United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Interactive Regional Workshop on Policies and Policy Tools in Implementing Regional Priorities of Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
UN House, Beirut, Lebanon, 1–2 March 2023

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Contents

Annexes

Introduction

1.   Since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, the Executive Secretariat of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has provided Arab States with the necessary support in drafting national review reports and devising regional reviews. ESCWA, in partnership with the Regional Office of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the League of Arab States (LAS), is also working on a regular five-year follow-up of the progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In this regard, a regional review of the progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 25 years into their adoption (Beijing+25) was conducted in 2019, and the Arab States adopted the "The Arab Declaration on Progress in the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 Years" (Amman, November 28, 2019). The said declaration affirms commitments related to urgent legislation to be adopted to eliminate discrimination against girls and women, advance the implementation of Security Council resolutions related to women, peace, and security, address gender stereotypes, and enhance women's participation at all levels of decision-making and of society.

2.   Moreover, ESCWA provides substantive and technical support to member States aimed at adopting and implementing policies that contribute to progress in gender equality national priority areas. With the approaching of the periodic review of the progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 30 years into their adoption, it is important to work on focused activities to document the best policy practices in this area, as well as to support the member State governments in adopting and implementing effective policies aimed at applying the Beijing+25 recommendations.

3.   In this context, ESCWA organized a regional interactive dialogue on policies and policy tools in support of addressing the five regional priority areas to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. During the event, participants exchanged experiences and best practices in terms of reforms and policy tools that contributed to progress towards addressing regional priority areas, as well as the challenges in this regard. The said exchange aimed at developing a guide of the best policy practices to support member States. Moreover, the dialogue in question and the respective guide contribute to documenting progress and identifying priorities and support mechanisms for policy reform. The dialogue outcomes also contribute to the preparation for the Beijing+30 national and regional review process scheduled for 2024.

4.   The dialogue focused on five regional priority areas for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA):

- Elimination of violence against women.
- Women's political participation.
- Equality and inequality in the law and the justice systems.
- Right to work, decent work environment, and leadership opportunities.
- Support for national mechanisms.

5.   The interactive dialogue was attended by 33 representatives of national women's machineries from 13 Arab countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Tunisia. Participants from civil society organizations active in the field of supporting women, experts on women's affairs, a representative from UN-Women Regional Office, as well as co-organizers at ESCWA also attended the workshop (list of participants). Women accounted for 88 per cent of participants.

Opening session

6.   Dr. Salma Al-Nims, Head of the ESCWA Centre for Women, inaugurated the workshop by bringing to mind the victims of natural disasters, wars, and occupation in the Arab region. She then praised the Arab States' hard work and political will to improve women's realities despite the national, regional, and global

challenges in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Al-Nims touched on the workshop objectives, based on the following:

- Presenting States' experiences in policy reform and policy tool adoption in relation to the five priority areas, as well as their impact on progress in these areas.

- Discussing the challenges facing States and limiting their progress in the five priority areas.

- Presenting the policy tools available within ESCWA to support States in policy planning and design.

- Approving the content of the guideline to achieve the desired results.

7.   Dr. Al-Nims stressed ESCWA's ceaseless endeavour to support Arab States. In this context, the interactive dialogue would deepen ESCWA's knowledge of national needs, so that it designs projects and programmes to better assist States in addressing their priorities.

8.   To ensure unified understanding and consistent communication throughout the dialogue, as well as a uniform understanding of the concepts presented, Ms. Linda Sabbarini, workshop facilitator, presented the policy tool design mechanism for strategy and legislation development. The mechanism is based on the following:

- Developing a database.
- Devising a draft strategy or legislation.
- Discussing and ratifying the strategy or legislation.
- Rolling out the strategy and raising awareness of it.
- Executing the provisions.
- Following up and evaluating implementation.

9.   Thereafter, there was a presentation of the set of tools needed for the success of the national policy and legislative reform process, namely:

- Ratifying and implementing international and regional standards and conventions, as well as abiding by their provisions.

- Collecting data and evidence, being mindful of the need for their disaggregation by gender.

- Sequencing policies, legislation, and procedures as per Sates' capabilities and realities.

- Having a political will at various levels, not just the senior ones.

- Capitalizing on awareness and advocacy campaigns.

- Ensuring women's leadership and participation in change at all levels.

- Ensuring intersecting and integrated work by stakeholders at the national level.

- Building and exchanging experiences nationally and regionally, guided by lessons learned and success stories.

