



# NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

## Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment within National Institutions in the Arab Region



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ESCWA, an innovative catalyst for a stable, just and flourishing Arab region

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Committed to the 2030 Agenda, ESCWA's passionate team produces innovative knowledge, fosters regional consensus and delivers transformational policy advice. Together, we work for a sustainable future for all.

# Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment within National Institutions in the Arab Region

The United Nations methodology to mainstream gender equality in its work has proven its merit in advancing equality issues. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), building on its successful experience, aims to transfer the methodology to national institutions in Arab countries and encourage its application therein.

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## 1. United Nations Organizations Announce their Interest in Mainstreaming Gender Equality in their Work

In 2012, the United Nations adopted the System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women pursuant to a 2006 policy by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board

for Coordination on strengthening and accelerating gender equality within the Organization. The Action Plan is the first accountability framework for mainstreaming gender equality in United Nations organizations. It facilitates the process of monitoring and guiding progress through a set of indicators on gender equality and women's empowerment, and it applies to all United Nations bodies, departments and offices.

**The System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women comprises 15 indicators to measure the performance of United Nations bodies and offices in a range of measures under each indicator**

**Element 1: Accountability**

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Performance indicator | Policy and plan                          |
| Performance indicator | Gender-responsive performance management |

**Element 2: Results-based management**

|                       |                          |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Performance indicator | Strategic planning       |
| Performance indicator | Monitoring and reporting |

**Element 3: Oversight**

|                       |                            |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Performance indicator | Evaluation                 |
| Performance indicator | Gender-responsive auditing |
| Performance indicator | Programme review           |

**Element 4: Human and Financial Resources**

|                       |                               |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Performance indicator | Financial resource tracking   |
| Performance indicator | Financial resource allocation |
| Performance indicator | Gender architecture           |
| Performance indicator | Organizational culture        |

**Element 5: Capacity**

|                       |                      |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Performance indicator | Capacity assessment  |
| Performance indicator | Capacity development |

**Element 6: Coherence, knowledge and information management**

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Performance indicator | Knowledge generation and communication |
| Performance indicator | Coherence                              |

## **2. ESCWA Response to the United Nations Resolution on Mainstreaming Gender Equality**

ESCWA, as a United Nations entity, committed itself to the Action Plan from the start. In 2012, it piloted the Action Plan along with eight other United

Nations entities. In 2015, ESCWA made significant strides in meeting the Action Plan's requirements compared with the United Nations Secretariat and the wider United Nations system. The experience of ESCWA demonstrated the importance of developing institutional mechanisms to support gender equality and women's empowerment within decision-making bodies.

Building on the success of ESCWA in implementing the Action Plan and its significant progress in effectively and efficiently implementing its work programmes and boosting its productivity, and in view of Arab national women's machineries' interest in this approach that was expressed in a recommendation made by the Committee on Women at its seventh session, ESCWA decided to share its experience with national institutions and to adapt it to the needs and specificities of Arab countries. At its seventh session held in 2016, the Committee on Women recommended working with national women's machineries on implementing a project to mainstream gender in public institutions by developing an Arab framework to measure progress towards achieving gender equality in these institutions. Transferring the ESCWA experience to national women's machineries is a first step towards building their capacity, in the hope that they in turn will transfer and disseminate the experience to all national institutions.

### 3. Transferring the ESCWA Experience to Member States

ESCWA, in partnership with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), held a regional workshop on institutionalizing gender at the organizational level (Beirut, 14-16 November 2016). The workshop aimed to

review the System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, adapt it to the needs of national institutions in Arab countries, and build the capacity of ESCWA member States to implement it. Based on the workshop's outcomes, the System-wide Action Plan was amended and the "Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment within National Institutions in the Arab Region" was prepared. The latter Action Plan is the first unified Arab framework with 15 performance indicators to measure efforts towards achieving gender equality in public institutions. Participants agreed to pilot the framework in one of the region's national machineries.

With funding from and in consultation with the UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States, ESCWA developed a project to pilot the proposed Action Plan. The Jordanian National Commission for Women expressed its readiness to implement the pilot project based on a clear political will to develop its work by firstly promoting equality and

The objectives of implementing the Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment within National Institutions in the Arab Region are to:

- Reach a common understanding of gender equality and women's empowerment;
- Adopt an inter-institutional methodology to mainstream gender equality;
- Follow a joint sliding scale to monitor progress.

empowerment within the Commission, and subsequently within various State institutions so as to achieve gender equality and empower women to access and benefit from all available resources.

