.

Jordanian family law is discriminatory and affects women's rights in various ways. A woman, for instance must have a male guardian until she is 30 years of age, whereas boys are considered independent when they turn 18. Females are also only allowed to inherit half of what males in the same position do.

Jordanian family law, as in most Arab countries, is based on Islamic law rather than on civil law. This common source of jurisprudence is reflected in and reinforced by the sociocultural tenets of the country. The inequality of women and a lack of women's rights often lead to cultural and structural violence, including early marriage.



Putting an end to discrimination

KVINFO's work for gender justice and equal rights is based on human rights and legal principles. Primarily informed by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, KVINFO is working at two levels:

The national legal framework is concerned with safeguarding rights and ensuring that existing laws do not discriminate or fail to protect anyone on the basis of their gender. Family law in the Middle East and North Africa is often highly discriminatory against women with regard to marriage, divorce, custody, and inheritance.

The penal codes offer only scant protection to persons subjected to gender based violence and only a few countries restrict domestic gender based violence and sexual harassment. Marital rape is not a crime in any of the countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Homosexuality is criminalised.

International conventions are not necessarily implemented even though the country is a signatory. Authorities may lack the qualifications to ensure the implementation of conventions, and citizens may not be aware of their rights and how to claim the fulfilment of these rights within the legal system.

by the law



Photo: Mai Rasmussen

A safe space for dialogue and reflection on change

Youth in Jordan are changing their own lives with the help of innovative methods. Some youth have managed to gain access to education, equal pay, and a life without violence.

What would you do if your task as an organisation was to assist people in vulnerable and marginalised positions to change their circumstances and communities for the better?

In a joint project with KVINFO, the Jordanian organisation Ahel uses a variety of methods and reaches out to refugees from Syria and Palestine as well as to Jordanian host communities to equip them with the tools to help both groups push for change in their everyday lives.

When people join sessions with Ahel, they have a great deal of experience with societal problems and injustices, but they have little or no experience with speaking up or taking action.

“People tend to be afraid and worry because of all the years of oppression they have experienced,” says Rahaf Abu Doha, Lead Public Narrative and Popular Education Trainer, Ahel.

FROM TALK TO ACTION

Over the years, Ahel has found that thinking and talking about change somehow comes naturally for most people. It may take time and lengthy dialogue, but it is achievable. However, transforming talk into action is challenging. Possibly even more so for refugees and Jordanians with limited education and economic means.

“We have discovered that people need time to reflect on why change is necessary. The trick is not to examine society, but to look at people’s own position in society,” explains Abu Doha.

“Often the participants have to determine what impedes their action for change. An obvious example is that people do not know how to deal with authorities, injustices, and masculinity,” adds Abu Doha.

Ahel applies a community organising model developed at the Harvard Kennedy School, USA. The project will also apply the GenderLAB methodology created by KVINFO and Copenhagen Business School.

“Both methods work with emancipation and empowering people in their own lives and communities,” emphasises Abu Doha.

IMPORTANT TO BE HEARD

Ahel uses community organising to prepare the participants thoroughly to identify issues and situations they want to change. Focussing on who the individuals and the group are, step one is called public narrative. Each participant in the session shares their own story and their communities’ stories.

“One participant said, ‘I have never been to a meeting where people would listen to my story. It is important to me because I feel heard’. This is not an uncommon reaction,” says Abu Doha.

Step two, called building relationships, allows participants to create a shared identity for their future action and establishes shared values within the group. This is the foundation for building a sense of mutual commitment among those involved in a specific campaign for change.

“People tend to be afraid and worry because of all the years of oppression they have experienced.

RAHAF ABU DOHA
LEAD PUBLIC NARRATIVE AND
POPULAR EDUCATION TRAINER, AHEL



Photo: Ahel

The final three steps are: structure, strategy, and action. At this point, the group must define exactly what they want to change and identify ways to bring about the desired changes.

“The first two steps allow people to create a story of self, a story of us, and a story of now, which is very much a question of values. This enhances trust and commitment, which is necessary for taking the next steps: Creating a structure that allows the group to grow and to design a strategy and then take action,” explains Abu Doha.

When the participants discuss and share values, they commit to their common goals helping their efforts to become more sustainable.

DEVELOPING THEIR OWN SOLUTIONS

The before-mentioned GenderLAB method includes the use of exercises with a norm-critical approach, in combination with design thinking to help participants identify problems and develop solutions. Some participants are noticeably quiet, especially in the beginning. Some say that they feel ashamed.

