

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COUNCIL**

Distr.
LIMITED
E/ESCWA/ECW/2013/IG.1/3
31 October 2013
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Committee on Women
Sixth session
Kuwait, 4-5 December 2013

Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda

**PROGRESS ACHIEVED IN THE FIELD OF ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN
SINCE THE FIFTH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN****IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES RELATED TO THE ADVANCEMENT
OF WOMEN UNDER ESCWA PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR THE BIENNIUM
2012-2013, AND PURSUANT TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS
OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN AT ITS FIFTH SESSION****Summary**

This report presents the main activities undertaken by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) since the fifth session of the Committee on Women, held in Beirut from 19 to 21 December 2011.

During the reporting period, ESCWA responded to the needs of member countries in various areas including gender-based violence, gender mainstreaming and the political and economic participation of women. Circulating best practice and successful experiences was at the heart of the goals of the Commission. Research projects were carried out and studies of gender equality and women's empowerment were published. Additionally, ESCWA designed and developed various tools (including manuals, newsletters and information kits) with a view to enhancing communication with national and regional stakeholders and to facilitate the exchange of information and expertise. Finally, demand-driven and tailor-made technical assistance services were also provided to member countries to respond to national needs.

The timely and comprehensive interventions of the Commission responded to the emerging socioeconomic and political needs of women during this transitional period in the region.

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Introduction

1. The Committee on Women was formed at the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) pursuant to ESCWA resolution 240 (XXII) of 17 April 2003. The resolution also stipulated the establishment of the Centre for Women (ECW), which was formally founded on 1 October 2003. Pursuant to ESCWA resolution 293 (XXVI) of 19 May 2010, the Centre was upgraded to the level of a division of the Commission. The Centre includes specialists in gender and women's issues who assist member countries and the ESCWA secretariat in promoting the empowerment of women and gender equality, and mainstreaming a gender perspective in national policies, plans and programmes.
2. The first session of the Committee on Women was held in Beirut from 4 to 5 December 2003, the second session was held in Beirut from 8 to 10 July 2004. The third session was held in Abu Dhabi from 14 to 15 March 2007, the fourth session was held in Beirut from 21 to 23 October 2009 and the fifth session was held in Beirut from 19 to 21 December 2011. The sixth session of the Committee on Women will be held in Kuwait from 4 to 5 December 2013.
3. With the adoption of ESCWA resolution 293 (XXVI) of 19 May 2010, the Centre was provided with additional human and financial resources, including a director post at the D-1 level, which was allocated to the Division at the beginning of the biennium 2012-2013. In addition, the resolution increased the financial allocations to the Centre (US\$211,433 for 2012-2013 compared to US\$176,676 for 2010-2011).
4. During the 2012-2013 biennium, ESCWA engaged in various regional and international partnership initiatives and reaffirmed its role in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women in all social, economic and political spheres in the region. The Commission cooperated with such regional and international organizations as the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the Hariri Foundation, the Norwegian Embassy in Lebanon and ABAAD (Dimensions) Resource Center for Gender Equality in Lebanon.
5. This report provides an overview of activities undertaken by the Commission as part of its 2012-2013 work programme for the advancement of women, including studies and research, expert group meetings, training sessions and workshops on key issues related to empowering women and reducing discrimination in various fields. Activities also included the preparation of information kits and technical material published electronically along with the provision of advisory services and technical assistance for member countries upon request.

ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED BY THE ESCWA CENTRE FOR WOMEN

A. LEGISLATIVE SUPPORT FOR THE AGENDA OF THE SIXTH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN

6. The Beirut Declaration was adopted during the fifth session of the Committee on Women on 21 December 2011, and called on member countries to promote the role of women in decision-making processes and empower rural women by integrating their priorities into national planning.¹ The Declaration also called on member countries to promote gender mainstreaming, develop knowledge and build the capacity of national machineries for the advancement of women, and requested member countries to fully implement such international instruments as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and to promote an effective role for women in the socioeconomic and political processes of their societies. Fighting gender-based violence was highlighted as a priority for the region. In addition, member countries were encouraged to increase cooperation and coordination with development partners, civil society organizations, legislative bodies, the private sector, donor agencies, and media institutions.

