



Inter-regional Interactive Dialogue on: Implementing Beijing+25 Commitments in the Context of COVID-19 and Towards Beijing +30
Platform (Zoom)
2 – 3 November 2021

Concept Note

Background and Justification

On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), in 2020 Member States from the region submitted national reviews; and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in partnership and close collaboration with UN-Women's Regional Office for Arab States (UN Women ROAS), League of Arab States (LAS) and the Arab Women's Organisation submitted a regional review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the BPfA since the previous five years.

The BPfA reporting period demonstrated positive gains on gender equality and women's empowerment across the region particularly on gender policies, laws and strategies as outlined in the [Arab Declaration on Progress in the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 years \(Amman, 28 November 2019\)](#). Examples include continuous revision of legislation to ensure eliminating discrimination based on sex, the adoption of National Action Plans on Security Council Resolution 1325 and an increased number of women in political positions especially positions not traditionally held by women, such as Trade and Industry, Planning and Economic Development, Defense, Foreign Affairs and Speaker of the House. Furthermore, some countries, such as Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and the UAE have started to adopt **gender** quotas (voluntary parity quotas, reserved seats and legislated gender quotas) to increase women's political representation.

Yet, comparatively across regions the Arab states remains one of lowest regions in the world on key gender development indices such as: Gender Gap Index and the World Economic Forum. In the 2020 [Gender Inequality Index](#), the region scored (0.611 as compared to the global average of 0.685), evidencing the region's performance across four subindices illustrated below.

International processes provide countries with the opportunity to take stock of success made against set criteria, examine progress made and challenges to be addressed. The national, regional and global BPfA reviews after twenty-five years of implementation provided such an opportunity for Member States in consultation with key stakeholders from civil society, private sector and academia. Along with identifying gaps and to take stock of gaps and progress, the Beijing +25 review process and associated outcomes helped to identify **key accelerators** to drive the implementation of the BPfA towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals Agenda 2030 and SDG5 in particular.

As a result, the key accelerators identified by Member States and articulated in the Arab Declaration on Progress in the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 years included several accelerators:

- Develop the work of national women's machineries and equip them with the necessary tools and resources;
- Develop gender-disaggregated data and data systems for national strategies;

- Continue effective monitoring of progress in the implementation of the Beijing Platform;
- Continue joint action, regional partnerships, and programmes to improve the status of women;
- Continue legislative reform to address discrimination against women and girls, including legislative and policy frameworks to address violence against women and girls (VAWG);
- Strengthen implementation of UN Security Council resolutions pertaining to women and girls affected by conflict, and develop national plans and strategies accordingly;
- Address negative social norms and stereotypes concerning the role of women;
- Review social protection policies for greater inclusion;
- Provide essential services to the survivors of VAWG;
- Ensure rural and urban women benefit equally from development programmes; and
- Ensure women's access to leadership positions in the public and private sectors, including as members of the judiciary.

These regional priorities align and resonate with the global B+25 review which also calls for inter alia the strengthening and prioritization of actions particularly: *gender-responsive institutions; and the production, analysis and use of gender statistics and data* through an integrated approach.

Nonetheless, the World is at an inflection point where global gender gains made thus far risk significant reversal as a consequence of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, based on projections by UN Women and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the economic fallout is expected to push 47 million more women and girls into extreme poverty in 2021, reversing decades of progress.

The COVID-19 outbreak has exacerbated the gendered impacts of the crisis by increasing women's economic and social insecurity, unpaid care work, and domestic violence while limiting [Women's access](#) to social and institutional support and services. Some of the sectors hardest hit by the pandemic are feminized sectors characterized by low pay and poor working conditions, including lack of basic worker protections like paid sick and family leave. The accommodation and food service sectors, for example, have been devastated by job losses. In most countries, women are over-represented in these sectors, often with a tenuous hold on their jobs.

COVID-19 is therefore exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems. In countries with [women](#) at the helm, confirmed deaths from COVID-19 are six times lower, partly due to these leaders' faster response to the pandemic and greater emphasis on social and environmental well-being over time.

Consequently, Member States are rapidly adjusting their development plans and budgets to respond to the pandemic and reprioritizing their commitments and timelines. Adjustments are informed by some of the unexpected positive outcomes of the pandemic such as a reframing and adjusted understanding of the burden of unpaid carework where fathers are contributing more to childcare than the pre pandemic period. Yet, due to women losing a higher rate of employment it is critical for economic stimulus packages to identify measures to protect women's employment and to facilitate women's access to land, financial capital and other assets, so they can weather a crisis and rebuild their small businesses.