Applying a popular education methodology allows for reflection. Created by Brazilian scholar Paulo Freire in the 1960s this methodology focuses on the interests of ordinary people in their commitment to social and political change.

“Reflecting and following up makes it clear to participants that change actually does happen, even if it is small in the beginning,” asserts Abu Doha.

By joining Ahel sessions and including all genders in group dialogues, the participants have already made the initial change happen. Some youth have managed to gain access to education, equal pay, and a life without violence

As the process progresses, successfully increasing the number of people working for change can serve as inspiration and boost the desire to persevere.

“People slowly recognise that change really does happen. It is so important, because this is what makes them trust that they are actually capable of making their everyday lives different,” states Abu Doha.

Battling with masculinity

To create positive change in vulnerable communities, young people in Jordan are challenging the traditional understanding of masculinity.

“We all know the stereotypes: To be a real man, you must be strong, and you cannot show emotion. But it does not have to be that way,” asserts Suhail Abualsameed, a masculinity expert and consultant in the joint project between KVINFO and Ahel.

“We work specifically with imbalances in power structures; we challenge privileges, and we enhance our understanding of how we think,” adds Abualsameed.

He continues, “Masculinity is not per se positive or negative. We focus on hierarchies, authorities, dictatorships, and the popular top-down leadership. This is where masculinity is practised in harmful ways.”

SESSIONS OPEN TO ALL GENDERS

Lamees Azaar recently joined a group of 16 young people in a session discussing types of masculinity led by Abualsameed in a programme offered by Ahel. The session mixed dialogue with reflection, participant stories, and commitments. Azaar describes that, “We listened to each other’s stories of masculinity. We shared our reflections on how we can become change agents in our own families and among our friends,” adding:



Photo: Ahel



stereotypes

“If men are expected to be strong, it will be reflected in society. Some people have mental health problems because they do not talk about emotions. If we all understand this properly, we will discover that it is okay to show emotion.”

“You might think that the session is for men only. Some people believe that if a woman is interested in discussions like this, then she must hate men and want women to be in complete power. But that is not the case,” stresses Azaar.

Abualsameed emphasises that, “It is not only men who have grown up with stereotypical perceptions of masculinity; so have women. That is why everyone must be part of this conversation.”

He continues, “Sometimes there is some resistance among participants. After all, we address deeply rooted understandings. But many people have experienced how negative masculinity in the shape of autocracy and dictatorship can ruin their lives with violence and conflict. They are deeply committed to change.”

Abualsameed underlines that, “The need to discuss masculinity is not unique to Jordan or the Middle East. Currently, the misogyny expressed by the far right in the West is perhaps the most powerful negative masculinity. The stereotypical perception of masculinity may have taken on a new form, but when it shows its face, it is still ugly.”

“Many people have experienced how negative masculinity in the shape of autocracy and dictatorship can ruin their lives with violence and conflict. They are deeply committed to change.

SUHAIL ABUALSAMEED
A MASCULINITY EXPERT

Facts on gender equality in Jordan

- Jordan boasts a highly educated female population.
- With less than one-fifth of women engaged in the workforce, Jordan also has one of the lowest rates of women's economic participation in the world.
- While some progress has already been achieved in the area of rule of law, there are no equal rights in marriage, divorce, guardianship of children, or inheritance.
- Polygamy is permitted.

› arabstates.unwomen.org



Photo: KVINFO



Photo: Emma Ellegaard

“We have been extremely focused on conducting an advocacy campaign regarding parity in the municipal elections. Fortunately, a majority of the parliament voted in favour of horizontal as well as vertical parity.

BESMA SOUDANI
CO-FOUNDER AND LEADER OF
LIGUE DES ÉLECTRICIENNES TUNISIENNES

After advocacy campaign, female candidates hold 47% of the municipal council seats

As a result of an amended local election law and numerous KVINFO partner activities, female candidates now hold 47% of the municipal council seats following the May 2018 elections in Tunisia.

When Tunisian voters went to the ballot boxes in May 2018, female candidates had a golden opportunity to become elected. Today, women make up for 47% of all municipal council members. The impressive result is the outcome of a 2016 amendment of Article 49 of the election law, ensuring that women have greater representation in municipal and regional elections.

