



Summary

Arab Regional Synthesis Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action Twenty Years Later¹

¹ This document was prepared for the Arab High-Level Conference on Beijing+20: Towards Justice and Equality for Women in the Arab Region.

General introduction

Background

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995 were adopted during the Fourth World Conference on Women.² These commitments were reaffirmed during the twenty-third special session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2000. The Beijing Platform for Action constitutes an international framework for achieving gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. It calls on Governments, the international community and civil society, including NGOs and the private sector, to take strategic action in the following 12 critical areas of concern: poverty, education and training, health, violence, armed conflict, the economy, power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, human rights, media, the environment, and the girl child.

In this context, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) reviews progress made in implementing the Platform for Action every five years. Three such reviews were completed in 2000, 2005 and 2010. A final document emerged from each of these reviews with the aim of enhancing the global commitment to the empowerment of women and children and delineating the priorities for action in the following five years.

In 2015, the fifty-ninth session of CSW will conduct a global review of progress made 20 years after adoption of the Platform for Action. In this context, the five regional commissions under the United Nations, including the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), have prepared regional reports based on national reports put together by United Nations Member States. They will be consolidated into the global report to be presented by the Secretary-General before the General Assembly.

The ESCWA Centre for Women (ECW), the Arab States Regional Office of UN Women and the Department of Women, Family and Childhood (Social Affairs Sector) of the League of Arab States have worked together to prepare the 2015 Arabic synthesis report. It combines 21 national reports submitted by member States: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

Methodology

In order to unify the concepts and visions presented in the national reports and guarantee consistency, the following procedure was followed:

- I. A guidance note³ was distributed to member States in order to provide a framework for the preparation of national reviews.
- II. A workshop was held to support the preparation of national reviews.
- III. A consultative workshop was held for civil society organizations in the Arab region on progress made in implementation of the Platform for Action after 20 years.
- IV. A meeting was held to review the first draft of the regional report. Representatives of National Women's Machineries from 15 of the Arab countries participating in the report attended, along with

² The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). Available from <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>

³ This note was prepared by UN Women and the five regional commissions. Available from www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/59/BeijingPlus20-GuidanceNote-en.pdf.

regional experts.⁴ The meeting coincided with discussion sessions on measures taken since 1995 and the course of past global reviews. The status of women in the light of recent developments and conflicts in the Arab region was also discussed.

- V. The regional report was based exclusively on the national reports and supported by the findings of experts and country representatives who attended the aforementioned meetings and workshops.

Contents of the report

In addition to the Introduction, which contains background and outlines the methodology used, the report is divided into four sections (following the arrangement used in the national reports), as follows:

- ❖ Section One covers the period since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and is enriched by previous regional reviews, resulting in a comprehensive analysis of trends, opportunities and long-term challenges. It also addresses the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000), which followed the first five-year review.
- ❖ Section Two highlights progress in the 12 areas of concern outlined in the Platform for Action, focusing on the past five years.
- ❖ Section Three offers data and statistics to complement the results of the global review of national gender statistics programmes, which was presented to the United Nations Statistical Commission in February 2013.
- ❖ Section Four addresses key opportunities and challenges in implementing the Platform for Action and new priorities that have emerged over the past five years.

General context of the regional report

Although the participating countries followed the same steps, the national reports covered a wide range of experiences in efforts to improve the conditions of women in terms of approaches, conceptual bases, the size, number and variety of parties involved, availability of statistical data and information, the nature of mechanisms used to address relevant issues, and the degree of discrepancy between planning and implementation.

These unique experiences reflect differences in the political, economic, social, cultural and security conditions in those countries and the degree to which they have been influenced by major global and regional events in recent years. Rapid developments in technology and communications, for example, have been accompanied by the globalization of economies, culture, media and consumer lifestyles, as well as financial crises, wars, uprisings and terrorist acts.

Section One – General overview of achievements and challenges in enhancing gender equality and the empowerment of women since 1995

The major upheavals that have occurred in Arab countries in the past five years have directly and indirectly affected the course of women's advancement and actions to promote women's rights.

