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Gender-inclusive social protection for fostering women's economic empowerment

Summary

Comprehensive social protection is crucial for reducing poverty and gender disparities. While some progress has been made in developing social protection systems, a significant share of the world's population, particularly women, still lack access to any form of social protection. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the inadequacy of those social protection systems in meeting women's needs, calling attention to a lack of gender-sensitive measures.

Arab women face challenges in accessing pension schemes, and are more reliant on social assistance because many are excluded from formal employment. The present document explores the ability of social protection to promote women's economic empowerment, and provides promising examples and recommendations for incorporating a gender-inclusive approach to social protection. The Committee on Women is invited to review the present document and provide comments thereon.

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Introduction

1. Comprehensive social protection is a powerful tool that can be used to prevent and reduce poverty. It plays a vital role in tackling gender inequalities, addressing women's vulnerabilities, and promoting women's economic empowerment. Despite some progress in expanding social protection to leave no one behind, significant gaps still exist. A large share of the world's population, particularly women, lack access to any form of social protection.¹
2. Even though social protection systems have provided an indispensable response to the COVID-19 pandemic, evidence suggests that they have not adequately met women's needs in multiple countries.² The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN-Women report that the global response to the pandemic, in terms of social protection, the labour market and fiscal and economic measures, has largely ignored gender considerations, with only 32 per cent of the 4,968 measures identified as "gender-sensitive".³ Similarly, Arab countries presented an uneven COVID-19 gender response, with 34 per cent of the 317 measures found to be gender-sensitive.⁴
3. Access to social protection programmes, namely pension and health insurance, is predominantly linked to the ability to access formal employment. This implies that women who are part of the formal labour force are more likely to have access to pension schemes that provide a reliable source of income in their old age. However, the existing gender gap in access to pension schemes in the Arab region presents a different reality.
4. The exclusion of many women from the labour force has rendered them financially reliant and more susceptible to poverty, thereby increasing their need to receive other forms of social protection, particularly social assistance. Women do not only encounter difficulties in obtaining formal employment. They may also be obliged to remain at home to provide care for their children, older family members or persons with disabilities, because of a lack of available services or as a personal choice. Social protection systems have not systematically taken such realities into account, leaving numerous women without protection or future pensions.
5. The present document explores the various facets of social protection, highlighting its potential to be a catalyst for women's economic empowerment. It examines the current state of social protection in the Arab region, taking into account the importance of gender responsiveness, and showcases inspiring examples from both the region and other parts of the world. The document also emphasizes the importance of incorporating a gender-inclusive approach to social protection, and sets out key recommendations for member States to consider.

I. Role of social protection in advancing women's economic empowerment

6. Social protection is defined as a set of programmes and policies aimed at ensuring an adequate standard of living and access to health care throughout the life cycle. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reflect a human rights-based approach to social protection: target 1.3 seeks to implement nationally appropriate

¹ International Labour Organization (ILO), [World Social Protection Report 2020–2022](#), 2021.

² Available evidence indicates that policy responses did not consider the inequalities faced by women, and therefore failed to adequately address women's specific needs and concerns, particularly those related to care work and the labour market.

³ The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN-Women, [COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker global factsheet, version 3](#), 2020. These measures were focused on either enhancing women's economic security, addressing violence against women, or supporting unpaid care work.

⁴ UNDP and UN-Women, [COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, Factsheet: Arab States Region](#), 2021.

social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and achieve substantial coverage of poor and vulnerable groups by 2030; and SDG 5 emphasizes gender equality and women and girls' empowerment.⁵

7. Social protection systems make people and their families more resilient to economic, health and climate-related shocks. They empower individuals by increasing productive capacities and enhancing capabilities. Operationally, social protection systems are structured around programmes or schemes, and include institutions that provide consistency and coherence. These systems⁶ provide income security and access to health care through a mix of contributory and non-contributory mechanisms, and encompass the following:

(a) Social insurance programmes are contributory programmes in which participants receive income support, compensation or protection from life-cycle risks in exchange for regular payments by workers and/or employers. The programmes cover a range of contingencies by providing old-age, disability, survivor, sickness, maternity/paternity, health-care, unemployment, and family/child benefits. These benefits are typically limited to formal employees and their dependents. Efforts are being made in many low-income and middle-income countries to expand the coverage of these schemes, so as to include informal workers and other vulnerable groups who are currently excluded from programmes covering formal employees;⁷