¹ http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/E_ESCWA_ECW_11_IG-1_7_Report_e.pdf

7. The Beirut Declaration requested ECW to share best practice and successful experiences with member countries and to offer technical assistance and advisory services to member countries. The Declaration also requested ECW to prepare the following two outputs: (1) a booklet on national machineries for the advancement of women to raise public awareness about their role in the promotion of gender equality; and (2) a booklet on the situation of women in the ESCWA region that includes baseline indicators. In accordance with the Beirut Declaration, ECW was requested to pursue its efforts to narrow the gender gap and work closely with member countries to lift their reservations to CEDAW, thereby increasing respect for the rights of women in accordance with international instruments. Achieving these goals depended on the following factors: (a) the degree to which member countries adhere to international commitment; (b) the presence of political will to strengthen the role of national machineries for the advancement of women; (c) the strength of the dialogue between member countries and civil society; and (d) sufficient political stability to allow development programmes to operate within the country.

8. As part of its 2012-2013 work programme, ECW continued to provide services and assistance to member countries by conducting studies and research, organizing meetings, providing technical assistance and advisory services, and cooperating and coordinating with regional and international organizations. The 2012-2013 programme of work focused on the following areas: (a) economic participation of women with greater attention to mainstreaming gender in government institutions; (b) political representation of women; and (c) combating violence against women.

B. STUDIES AND RESEARCH

9. At its fifth session, the Committee on Women issued a number of recommendations to ECW, including 7(a) to “circulate best practices and successful experiences documented by member countries for the benefit of other countries”. Pursuant to that recommendation, ECW published the following studies on priority issues related to women in the Arab region.

Addressing Barriers to Women’s Economic Participation in the ESCWA Region

This study investigates the level of Arab women’s economic participation in the labour force, which is considered to be the lowest in the world despite the educational gains of girls and women over the past decade. The study points out that existing economic and employment policies discourage women from entering and indeed remaining in the labour market. It calls upon policymakers to recognize all types of work that women do, revise gender-blind economic policies, improve maternity protection measures at work and adopt institutional policies on school-to-work transitions to link educational policies with the labour market needs.²

Multi-sectoral Efforts to Combat Violence against Women in the ESCWA Region

This study was carried out in partnership with ABAAD (Dimensions) Resource Centre for Gender Equality. It provides an overview of the prevention, protection and rehabilitation services available to women in the ESCWA region, including services offered by state institutions and non-governmental organizations. The study also explores the overall structure and dynamics of referral programmes available to survivors of violence and identifies existing gaps in this structure.

Women’s Political and Public Participation in the Transition to Democracy

The study examines the political participation of Arab women before the recent upheaval in some countries of the region. It analyses structural factors limiting the effective political engagement of women and provides an in-depth comparison between their participation before, during and after the latest political

² http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/E_ESCWA_ECW_12_1_E.pdf

developments. The study identifies lessons learned from other regions and the best approaches to facilitate the integration of women into the political sphere in the ESCWA region.

Social and Economic Situation of Palestinian Women (2011-2012)

The report was issued in accordance with resolution 2011/18 of the Economic and Social Council on the Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women. The report provides updated information on the conditions of Palestinian women and girls who are living under Israeli occupation. It details increasing poverty, unemployment, food insecurity, violence against women and health problems, and provides information on progress towards the implementation of earlier resolutions of the Economic and Social Council on Palestinian women and offers recommendations to improve their socioeconomic conditions.³

Trafficking of Women and Children in the Arab Region: A Regional Perspective

The study analyses state responses to trafficking in persons, including national laws and legislation, action plans and national strategies. It also highlights prevention and protection efforts. The study proposes policy recommendations to member countries and civil society organizations on combating trafficking in women and children.