- Seeking to positively influence norms and change prevailing stereotypes.

- Verifying implementation and compliance with plans and standards, as well as measuring indicators.

10.   As a result, and in the context of reviewing some of the previous tools and their significance in advancing the five areas focus of the workshop, the following was emphasized:

- The need to collect gender-disaggregated data and evidence nationally, in an automatic and systematic manner.

- The need for participatory national action among stakeholders.

- The need to exchange experiences regionally to be guided by success stories and lessons learned.

Session I: Where are we coming from Beijing+25?

11. Ms. Nadya Khalife, Regional Advisor on Gender Equality at ESCWA, gave a presentation in which she summarized the reality of Arab States in terms of gender equality, by assessing the performance of the Arab region in indicators and showcasing country reports. Arab States rank lowest in the Global Gender Gap Index, despite progress in the areas of health, school retention, and educational attainment, Khalife explained. According to the World Bank's Women, Business, and the Law Index, 17 Arab States (out of 190) had the lowest percentage, and Arab States generally ranked below the global average (76.5 per cent), she moreover stated. She then elaborated on the following points:

- Women's participation in politics and public life, at 15.2 per cent in parliament houses, 20.2 per cent in the Government, and 14 per cent in the judiciary.

- Women's participation in the labour market was 18.5 per cent, with one third of women working in the agricultural sector without any social protection. Women ownership in the Arab region almost reached 25 per cent, yet still lower than the global average (35.9 per cent).

- In the case of violence against women, 46 percent of the trafficking victims in the Arab region are women.

- Discrimination against women persists in Arab laws, with only six Arab States allowing women to pass on nationality to their children. On the positive side, a number of Arab States have criminalized cyber violence against women and girls, as well as sexual harassment in the workplace.

12. Emphasising the importance of compiling data and statistics for the success of policy and legislative reforms, Ms. Sabbarini shared the reality of monitoring and compiling gender-disaggregated data by national statistical agencies, and their importance in identifying various needs and gaps. As per the information from country reports and other sources, the Arab States were divided into three groups, namely:

Group I: States in this group have continued to make achievements in terms of producing gender-disaggregated statistics.

Group II: During the past five years, States in this group succeeded in breaking out of the cycle of statistical deficiency.

Group III: For this group, gender-equality data and statistics remains a major challenge.

13. In general, comprehensive statistical data on economic and social issues are not available in all Arab States, and if they are, they are not updated periodically. These data do not include all the gender-equality indicators and targets contained in the 2030 Agenda.

14. The reality of the Arab States in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic was addressed, with women and girls being the most affected by its repercussions, as shown in the ESCWA report.[1] Given the instability brought about by the pandemic at the economic, social, educational, and health levels, similar to other schemes, strategic plans were bound to be affected, either in a positive, responsive manner to the occurring change, or negatively, like in the cases in which other plans were given priority. Interventions and responses were varied, with some States adhering to their strategic plans, as they already cover different sectors. Some noted that the pandemic had exposed gaps and challenges in current strategic plans, particularly in terms of women's

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[1] ESCWA, 2020, The Impact of COVID-19 on gender equality in the Arab region.
https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/pubs/pdf/20-00132_gpid_pb_ar_apr2_0.pdf.

participation in the labour market and the protection of women survivors of gender-based violence. However, in other Arab States, addressing the pandemic consequences was prioritized over women's issues.

15.   As some national women's agencies form part of a ministry or government body, a number of services were made available to women during the pandemic. Moreover, some national institutions issued annexes or amendments to their strategic plans to address the pandemic repercussions, including the following:

- Giving greater importance to the protection of women during the pandemic; providing basic services to shelter women and children victims of violence; training and building the capacity of staff associations dealing with women survivors of violence to manage reported cases remotely; and enhancing the immediate response of the hotline service.

- Introducing a remote psychological support service presented in sessions as per each case's needs.

- Providing family planning techniques.

- Waiving fees; deferring loan payments; and working to revive small projects and protect them from the pandemic's repercussions.

- Emphasizing remote work while taking into account pregnant women's circumstances, or the presence of children under a certain age, as was the case in some government agencies.

- Protecting women from unfair dismissal during the pandemic.

- Providing assistance to families in need in general, and those headed by women in remote and isolated areas in particular.

16.   In fact, some States responded quickly to the pandemic, reducing its impact on women, despite the fact that some responses did not particularly address the situation of women and girls, including:

- Closing public and private educational institutions, including higher education institutions, and adopting the distance education system.