(b) Social assistance programmes consist of non-contributory forms of support that are often intended for poor and vulnerable segments. These include cash transfers, vouchers, in-kind support, non-contributory (or social) pensions, and school feeding. These programmes can be universal or targeted towards specific groups, and are either conditional or unconditional. While cash transfers can play a significant role in helping poor households cope with risks and shocks, they are insufficient to transform poverty on their own. Effective cash transfer systems should be well targeted, responsive to changing circumstances, and complemented with graduation strategies to help recipients eventually transition off the programme;

(c) Active labour market policies (ALMPs) are government-initiated programmes aimed at enhancing opportunities for income generation and skill development. These policies can be considered as social protection if they are targeted towards social assistance beneficiaries or tailored according to their needs. ALMPs examples that are relevant from a social protection perspective include micro-credit programmes, job-search services, public work programmes, coaching or training for entrepreneurs, promoting labour market participation, and ensuring minimum employment standards. When ALMPs exclusively address beneficiaries of social assistance programmes, they are often called graduation programmes. These programmes can provide a package of support for a specific duration to improve livelihoods, and help individuals escape poverty and become self-sufficient with a stable income. These packages can include transfers of productive assets and other resources, coaching or training of micro-entrepreneurs, and skills development.

8. Social protection systems have the potential to improve the lives of women, their families and communities, provided that they take into account gender dynamics and respond to the daily realities and needs of women. When designed, implemented and monitored in a gender-responsive manner, social protection systems can significantly impact women's empowerment and opportunities by improving their access to and control over income and assets, upgrading their social networks, and enhancing their status in the social, economic and political spheres.⁸ They can challenge discriminatory norms and power structures by supporting

⁵ Discussions on the topics of gender and social protection mainly focus on women's duties as caregivers and on support for unpaid care and domestic work (SDG target 5.4). However, this objective alone is not enough to drive greater investment in gender-transformative social protection policies. To make progress in advancing gender-sensitive social protection, it is essential to view women not only as mothers and carers, but also as rightful recipients of social protection.

⁶ In addition, public services and infrastructure (such as easily accessible, reasonably priced and high-quality childcare, health care, education, and social care services and infrastructure, like public transport and clean drinking water) are often indispensable to fully utilize social protection benefits. For instance, a cash transfer programme that encourages the use of health and education services should be reinforced by investments in the quality and accessibility of those services.

⁷ Rebecca Holmes and Lucy Scott, [Extending social insurance to informal workers: a gender analysis](#), 2016.

⁸ On the other hand, gender-blind or gender unaware systems and schemes can perpetuate gender inequality and risk exacerbating the intersecting forms of discrimination women face.

gender equality more explicitly, thus ultimately transforming women's outcomes. However, most social protection programmes in lower-income and middle-income countries have paid little attention to the multiple needs of women and gendered life cycle risks. As a result, women often tend to be excluded from social protection.⁹

Box 1. National social protection strategies and gender priorities

National strategies for social protection can play a crucial role in shaping gender-sensitive systems. Like other strategic planning documents, such as national development plans, these strategies demonstrate a country's dedication to social development, and outline a vision for its accomplishment through different aspects of a social protection system. National strategies for social protection usually include evaluating risks and vulnerabilities, examining the strengths and weaknesses of current social protection mechanisms, and identifying priorities for enhancing their accessibility and effectiveness.^a

The UN-Women indicator framework^b showed that very few Arab countries, such as the Comoros, Djibouti, Jordan, Mauritania and Somalia, have dedicated social protection strategies. The strategy of the Sudan is pending approval. Most existing strategies only implicitly recognize gendered risks and vulnerabilities, and do not include specific measures to address such risks. Furthermore, most strategies do not sufficiently incorporate a gender perspective, and fail to prioritize gender equality and women's empowerment as central objectives of social protection.

^a UN-Women, [Putting gender equality at the centre of social protection strategies in sub-Saharan Africa: How far have we come?](#), 2021.

^b UN-Women, [Towards gender-responsive social protection strategies: A four-step checklist](#), 2021.