⁴ ECW conducted the meeting in conjunction with UN Women and the Department of Women, Family, and Childhood (Social Affairs Sector) of the League of Arab States in Beirut on 22-23 October 2014.

A. Key achievements

Since the 1990s, Arab countries have accomplished much in terms of awareness-raising, legislation and planning, and compliance with international agreements and conventions. That progress was interspersed with setbacks caused by crises, armed conflicts, occupation and acts of terrorism.

- **International treaties**

Arab countries adopted a more positive stance towards international treaties, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Some Arab States ratified the convention (table 1), while others lifted their reservations. Arab countries also ratified other agreements concerning human, women's and children's rights.

Table 1: Status of Arab countries with regard to ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Country	Date signed	Date ratified
Jordan	3 December 1980	1 July 1992
United Arab Emirates	--	6 October 2004
Bahrain	19 June 2002	19 July 2002
Tunisia	24 July 1980	20 September 1985
Algeria	--	22 May 1996
Comoros	Joined 1994	31 October 1994
Syrian Arab Republic	--	28 March 2003
Djibouti	Joined 1998	2 December 1998
Sudan	--	--
Somalia	--	--
Iraq	--	13 August 1986
Oman	--	7 February 2006
State of Palestine	--	2 April 2014
Qatar	--	29 April 2009
Kuwait	--	2 September 1994
Lebanon	--	6 April 1997
Libya	--	16 May 1989
Egypt	16 July 1980	18 September 1981
Morocco	--	21 June 1993
Saudi Arabia	7 September 2000	7 September 2000
Mauritania	Joined 2001	5 October 2001
Yemen	--	30 May 1984

Source: United Nations Treaty Collection, available from: <http://treaties.un.org>

Note: The mark (--) indicates that the country did not sign or ratify the convention.

- **Legislation**

Legislation in many Arab States has been amended over the past 20 years to address gender equality. Labour laws have also been amended, especially with regard to equal wages and maternity leave. Some countries enacted personal status laws and others modified personal status codes to better reflect gender justice and facilitate equality in the family. Numerous Arab countries have amended their

criminal codes with regard to “honour crimes”. Legislation criminalizing domestic violence has been passed in some countries and awaits approval in others. Similarly, constitutional amendments granting mothers the right to confer their nationality on their children, even if the father is of another nationality, have been enacted or are pending in certain countries. Legislation in some countries has been brought into line with regional and international standards for preventing human trafficking. A number of Arab countries have passed laws to encourage participation by women in political life, such as through quota systems reserving a set number of seats in parliaments and local councils for women.

- **Education**

Arab countries have achieved remarkable progress in education for women, reducing gender and urban-rural inequalities, introducing new methods for informal education and implementing programmes to improve educational performance. Many Arab countries have developed literacy programmes, worked towards making education mandatory for all and developed vocational training programmes for female students who drop out of school. A key accomplishment in a number of countries has been the adoption of universal, mandatory and free primary education.

- **Health**

Advances have been made even in some low-income countries on improving awareness of women’s health issues, birth delivery conditions and maternal care. Mechanisms have been established to improve women’s health services, especially in rural regions. Most countries have succeeded in reducing maternal mortality rates.

- **Economic empowerment**

Numerous countries have acted to help women with limited incomes, especially in rural areas, to obtain gainful employment and establish small enterprises through micro-loans. Some countries have created legal frameworks to enhance the participation of women in economic life.

- **Role of associations and NGOs**

The role of associations and NGOs has grown substantially in some countries since the 1990s and their cooperation has become a key to implementing national plans and strategies. Awareness-raising campaigns by NGOs have attracted media interest in a range of women’s issues. Groups supporting women’s rights have often stood at the forefront of broader social protests.

- **Gender-responsive budgeting**

A number of countries have acted to address gender issues in their budgets and make financial systems more gender-responsive.

