

**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

Committee on Women  
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## **Supporting the Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals**

### **Summary**

The Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) comprises senior representatives of Arab national machineries for women. It was established at the request of ESCWA's Committee on Women in its seventh session (Muscat, 20-21 January 2016). The request emphasized the significant role that national women's machineries are playing in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The present document reviews the activities undertaken by ESCWA, in partnership with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the League of Arab States, in the context of building the capacities of the Committee members during 2020-2021, based on the tasks, priorities and recommendations set out for ESCWA in the ninth session of its Committee on Women (Amman, 26-27 November 2019).

The Committee on Women is requested to take note of the implemented activities and make suggestions regarding the ways to continue supporting the Subcommittee in the coming period.

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## **Introduction**

1. In the seventh session of the Committee on Women of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), Member States recommended the establishment of a subcommittee comprising senior representatives from national women's machineries. The subcommittee was tasked with following up on the implementation of the gender aspects of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and addressing the needs of Member States in fulfilling their commitments to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a particular emphasis on SDG 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of women.
2. The Committee, in its eighth (Beirut, 4-5 October 2017) and ninth (Amman, 26-27 November 2019) Sessions, recommended continuing to support the Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals, and providing the diverse knowledge and tools needed to help Member States to implement SDG 5 and its targets.
3. This document presents the activities carried out in 2020-2021 in this context and provides proposals to support the future work of the Subcommittee.

### **I. The terms of reference of the Subcommittee and the determinants of its work**

4. ESCWA serves as the secretariat of the Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals. In partnership with UN Women and the League of Arab States, ESCWA supports the Subcommittee in implementing its tasks through a range of activities. The terms of reference of the Subcommittee include the following:

- (a) Providing member States with the necessary tools and skills to formulate and review gender-related policies and plans to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- (b) Enhancing coordination mechanisms to identify and select national indicators to measure progress achieved in the implementation of SDG 5;
- (c) Strengthening national monitoring abilities and data collection for reporting purposes;
- (d) Developing a roadmap that brings together the gender-related targets of the 2030 Agenda and related indicators into various interdisciplinary clusters, with a view to facilitate implementation and review efforts, and to promote comparability of national indicators;
- (e) Establishing innovative regional knowledge sharing mechanisms to share experiences and best practices to advance gender equality;
- (f) Formulating recommendations to improve women's status in the region, and promoting women's leadership in driving sustainable and inclusive growth;
- (g) Coordinating efforts to follow up and review of the implementation of the gender dimension of the 2030 Agenda at the national and regional levels.

5. In its eighth Session (Beirut 4-5 October 2017), ESCWA's Committee on Women recommended that the secretariat expand membership in the Subcommittee so to include all interested Arab States, and to engage statistics bureaux in the Subcommittee's work. The recommendations also included continuously providing the Committee on Women with information on SDG 5, and building capacities on collecting information related to the indicators of that SDG.

6. The Committee, in its ninth Session (Amman, 26-27 November 2019), took note of the work of the Subcommittee and stressed the commitment to participating in its activities, and to transferring its knowledge at the national level to implement the SDGs and national priorities. The ESCWA secretariat recommended continuing to provide technical support to the Subcommittee, providing the diverse knowledge and tools

needed to assist member States in accelerating the implementation of the SDGs and their targets, especially those related to gender equality, and inviting national women's machineries statistics bureaux and other stakeholders to participate in the activities of the Subcommittee.

## II. Activities to support the Subcommittee

7. Guided by the action plan adopted at the Preparatory Meeting for the 60th Session of the Committee on the Status of Women (Beirut, 2-3 March 2016) and by the recommendations of the ninth Session of ESCWA's Committee on Women, the support by ESCWA and its partners has been complimented by an emphasis on capacity-building and the development of technical tools to support the Subcommittee in achieving its objectives.

8. To build on global expertise, ESCWA and its partners have expanded cooperation with international organizations, holding a workshop with UNFPA and UNDP on SDG target 5.1. Paragraphs 9 to 12 of this document present detailed information on this workshop.

### A. Capacity development

9. ESCWA, in collaboration with UN Women, UNFPA, UNDP and the League of Arab States, organized a regional capacity-development [workshop on gender justice and the law for members of the Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals](#). Due to the hazards associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, the workshop was held online (8-10 December 2020).

10. The workshop aimed to facilitate the sharing of expertise between Member States to develop and enhance legislation that mainstreams gender equality, and to discuss mechanisms for implementing the [Gender Justice and the Law in the Arab Region initiative](#). Implementation by ESCWA, UN Women, UNFPA and UNDP began in December 2018, by launching 18 nationally validated reports on gender justice and law in the Arab region that identified existing legal measures to eliminate discrimination against women and girls and address gender-based violence.