II. Importance of social protection for Arab women

9. Despite considerable efforts made by Arab countries to reform and strengthen their social protection systems over the past few decades, social protection spending in the Arab region is low compared with other parts of the world. On average, Arab countries allocate less than 5 per cent of their gross domestic product towards social protection, excluding health (with significant differences across countries). Meanwhile, Governments have increasingly focused their efforts on poverty-targeted cash transfers.

10. The unfortunate reality in the Arab region is that many countries still lack effective and transparent social protection systems. Available data¹⁰ on the percentage of people covered by at least one social protection benefit indicate low social protection coverage in the Arab region, at about 35 per cent with significant variations across Arab countries, which is significantly lower than the world's average of about 47 per cent. The COVID-19 pandemic has also revealed fundamental gaps in social protection systems across the Arab region.¹¹

11. Social insurance in the region is far from comprehensive and primarily tends to cater to public and formal private sector workers,¹² thereby reducing its impact and sustainability. Individuals who are informally employed, unemployed or outside the labour market are excluded from employment-related social protection.¹³

⁹ Rebecca Holmes and Nicola Jones, *Gender and social protection in the developing world: beyond mothers and safety nets*, 2013; Rebecca Holmes and others, [The politics of gender-responsive social protection](#), 2019.

¹⁰ Data on social protection coverage are scarce, and statistics on social protection coverage depend on partial information available in some countries.

¹¹ Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), [The COVID-19 Pandemic in the Arab Region: An Opportunity to Reform Social Protection Systems](#), 2022.

¹² Social insurance schemes for private sector workers provide protection only for a limited range of risks and contingencies (Source: ILO, [World Social Protection Report 2020–2022](#), 2021).

¹³ ILO, [Social Security in the Arab States](#), 2021.

There is also a significant gender gap in access to contributory social insurance in the region, and women-specific social protection needs are often unmet.

12. Overall, the female labour force participation rate in the Arab region is low, and the number of women engaged in formal employment is even lower. This is because most Arab women are economically inactive or mostly concentrated in the most vulnerable forms of informal employment. However, informality rates are lower among women than men, especially in middle-income countries, owing to the high absorption of women in public sector employment.¹⁴ In contrast, women working in the private sector are more likely to be in diverse and precarious work arrangements, without social insurance. Women are also time-poor as they receive the lion's share of unpaid care work and family responsibilities, hindering their ability to enter and advance in the formal paid workforce. Consequently, women have a lower participation rate in contributory systems.¹⁵

13. Within the region, there is a noticeable gender imbalance in contributory pension programmes, with women having a lower probability of reaping the rewards compared with men. Available data from four Arab countries reveal that the percentage of women receiving old-age pensions through social insurance is consistently lower than that of men. For instance, in Tunisia, only 14 per cent of older women are covered by pensions compared with 86 per cent of older men. In Jordan, the figures stand at 17 per cent for older women and 83 per cent for older men. Bahrain and Kuwait exhibit similar disparities, recording pension coverage rates for older women of 25 and 37 per cent, respectively, compared with 75 and 63 per cent for older men.¹⁶

14. This gender imbalance is partly attributed to the fact that pension insurance schemes are linked to formal long-term stable waged employment.¹⁷ In theory, policymakers have a wider range of innovative and comprehensive social protection policy design options at their disposal to ensure responsiveness to the various economically valuable roles that women play in society. Next to facilitating women's uptake of formal employment, policy reforms must focus on extending the reach of contributory and non-contributory old-age protection programmes, such as social pensions, to a more comprehensive range of workers, including self-employed, part-time, temporary or informal workers, and provide more equal access to contributory old-age pensions for women.

Box 2. Addressing gender gaps in access to pension insurance benefits in Canada

Old-age insurance schemes that assume uninterrupted and full-time formal employment in their design can negatively impact women, who often have disrupted work histories and lower earnings. To address this, pension schemes may consider periods of childcare when determining pensions. For instance, the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) has provisions for primary caregivers who have lower earnings or have stopped working to raise children under 7 years old. These individuals can request to have these periods excluded from the calculation of their basic pension, so as to receive a higher benefit. The CPP benefit has two components: the basic pension (25 per cent of lifetime average earnings) and the enhanced pension (8.33 per cent of additional average earnings). The enhanced component also provides pension credits for months with lower earnings, based on the average earnings in the five years before the birth or adoption of a child.