The amendment includes horizontal and vertical gender parity. Horizontal parity requires that municipal election lists across Tunisia have an equal number of men and women and that the top candidates have to alternate in gender, while vertical parity requires that every other candidate on the lists is a man or a woman.

The passing of the amendment is also a clear victory for powerful women's rights groups in Tunisia. One of which is KVINFO's partner Ligue des Électriciennes Tunisiennes.

Facts on gender equality in Tunisia

Tunisia is known for its progress on gender equality. Women have equal rights to vote and run for office, and they have the right to work. The parliament ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women without any reservations. Domestic violence and rape, including marital rape, and sexual harassment are illegal.

With equal access to bank loans and credit women are able to own and manage land and other property independently. However, equal rights to inheritance are still not a reality and there are restrictions on women working night hours and doing specific types of work. Parental leave is not aligned with the International Labour Organisation Convention and homosexuality is criminalised.

› arabstates.unwomen.org



“We have been extremely focused on conducting an advocacy campaign regarding parity in the municipal elections. Fortunately, a majority of the parliament voted in favour of horizontal as well as vertical parity,” says Besma Soudani, co-founder and leader of Ligue des Électriciennes Tunisiennes.

YET ANOTHER VICTORY FOR A KVINFO PARTNER

Ligue des Électriciennes Tunisiennes has also been conducting campaigns informing Tunisian women of their right to run for election. The organisation oversaw the training of 400 candidates, observed the elections, and verified this landslide victory for women.

The passing of the municipal election law is yet another victory for Ligue des Électriciennes Tunisiennes’ advocacy for women’s rights. Soudani and her colleagues have also succeeded in advocating to have significant passages added to the 2014 Tunisian constitution and the election law regulating parliamentary elections.

After the 2014 parliamentary elections, women held 31% of the elected seats in parliament but that unfortunately decreased to 25% after the 2019 election. This speaks to the need for Ligue des Électriciennes Tunisiennes’ continued advocacy for parity in parliamentary elections as well.



Photo: Jens Juul

“I am part of a family of five living on my father’s pension and my brother’s income. Men are the breadwinners in Jendouba, while the women are responsible for doing the household work – even if they also have a job. This is how it is in our society.

People in my social circle reject child marriage and violence against women, which they consider a crime against humanity. In my family circle I live a harmonious life because my family has encouraged me to be active in politics, although it is against the norms in our society.

Numerous organisations are working to change the negative perception of women and prove that women are capable of succeeding in public life. They are defending women’s rights and I think they have been successful to a large extent, but it is necessary that they continue on this track to prove that women have the capacity to make it in Tunisia.

My family has always pushed me to achieve and that has affected me positively; they believe in me and that has boosted my determination to continue, to overcome obstacles, and to succeed.

Our country has always been a pioneer in terms of women’s rights, but today some political parties are trying to push women back. With the support of organisations rendering justice to women, I believe that these parties will fail, and I hope the future will be bright.

THIRTY-FIVE-YEAR-OLD UNMARRIED FEMALE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE, JENDOUBA, NORTH WEST TUNISIA

Empowering women to become masters of technology

Women use tech solutions but rarely create them. KVINFO and partner Motoon are supporting women to take charge in the Egyptian tech sector.

Until women have the knowledge and skills to take charge of tech solutions, they will not be able to create algorithms and use technology to their own advantage. Factors that exacerbate the situation are the highly male dominated work environment in most tech companies and the lack of digital security for female activists, women's organisations, and any woman using social media.

"These problems are huge everywhere, especially for women. In the Middle East and North Africa even more so because of the risk of bringing shame on the family – as a woman you are solely responsible for the entire family's honour," says Katarina Blomqvist, Senior Advisor, KVINFO.

TECH COMMUNITIES ARE UNFRIENDLY TO WOMEN

In Egypt, KVINFO is supporting female techies through its partner Motoon's project Noon Tech.

"The Noon Tech project is empowering women as users to master the technology, including understanding the opportunities it can offer and the threats it may bring. The project also supports women who work in the tech field and in tech communities, which are not very women-friendly worldwide. We need to have more successful female role models, because you cannot empower more women to master technology when your trainer team does not have any women in it," says Manal Hassan, Co-founder and Programme Development Officer, Motoon.

She explains that online behaviour is an extension of offline behaviour: "The threats women face in their societies can be easily replicated and sometimes magnified on the internet, from monitoring and tracking by parents and spouses, to fake accounts and blackmail, to hijacking of personal data, accounts, and devices."

