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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 the ESCWA Committee on Women in its seventh session (Muscat, 20–21 January 2016). The request emphasized the significant role of national women's machineries in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The present document reviews the activities undertaken by ESCWA during the period 2022–2023, 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, based on the tasks, priorities and recommendations set out in the tenth session of the Committee on Women (Beirut, 16–17 November 2021).

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. Since its establishment, from its eighth session (Beirut, 4–5 October 2017) to its tenth session (Beirut, 16–17 November 2021), the Committee recommended continuing to support the Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals, and to provide the knowledge and tools needed to help member States implement SDG 5 and its targets.
3. The present document reviews the activities carried out in 2022–2023 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 members of the Subcommittee in implementing their tasks through a range of activities. The terms of reference of the Subcommittee include the following:

- (a) Providing member States with the tools and skills needed 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 and data collection capacities for reporting purposes;
- (d) Developing a roadmap that classifies gender-related targets of the 2030 Agenda and their related indicators into various interdisciplinary clusters, to facilitate implementation and review efforts, and to promote comparability of national indicators;
- (e) Establishing regional innovative mechanisms to share knowledge, experiences and best practices to advance gender equality;
- (f) Making recommendations to improve women's status in the region and promote their leadership in driving sustainable and inclusive growth;
- (g) Coordinating efforts to follow up on and review the implementation of the gender dimension of the 2030 Agenda at the national and regional levels.

5. The ESCWA Committee on Women, in its successive sessions since the formation of the Subcommittee, has recommended the secretariat to expand membership in the Subcommittee so as to include all interested Arab States, and to invite national women's machineries and other parties, such as national statistical offices, to participate in the Subcommittee's activities. 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. In its tenth session, the Committee recommended the secretariat to "continue issuing technical papers that contribute to developing knowledge and mechanisms, and formulating training programmes for members

of the Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals that include a focus on SDG 5 and other related Goals".

7. Meetings of the Committee in previous years provided opportunities for discussion among States to exchange experiences and strengthen national capacities on priority issues in the region, namely women's economic empowerment, unpaid care and care economies; gender equality and the law; the role of communication technology in the implementation of SDG 5; and the estimation of the cost of violence against women.

II. Activities to support the Subcommittee

8. To complement the efforts of ESCWA and its partners in supporting the Subcommittee since its formation, and guided by the action plan adopted at the Preparatory Meeting for the sixtieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (Beirut, 2–3 March 2016) and by the discussions and recommendations of the tenth session of the ESCWA Committee on Women, emphasis has been placed on capacity-building and the development of technical tools to support the Subcommittee in achieving its objectives.

9. A number of Subcommittee members participated in the periodic workshop organized virtually by ESCWA on 22 and 23 February 2022, in cooperation with the League of Arab States, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and the [Community of Practice on Voluntary National Reviews \(VNRs\)](#). [The sixth regional workshop on VNRs](#) explored mechanisms for mainstreaming gender equality issues in VNRs based on the [relevant guidelines](#), which were developed by ESCWA in 2019, in addition to the e-learning programme on mainstreaming a gender perspective in VNRs, available on the [ESCWA e-portal](#). Members of the Subcommittee also shared national experiences in mainstreaming gender equality in their VNRs.

10. On 27 and 28 June 2022, ESCWA, in partnership with the League of Arab States and UN-Women, organized a [regional meeting](#) to strengthen the capacities of the Subcommittee in the area of women's economic empowerment and care economies.

11. The meeting was held as part of efforts by ESCWA and its partners to advance progress in the implementation of SDG 5 with a focus on target 5.4, which calls to "recognize and value 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".

12. The meeting focused on exploring lessons learned in mainstreaming gender equality in the COVID-19 response in the Arab region by promoting care-related issues and policies, and presented the most prominent findings and recommendations to be pursued or adopted in future crisis response plans. Participants discussed topics including the development and reform of care and social protection policies to empower women economically and enhance their participation in the labour market. Case studies prepared in three Arab countries were also discussed (for more details, see E/ESCWA/C.7/2023/7(Part V) submitted to the current session of the Committee on Women under item 8 of the provisional agenda).

13. The meeting also touched on the various legal and policy frameworks in Arab countries. It explored ways to promote the care sector based on a clear vision that allows the redistribution of responsibility between the State, society and family members, allowing women to enter into and advance in the labour market in a more organized and effective manner.

14. In preparation for the periodic review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) thirty years after its adoption, ESCWA and its partners organized a [regional workshop](#) in Beirut on 21 and 22 June 2023, to strengthen the capacities of the Subcommittee members in conducting national reviews of progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action +30, set to begin in 2024.

15. The workshop aimed to assess member States' experiences in conducting national reviews of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action +25, examine lessons learned and challenges, and familiarize participants with the platforms and tools available to facilitate the preparation of national reports and provide the required data for their development. The workshop also served to consult member States on planning the national reviews and regional review process of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action +30, set to begin in October 2023; to maximize the use of this process to support the follow-up of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs; and to mainstream a gender perspective in the VNRs.

16. The workshop included refresher presentations on national review mechanisms related to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action +30 to support the follow-up of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. It also presented ESCWA tools for mainstreaming a gender perspective in the VNRs. The presentations focused on the interlinkages between the critical areas of concern of BPfA, the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda, including at the local level, and the principle of leaving no one behind, especially girls, women with disabilities, older women, and female migrants and refugees.

17. The workshop included a discussion on the available statistical platforms and tools to facilitate the preparation of national reports, including the Arab SDG Monitor, the Arab Gender Gap Report 2020: Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals, the conceptual framework for the development of national gender statistics programmes, the Gender Statistics Database, the technical paper on SDG frameworks in relation to vulnerable groups, and the National Gender Lens Pocketbook 2022.

18. The workshop provided an opportunity for members to exchange experiences in preparing national reviews, lessons learned, successes and challenges. Members suggested the best ways to ensure reviews were conducted through a holistic mechanism so as to yield participatory results that would pave the way for continued work and progress towards achieving gender equality. The workshop concluded with a roadmap for the next national and regional review process, which will conclude at the end of 2024 with a high-level meeting, and the Arab Declaration on Progress in the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 30 years, which will be presented with the regional report at the sixty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women to be held in New York in March 2025.

III. Conclusion

19. The Committee on Women is invited to review the efforts by ESCWA and its partners to provide technical support and build the capacities of the Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals, and to agree on the way forward in the coming years, particularly in terms of providing more technical support to enhance the work of the Subcommittee.