For that reason, UN Women in partnership with ESCWA seeks to support a regional interactive Inter-regional learning Dialogue amongst Member States to share details of actions taken to adjust BPfA implementation in the COVID-19 context that seek to accelerate implementation in four BPfA areas that were previously identified by Member States in the [Arab Declaration on Progress in the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 years \(Amman, 28 November 2019\)](#):

- Develop the work of National Women's Machineries and equip them with the necessary tools and resources (Article I);
- Develop gender-disaggregated data and data systems for national strategies (Article J);
- Continue effective monitoring of progress in the implementation of the Beijing Platform (Articles G and L); and
- Continue joint action, regional partnerships and programmes to improve the status of women (Article K).

The centrality of sufficient financing for commitments to gender equality and the empowerment of women has never been more prescient given the COVID-19 context. The issue of **financing** is outlined in the [Addis Ababa Action Plan on Transforming Financing on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment](#). In line with the regional call to equip **National Women's Machineries** with resources the UN has also called for increasing financing to gender equality and strengthening gender responsive institutions to allow for the effective execution of their respective mandates and to support the coordination of monitoring the implementation of global, regional and national gender norms and reporting commitments. Allocating sufficient resources will contribute towards building back better from the pandemic.

In response to the above, the envisioned regional Dialogue will offer countries in the Arab region to discuss efforts made towards responding to commitments towards the advancement of women during an unprecedented situation arising from the pandemic and identify priorities for the coming years prior to the Beijing + 30 review. This is particularly essential given that all countries have already implemented two years of the BPfA in a pandemic context since the last review.

The Dialogue further offers the opportunity for cross-regional exchange and learning on progress thus far; and to collectively ensure the gains are not lost by sharing good practices to contribute to the region building forward better equitably after the pandemic. The Dialogue will provide space to explore potential joint collaboration between States on data, financing gender institutions and programmes, and monitoring. Finally, the Dialogue will guide UN organisations active at a regional level to clearly identify the needs of member countries in fulfilling commitments made during the Beijing + 25 review and incorporated in the [Arab Declaration on Progress in the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 years \(Amman, 28 November 2019\)](#).

Objective of the Interactive Inter-regional Dialogue

The interactive Dialogue is designed to provide Member States to take stock of, share experiences, lessons learned, constraints and opportunities in the implementation of their national and regional commitments to the BPfA +25 and towards B+30 implementation. It will also aim to inform UN regional offices on the needs and priorities of member states, which will help in designing tailored made programmes and actions.

The **Interactive Inter-regional** Dialogue will focus on four key aspects of regional BPfA implementation priorities:

- Develop the work of National Women's Machineries and equip them with the necessary tools and resources;
- Develop gender-disaggregated data and data systems for national strategies;
- Continue effective monitoring of progress in the implementation of the Beijing Platform; and
- Continue joint action, regional partnerships and programmes to improve the status of women.

Each aspect will be discussed and experiences shared to highlight lessons learned, good practices and opportunities including potential for joint collaboration across States. All examples, priorities and opportunities will be curated and later disseminated to Member States for further discussion at national levels.

The **Interactive Inter-regional Dialogue** will comprise of #4 virtual dialogues over two days. Each dialogue will be facilitated around one of the priorities outlined above to respond to a set of questions that will help in identifying constraints and opportunities and lessons learnt.

UN Women and ESCWA will facilitate during the Dialogue sessions.

Outcome

Key discussion points and priorities will be curated from each of the four Dialogues into a regional brief documenting lessons learned, good practice and opportunities for accelerated BPfA implementation. The document will be available for discussion at national level to further inform ongoing BPfA implementation and to feed into national and regional preparations for B+30 reviews.

Participants

The **Interactive Inter-regional Dialogue** is designed for Member States represented by National Women's Machineries (NWMs), and/or Finance and Planning Ministries and/or National Statistical Offices in the Arab region.

UN Women and ESCWA will coordinate with Member States on preparatory work to be prepared prior to the regional workshop.

Date

The **Interactive Regional Dialogue** will take place via Zoom. Two Dialogues will be held on each day for two hours and 15 minutes between 2-3 November 2021.