Motoon also provides women with technical support through its on and offline tech clinic, the documentation of stories, and the production of simple guides illustrating various scenarios and threats.

With the support of Motoon, women who work in technology are offered space to engage in discussions about the obstacles they face as women working in this field.

"From early discussions it was very clear that a lot of the problems faced by women in this field can be attributed to stereotyping and the opportunities available to these women, including learning, networking, and job opportunities. Will being hired by a software company give women an opportunity to be part of creating the actual application or will it limit them to managerial and client relationship tasks?" asks Hassan.

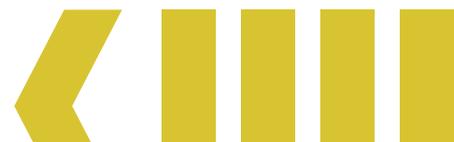
SHARING KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCES

KVINFO is collaborating with Motoon in various ways. Motoon Project Manager Nada Kabbry has, for example shared the experiences from Egypt at online seminars on gender and digital violence organised by KVINFO and Oxfam Ibis. As a global problem it is important to share methods.

KVINFO also supports Motoon's tech camps targeting university students studying computer science and information systems, where participants are invited to question whether algorithms can be neutral or whether they reflect the biases of their creators.

A database containing the profiles of female techies is under construction and will be made available to event organisers and curators looking for speakers and trainers.

The communities of skilled female techies are connected with civil society through meetings and by targeting university IT students and graduates. Techies are invited to all-female tech workshops, where trainers and trainees organise events around women and technology.



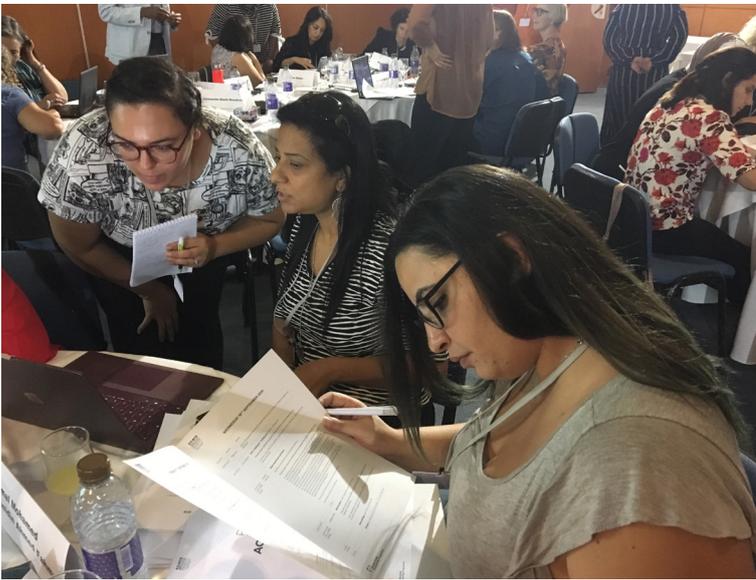


Photo: KVINFO

“I was very impressed by the solidarity and the willingness to share, not only stories of success but also failures. Many of the participants are stars in the Egyptian IT sky.

KATARINA BLOMQVIST
SENIOR ADVISOR, KVINFO

Blomqvist recalls participating in one of these events:

“It was fun. It continued way into the night, and during the breaks we were all mingling. One of the speakers, Nada El Shabrawy, was a young YouTuber and vlogger reviewing books. She has a hundred thousand followers. Another participant had built a community called Femi Hub for young women living away from their families. They were lonely until they joined together to support each other online,” says Blomqvist.

“I was very impressed by the solidarity and the willingness to share, not only stories of success but also failures. Many of the participants are stars in the Egyptian IT sky,” stresses Blomqvist.

MEN DOMINATE THE FIELD

The gender inequality in the tech sector is not unique to Egypt. Similar problems occur all around the world – also in Denmark, which makes gender

and IT an interesting field for cooperation. Lack of equal pay and equal opportunities for promotion are common problems, and gender norms are one of the barriers.

“IT and media are a double-edged sword,” says Blomqvist, “The smart phone and social media carry a lot of freedom for Egyptian girls and women, who are usually expected to come straight home from school or work and who cannot move freely outside. Thanks to social media, they may chat with friends, do business, and take part in societal activities online. But women also face sexual harassment online.”

