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

Committee on Women  
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Item 4 of the provisional agenda

## **Implementation of activities on women's issues under the ESCWA programme plan and of recommendations made by the Committee at its eleventh session**

### **Summary**

The present document reviews the activities undertaken by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) as part of its programme plan on women's advancement and in implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee on Women to the ESCWA secretariat at its eleventh session, which was held in Beirut on 10 and 11 October 2023. Those recommendations included issuing publications and studies, conducting research, organizing conferences and expert meetings, holding training courses, and strengthening partnerships with relevant international and regional organizations.

The Committee on Women is invited to take note of what has been implemented and discuss the way forward.

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## Introduction

1. At the close of its eleventh session, held in Beirut on 10 and 11 October 2023, the Committee on Women of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) issued a set of recommendations, some addressed to member States and others to the ESCWA secretariat.
2. The present document sets out the actions taken by the ESCWA secretariat from December 2023 to November 2024 to implement the recommendations addressed to it, and the activities it carried out to implement the ESCWA programme plan on women's advancement, which include generating evidence-based knowledge, producing flagship publications and organizing conferences and expert meetings to facilitate consensus building on regional priorities.
3. The ESCWA programme plan on women's advancement aims to reduce gender disparity and promote women's empowerment in line with international conventions and conferences. The programme plan addresses the following themes: combating violence against women; women, peace and security; gender justice; enhancing women's economic participation; and integrating the gender equality approach into national institutions.
4. In implementation of the recommendations of the Committee on Women at its eleventh session, ESCWA has expanded its partnerships with United Nations agencies, regional organizations, civil society organizations and academia to ensure that efforts are consolidated at the regional level, and has carried out many of its activities within the framework of these partnerships. Examples of such partnerships include working closely with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), as well as with regional actors such as the League of Arab States, and with academia, such as the Lebanese American University and the American University of Beirut.

### I. Progress in supporting States to fulfil their international obligations

5. From 5 to 7 March 2024, ESCWA hosted the 2024 [Arab Forum for Sustainable Development](#) (AFSD-2024) on the theme "Delivering for sustainability and peace". A special session was held on the first day of the Forum on the theme "[Nexus between the women, peace and security agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region](#)", in partnership with UNDP, UNICEF and UN-Women. It hosted a dialogue with representatives from Iraq, the State of Palestine, the Sudan and the Arab Women Organization, and sought to identify the entry points and actions required for stronger complementarity and interlinkages between the frameworks for achieving peace and development.
6. ESCWA published its annual report on "[Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab region](#)", which provided information on the region's progress in each of the 17 Goals with their 169 targets and related indicators, including Goal 5 on gender equality. Findings show that while there were improvements in the social, economic, political and legal spheres, the Arab region is not making sufficient progress towards achieving gender equality by 2030, and that women and girls continue to face challenges to the full realization of their rights.
7. To address the situation of climate change in the region, ESCWA issued a report and policy brief on "[Migration and climate change in the Arab region](#)", which detailed the impact of climate-induced migration and displacement on women, including their marginalization in decision-making, a heavier burden of unpaid care work, and an increase in gender-based violence. Gender-sensitive policy recommendations were provided to address these issues.

8. ESCWA also issued the “[Handbook on the Arab Gender Indicator Framework 2023](#)”, which aims to support member States in producing and disseminating comparable gender indicators to forge a common understanding among stakeholders on ways to produce quantitative monitoring and reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other key development indicators, highlighting priority gender issues in the region and the need for gender-sensitive measurements in Arab countries.

9. On 11 March 2024, ESCWA co-hosted a side event at the sixty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women on the theme “[Differential impact on women and girls during the war on Gaza](#)”. Panellists included representative of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs of the State of Palestine, the Palestine Office of UN-Women, and the Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling, and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences. The event served as an advocacy and awareness-raising session on the dire situation women and girls are facing in Gaza.

## **II. Progress in gender equality and combating violence against women**

10. ESCWA and the Jordanian National Commission for Women published a report entitled “[Estimating the economic cost of domestic violence against women in Jordan](#)” to provide a basis for policy reform in the country. Significantly, this is the first report in the Arab region to combine the calculation of out-of-pocket costs and cost of services, according to a full operational model produced by ESCWA for estimating the costs of marital violence in the Arab region. The process of calculation employs a mixed-method approach to estimate these costs. Focusing primarily on tangible monetary costs, estimates of out-of-pocket costs and foregone income due to marital violence have been produced. In addition, the report provides an estimate of the various costs associated with providing services across key sectors, and sets out recommendations related to improving prevention, protection and response, providing data and documentation, and enhancing investment and funding for future interventions.