Arab Millennium Development Goals: Facing Challenges and Looking Beyond 2015

ECW contributed to the report, which considers progress towards the Goals since 1990. It reviews development successes and challenges, and provides an account of the main trigger factors behind the political turbulence in some Arab countries and the consequences of instability on the achievement of the Goals. The report also offers perspectives on setting a post-2015 development agenda owned and driven by national Governments. ECW provided a background paper analysing the economic and political participation of women in the region and provided an overview of the main challenges to gender equality in Arab countries.⁴

Women and Development Series: Review of the Status of Gender Mainstreaming in Government Institutions in ESCWA Member Countries

This study builds on the earlier efforts of the Centre to strengthen the capacity of member countries in the field of gender mainstreaming. It examines prevailing gender mainstreaming approaches in the region through the prisms of established national machineries for the advancement of women and cites best practice supportive of the empowerment of women and gender equality within the socioeconomic and political context of the region. The study also identifies gaps and challenges that undermine the development of effective gender mainstreaming strategies, and that may prevent member countries from adhering to such stated commitments and mandates as CEDAW and Beijing Plan of Action. The findings of the study form the basis for policy recommendations geared towards supporting the functions of national machineries for the advancement of women as the primary entities entrusted with monitoring national compliance with gender-related international agreements and United Nations instruments.

C. MEETINGS AND TRAINING WORKSHOPS

10. Pursuant to recommendation 7(a), to “circulate best practices and successful experiences documented by member countries for the benefit of other countries”, ECW held the following expert group meetings:

³ http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/E_ESCWA_ECW_12_TP-2_E.pdf.

⁴ <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/pubaction.asp?PubID=1364>.

Review of the draft study Addressing Barriers to Women's Economic Participation in the ESCWA Region

A prominent group of experts in gender, human rights, education and labour economics attended the meeting and investigated the low level of economic and labour force participation among Arab women despite the educational gains that girls and women have made over the past decade.⁵

Innovative Approaches for Promoting Women's Political Representation in the ESCWA Region

The meeting gathered leading experts in political sciences and gender issues representing a number of universities, international institutions and United Nations organizations and specialized agencies. Discussions focused on the political participation of Arab women before and after the political transitions that have taken place in some Arab countries and analysed factors that have contributed to their low rate of participation.

Assessment of the Status of Gender Mainstreaming in Governmental Institutions in ESCWA Member Countries

The consultative expert group meeting aimed to collect and discuss information on the efforts of member countries to mainstream a gender perspective into governmental institutions. The meeting offered opportunities to exchange experience and good practice in this area.

11. Pursuant to recommendation 7(b) of the fifth session of the Committee on Women to “offer technical assistance and advisory services in support of implementation by member countries of the recommendations”, ECW organized the following regional training workshop:

Enhancing National Action Plans to Implement Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women and Peace and Security

The workshop was organized in partnership with the Women Affairs Committee in Kuwait and was attended by 35 participants representing 13 Arab countries, including specialists in preparing national reports. It aimed to build the capacity of member countries to develop and monitor national action plans for the implementation of the resolution. It shared success stories and lessons learned related to protecting the human rights of women in armed conflicts and promoting their role in peacemaking.

12. During the biennium, ECW commemorated International Women's Day 2012 and 2013. On 8 March 2012, the Centre held an event in partnership with the Specialized Media and Advertising Research and Training (SMART) Center and Neswa Cafe.⁶ The theme of the celebration was “Towards a positive image of Arab women in the media”. Diplomats, representatives of United Nations organizations, non-governmental organizations and news media attended the event, which included two round tables: the first focused on “Women and Traditional Media”, while the second examined “Women and Social Media”. In 2013, the International Women's Day event took place on 8 March 2013, under the theme “Eliminating all forms of violence against women”.⁷ The event was held in the presence of diplomats, United Nations officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations and a host of activists, media professionals and academics. The event consisted of a panel discussion on violence against women, with presentations by ESCWA officials, a former female cabinet minister from Lebanon and representatives of international and regional organizations. The presentations addressed different aspects of gender-based violence in the context of international conventions and human rights frameworks, explored its economic and social cost and underlined the role of the State and civil society in its total elimination.