## 4. Implementing The Pilot Project In The Jordanian National Commission For Women

Conducting gender audits should precede the implementation of the Action Plan at the institutional level. ESCWA urges all stakeholders in national institutions to use this tool as a concrete and clear first step towards implementing the Action Plan. Accordingly, the Jordanian National Commission for Women conducted an audit and derived reform processes from its results, notably developing a capacity-building programme for the Commission's staff, and revising the Commission's documents to ensure consistency with its goal of achieving gender equality and women's empowerment.

### A. Participatory audit of gender equality and women's empowerment

The audit began with a discussion of its primary goal, which was to highlight strengths and weaknesses in mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment in the various areas of the Commission's work. It was agreed that the audit's findings would contribute to drafting recommendations to further consolidate and institutionalize strengths, and to address weaknesses and ensure that they were not repeated. Accordingly, an internal work agreement was prepared based on the following:

- Employing the International Labour Organization's (ILO) participatory gender audit methodology, which includes five key areas for analysing data and results;
- Selecting a process facilitator certified by ILO;
- Coordinating and cooperating with ESCWA in all phases of the audit;
- Selecting an audit team from within the Jordanian National Commission for Women to work with the facilitator;

#### Proposed steps to implement the Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment within National Institutions in the Arab Region:

- Discuss the Action Plan with the institution that wishes to implement it;
- Secure the institution's leadership commitment to its implementation;
- Conduct an institutional gender audit so as to identify gaps;
- Build on the results of the audit to determine required and workable actions;
- Prepare the first report on the Action Plan as a baseline for monitoring progress in future annual reports;
- Prepare annual reports;
- Prepare remedial plans and work on their implementation.

- Developing a clear action plan that takes into account the ILO participatory gender audit methodology;
- Implementing the action plan in four phases.

The audit concluded the following:

- Agree on the importance of mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment into the Commission's work before focusing on other organizations and target groups. This is an expression of the Commission's willingness and readiness to work at all levels to discuss relevant issues with organizations and target groups. Consequently, the Commission must acquire a deep understanding of the importance of gender mainstreaming and ways to achieve it, and must train its staff to respond to questions based on practical experiences rather than conceptual beliefs. Mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment in the Commission is a good practical example for other actors, an indication of the Commission's integrity in dealing with gender equality issues; and a prologue for successful experiences that can be utilized elsewhere;
- Unify views at all management levels on the importance of working together to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the Commission before transferring expertise beyond it, while taking into account that the Commission, although founded on principles of equality, still

Five key areas of analysis of the ILO participatory gender audit methodology:

1. Gender issues in the context of the work unit, and existing gender expertise, competence and capacity-building.
2. Gender in work unit's objectives, programming and implementation cycles, and choice of partner organizations.
3. Information and knowledge management within the work unit, and gender equality policy as reflected in its products and public image.
4. Decision-making, staffing and human resources, and organizational culture.
5. Work unit's perception of achievement on gender equality.

Phases of the participatory gender audit at the Jordanian National Commission for Women

**Phase I:** Preparation and planning

**Phase II:** Establishing a supportive environment for the audit process, gathering necessary information, and identifying means to collect information using the three tools contained in the ILO methodology:

- Desk review;
- Individual interviews;
- Workshops.

**Phase III:** Analysing data and preparing a report based on all available data in line with the five key areas of the ILO methodology

**Phase IV:** Discussing the draft report with various departments with a view to adopting it along with recommendations emanating from the analysis

suffers from gaps that need to be addressed before working with other institutions and stakeholders;

- Identify and tackle gaps in the Commission highlighted by the audit, and develop clear recommendations and indicators for preparing an implementation plan;
- Agree on the importance of developing a clear institutional strategy on gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment, which will form a solid foundation for the Commission's work and a positive example for other institutions.

## **B. Jordanian National Commission for Women's response to the audit recommendations**

Based on the audit recommendations, the Commission developed terms of reference to modify its structure, functions and work documents and to implement a training programme. The terms of reference stressed that the objective was to implement the reform plan developed on the basis of the findings and recommendations of the audit report. Based on the terms of reference, the Commission, with the support of ESCWA, contracted experts to implement the reform plan.