11. ESCWA prepared a policy brief entitled “Violence against women and girls with disability in the private and public spheres” (forthcoming), which sheds light on the specific experiences of women and girls with disabilities based on other ESCWA work, including a focus group discussion with representatives from organizations working with persons with disabilities. The policy brief also provides recommendations for the development of an operational definition of economic violence, and the integration of economic violence into national domestic violence legislative frameworks.

12. On 10 October 2024, in commemoration of the International Day of the Girl Child, ESCWA launched a study entitled “[Estimating the economic cost of child marriage in the Arab region](#)”, undertaken in partnership with UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women. The study builds on two previous ones, expanding findings to include 13 Arab countries where data are available. It determined the economic cost of child marriage in terms of gross domestic product loss in Arab countries, and concluded that reducing instances of child marriage in the Arab region would boost the economy by 3 per cent each year, equivalent to more than \$3 trillion during the period 2021–2050. The study also reviewed the multiple ways in which child marriage affects women and girls individually, as well as its family and nationwide impact. It proposed actions that countries could take to prevent child marriage, and to mitigate the associated demographic, health and economic impacts.

13. In line with global activities to end violence against women and girls, ESCWA commemorated the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence (25 November–10 December 2024) through its annual social media campaign on the subject and other related activities.

## **III. Progress on the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda**

14. To shed light on the perilous situation faced by Palestinian women and girls, including those with disabilities, during the war on Gaza, ESCWA issued a series of policy briefs. The first, entitled “[War on Gaza: where everyone is left behind](#)”, outlined the immediate and anticipated long-term gendered impacts of the

current war. Subsequent policy briefs discussed the ongoing plight of women and girls, and included “[War on Gaza: twenty-first century's deadliest 100 days?](#)” and “[Gaza war: expected socioeconomic impacts on the State of Palestine](#)”. These highlighted the ongoing impact of the war on the people of Gaza, and the compounding issues faced by women and girls.

15. ESCWA included a discussion on the impact of the current war on Palestinian women and girls in addition to the gendered impact of the occupation in its annual report on the “[Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan](#)”.

16. ESCWA prepared a technical paper entitled “Working toward disability inclusion in the women, peace and security agenda in the Arab region” (forthcoming), which examines how women and girls with disabilities in the Arab region experience conflict and what can be done to better ensure their substantial engagement in peace and security concerns through national action plans on women, peace and security and through other mechanisms.

#### IV. Progress in gender justice

17. As part of its ongoing commitment towards gender justice in the Arab region, ESCWA, in partnership with UNDP, UNFPA and UN-Women, and in close collaboration with member State representatives, has updated the [Gender Justice Portal](#) and revisited the colour codes assigned to newly introduced laws. On 10 December 2023, ESCWA and partners announced the outcome of the annual update and revision of relevant laws and associated colour codes for each country, highlighting that 39 laws were introduced in 15 countries during the period October 2022–October 2023. These changes included constitutional amendments, issuance of or amendments to laws, national policies, presidential decrees or decrees issued by the council of ministers, and regulations or other orders. The final outcomes of the annual updates resulted in 16 colour code changes assigned to measures aimed at enhancing equality between men and women in the workplace and in access to health services, and at combating violence against women in Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine and Saudi Arabia.

#### V. Progress in women’s economic empowerment

18. ESCWA is supporting regional and national efforts to address women’s exclusion from labour markets, and ensure their full participation by strengthening the care economy on the one hand and identifying the reasons for women’s weak economic participation and lack of involvement in entrepreneurship on the other.

19. On the economic engagement of young women, ESCWA issued a policy brief entitled “[Youth employment dynamics in Egypt: challenges and opportunities](#)”, which advocates for greater inclusion of young people and women in the formal labour market through targeted initiatives, including prioritizing highly productive sectors, enhancing job placement services, and increasing investments in technical and vocational education.

20. In January 2024, ESCWA and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in partnership with UN-Women and the International Labour Organization, organized a regional meeting on the theme “[Role of parliamentarians in accelerating the achievement of women’s economic empowerment in the Arab region](#)”, which brought together 35 parliamentarians from 18 Arab States and 55 observers (parliamentary staff, government officials, and representatives of international and civil society organizations). The meeting tackled the interlinkages between gender equality and women’s economic empowerment, care policies, human capital development, and the dignity and rights of caregivers and care receivers.