In Egypt, social media are closely monitored by the authorities, who crack down on any political opposition and also on content often labeled as girls entertainment, such as short dance videos. Subsequently, two young women have been sentenced to two years’ prison for posting indecent videos on the video-sharing app TikTok.

Facts on gender equality in Egypt

- Women make up a persistently low 23% of the Egyptian labour force. Without inclusiveness, however, economic growth cannot be sustained, and women represent an untapped resource in Egypt’s economy.
- Women have made up less than 25% of tech employees over the past 20 years.
- Gender-specific restrictions are applied to women working night hours and doing specific types of work, and there is no legal protection for domestic workers.
- Egyptian family law is based on Islamic law and discriminates against women’s rights regarding marriage, divorce, male access to polygamy, and inheritance. Egypt also lacks a law on violence against women.

› arabstates.unwomen.org



Photo: Simon Læssøe/dapp.dk

KVINFO supports organisations to become strong voices for human rights and gender justice

All human beings have the right to develop their personal abilities and make choices without limitations set by gender norms. KVINFO aims for a society with equal opportunities, rights, and responsibilities for everyone. As this publication shows, many women experience multiple barriers in achieving gender justice.

KVINFO strives to work adaptively to ensure that progress is possible despite instabilities and political changes in the Middle East and North Africa. KVINFO's approach includes space for learning and experimentation, information sharing, and changes in methodologies and strategies.

KVINFO works through partnerships with national and international NGOs, networks, governmental institutions, private sector companies, professional associations, trade unions, religious institutions, media, and academia.

INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE BENEFIT THE ACTIVITIES

KVINFO's project implementation is usually led by local partners that are part of and experts in the particular context. They have intimate knowledge and connections that benefit the activities that KVINFO and the partner wish to implement.

The partners have close ties to their constituencies, and they know how to adapt activities to their specific needs and changing circumstances. An example is the adaptability they have demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Local partners

remain in their own countries, allowing them to advocate persistently and to contribute to making outcomes sustainable.

INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

“The point of departure in our work is international human rights conventions,” explains Lene Steffen, International Director of KVINFO. For example, The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for action.

“The conventions are the most specific instruments we have, and the governments have signed and ratified them. This does not necessarily entail that the governments implement the changes that are necessary to fulfil them,” says Lene Steffen.

KVINFO’s work contributes to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, “However, data to monitor progress on gender equality are often lacking, particularly in areas such as gender based violence,” Lene Steffen states.

ADVOCACY FOR POLICY CHANGE AT NATIONAL LEVEL

KVINFO advocates for changes in policies and laws that are not favourable to gender justice.

KVINFO and partners focus on family law that derives from Islamic law and that allows for legal discrimination.

“In some countries our local partners focus on changing one law at a time. They hope for a country-to-country domino effect. We have previously experienced such an effect when laws were abolished that allowed rapists to escape prosecution if they married the woman who was raped. Our partners are supporting each other in this process,” says Steffen.

As a supplement to advocacy, KVINFO and partners raise awareness on laws, rights, and the duties of states as agreed in international conventions.

CHANGING GENDER STEREOTYPES

“Men make decisions, but as breadwinners they have duties too in the Middle East and North Africa. If you want to change a patriarchal culture, you must change everybody’s perception of the male role. This is why we are working with masculinity and gender stereotypes in all the countries. Cultural change is needed if the laws are to be changed, and when the laws are changed, the culture changes further,” explains Cecilie Poulsen-Hansen, Senior Programme Advisor, KVINFO.

The foundation for KVINFO’s work

A rights-based approach: We analyse and evaluate national legislation and practices on gender equality against international conventions and standards ratified by states. We point out differences between what states have pledged to fulfil and what they practice, and we provide constructive suggestions as to how the states may fulfil their obligations.

Systemic and institutional: We work to make change sustainable by addressing structural inequalities and discrimination. We seek to institutionalise progress through inclusion in laws, policies, budgets, and guidelines, and we support institutions responsible for the implementation and monitoring of gender equality and anti-discrimination efforts.

An intersectional approach: We analyse complex perspectives on gender and equality issues while paying attention to the complex interaction between gender identity and its manifestations, race, ethnicity, sexuality, socioeconomic background, age, disability, and religion, which may reinforce vulnerabilities and inequalities.