### **1. Revising literature and terms of reference**

Based on the audit findings, the Commission's institutional documents were revised from the perspective

of gender equality and women's empowerment to strengthen the Commission's ability to reach its desired goal. The proposed amendments aimed to form a clear notion of the Commission's vision, mission and objectives and to confirm women's role in the development process, so as to fulfil the Commission's ultimate role of advancing development and safeguarding its values. The revisions also aimed to promote coherence between the Commission's functions, mission, goals and values, and to focus on women's rights rather than on their gains.

### **2. Capacity-building**

The Commission prioritized strengthening its human capacity as a basis for implementing all the audit recommendations. Accordingly, several training sessions were held, including the following:

- Training Commission staff members to employ tools to analyse gender equality and disparities and the respective roles of men and women; assessing different needs and identifying gaps to enable trainees to mainstream gender equality and empower women in all stages of planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating development policies and programmes; analysing data from the same perspective and drawing on information gleaned to develop work plans; and following up on programme implementation and draft reports, so as to take appropriate action and develop programmes

on operationalizing the role of both women and men;

- Training staff members on communication and persuasion skills in the field of women's rights and gender equality, and on analysing target groups at the community or decision-making level;
- Training some Commission staff to deliver training in that area through a specific methodology, exercises and tools to teach new staff members of the Commission and intended beneficiaries of its programmes to mainstream gender equality and to use analysis tools and assess needs from that perspective;
- Holding panel discussions for staff in administrative support roles in the Commission and the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development, the Commission's host, to raise awareness of the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment so as to achieve sustainable national development and to publicize women's rights and the concept of equality and empowerment. The sessions addressed the need to dismantle gender stereotypes and included an overview of the forms of discrimination against women in the labour market and how to eliminate them, and highlighted the significance of gender diversity by raising awareness of the importance of women's empowerment and

participation in the economy towards sustainable national development.

### **3. Preparing an induction and training manual**

The manual includes introductory material on the nature of the Commission's work, functions, objectives, action lines and key units, and a summary of its terms of reference. It also reviews the concept and relevance of gender equality and women's empowerment and includes training material on gender analysis tools.

The manual is an introductory training material used by staff members of the Jordanian National Commission for Women who participated in sessions on analysing and acquiring communication and persuasion skills, held under the training programme. The manual was designed for staff members to learn without the need for a professional trainer. It should be noted that new recruits to the Commission can also benefit from the manual.

### **C. First report of the Jordanian National Committee for Women on the action plan**

As noted above, implementing the Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment within National Institutions in the Arab Region requires annual progress monitoring of performance indicators through self-evaluation and reporting on achievements and on future remedial plans. The evaluation system is a tool for steering progress and moving forward.

ESCWA supported the Jordanian National Committee for Women

in preparing the first report as an additional step under the pilot project. The evaluation process was not limited to 12 months but encompassed several years, given that the first report is a benchmark for measuring future progress. The evaluation contributed to identifying strengths that the Commission could build on and weaknesses requiring interventions. It concluded with a number of proposals for further progress.

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## 5. Conclusions and lessons learned

The approach adopted by ESCWA aims to build and promote the capacity of national women's machineries and to support them in achieving their objectives firstly, and subsequently transferring their expertise to other institutions and ministries based on a firmly held belief that implementing such an Action Plan in all institutions will benefit, support and mainstream gender equality issues.

The following are key lessons learned from adapting and implementing the Action Plan:

- The importance of working towards the implementation of the Action Plan in national women's machineries, while highlighting many of the gaps whose solutions undoubtedly contribute to promoting gender equality in Arab countries;
- The importance of building the capacity of national women's machineries in Arab countries to transfer and implement the Action Plan in other institutions and ministries concerned with labour, finance, planning and other matters;
- The importance of the Action Plan in identifying gaps in public institutions' performance and in improving performance to serve all the institution's purposes and objectives, including achieving gender equality. Experience has shown that the Action Plan can contribute to bridging many performance gaps;
- Implementing the Action Plan does not require additional efforts or significant funding, since the approach aims to guide and improve an institution's work without imposing cumbersome additional requirements.

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## 6. Future steps

Several national machineries have expressed interest in implementing the Action Plan, which is expected to be rolled out in the Protection and Social Rehabilitation Centre (AMAN) at Qatar Social Work.

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