21. In November 2023, ESCWA, in collaboration with the Central Administration of Statistics of Lebanon, organized a South-South cooperation [webinar](#) on SDG indicators 5.5.2 (proportion of women in managerial positions), 8.3.1 (proportion of informal employment, by sector and sex), 8.5.2 (unemployment rate, by sex

and disability) and 8.6.1 (proportion of youth not in education, employment, or training by sex and age) that are less produced in the Arab region, as part of the third wave of series of SDG webinars. The main objectives of the regional training were to share national good practices in the successful collection and dissemination of SDG indicators produced by a handful of Arab countries and available in the Global SDG Database as country data.

22. In line with global activities on the promotion of gender equality, ESCWA celebrated International Women's Day with a webinar entitled "[Care work in the Arab region: International Women's Day 2024](#)" on 4 March 2024. The theme of International Women's Day 2024, "Invest in women: accelerate progress", focused on the goal of greater economic inclusion for women and girls. Moreover, to shed light on the issue of the care economy and its disproportionate impact on women and girls in the Arab region, and to advocate for transformative care policies, ESCWA hosted an online information session for journalists from across the Arab region on the care economy and the importance of International Women's Day. Journalists were invited to raise awareness on unpaid care work and its effects on the economic inclusion of women and girls in the Arab region.

23. At the sixty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (New York, 11–22 March 2024), the Executive Secretary of ESCWA was the keynote speaker at a [high-level side event](#) on the theme "Closing the gap: women's empowerment in the Gulf Cooperation Council region", which was co-sponsored by the Gulf Cooperation Council.

24. Using data from Index Simulator for Policymakers (ISPAR), ESCWA issued two policy briefs within a policy series entitled "The contribution of development indices in closing the gender gap and advancing social and economic development". The policy series analyses how progress made in various aspects related to gender equality would affect countries' ranking and scores on prominent developmental indices, highlighting good experiences from the region. The first brief entitled "[Brief No.1: Women's economic participation in the Arab region: recent accomplishments and remaining barriers](#)" discusses the legal, structural and cultural barriers women face in joining the workforce, citing examples from various countries and their efforts to address these obstacles. Furthermore, it demonstrates how legal reforms and policy changes can improve women's economic empowerment and contribute to achieving the SDGs.

25. The second policy brief entitled "Brief No.2: Education in the Arab region: closing gaps to ensure that no child is left behind" (forthcoming) highlights the pivotal role of education for women and girls in fostering sustainable development and prosperity, emphasizing its transformative impact on societies and economies. It examines the progress made by Arab countries in enhancing educational access and achieving SDG 4, and identifies persisting disparities and barriers hindering universal educational attainment. Analysing gaps in educational access based on wealth, the rural-urban divide and gender, it explores targeted policy interventions and simulations using the ISPAR tool to illustrate potential improvements Arab countries can make on development indices.

26. ESCWA prepared a technical paper entitled "Empowering Arab women through wage equality: a comprehensive analysis of wage disparities and strategies for promoting equal pay in the Arab region" (forthcoming) to support member States formulate related policies. By analysing data from labour force surveys and labour market panel surveys, the technical paper examines factors contributing to wage gap disparities between men and women in six countries (Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, the Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen), while looking at educational attainment, work experience and discrimination. Key findings show that there is a positive correlation between educational attainment, work experience, job type and social characteristics, which impact the monthly and hourly wages of women. The technical paper also provides evidence that discrimination is a key factor in wage disparities.

## VI. Progress in supporting national women's machineries and integrating the concept of equality at the national level

27. To enhance the exchange of information and knowledge among national women's machineries, ESCWA developed an online [platform](#) for national women's machineries in the Arab region. The platform is a one-stop shop for relevant information, which supports the comparison of policies and strategies between Arab countries. The platform is also linked to ISPAR, allowing access to varied global data on gender equality, and the comparison of rankings within the region and beyond. It also offers an interactive tool to analyse the potential impact of specific policies on national rankings in selected international indices, including the Gender Gap Index.

## VII. Implementation of recommendations made by the Committee on Women at its eleventh session

28. The ESCWA secretariat implemented the activities set out in chapters I to VI of the present document, pursuant to the recommendations addressed to it by the Committee on Women at its eleventh session. The table below lists the recommendations and the materials published or the meetings held for their implementation. Paragraph numbers refer to the present document, and are provided as a reference for more information on each activity.