- Ensuring the continued functioning of Sharia/family courts and family reconciliation offices, by enabling filing Sharia lawsuits of all types electronically, as well as providing the Family Reconciliation Office services through an electronic platform, such as providing family counselling and holding reconciliation and settlement sessions virtually.

- Providing moral support to frontline doctors, nurses, and healthcare workers by meeting their children's educational needs in the absence of one parent, in addition to providing their families' necessary needs (consumables and protective equipment).

- Ensuring the continued provision of Government services.

- Providing financial support for informal employment in some States.

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Session II: Presentation on progress and challenges in first and second priority areas: Gender Equality in Justice and the Law, and Women's Political Participation

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1. *First Area: Gender Equality in Justice and the Law*

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17.   Participants elaborated on their States' achievements in terms of amending and/or enacting laws that support gender equality in justice and law, reflecting an undoubted prevailing political will by "enriching the State's legal arsenal with new laws that promote women's rights and facilitate their access to justice". Thereafter, it was noted that some Arab States emphasised the provisions of the constitution related to gender equality, given that the Constitution is the reference that regulates relations in the State and the rights of male and female citizens, and that it transcends all laws, legislation, and regulations.

18.   Some female participants explained that the challenge was that Arab constitutions did not provide for full gender equality and non-discrimination against women, while others provided for equality but allowed laws to interpret it, hence leading to gender discrimination. It was pointed out that the vast majority of Arab constitutions defined a State religion, and linked laws either directly to Islamic Sharia or to its principles, with the exception of Tunisia, which linked the Personal Status Law or Family Law to divine laws, and delegated the organization of courts to religious sects. Despite the amendments made by many Arab States to the Family Law, for example, because it regulates many aspects of women's relationship with men and guarantees women's basic rights in patriarchal societies, the amendments were not fundamental and did not address the key articles, such as those pertinent to custody, guardianship, and trusteeship, or other provisions in the Personal Status Law, the Penal Code, and the Nationality Law. Consequently, a range of problems arises as a result of the incoherence and lack of complementarity of legislation and laws, thus curbing the achievement of their noble objective.

19.   A fundamental challenge posed by participants was the attempt by some governments to harmonise international conventions with national legislation. Indeed, this harmonisation is subject to criteria that take into account the balances between societal culture and the legislative system forces, or the so-called obstructive forces. Reference was also made to the political balances that impact the States' ability to achieve equality and fulfil their obligations; most Arab countries have ratified international conventions but have been unable to lift reservations to some provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), for instance. Therefore, the use of middle-way policies and the lack of full equality prevent establishing an integrated system of justice, equality, and non-discrimination.

20.   Among the proposals made by participants to address and overcome the challenges:

(a) Having a bold political will to take decisive decisions on the implementation of the ratified international and regional instruments;

(b) Ensuring complementary and harmonious action when amending legislation and laws;

(c) Upgrading the skills, expertise, and capacities of key actors in the field of law-making and implementation;

(d) Reforming the justice system by criminalizing a range of acts that constitute customary practices;

(e) Proper planning as per realistic analysis based on evidence and collected information;

(f) Forging national alliances with civil society to leverage and strike a balance in Government-legislature consensuses pertaining to gender equality.

2. *Second Area: Women's Political Participation*

21.   Interventions during the workshop emphasized the improvement of women's political participation in the Arab States, which aligns with the ESCWA report.[2] Positive discrimination for women has contributed to the said improvement through making legal amendments and adopting the electoral quota system, which has been reflected in women's participation in parliament, and community and voluntary work, as well as in their representation in governments and the judiciary. A female participant explained that women's political participation is not limited to their role in parties, parliaments, or civil society institutions, as she believes that *"what's most important is to adopt a doctrine or an ideology, be it religious, liberal, or other, that reflects women's view of all issues. Therefore, it is crucial to deepen women's thinking and instil in them a set of principles according to which they work, she further said."*

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[2] ESCWA, 2020, Arab Report on the Periodic Review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 Years https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/pubs/pdf/synthesis-arab-report-periodic-review-beijing-declaration-platform-arabic_2.pdf.

22.   However, the challenges posed continue to hinder women's representation and political participation at a percentage that conforms to their representation in the social fabric. These challenges include cultural and social structures that limit women's participation in democratic political life, especially in tribal and narrow societies and territorial collectivities. The challenges also include States' political context, which sometimes restricts civil society organizations through laws that prevent them from activating women's political participation.