Source: Government of Canada, [Child-rearing provisions](#), 2023.

¹⁴ For example, in Jordan, the informality rate among employed men is 57 per cent compared with only 36 per cent for women. The pattern is similar in Egypt and the State of Palestine (Source: <https://ilostat.ilo.org/>).

¹⁵ ESCWA, however, notes that the proportion of women benefiting from and contributing to pension schemes is increasing slowly, at least in some countries, even if from very low levels (Source: ESCWA, [Population and Development Report Issue No. 9](#), 2022).

¹⁶ ESCWA, [Inequality in the Arab region: A ticking time bomb](#), 2022.

¹⁷ In its 2015 report entitled "[Protecting women's income security in old age](#)", UN-Women states that the connection between labour market participation and pension benefits is strong, resulting in women having fewer entitlements owing to lower average contributions and earlier retirement ages (in some contexts). In addition, women are disproportionately impacted by a decrease in pension benefits over time, as they tend to live longer than men.

15. Maternity provisions are essential for providing financial stability to women and their families, and ensuring women's equal access to employment. These provisions, however, are largely inadequate in the Arab region. Arab countries typically provide for paid maternity leave only as an employer liability, and not as part of their social insurance schemes. Evidence shows that employer-liability-based maternity schemes offer limited protection to women owing to weak enforcement. They negatively impact women by placing financial burdens on employers, leading to reluctance in hiring, retaining or promoting female employees. Maternity schemes based on employer liability also act as a barrier for employers to hire women of reproductive age to avoid bearing the cost of their maternity leave, thus contributing to the low rate of female participation in the workforce. In contrast, schemes based on social security are more likely to promote positive outcomes for hiring women workers.¹⁸

Box 3. Jordan boosts maternity protection of female employees

Recognizing the significance of maternity cash benefits in promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment, Jordan became the first country in the region to switch from employer-liability mechanisms to collectively funded social insurance, which includes financing for childcare as part of the maternity insurance scheme. According to the 2014 Social Security Law No. (1), the governmental Social Security Corporation (SSC) in Jordan funds maternity insurance through employer contributions from both male and female wages. In 2020, Jordan approved Regulation No. (93) of 2020 on Maternity Social Protection under the Social Security Law, which allows working mothers to return to work while ensuring childcare for their children either at a childcare centre or at home for the first six months after the end of their maternity leave.

In 2021, ILO^a evaluated the maternity insurance scheme and found that the Social Security Law in Jordan had been effective in retaining women in the workforce. The study showed that all surveyed women who were covered by maternity insurance had returned to the same job and received the same wage after their maternity leave. Moreover, the Social Security Law was found to mitigate gender discrimination in recruitment, provide women with time to recover mentally and physically from their pregnancy and to care for their newborns, and empower them to make financial decisions for their households.

^a ILO, [Assessment of the Maternity Insurance in Jordan](#), 2021.

16. Existing tax-financed social assistance programmes in the Arab region have proven to be insufficient to fill the significant gaps left by social insurance schemes, given their fragmented nature, limited coverage, and low benefit levels. Such systems currently only cater to less than a third (about 24 per cent) of vulnerable people in Arab countries.¹⁹ For this reason, women rely more heavily on social assistance support (cash transfers). Research conducted on social protection of the middle-class in Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia suggests a substantially higher reliance of female-headed households on non-contributory social assistance transfers compared with male-headed households, and a lower likelihood of having one household member actively contributing to a social insurance scheme.²⁰ In Egypt, women represent 74 per cent of beneficiaries in the *Takaful* and *Karama* programmes, while in Jordan and Saudi Arabia, they represent 60 per cent of recipients in both the National Aid Fund's monthly cash transfers and Social Security Benefits, respectively.²¹ These programmes have certain gender-specific features, but the actual impact of such measures is complicated to evaluate. Evidence suggests that cash-based interventions in specific social assistance designs, like conditional

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ ILO, [World Social Protection Report 2020–2022](#), 2021.

²⁰ Irene Selwaness and Marco Schaefer, *Social protection and the middle-class: evidence from Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia*, 2023.

²¹ Households headed by females are more vulnerable and tend to face multiple disadvantages, and are thus prioritized, partly owing to gender-focused targeting approaches.

cash transfers that target women, may add to women's burden by reinforcing traditional gender roles,²² but they may also enhance their economic empowerment.