### Recommendations to the ESCWA secretariat by the Committee on Women at its eleventh session

Recommendations	Related Activities
<p>(a) Continue preparing studies and reports that contribute to developing the work of national women's machineries as part of the ESCWA areas of competence; and provide technical support at the request of countries, and in accordance with available resources, to translate the studies into policies and programmes that contribute to combating violence against women, estimating the economic costs of various forms of violence, implementing the women, peace and security agenda, promoting gender justice, protecting older women and women with disabilities, and strengthening women's economic participation;</p>	<p>Report entitled "<a href="#">Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab region</a>" (para. 6).</p> <p>Report entitled "<a href="#">Migration and climate change in the Arab region</a>" (para. 7).</p> <p><a href="#">Handbook on the Arab Gender Indicator Framework 2023</a> (para. 8).</p> <p>Technical paper entitled "Violence against women and girls with disability in the private and public spheres" (forthcoming) (para. 11).</p> <p>Policy brief entitled "<a href="#">War on Gaza: where everyone is left behind</a>" (para. 14).</p> <p>Technical paper entitled "Working toward disability inclusion in the women, peace and security agenda in the Arab region" (forthcoming) (para. 16).</p> <p>Policy brief entitled "<a href="#">Youth employment dynamics in Egypt: challenges and opportunities</a>" (para. 19).</p> <p>Flagship report entitled "<a href="#">Estimating the Economic Cost of Domestic Violence against Women in Jordan</a>" (para. 10).</p> <p>Policy brief entitled "<a href="#">Brief No.1: Women's economic participation in the Arab region: recent accomplishments and remaining barriers</a>" (para. 24).</p>

Recommendations	Related Activities
	<p>Policy brief entitled “Brief No.2: Education in the Arab region: closing gaps to ensure that no child is left behind” (forthcoming) (para. 25).</p> <p>Technical paper entitled “Empowering Arab women through wage equality: a comprehensive analysis of wage disparities and strategies for promoting equal pay in the Arab region” (forthcoming) (para. 26).</p>
<p>(b) Continue to support member States in the field of protecting girls and women who are living under occupation or in conditions of war, conflict or terrorism, or their repercussions, by adopting appropriate policies and programmes that have become urgent in view of the security conditions that the Arab region is experiencing, especially the State of Palestine;</p>	<p>Document E/ESCWA/C.7/2024/4 on technical cooperation activities, submitted to the Committee at its current session (provisional agenda item 5).</p>
<p>(c) Continue supporting Arab countries in preparing the periodic review of progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 30 years after their adoption, draft the regional report, and organize a high-level meeting before the twelfth session of the Committee on Women, which will be held exceptionally in 2024, to coordinate the regional position;</p>	<p>Document E/ESCWA/C.7/2024/8 on the regional review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 30 years in Arab countries, submitted to the Committee at its current session (provisional agenda item 10).</p>
<p>(d) Organize a training programme for members of the Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals on how to translate the concepts of women’s economic empowerment presented by the ESCWA secretariat at the current session into programmes related to the implementation of relevant SDGs and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action;</p>	<p>For more information on activities related to the training programme for Subcommittee members, see document E/ESCWA/C.7/2024/5 on supporting the Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals, submitted to the Committee at its current session (provisional agenda item 6).</p>
<p>(e) Monitor the legislative developments and achievements of member States, and update the electronic platform periodically to strengthen the transfer of experiences and provide learning opportunities;</p>	<p>On 10 December 2023, ESCWA and partners announced the results of the annual updates to the <a href="#">Gender Justice Portal</a> (para. 17).</p>
<p>(f) Support the exchange of experiences among member States on mechanisms for the prevention of and protection against sexual harassment, so as to translate existing legislation into clear procedures that contribute to women’s ability to confront violence;</p>	<p>ESCWA and partners launched a study entitled “<a href="#">Estimating the economic cost of child marriage in the Arab region</a>” (para. 12).</p> <p>Celebrating International Women’s Day with a webinar entitled “<a href="#">Care work in the Arab region: International Women's Day 2024</a>” (para. 22).</p>



Recommendations	Related Activities
	<p>Participating in the 16 days of activism campaign from 25 November to 10 December 2024 (para. 13).</p> <p>Regional meeting on “<a href="#">Role of parliamentarians in accelerating the achievement of women’s economic empowerment in the Arab region</a>” (para. 20).</p> <p>Webinar on South-South cooperation on <a href="#">SDG indicators 5.5.2, 8.3.1, 8.5.2 and 8.6.1</a> (para. 21).</p>
<p>(g) Provide national women’s machineries with information on the working method of the ESCWA technical cooperation programme, and on ways to submit requests for support through official channels approved by countries.</p>	<p>An information note on the United Nations Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation and ways to submit requests to the ESCWA secretariat through official channels to benefit from it was sent to national women’s machineries by email in November 2024, as part of advocacy efforts of the ESCWA secretariat on the Programme.</p>

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