11. The workshop discussed SDG target 5.1 on ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere, and the mechanism for measuring SDG indicator 5.1.1 on whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex. The workshop aided in setting out the third phase of the Gender Justice and the Law in the Arab Region initiative, expanding the scope of data and providing a tool for surveying legislation and measuring its compatibility with the standards set by international conventions and mechanisms, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and International Labour Organization conventions. The tool depicts the degree to which national legislation is compatible with international standards using three colours: green reflecting compatibility with international standards, orange indicating relative compatibility and red indicating that the legislation is incompatible with international standards. The third phase also includes the development of national reports to achieve the following: (a) the inclusion of 20 Arab States; (b) using the methodology for measuring SDG indicator 5.1.1 to expand the matrix and formulate questions relating to legislation so as to determine its compatibility with international standards of gender equality, using 79 indicators instead of the 29 in the first phase of the initiative, and thus aiding States in implementing their commitments in the context of the SDGs, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, especially since these frameworks are closely linked to women's rights; and (c) to inform Subcommittee members of the mechanism for monitoring national laws and updating the matrix on the website on 10 December (International Human Rights Day) of each year.

12. The workshop also discussed policies and legislation that need to be developed in line with international frameworks. Participants shared knowledge, monitored progress and developed ways to address gaps and to apply good practices.

13. The ESCWA secretariat, in collaboration with UN Women and the League of Arab States, implemented a programme to enhance the capacities of the Subcommittee on Gender Equality. These efforts aim to accelerate progress in SDG 5, particularly in SDG target 5.4. that pertains to recognizing and valuing unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.

14. The programme, which aimed to build national capacities in the development and reform of social care and protection policies that empower women economically and facilitate their participation in the labour market, was attended by representatives of Arab statistics offices and ministries of labour and planning, in addition to national social protection institutions. The events of the programme comprised of a virtual seminar and two training workshops.

15. The seminar introduced SDG target 5.4 and its indicators as specified in the 2030 Agenda. Moreover, the seminar included discussions on the redistribution of unpaid care work in order to promote the economic participation of women, particularly in light of the prevailing and anticipated demographic dynamics, and the worsening of social and economic crises under the COVID-19 pandemic. Discussions also addressed the concept of the care economy as well as its importance in promoting the economic empowerment of women.

16. The first workshop focused on the indicators of SDG target 5.4, and discussed the data needed to measure the indicators, providing insights on the availability of such data in the Arab region. The participants also presented efforts being made in this domain across the region.

17. The second workshop presented the regional policy and legal frameworks related to care work, and the measures taken in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The participants presented the laws and policies that influence care services and discussed care activities and services in the region. Good practices from within the region and other parts of the world were also discussed so as to utilize them.

18. The programme was based on a series of national-level studies prepared by ESCWA, studies prepared by UN Women, as well as a guide issued by ESCWA on the development of national policies on the care economy and the provision of relevant services, whether in the care of children, the elderly or persons with disabilities.

19. The participants stressed the need for the training programme to boost efforts for the economic empowerment of Arab women so as to achieve their full potential. The participants also underscored the importance of building capacities to ensure the availability of the data needed for the development and reform of care policies. There was general agreement on the importance of ESCWA's work on the preparation of a survey of the regional care policy and legal frameworks that would serve as a reference to monitor efforts, decide on priorities, exchange of expertise and experiences on achieving gender equality between countries.

## **B. Knowledge production and sharing**

20. In the context of capacity-building activities under the initiative [Gender Justice and the Law in the Arab Region](#), ESCWA and partners from UN Women, UNFPA, UNDP and the League of Arab States have called, through several publications, for the reform of policies and institutions and for addressing structural obstacles to gender equality and the empowerment of women. December 2019 saw the launch of the regional report on "Gender Justice & Equality before the law: Analysis of Progress and Challenges in the Arab States Region", as well as a supplementary report on gender justice and the Gender Justice and the Law Dashboard (color-coded chart of each country) showing the state of legislation in 18 Arab States. In early 2020, partners began expanding the list of laws and set standards for assessing the compliance of legislation with international standards, with the aim of supporting States in reforming gender-sensitive laws and policies.

21. ESCWA has also produced several studies and reports on gender equality statistics. Those included: "[The Arab Gender Gap Report 2020: Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals](#)", which

surveyed gender equality in 22 Arab countries using the SDG indicators relating to gender equality. The report covered information on policies and laws at the country level, including on ensuring that data was analysed from a gender perspective. It presents over 200 quantitative and qualitative regional priority indicators on gender equality to accelerate progress. The list of indicators constitutes a basis for preparing a crucial framework of Arab gender indicators that should be monitored at the national and regional levels.

### **III. Future prospects**

22. The search continues for sources of funding to enhance the capacity of Subcommittee members, with the aim of moving forward with its objectives, in particular ensuring that strategies for the advancement of women and other thematic strategies are in complete synergy with SDG 5; enhancing national reporting capacities; and providing qualitative and technical references and knowledge to help develop effective policies and programmes based on best practices and experience.

23. ESCWA seeks to build more partnerships with various Arab and international organizations and bodies. This would help the Subcommittee achieve its objectives and develop tools to help Member States formulate policies and establish institutional mechanisms that support the role of national women's machineries in integrating gender issues into national efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda, with a focus on SDG 5. ESCWA has a particular interest in indicators and reporting issues.

24. The Committee on Women is invited to review the efforts by ESCWA to provide technical support and capacity-building to the Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals, and to agree on the way forward in the coming years, particularly for providing more technical support to enhance the work of the Subcommittee.

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