⁵ http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/E_ESCWA_ECW_12_WG-1_2_Report_E.pdf.

⁶ <http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/ecwnewsdetails.asp?id=70&division=ecw>.

⁷ <http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/ecwnewsdetails.asp?id=78&division=ecw>.

13. As a side event to the High-Level Meeting on Reform and Transitions to Democracy, ECW organized a seminar entitled *Women in the Uprising*.⁸ The seminar was organized in collaboration with the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World at the Lebanese American University and the Institute of Political Science at the University of Saint Joseph in Beirut. The seminar was attended by Arab activists, representatives of United Nations organizations and academic institutions. Prominent Arab activists led a panel discussion of the impact of recent uprising on female Arab leaders.

D. MANUALS, DATABASES, NEWSLETTERS AND INFORMATION KITS

14. Recognizing the importance of and need for communication between ESCWA and governmental and non-governmental bodies, including experts and researchers, ECW continued to develop and disseminate manuals, newsletters and information kits related to gender and women's issues. These communication tools aimed to raise awareness about gender-related priorities in the region and the need to mainstream gender issues in policies, programmes and national plans.

15. Recommendation 7(e) of the fifth session of the Committee on Women requested ECW to “publish a periodic booklet on the situation of women in the ESCWA region, including baseline indicators”. Pursuant to that recommendation and in preparation for the sixth session of Committee on Women, ECW produced a poster and an information kit with statistical data on the status of Arab women in the main socioeconomic fields (health, employment, political participation and education).

16. ECW produced eight newsletters on developments related to the status of women in Arab countries, each of which focused on an important emerging theme. The first newsletter focused on women and economics and the second focused on women in information and communication technology (ICT). The combined third and fourth newsletter focused on violence against women, underscoring recent initiatives undertaken by ECW to tackle this human rights problem. The newsletter highlighted findings from four ECW studies indicated above, which reflect the significance of violence against women in the 2012-2013 work programme of the division. Findings detailed in the newsletter also correspond directly to the conclusions of the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which was held in March 2013 under the theme. The elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls. The newsletter also discussed the tenets of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on Women and Peace and Security and a recently initiated ECW project to build the capacity of Arab parliamentarians on the implementation of the resolution. The combined third and fourth newsletter also included new sections that highlighted such topics as recent legislation related to women in the region and various relevant training, communication and knowledge tools.

17. Four additional newsletters were issued. One featured the results of the Situation Analysis on Female Refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic, which explored the status and conditions of Syrian refugee women in Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, specifically in relation to four issues: (1) gender-based violence; (2) access to food; (3) health care; and (4) education. The objective of the situation analysis was to gather facts about the living conditions of Syrian refugee women and to discuss their needs in terms of policies and programmes. The findings of the analysis contributed to the formulation of new initiatives at ESCWA to respond to emerging priorities in the region. The three remaining newsletters also communicated priority issues related to the empowerment of Arab women to policymakers and relevant stakeholders. The topics of those newsletters were as follows: Women and political participation; Trafficking in women and girls in the region; and Violence against women. Each provided a concise summary of the issue as it relates to the region, highlighted main findings and facts, and proposed policy options to address identified gaps and needs.

⁸ <http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/ecwnewsdetails.asp?id=76&division=ecw>.

18. ECW maintains an updated web page displaying all activities undertaken by the Centre including studies, research, reports, meetings, workshops and newsletters.

19. A continuously updated page for ESCWA on Facebook displays news concerning major developments and activities. Using that page, ECW responds to inquiries on women and gender issues.