23.   Participants stressed the need to integrate the concept of women's participation in decision-making and not just in politics. Although positive discrimination for women played an important role in improving women's participation in decision-making, a number of female participants explained that in some cases, these practices were not competence-based. Therefore, some women who assumed leadership positions showed weak performance, which had an adverse impact on the attained progress. In contrast, when a man is incompetent in leadership positions, gender is not associated with the incompetence, the participants further pointed out.

24.   Proposals to overcome challenges in this area included:

(a) Devising plans and policies based on addressing gaps in political participation;

(b) Building women's capacities in the three branches of Government (legislative, executive, and judicial) to be qualified for senior positions;

(c) Crystallizing the qualitative role of women's participation as effective leaders in the structure of political parties and movements;

(d) Enacting a civilized and modern electoral law that steers clear of factionalism, sectarianism, and ethnicism;

(e) Protecting all citizens' freedom of peaceful action and expression, so as to encourage them to engage in political work;

(f) Establishing laws regulating the work of associations and institutions that allow enhancing women's political participation and effective engagement in the public arena.

Session III: Good practices in Arab and neighbouring States in first and second priority areas

25.   Attendees shared many examples of good practices in the Arab countries, such as final changes or amendments to laws and legislations so as to advance gender equality nationally. The procedures and mechanisms adopted in neighbouring States leading to the desired changes were also identified. These effective procedures and mechanisms have hence become the cornerstone in devising policies and legislation to achieve equality in justice, law, and women's political participation.

26.   Examples included:

- Defining performance indicators and linking them to the implementation of strategies, as well as ensuring their follow-up, and issuing reports that summarize reality.

- Preparing gender-responsive budgets pertaining to achieving equality in justice, the law, and political participation.

- Holding decision-makers and legislators accountable for committing to activities and interventions.

- Establishing peer councils (Algeria, Morocco), the Equal Opportunities Unit (Egypt), or follow-up departments in the relevant ministries and Government units (Bahrain), which, in some cases, encouraged decision-making that took women's needs into account.

- Empowering women in legislative areas and increasing their access to judicial and legislative positions, hence creating a voice for women and allowing them to present proposals that may affect the course of decision-making.

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**Session IV: ESCWA policy tools to advance
the first and second priority areas**

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27.   As the provision of data, evidence, and collected information is essential to the success of any policy and legislative development, ESCWA decided to share a number of policy tools that provide data to be initially used to build a database. Thus, governments do not incur the material and human costs of collecting and disaggregating some of these data.

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1. *Platform for Gender Justice and the Law in the Arab States Region*[3]

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28.   The "Gender Justice and the Law" initiative is the outcome of a participatory and consultative process over several years, including four United Nations agencies, namely ESCWA, UNDP, UN-Women, and UNFPA, in addition to national stakeholders in Arab States.

29.   The latest study covers 17 Arab countries and reviews key developments in terms of legislation and public policies in relation to gender equality and the law. Each country report consists of a narrative summary of the country and a code matrix. The matrix uses a simple four-coloured system to compare laws and policies in each of the six areas identified against international standards and conventions. Within the framework of this regional project, a coding matrix of regional legal frameworks has been developed to visually categorize laws concerning gender equality with respect to how well they meet international standards. The regional chart is based on each country's brief overview of the legal framework.

30.   The report's methodology neither seeks to assess the State's efforts and endeavours to realize women's rights, nor to review all national interventions, programmes, and measures. Neither the matrix nor the adopted standards measure the implementation aspect of laws. They rather focus on the legal framework and the extent to which it achieves gender equality as required by international conventions and frameworks. Reports do not necessarily imply that States had adhered to all international standards contained therein. Therefore, the said reports are helpful tools to enhance States' commitment to international frameworks, and they provide policymakers with a map that identifies legislation that needs further attention, harmonisation, and/or modification, according to international standards. Through the dissemination of reports at the country level, the four partners aim to promote policies and institutional reforms to promote equal rights for women and address structural barriers to gender equality.

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2. *The Index Simulator for Policymakers in the Arab Region Platform*[4]

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31.   Through the Index Simulator for Policymakers, ESCWA aims to assist member States in identifying effective actions that can be implemented in the short, medium, and long terms, so as to improve their ranking in gender equality global indicators and enhance socioeconomic development. The tool in question contributes to increasing and disseminating knowledge on performance measurement, monitoring, and evaluation, conducting analysis of existing obstacles, and formulating reform scenarios to enhance policy effectiveness and efficiency. Moreover, the tool allows policymakers to monitor the effects of various issues on a State's economic performance as measured by international indicators.