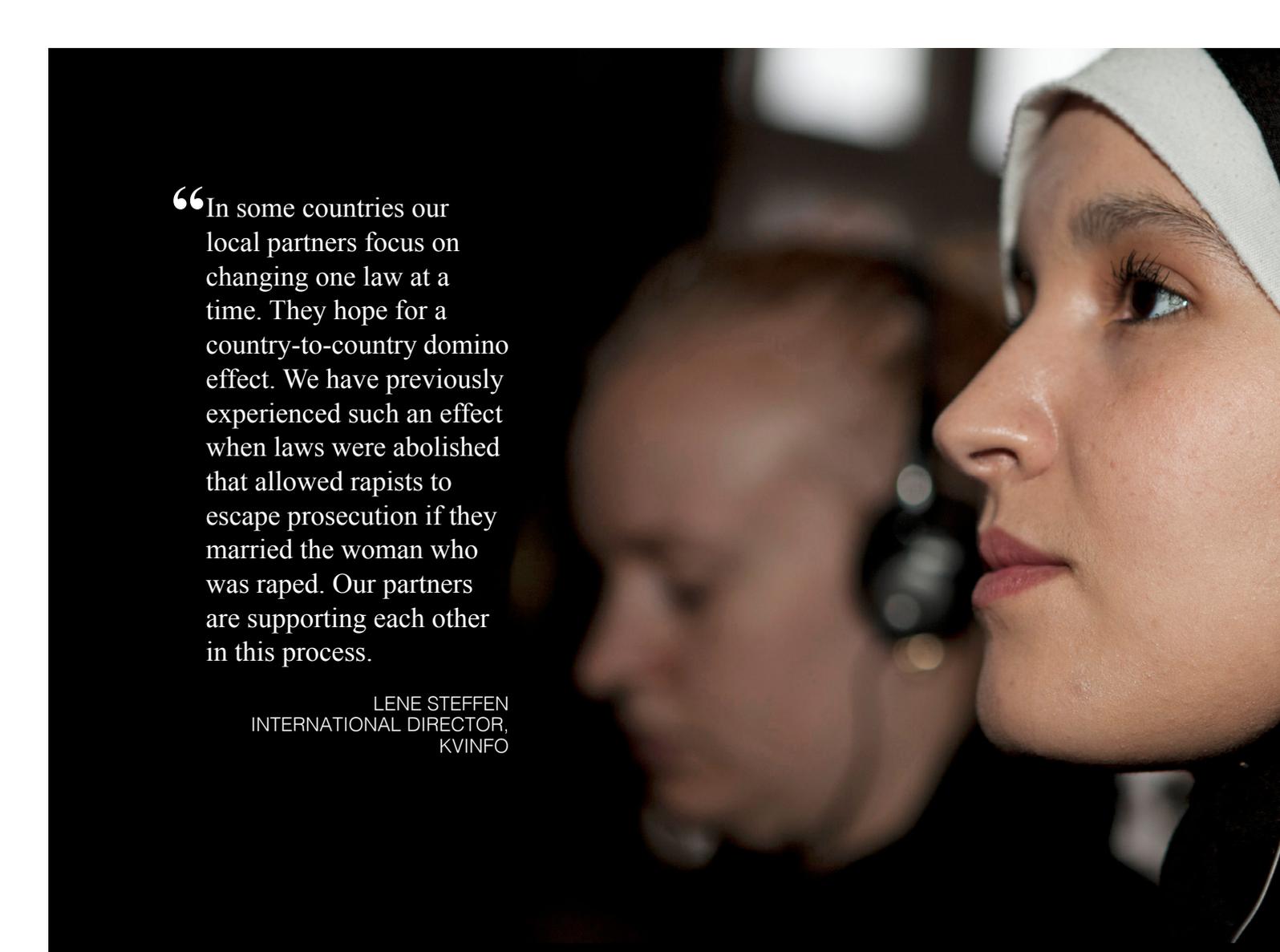
A norm-critical approach renders visible, and challenges and changes, constraining norms, both linguistic and social, at a structural level. We apply this approach to uncover the conscious and unconscious bias influencing our perception of others and of ourselves.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are an important driver of sustainable development. KVINFO is contributing to achieving the goals, subgoals, and indicators relevant to our

work, especially SDG 5 on gender equality. We work to ensure that Denmark and other countries live up to the ambitions on gender equality, and we use the SDGs as a framework for our work and communication.

