

Regional meeting to strengthen the Sub-Committee's capacity on gender equality
"Women's economic empowerment and access to decent work"
UN-House, Beirut on 09 – 10 July 2024

Concept note

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in partnership with the League of Arab States and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), is organizing a regional meeting to strengthen the Subcommittee's capacity on gender equality in women's economic empowerment and access to decent work on 09 – 10 July 2024.

Background

Economic empowerment is a cornerstone of gender equality that refers both to the ability to succeed and advance economically, and to the power to make and act on economic decisions. Women's economic empowerment is a right that is essential for realizing gender equality and achieving broader development goals, such as economic growth, poverty reduction, and improvements in health, education and social well-being. Women make up 50 per cent of the world's population, but account for only 37 per cent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP).¹ This means that, in general, women are not reaching their full potential in terms of their contribution to the global economy.

As the world embarks on reviewing the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action after 30 years, countries progress in implementing (1) inclusive development, shared prosperity, and decent work; and (2) poverty eradication, social protection and social services takes particular importance in the Arab region as many countries consistently ranks at the bottom of global indices on women's engagement in the economic sphere. The Arab region registers low in the Global Gender Gap Index due mainly to low rates of women's participation in the labour force. Women's labour force participation dropped to 18 per cent in 2021,² a decline partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, regardless of the pandemic's impact, the region continues to underperform in that indicator, despite relatively high female primary school enrolment (94 per cent)³ and moderate secondary school enrolment (71 per cent) in 2020,⁴ and the region's tireless efforts to promote such participation with positive impacts on societies and economies.

The Sub-Committee on Women, composed of representatives of national machineries for the advancement of women in Member States, was formed to support efforts to implement sustainable development goal 5 on gender equality, based on the recommendations of the ESCWA Women's Commission at its seventh session, held in Muscat on 20 and 21 January 2016. In the next regional meeting, the sub-committee will consider areas that can influence women's ability to realize their full potential and increase their economic empowerment, by heightening their sense of safety, expanding their choices, and increasing their access to and control over resources. The areas to be discussed include safe transportation, addressing sexual harassment, legislative reforms for economic empowerment, access to land, property and immovable assets and women's entrepreneurship, gender-inclusive social protection, and the advancement of care policies.

¹ McKinsey Global Institute, The power of parity: how advancing women's equality can add \$12 trillion to global growth –executive summary, 2015.

² World Bank, Labor force participation rate, female (% of female population ages 15+) (modeled ILO estimate) - Middle East and North Africa.

³ World Bank, School enrollment, primary, female (% gross) – Arab world.

⁴ World Bank, School enrollment, secondary, female (% gross) – Arab world

The topic of the regional meeting responds to requests from member states during ESCWA eleventh committee on women, held in Beirut, Lebanon in October 2023, which states: “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.”

ESCWA, the League of Arab States and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality, seeks to discuss in depth the topic of women's economic empowerment to keep abreast of Arab States' efforts to promote women's economic empowerment by providing them with the knowledge, skills and tools that contribute to (a) the reality of women’s economic empowerment; and (b) good practices for enhancing women’s economic empowerment focusing on safe access to resources and opportunities, and safety. Thus, partners will organize a regional meeting aimed at strengthening the Sub-Committee's capacities on women’s economic empowerment and access to decent work.

The meeting will include presentations on a wide array of topics and best practices related to increasing women’s safety and access to decent work. It will provide tools related to economic empowerment policies. It will allow for hands-on sessions with active training opportunities and enable the exchange of lessons and experiences between participants with the goal of participants having a strengthened understanding of the current state of women’s economic empowerment, and of how to advance the necessary policies to strengthen women’s economic empowerment in their state.

Participation

Participants in the meeting are Members of the Subcommittee on Gender Equality representing national machineries for the advancement of women, in addition to representatives of ministries of labour and national social protection institutions.

Language

Arabic is used during the meeting with sign language when registering for this service.

Time and place

The meeting will be held at the United Nations House in Beirut on 09 – 10 July 2024 in accordance with the annexed agenda.

Proposed Agenda

Day I: Tuesday 09 July 2024	
08:30: 09:00	Registration
09:00 – 09:30	Opening remarks ESCWA LAS UN Women Objective, Agenda, and introduction of participants
09:30 – 11:15	Introduction to economic empowerment and decent work <i>Focus on guiding international frameworks, particularly the Beijing Declaration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Presentation by ILO on decent work and the informal economy ▪ Presentation by UN Women on the women’s engagement in the Green and Blue economies ▪ Private sector perspective (H.E. Nadia Al Saeed. CEO of Bank Al Etihad -Jordan) ▪ Group discussion on emerging challenges: gender norms and economic empowerment; the MENA Paradox; etc.
11:15 – 11:30	Coffee Break
11:30 – 13:00	Understanding the reality of economic empowerment and decent labour Looking at the national level: Presentation of a proposed approach and some tools available to understand and analyse the reality of economic empowerment at the state-level to identify priorities and changes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Economic Country Profiles (Presentation by League of Arab States) ▪ ISPAR as a tool to understand the economic empowerment impact on countries’ ranking and scores on international indices. ▪ Member State economic empowerment self-assessment and preparation of post-it notes (current economic empowerment challenges, achievements, and goals) and presentation.
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch Break
14:00 – 15:30	Access to land, property and immovable assets and women’s entrepreneurship and good practices Examining how access to land contributes to women access to markets – ESCWA presentation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Presentation on key findings from some Arab countries ▪ Mini ‘pop quiz’ at the end of the session
Day II: Wednesday 10 July 2024	
09:00 – 11:00	Unpaid Care Work

	<p><i>The session will examine unpaid care work and examine key challenges women face in juggling their dual paid and unpaid responsibilities and discuss some of the possible solutions from the region and beyond.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Watch ILO video on the care economy. ▪ Challenges faced by women in unpaid care work and good practices by countries such as Lebanon, Morocco, Oman and Saudi Arabia – Presentation by Rouba Araja, Social Affairs Officer, ESCWA ▪ The role of men in unpaid care and domestic work in the Arab region: An overview, lessons learned and the way forward – Presentation by Rodrigo Montero Cano, Regional Programme Manager, UN Women
11:00 – 11:15	Coffee Break
11:15 – 12:15	<p>Addressing sexual harassment in the public sphere and the workplace <i>The session will look into measures taken to address sexual harassment as a deterring factor and initiatives to address this at the national level.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Presentation on key challenges and solutions to address sexual harassment in the public sphere and workplace. – ESCWA presentation ▪ <i>Experiences from countries: Lebanon</i>
12:15 – 13:15	<p>Safe, accessible, efficient and affordable transport systems <i>Enablers of women’s economic empowerment and good practices, with a focus on Leaving No One Behind</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Access to transportation in the Arab Region– ESCWA presentation ▪ Scenario exercise on adding or improving a public transportation system in participants’ capital cities.
13:15 – 14:15	Lunch Break
14:15 – 15:30	<p>Inclusive social protection policies <i>Discussion on social protection systems in the region and measures to ensure that women are benefiting equally.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gender Inclusive social protection for fostering women’s economic empowerment – ESCWA presentation
15:30 – 16:00	Evaluation and Closing session