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[3] http://genderjustice.unescwa.org/.

[4] https://ispar.unescwa.org.

32.   The session began with presenting a number of indicators related to violence against women, women's right to work, and a decent work environment using outputs from country reports available on the Platform for Gender Justice and the Law. The presentation came as an example of how to read the indicators in question, and how to use them to describe national realities.

1. *Third Area: Right to Work and Decent Work Environment*

33.   When assessing the reality of Arab States in terms of women's right to work, it was found that in a number of them, women were still legally prohibited to work in some jobs and professions that are believed to be beyond women's capabilities, such as arduous jobs and work during night hours. Therefore, the first step of reform ought to be lifting restrictions on women's freedom to choose the type and timing of work, all while ensuring protection for all male and female workers.

34.   National strategies that empower women economically included numerous interventions that sought to improve the reality of work, including devising codes of conduct regulating relationships at work, and the passing of a law by some States criminalizing sexual harassment in the workplace. The labour laws of several States stipulate the right to equal pay for the same value of work, especially in the public sector, and also enact control over this requirement through the Civil Service Law.

35.   However, one of the main challenges facing women in the labour market is the lack of social protection in informal sectors. The proportion of women working in informal sectors is rising both nationally and/or regionally, making them more likely than men to work in an inappropriate work environment. Women earn up to 50 per cent less than men's wages in the agricultural sector, and are not covered by social and health insurance.

36.   Participants also stressed that trade unions in the Arab world are still unable to effectively protect the rights of workers, represent them, and communicate their demands. This is due to the weak protection of the right to organize in many States, and/or politicizing union action and aligning its discourses with those of government, or disabling union action in some sensitive State sectors, such as the public or security sectors, and the army.

2. *Fourth Area: Elimination of Violence against Women*

37.   Governments are trying, albeit unevenly, to fulfil their obligations under all international conventions. A fair number of laws and procedures have been applied. However, they are insufficient and remain timid, as governments are keen to maintain an illegitimate balance between their obligations on the one hand, and traditional forces opposed to women's rights on the other. Change is a matter that always features two opposed sides: the opponent and the supporter. On the opponent side, there is the societal cultural aspect, which includes religious and ethnic bodies, and it is the most influential and obstructing. Old mentalities seek to continue existing while new ones aspire to emerge.

38.   The session features ideas emphasising the reality of many Arab States, where rehabilitation and training policies for women created a framework that enabled them to gradually play new economic and political roles in society. This has resulted in a change in the balance of power between them and other parties, both familial and social. Therefore, a form of progress emerged of rejecting and opposing violence. Political reforms in the field of legislation and laws have had an important impact on introducing the issue of violence against women into national agendas, hence prompting policymakers to plan and design national strategies to combat it.

39.   Additionally, Arab States, at various levels of commitment, have provided care homes, shelters, and rehabilitation centres for women victims of violence, as well as reception centres for victims of human trafficking. However, efforts in this regard still require a feminist human rights perspective, to manage them and address the issues raised, so as to support victims and help them in their post-protection journey through providing economic and social empowerment.

40.   Participants noted the reluctance of governments to shoulder the key role in combating violence against women and pointed out that NGOs and civil society organizations played the primary role in raising awareness of the negative impacts of violence against women, as well as its economic and social costs. These organizations also design intervention programmes in an effort to alter stereotypes that give males guardianship over women, hence granting them control over women and their bodies, and justifying their violence against women and girls. Although protection houses have been established in key ministries, such as the Ministries of Interior, Justice, and Social Action and Solidarity, these work in a way that reflects the Government's vision, rather than the objective and comprehensive vision of human rights in accordance with international standards.

41.   Hence came the recommendation on the need to strengthen the qualifications and competencies of civil society organizations defending women's human rights, as well as facilitate their roles and support their available capabilities to overcome obstacles. Moreover, the State must be supported in implementing its obligations in terms of equality and in combatting violence against women, as failure to adhere to certain obligations negatively impacts women's economic and social realities.

Session VI: Good practices in Arab States in third and fourth areas

42.   The session in question featured several examples relating to women's right to work and a decent work environment, as well as the elimination of violence against women. A positive practice that calls for further elaboration is: devising a strategy to empower women economically or to combat violence against them.