We recognise that **gender inequality is a global challenge**. We advocate that Denmark continuously prioritises a focus on gender justice in the Nordic countries, in Europe, and globally.

First and foremost Denmark must do whatever it takes to ensure full gender equality in Denmark, in keeping with its obligations as stated in national laws as well as in human rights conventions because that will reinforce the credibility of our international voice. KVINFO is using expertise from our national and international engagements to ensure mutual inspiration.



“In some countries our local partners focus on changing one law at a time. They hope for a country-to-country domino effect. We have previously experienced such an effect when laws were abolished that allowed rapists to escape prosecution if they married the woman who was raped. Our partners are supporting each other in this process.

LENE STEFFEN
INTERNATIONAL DIRECTOR,
KVINFO

Photo: Jens Juul

“KVINFO contributes to knowledge building and to bringing people together. The convening power is our focus. We are able to bring the most important people, institutions, and corporations into action,” says Poulsen-Hansen.

For example in Tunisia in 2019, KVINFO hosted a meeting for all its partners.

“People from different countries escaped the daily humdrum for a while to meet, exchange knowledge and experiences, and be recognised by like-minded professionals,” explains Katarina Blomqvist, Senior Programme Advisor, KVINFO.

Partner representatives have also been on study trips during three elections in Denmark to meet peers.

DATA COLLECTION AS EVIDENCE

KVINFO supports data collection and analysis to document the existence of the problems and barriers to gender justice, and to be able to measure

progress – or the opposite – on key gender justice issues. By systematically collecting evidence, organisations can document that it is not a matter of one woman being beaten, but a systemic and structural societal problem experienced by many.

PROVIDING EVIDENCE-BASED RECOMMENDATIONS

Denmark has been elected as a member of the UN Human Rights Council for the 2020–2022 term. KVINFO, together with other Danish organisations, has provided evidence-based recommendations to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark prior to the council sessions.

KVINFO has also supported partners with participation in follow-up activities concerning the Beijing Declaration in the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York.

“This was especially useful for Egyptian partner organisations, because at such international



meetings no one can silence their voices,” stresses Lene Steffen.

As demonstrated by the sample of activities included in this publication, KVINFO and its partners use a variety of methodologies in the implementation of projects at field level. KVINFO supports partners with coaching on human rights and gender equality so they can develop their own methodologies.

To enable complete transparency, results from KVINFO and partner activities are documented with a focus on changes at individual, group, and societal level.

LOTS OF EXPERIENCE AND EXTENSIVE ADAPTABILITY

“KVINFO is widely recognised as a player in the region. Due to our vast experience, we are able to pick up the context quickly and lead highly complex programmes,” explains Poulsen-Hansen.

COVID-19 brought a dramatic increase in gender based violence

The COVID-19 crisis prompted lockdowns in the Arab region from mid-March 2020. Affecting women and LGBT+ persons especially hard 2020 brought a dramatic increase in domestic violence. On- and offline gender based violence also increased in society in general.

Women are disproportionately affected by the steep rise in unemployment rates following the lockdown in the formal and informal sectors, in the latter case without social protection. At the same time, many governments used states of emergency as an excuse to crack down on critical voices, including women’s rights and LGBT+ activists.

Post COVID-19 Challenges and Opportunities for Gender Equality in Arab Countries, KVINFO, 2020.

kvinfo.dk

KVINFO considers partners better placed to advocate and fight for gender justice in their contexts. It is important to support the organisations to become strong voices for human rights and gender justice, and KVINFO considers this a more sustainable way to achieve change rather than opening KVINFO branches or offices outside of Denmark.

“Fortunately, our partners are very good at detecting the most important issues and have changed their focus to what the pandemic has done to people, for example by addressing the escalation of violence against women while confined during the health crisis. One organisation carried out an extensive COVID-19 campaign on the streets. Another developed a study about the consequences of the crisis,” she explains.

KVINFO

INTERNATIONAL

KVINFO is the Danish Centre for Gender and Equality.

KVINFO's vision is a free and equal society. Free in this context means a society not limited by structures, norms, and stereotypes about gender that constitute a barrier for every individual to reach their full potential. Equal in this context means that everyone should

have the same opportunities and rights to participate in society on an equal footing, irrespective of gender.

KVINFO's mission is, on a knowledge-based foundation, to qualify debate and further equality in a modern context through communication, partnerships, and innovative projects, nationally as well as internationally.