20. Pursuant to recommendation 7(a) and with a view to improving the quantity and quality of statistical methodologies for measuring the status of women, ECW conducted a review of all relevant national legislation (including penal codes, personal status codes, labour laws and social security laws) related to violence against women within the framework of international conventions on human rights (especially CEDAW). The review is part of a project that aims to do the following: (a) increase awareness about national laws governing or impacting violence against women; and (b) develop national measures to rectify legal gaps and discriminatory aspects. The findings of the review are presented in an analytical regional report, which will feed into a comprehensive evolving database accessible to all member countries through the web portal of ESCWA, to be used as a monitoring and reporting tool on any legislative development relevant to violence against women in the region. The project also includes a training workshop to build the capacity of member countries with regard to legislation and to orient them on accessing and using the database.

E. ADVISORY SERVICES AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

21. Pursuant to recommendation 7(b) to “offer technical assistance and advisory services in support of implementation by member countries of the recommendations” of the fifth session of the Committee on Women, ECW provided advisory services and technical assistance on gender-related topics to nine member countries, namely Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. More than 450 officials benefitted from the direct assistance and services of ESCWA in the areas of gender mainstreaming, formulation of national strategies for women, developing national and international statistical indicators to monitor progress achieved in the implementation of international conventions on women issues and Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW reporting, monitoring and evaluation, and leadership skills. As a result of those capacity development efforts and advisory services, an increasing number of member countries have begun to mainstream gender in national policies. In addition, an increasing number of member countries have recently formulated national strategies or action plans for the empowerment of women to reduce the gender gap and expedite the achievement of gender equality. The following table includes details of official missions undertaken in member countries in chronological order:

OFFICIAL MISSIONS UNDERTAKEN IN MEMBER COUNTRIES

Countries	Beneficiary	Technical assistance	Period
Qatar	Council for Family Affairs and National Commission for Human Rights	Conducted a national workshop on The Right of Women to Work as Enshrined in International Instruments such as CEDAW.	4-5 April 2012
Jordan	Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation	Provided technical assistance on mainstreaming gender in plans and policies.	18-21 May 2012
Sudan	Non-governmental organizations and Ministry of Social Affairs	Conducted a training session on Gender and Millennium Development Goals with a special focus on legislation geared towards gender equality and the empowerment of women.	15-20 June 2012
Sudan	Civil society organizations and Ministry of Welfare and Social Security	Fact-finding mission to assess National Women Machineries needs in Sudan.	19-21 June 2012

Countries	Beneficiary	Technical assistance	Period
Jordan	Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation	Conducted a training workshop on Women and Leadership Skills.	10-11 September 2012
Qatar	Supreme Council for Women, National Commission on Human Rights in Qatar/Commission on Human Rights in Qatar	Facilitated a seminar on CEDAW and Islam.	18-21 November 2012
Saudi Arabia	Ministry of Economy and Planning	Contributed to the preparation and development of a chapter on Women and family issues in the tenth Development Plan and presented it to the Government.	7-9 December 2012
Lebanon	National Commission for Lebanese Women and the United Nations Population Fund	Contributed to the discussions of the National Plan of Action and implementation of the national strategy for women 2011-2021.	12-13 February 2013
	Ministry of Education	Provided advisory services on the plan of action of the Committee on Gender Mainstreaming in the Ministry of Education.	30 October 2013
	Ministry of Social Affairs/Directors of regional centres for social services	Conducted a training workshop on gender mainstreaming in the work of the Ministry of Social Affairs.	27-28 November 2013
Bahrain	National Supreme Council for Women	Conducted a training workshop to raise awareness of non-governmental organization working under the umbrella of the Council. Provided technical assistance to the Council to develop a standard system to certify trainers. Conducted a training workshop for judges on the implementation of CEDAW.	11-14 March 2013
United Arab Emirates	Women's General Union	Reviewed two policy papers focusing on health and education to feed into the national strategy on women.	April 2013
	Women's General Union/Directors of statistical units in ministries and departments	Conducted a national training workshop on statistical indicators related to monitoring the status of women.	16-18 December 2013
Palestine	Ministry of Women Affairs/Directors of Gender Units in all ministries and departments	Conducted a training-for-trainers workshop on concepts related to gender and training skills and techniques.	12-14 November 2013