43.   Egypt not only criminalized female genital mutilation under the Penal Code and raised societal awareness of the harms of this practice, but also supported these measures by mobilizing Muslim and Christian clerics after building their capacities. Additionally, the Government intensified penalties against practitioners who perform the genital mutilation procedure and against a guardian who requests it. The measures in question changed the desired results. The United Arab Emirates has activated and implemented harsh penalties against perpetrators of cyber violence against women and girls. The said penalties could reach imprisonment and even deportation for non-citizens.

44.   In Morocco, in aims at supporting women working in informal work sectors such as agriculture and domestic work, and after assessing their needs for social and health protection and providing evidence and data, an electronic application was developed that enables women to enrol in a social and health protection program for a monthly fee. During the initial phase of implementation, the impact on women was monitored to show that the monthly fee comprised a challenge for some, especially during intermittent growing seasons. Those in charge of the application are in the process of reviewing the cost value and evaluating the feasibility of changing the subscription fee.

45.   In the Sultanate of Oman, after tracking a decline in the number of women enrolled in a number of training fields, based on the results of a survey carried out, and identifying reasons of this decline, it was found that women's caretaking role limited their ability to enrol in certain training programs. Therefore, a decision was issued stipulating that the husband shall accompany his wife during the training period to help in caretaking so that she can complete the training requirements.

46.   Hence, it is certainly crucial to apply monitoring and evaluation practices that include studying the needs of the concerned and target groups, and follow up on the impact of policies and legislation on the ground. This

process provides feedback on what has been achieved and existing deficiencies based on evidence. Hence, additional interventions are defined upon revealing deficiencies in achieving the desired results.

<h3 style="text-align:center">Session VII: ESCWA policy tools to advance
third and fourth areas</h3>

47.   Influencing economic and social policies requires evidence, preferably quantitative in the main, to address decision-makers in the numerical language prevalent in these sectors. Hence, ESCWA specialists shared two policy tools that enable States to provide quantitative data that support advocacy messages used by supporters of women's empowerment.

<h4 style="text-align:center">1.   ESCWA Skills Monitor[5]</h4>

48.   This tool was developed by an ESCWA technical team, to qualify young men and women in the Arab world, provide data to Arab States on the future of employment therein, and assist in policy-making that affects the labour market. The tool provides member States with the following support:

- Providing the data required for national planning.

- Assisting in the design of comprehensive policies.

- Providing information on job characteristics to build a diversified economy.

- Helping link educational programmes with the required skills.

- Helping in nationalizing posts.

- Helping in linking the support programmes allocated for the unemployed with the actual needs of the labour market.

<h4 style="text-align:center">2.   Cost of Violence against Women</h4>

49.   This tool calculates the individual, local, national, and international economic costs of violence against women. The calculation mechanism of this cost aims at:

- Showing the dangerous economic repercussions of violence against women.

- Explaining the impact of violence against women on economic and social development and wellbeing.

- Demonstrating that violence against women hinders governments from realizing their development goals such as reducing poverty, strengthening human resource capacities, developing strong institutions, and achieving high living standards.

- Informing policymakers of national spending priorities by estimating the cost of violence against women and increasing knowledge of gender-responsive budgeting.

- Developing a tool for national policy reform and supporting the development of effective legislation and policy frameworks to address violence against women.

- Guiding national planning and developing a tool to allocate additional resources to address violence against women, specifically through devising early prevention mechanisms.

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[5] https://skillsmonitor.unescwa.org.

Session VIII: Supporting national mechanisms

50.   The session began by recalling the Beijing Declaration on Institutional Arrangements at the National Level: "National machineries and institutions for the advancement of women should participate in public policy formulation and encourage the implementation of the Platform for Action through various bodies and institutions, including the private sector, and, where necessary, should act as a catalyst in developing new programmes in areas that are not covered by existing institutions".

51.   Accordingly, participating States emphasized the coordinating role that national women's machineries should play in influencing policies and legislation. All States showed appreciation of the said machineries' role within their capacities and potential, although it was clearly influenced by the legal framework in which they functioned. It has been shown that the more legally enabled the national machineries are in their operations, the greater their ability to move beyond the advisory aspects to the coordination and operational ones. In some States, these machineries make recommendations on legal, economic, and social measures aimed at the empowerment of women. Moreover, ministries work in a consistent, coordinated manner to socially and economically empower women. In other States, national machineries comment that Government priorities are not oriented towards the empowerment of women.