Box 4. *Takaful* and *Karama*: pro-women cash transfer programmes in Egypt

In Egypt, *Takaful* and *Karama* are both targeted cash transfer programmes that aim to increase the consumption of individuals and households living in poverty. Both programmes identify entitled applicants using proxy means testing in ways that do not penalize women who work, and that recognize family poverty as a basis for individual entitlements.

Takaful (Solidarity) is a family income support programme with co-responsibility (conditional cash transfer programme), aimed at reducing poverty and improving human development. Beneficiaries are awarded monthly transfers contingent upon children (aged 6 to 18 years) achieving 80 per cent school attendance, mothers and children below 6 years old attending four visits a year to health clinics, and mothers maintaining child growth records and attending nutrition awareness sessions. In contrast, the *Karama* (Dignity) programme provides unconditional income support to older persons (above 65 years old), persons with disabilities, and orphans.

As at June 2022, a total of 3.69 million households were enrolled under *Takaful* and *Karama* (approximately 13 million individuals), with women representing 74 per cent of direct beneficiaries.^a Under these programmes, cash benefits are always distributed to the mother in the household, so as to empower women and strengthen their position within their families. As a result, these programmes have been proven to mitigate poverty and increase human capital. An independent impact evaluation^b has revealed impressive effects on women's empowerment, whereby women's decision-making ability has been positively affected by targeted transfers, which have enhanced their ability to make spending decisions.

^a World Bank, [New world bank financing will expand and strengthen Egypt's flagship social protection program](#), 2022.

^b International Food Policy Research Institute, [Impact evaluation study for Egypt's Takaful and Karama cash transfer program](#), 2018.

17. Non-contributory old-age pensions are not common in the region. However, countries that provide them, such as Bahrain and Oman, have found them to be beneficial for ensuring income security for women in their old age.²³ Moreover, in several Arab countries, most working poor are not eligible for either social assistance programmes (aimed at the extremely poor) or social insurance programmes (intended for the formally employed).

Box 5. Social assistance old-age pensions provide income security for women in South Africa

Tax-financed old-age or social pensions can be an effective tool for ensuring a basic income for women who do not qualify for a contributory pension. Studies show that access to social pensions, such as the South African Old Age Grant, can improve women's household decision-making power.^a The Old Age Grant is a means-tested social pension for people over 60 years old, with a varying amount between 1,980 South African rand (R) (around \$114) for those up to 75 years old, and R 2,000 (around \$115) for those older than 75. Most recipients of the Old Age Grant in South Africa are women (more than 60 per cent), likely owing to their longer life expectancy and lower income and savings.

Source: Ingrid Woolard, The role of social grants in economically enabling South African women, 2022, In: Anita Bosch (ed.): *Women's Report 2022: Women and fiscal policy*, pp. 20–23. Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University.

^a Kate Ambler, [Bargaining with grandma: the impact of the South African pension on household decision-making](#), 2016.

²² UN-Women, [The effect of cash-based interventions on gender outcomes in development and humanitarian settings](#), 2019.

²³ ILO, [World Social Protection Report 2020–2022](#), 2021.

18. In terms of labour market policies, active measures that promote the integration of persons in the labour market, and passive measures that protect the incomes of underemployed or unemployed persons, are often coupled with existing social protection programmes.

19. In Tunisia, an economic empowerment programme for poor and low-income households and persons with disabilities was launched in September 2022.²⁴ It provides financing for social assistance beneficiaries and persons with disabilities who choose to implement their business ideas under the AMEN social cash transfer programme, while giving priority to women, higher education graduates, and holders of vocational training diplomas. Local social affair bodies follow up regularly with projects that have been awarded funding, so as to help overcome obstacles and suggest support mechanisms.