22. In addition, ECW networked and shared information with other agencies working in the same field. ECW participated in the fifth meeting of the Think Tank for Arab Women organized by the Swedish Institute in Alexandria and Karama, a non-governmental organization based in Cairo. In 2012 and 2013, ECW also participated in the regional workshop on Women in Computing in the Arab World, organized by the New York University in Abu Dhabi.

23. ECW continued to focus efforts on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, especially Goal 3 on gender equality. In cooperation with the Emerging and Conflict-Related Issues Division of ESCWA, ECW provided a series of capacity-building activities to support the efforts of the Sudan to meet the Millennium Development Goals. Accordingly, ECW facilitated training sessions to Sudanese women, including women in rural areas, on priority issues including violence against women and women in conflict. This also included building the capacity of government officials on United Nations frameworks for advancing gender issues.

F. FIELD PROJECTS AND EXTRABUDGETARY ACTIVITIES

24. Pursuant to recommendation 7(a), in partnership with UN Women and with funding support from the Norwegian Embassy in Lebanon, ECW published a flagship study on Combating Domestic Violence Against Women and Girls: Policies to Empower Women in the Arab Region. This study investigated violence against women and girls in the domestic sphere. The study focused on 18 Arab countries covered by the mandates of ESCWA and UN Women. Its objective was to generate evidence-based policy recommendations addressed to Arab states to scale up their commitment to combat domestic violence. Some of the recommendations are also addressed to civil society organizations as partners in the development process. The study drew on desk research and an in-depth examination of laws and regulations, as well as field research conducted in eight countries. It benefitted from consultations with experts and specialists in the field, carried out as part of two expert group meetings held in January and May 2013 at the United Nations House in Beirut.

25. ESCWA is implementing a United Nations Development Account project titled Institutional and capacity building project for Arab Parliaments for the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on Women and Peace and Security. The project, which is currently being implemented in partnership with the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Economic Commission for Africa Subregional Office for North Africa, aims to build and strengthen the capacity of Arab parliamentarians and legislative bodies in countries that are affected by conflict or that are currently in transition. The project specifically focuses on Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Tunisia and Yemen to ensure their full implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. The project shall target members of parliament and provide training on legislative change, notably in the area of ensuring the rights of women in conflict settings and ending impunity for crimes committed against them. The project shall also produce two normative outputs, namely a study on gaps in legislation for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 in selected Arab countries, and a training manual on the roles of members of parliament in implementing national action plans and the legal implications of the resolution. The project shall also result in the establishment of an electronic network for parliament members and parliament administrators, within the International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW Politics) to sustain acquired knowledge and provide a forum for the exchange of good practice and success stories in the implementation of the resolution.

26. ECW is implementing a project to establish an Observatory for Women in the Arab Region in partnership with the Hariri Foundation for Sustainable Human Development. The project aims to produce an index to measure gender equality, tailored specifically to the Arab region. Other deliverables expected over the next two years include the creation of a sex-disaggregated database on the civil, political, social, economic and legal status of women in Lebanon and the production of country profiles covering those areas.

27. Within ESCWA, ECW is leading the implementation of the United Nations Chief Executive Board System-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) on gender equality and the empowerment of women. In accordance with the UN-SWAP framework, ECW has assessed and periodically reported on the status of gender equality within ESCWA in the following areas: (a) accountability; (b) results-based management; (c) oversight; (d) human and financial resources; (e) capacity; and (f) coherence, knowledge and information management. Having successfully piloted UN-SWAP across the Commission, ECW will continue to monitor the Commission's progress towards full compliance with the UN-SWAP framework.