52.   Challenges that hinder the ability of national machineries to play their coordinating role as desired include:

- Lack and/or weakness of qualified human resources working within the national women's machineries.

- The presence of an intersection between the work of national machineries and that of ministries and other institutions, and it has been noted that there is a lack of competencies in the departments and sections of ministries and institutions responsible for integrating gender equality.

- Limited allocation of resources nationally to women's affairs in some States.

- Dispersion of efforts between the various national bodies responsible for the advancement of women, as women's issues are not addressed in a cross-sector manner.

- Absence of constant coordination with national women's machineries before devising policies, regulations, and strategies, and working retroactively based on requesting feedback only.

- Vagueness of the gender equality concept in some Arab States, and/or not fully accepting the United Nations' definition if it contradicts with customs and traditions.

53.   Finally, the session touched on the nature of the support needed by national women's machineries to fulfil their coordinating role in line with the BPfA:

- Seeking to integrate roles nationally, especially in States where national machineries do not enjoy a legal weight.

- Calling on national machineries to raise coordination and networking between ministries and institutions responsible for the advancement of women, as well as to expand partnerships with universities and research centres.

- In the Arab States where national machineries fall under the umbrella of the Government, increasing financial allocations to increase programmes and interventions that serve the empowerment of women.

- Building capacities in terms of devising strategies based on integrating gender equality into policies, and linking national strategies to the Sustainable Development Goals.

- Activating Government support for national machineries at the level of the media, and expanding advocacy campaigns in a unified manner, especially on issues that require altering societal stereotypes.

ESCWA policy tools – Participatory Audit and UN-SWAP Tool

54.   ESCWA provides technical support to national institutions by supporting them in drawing up a roadmap for realizing gender equality. The approach in question is based on the principle of enhanced integration and interaction between six areas: human resources, supervision, results-based management, accountability, capacity, coherence, and knowledge and information management. Implementing the plan, therefore, helps to improve managerial performance, thus facilitating the achievement of the goal of gender equality and women's empowerment.

55.   The benefits of participating in devising and implementing the roadmap include:

- The plan contributes to a unified understanding of gender equality and the empowerment of women and allows for concerted institutional efforts in predetermined and mutually-accepted directions.

- It delineates a shared responsibility by all departments and employees, each according to its/their duties.

- The plan implementation is based on the principle of gradation and accumulation of experience.

- The implementation process is highly flexible as per the organization's priorities, the change methodology that suits its work, and/or the available human and material capabilities.

- Accountability is pursuant to a clear delineation of responsibilities, and it is not conducted to test the management or staff in aims at holding them accountable.

Session IX: Discussion of guideline content

56.   Time was allocated for the attendees to share their perceptions of the guideline content, given its importance in serving governments in policy-making and amending legislation nationally. Subsequently, a few proposals were compiled to be considered for adoption when preparing the guideline, including:

- The need to present basic concepts and theoretical background in the guideline introduction, to frame the work and ensure a common and unified understanding.

- Summarize the skills and best practices to design strategies and legislation pertaining to the priorities discussed during the workshop in checklists.

- Share good practices from the Arab world as a means of empowering other States and spreading the benefit.

57.   During the guideline preparation process, the concerned States will be contacted to give the reader an integrated picture by providing additional technical details on the working mechanism in planning and implementing good practices. Moreover, it was agreed to share the first draft of the guideline with the participants to provide any comments they may have.

Closing session

58.   In conclusion, Dr. Salma Al-Nims thanked the participants for their transparency in presenting balanced success stories and good national practices, while pointing out the challenges and submitting proposals to overcome them. She stressed ESCWA's ceaseless technical support to member States to continue the progress toward empowering Arab women and bridging the gender gap in the political, social, and economic fields.

Annex I

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Annex II

Evaluation form

Interactive Regional Workshop on Policies and Policy Tools in Implementing Regional Priorities of Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
UN House, Beirut, Lebanon, 1–2 March 2023

1. **In your opinion, to what extent has the meeting achieved its intended objectives? Kindly circle the number that reflects your view:**

A little extent　　　1　　　　2　　　　3 (2)　　　4 (14)　　　5 (6)　　　**A great extent**

2. **What topics have you benefited from the most?**

- Learning about State experiences

- Exchanging experiences with other States

- Learning about the Index Simulator for Policymakers/Gender Justice Platform and Skills Monitor

- All are important, but we might have discussed matters more extensively if only one topic was tackled