20. In Egypt, *Takaful* and *Karama* beneficiaries (box 2) are eligible for support under the *Forsa* programme, implemented by the Ministry of Social Solidarity. The programme aims to empower beneficiaries by helping them transition from a state of reliance on cash transfers to a state of financial independence through sustainable income generation. The programme achieves this goal by focusing on rural activities and women, offering wage employment and assets that facilitate sustainable income generation, and providing technical and financial support. In collaboration with local non-governmental organizations, *Forsa* has conducted behavioural change trainings to introduce the programme and encourage economic inclusion activities. As a result, over 60,000 women have been reached, and around 4,000 have received assets to sustain their livelihoods.²⁵

Box 6. Supporting working mothers through complementary services and transfers in Ethiopia and Mexico

The Mexican support for the welfare of children of working mothers programme (*Apoyo Para El Bienestar De Las Niñas Y Niños Hijos De Madres Trabajadoras*) provides up to 3,600 pesos (approximately \$183) in monthly cash assistance to working mothers and vulnerable single fathers. It aims to improve access to care and education for children under 6 years old, and to encourage parents' participation in the workforce. Its predecessor, the federal day care programme for working mothers (*Estancias Infantiles para Apoyar a Madres Trabajadoras*), heavily subsidized public childcare for low-income mothers. It enhanced women's employment and created paid jobs for care providers through grants to individuals and civil society organizations that establish and run childcare services, primarily benefiting women.^a

The Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) in Ethiopia is a public employment programme that offers free on-site childcare to support the participation of women in the labour market. PSNP supports households that are vulnerable to environmental shocks and food insecurity, accommodates women's care responsibilities by offering more flexible attendance hours, and provides direct cash assistance to women during pregnancy and breastfeeding for up to 10 months. Impact evaluations and gender-focused reviews have shown that PSNP has led to significant improvements in food security for female-headed households, and has reduced financial pressure on families to marry off girls. It has also improved education opportunities for girls.^b

^a Sriani Ameratunga Kring, *Gender in employment policies and programmes: What works for women?* Employment Working Paper No. 235, 2017.

^b Maja Gavrilovic and others, *Child marriage and Ethiopia's productive safety net program: Analysis of protective pathways in the Amhara region*. Innocenti Research Report No. 83, 2020; Jones, Nicola, "Gender and Social Protection", 2021, in: Esther Schüring and Markus Loewe (eds.): *Handbook on Social Protection Systems*, Elgar Handbooks in Social Policy and Welfare. Cheltenham: Elgar, pp. 337–348; International Aid Transparency Initiative, *Ethiopia productive safety net programme (PSNP): performance and conclusions*, 2015.

²⁴ ILO, [Government of Tunisia Decree No. 2022-715 of 20 September 2022](#), 2022.

²⁵ World Bank, [Egypt: job creation and affordable housing are vital to women's empowerment](#), 2023.

III. ESCWA comprehensive model on social protection in the Arab region

21. ESCWA supports member States in promoting social protection systems that are inclusive, equitable and responsive to the needs of different population groups, including women. To this end, ESCWA provides technical assistance in the form of research, detailed analysis, and policy guidance to support the development and implementation of inclusive social protection policies and programmes. ESCWA also promotes regional cooperation and coordination on social protection, and works to enhance the monitoring and evaluation of social protection initiatives in the region.

22. ESCWA has developed a practical tool to assess the effectiveness of existing national social protection programmes in the region. The Social Protection Programme – Rapid Assessment Framework (SPP-RAF) enables policymakers and government officials to undertake a fast and low-cost evaluation of national social protection programmes, so as to improve their efficiency and expand coverage to those most in need. The tool seeks to better understand the effectiveness of national social protection programmes by identifying the characteristics and needs of beneficiaries, how to target them, how to minimize inclusion and exclusion errors, and how to support beneficiaries in graduating from social assistance.

23. ESCWA also offers several tools to accurately identify individuals who are most in need of social assistance. As most social assistance programmes target extremely poor and vulnerable populations in Arab countries, these tools support efforts to identify low-income households and the potential beneficiaries of social assistance programmes.

Box 7. Improved targeting of potential beneficiaries

ESCWA developed the following tools to support member States in identifying the population groups that are suffering from money-metric or multidimensional poverty, and that need to be targeted through improved social protection schemes:

(a) The Money-Metric Poverty Assist Tool (MPAT): MPAT is an online tool that calculates monetary poverty levels using money-based metrics in an easy-to-use manner. It provides poverty estimates for national subregions, groups of economies, or individual economies over time using different poverty lines. The tool also showcases poverty trends and changes, and allows users to predict monetary poverty until 2030 based on varying economic and policy scenarios;

(b) The Multidimensional Poverty Index Assist Tool (MAT): The MAT platform offers a tailored national multidimensional poverty index for policymakers in areas such as education, health, housing, living standards, and access to services. MAT helps countries assess multidimensional poverty within their populations using microdata surveys. It facilitates progress tracking, the simulation of development impacts, and the implementation of regional and temporal comparisons. In addition, ESCWA has integrated an optimization module into MAT to assist policymakers in selecting the most effective poverty reduction strategies, given limited resources. The tool allows policymakers to tackle multidimensional poverty in a targeted and feasible manner.