- State experiences in matters related to the Beijing Declaration

- All topics

- ESCWA policy tools

- Tools

- Viewing State experiences and learning about the different monitoring mechanisms and methods

- Identifying positive practices in sibling States and the State classification from a challenges standpoint

- All details related to leading experiences

- All details related to the suggested tools

- Women's economic empowerment

- Exchanging expertise between States

- Improving performance through ESCWA specialists' technical expertise

- State experiences

- ESCWA platforms

- Platform for Gender Justice and the Law

- ESCWA Skills Monitor

- Cost of violence against women

- Managing situations of violence

- State experiences in amending laws

- Learning about new communication and monitoring mechanisms

- Learning about other States' concepts and experiences in terms of combating violence and women's economic empowerment

- Showcasing States' initiatives and success stories

- Previewing statistics and data on progress in the Arab States and identifying gaps

- Gender Equality in Justice and the Law

- Women's Political Participation

- Sessions 2–4–8

- Learning about ESCWA evaluation mechanisms

- Meeting with representatives of other national machineries on the basis of the similar view of their role and tasks

18

3. What topics would you like to have been included in the workshop programme?

- Administrative levels for women

- Partnership between civil society and State institutions

- ESCWA policy tools

- Topics related to mobilization and advocacy mechanisms at the level of decision-makers

- Course on policy and policy actors

- Allocating more time to work on the information platform in session IV (Index Simulator tool)

- Focusing more on funding mechanisms, as well as vigilance and tracking mechanisms

- Pre-workshop preparation by participants/States through more detailed forms

- Illustrated success stories in coordination with governments

- Focusing on decent work

- Women and climate change

- Women, digital transformation, and the use of technology

- Training on results-based reporting and impact measurement

- Right to health

- Right to education

- Women's participation in decision-making positions

4. What topics/issues did you dislike in the workshop and believe would better be modified in similar event programmes in the future?

- Insufficient time to raise all related issues

- During the sessions, the teams were distracted from the main objectives of each session, and the information and presentations overlapped

- Refraining from discussing the hopes of the situation in the Arab world, and adhering to Western standards may not be the needed recipe with regard to all indicators. Therefore, it is necessary to take into account certain specificities

- Poor distribution of time between participants, given that parity between States must be ensured

- Taking into account States' general context to work in coherent groups that share the same general goals (visions)

- The workshop would have been more successful if it had been divided into two courses: one for sectors and governments, and another for civil society and experts

- Each State had the time to preview its role and initiatives through a time-bound online presentation to ensure showcasing efforts in an effective and orderly manner

- Identifying key points to be circulated to States as a basis for progress, and each State conducts progress schemes accordingly

- Establishing promptly a platform that includes States' focal points and their role

- Clarifying the purpose of the interactive dialogue, because it was composed of State experiences, and did not show that it was prepared for much

- Participation should have included civil society representatives, so as to present a clearer picture of the reality of each State

5. What is your assessment of the workshop benefit in terms of:	Very weak	Weak	Average	Good	Very good
Topic significance for the field of work and experience			1 (5%)	9 (43%)	11 (52%)
Information and skills acquired		1 (5%)	1 (5%)	15 (71%)	4 (19%)
Allowing for the exchange of information with the other participants		1 (5%)	2 (10%)	12 (57%)	6 (28%)
Providing an opportunity to establish new and useful work connections			4 (20%)	11 (52%)	6 (28%)

6. What is your assessment of the workshop benefit in terms of the following aspects:	Very weak	Weak	Average	Good	Very good
Clarity of presentations			1 (5%)	11 (52%)	9 (43%)
Organizational arrangements for working sessions before and during meetings			1 (5%)	10 (47.5%)	10 (47.5%)

7. Trainer evaluation:	Very weak	Weak	Average	Good	Very good
Trainers are familiar with the subject of training and well-prepared to tackle it				9 (43%)	12 (57%)
They managed the workshop well and explained the objectives and concepts clearly			2 (10%)	8 (38%)	11 (52%)
They piqued my interest in the workshop topic and answered my questions				14 (66%)	7 (34%)
They used interactive means to deliver the workshop content			3 (14%)	11 (52%)	7 (34%)

8. What do you think of the logistical arrangements for this workshop?	Very weak	Weak	Average	Good	Very good
Venue	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	4 (19%)	8 (38%)	7 (33%)
Session duration			3 (14%)	12 (57%)	6 (29%)
Break			1 (5%)	15 (71%)	5 (24%)