Source: Compiled by ESCWA.

24. ESCWA supports Arab Governments in introducing and enhancing their graduation strategies for social assistance beneficiaries to move out of poverty and transition to the labour market. For instance, ESCWA is currently supporting the National Aid Fund (NAF), which is the main entity responsible for social protection in Jordan, to enhance its graduation approach in facilitating the transition to dignified livelihood opportunities, in line with the National Social Protection Strategy (2019–2025) in Jordan. The Strategy not only provides cash assistance, but also supports beneficiaries in transitioning to the labour market through graduation strategies. ESCWA has analysed the Jordanian labour market by utilizing its Skills Monitor, which tracks all job advertisements in the country by job title, skill requirement, and any unintentional gender or disability bias. Using its Skills Monitor, ESCWA developed an up-to-date picture of labour market demand and established a

template to measure labour market supply, including social assistance beneficiaries' skillsets and work experience. ESCWA and NAF intend to use their analysis of labour market demand and supply to match social assistance beneficiaries with private sector job opportunities, and to address any skills mismatch through specifically designed training programmes. These initiatives should increase beneficiaries' employability and chances of obtaining decent employment, so as to move out of poverty and stop receiving social assistance.

IV. Recommendations and priority actions for promoting gender-equitable social protection and empowering women

25. Advancing gender-sensitive social protection is more likely when countries adopt and fortify effective policies and enforceable laws for promoting gender equality and empowering women, take a comprehensive approach to address deep-rooted structural issues, and remove multiple barriers to women's economic participation. The following recommendations should be considered by countries to move in the right direction:

- Promote women's access to the formal labour market and their membership in contributory social protection schemes, like pensions and social health insurance.
- Consider a broad-based introduction of tax-financed social pensions for women who did not contribute to contributory pensions in the formal sector.
- Establish more coherent and effective social protection systems, and consider gender differences in the identification of needs and access to social protection.
- Invest in gender-responsive social protection systems by considering gender-specific risks, economic and social vulnerabilities, and multiple and overlapping disadvantages.
- Foster women's economic empowerment by including gender equality objectives in programme design, implementation and outcomes.
- Adopt an inclusive and gender-responsive policy approach in the region.
- Reform social protection systems to address structural barriers and ensure that social protection interventions are gender sensitive, starting by assessing the extent to which gender equality considerations are present in national social protection strategies across the region.
- Extend social protection to previously uncovered groups, including informally employed women workers, by introducing policies that customize contributory social insurance to the income patterns of diversified occupational groups in the informal sector, while ensuring that informal workers have access to non-contributory social protection.
- Promote transformative outcomes through social protection programmes, by scaling up graduation approaches that support skill development and women's labour market participation.
- Adopt a participatory process involving national ministries, which focuses on engaging national women's machineries, commissions or other agencies working towards gender equality and women's empowerment, international agencies, and gender-focused civil society organizations.
- Strengthen the evidence/statistical knowledge base on social protection in the Arab region, with improved data disaggregation and quality. Member States should ensure that data collection and analysis consider gender differences and implications, and should use gender data to inform decision-making.
- Invest in gendered poverty and vulnerability assessments to improve social protection effectiveness, and monitor the gender equality outcomes of all social protection programmes.
- Improve institutional capacity and national administrative and delivery structures of social protection systems, and ensure robust accountability mechanisms, including participatory monitoring and evaluation frameworks and grievance and redress mechanisms.

- Ensure adequate and gender-responsive financing by closing social protection financing gaps in sustainable and equitable ways.
- Increase the fiscal space by considering a diversity of financing mechanisms based on national and international solidarity, such as reallocating resources, enhancing spending efficiency, raising additional revenue for social protection interventions, and mobilizing global financial support to expand social protection systems.