B. Challenges and obstacles

In spite of their achievements, Arab countries still face considerable obstacles and challenges. They include addressing security problems, implementing legislation and plans, combating poverty, reducing regional disparities, and creating a cultural environment conducive to improving the situation of women.

- **Armed conflicts and refugees**

The occupation and settlement activities of Israel in Palestinian territory and its military offensives in the Gaza Strip constitute flagrant human rights violations. War and terrorist actions in other countries have inflicted serious damage on infrastructure and crippled Government services, making women more vulnerable to violence and aggression. War crimes and the incidence of rape have

increased, according to the national reports of some countries. Violence in all forms has increased, posing a serious threat to women's safety. Conflicts have created millions of displaced persons and refugees, the majority of whom are women and children.

- **Institutional challenges**

Despite clear advances in legislation and planning to counter discrimination and violence against women, a chasm still divides them from implementation on the ground. There are many reasons for this. Most Arab countries have failed to make effective commitments to integrating gender issues in policies and budgeting, although there has been some improvement in that regard. Institutional performance has been disrupted in some countries by instability and political conflict, and otherwise hampered by inadequate Government funding and a lack of qualified human resources. The slow activation of legal reforms and the nature of auditing mechanisms for integrating gender issues has also been responsible for delays in implementation.

- **Cultural environment**

Almost all national reports cited cultural reasons for the gap between planning and implementation. Local cultures respond poorly to changes in standards and legislation concerning women. The traditional perception that women's work should be restricted to the home, for example, has prevented the application of equal employment legislation adopted by most Arab countries. The rise of radical groups in countries engulfed by armed conflict has had a profound impact on approaches to gender issues, especially due to the decline in women's protection mechanisms.

- **Poverty and regional disparities**

Economic statistics disaggregated by gender are largely unavailable, effectively concealing the real obstacles women face due to poverty and deteriorating economic conditions.

Although some countries have pursued initiatives to empower underprivileged women, the mechanisms in terms of loan provision and vocational training are limited in number and lack resources. Sluggish modernization in rural areas, where production is usually limited to handicrafts and traditional farming, exacerbates the problem. The persistently high rates of illiteracy among women in some countries, especially in rural areas, further hinder their participation in the cycle of economic production and their awareness of their rights.

Section Two – Progress in addressing critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action since 2009

The wars, uprisings, armed conflicts, terrorist acts and societal divisions experienced by the region in the past five years have had a significant impact on the course of women's advancement and progress towards securing women's rights.

A. Burden of poverty on women

- **Legislation and measures**

Arab countries have continued efforts to combat poverty, the extent of which varies from one country to another. Priority has been given to empowering rural women and tackling conditions in the most poverty-stricken regions. The most significant initiatives have included facilitating small credit programmes and projects to generate income for poor women and their families. As a result, the share of loans and funding directed at women in Arab countries rose. Cash assistance to poor families has

been increased in some countries without gender-specific loan or funding programmes or projects in the poorest regions. In some countries, work has been done to improve infrastructure in isolated rural areas.

- **Obstacles and challenges**

In spite of these efforts, many obstacles remain, including: uneven growth across regions; barriers to service access for rural and poor women; lack of health insurance for women in countries seriously affected by poverty; administrative complications; delays in amendments to laws on women’s economic independence; the negative impact of certain economic policies and the global economic crisis; armed conflicts; political divisions caused by recession; the growth of poverty in certain social sectors; the limited access of women to production tools, property ownership and resources; and the tendency to undervalue women, their household duties and work done by them outside the home.

B. Education and training

- **Legislation and measures**

National reports showed that legislative and regulatory measures have been taken in most Arab countries to eradicate illiteracy and improve educational and training infrastructure, prevent gender-based discrimination and facilitate empowerment of women in education in particular. Most Arab countries have achieved notable progress in illiteracy eradication, particularly with regard to women. Female enrolment rates have improved at all levels of education (see table 2). In some Arab countries, female students have demonstrated excellence, surpassing their male peers at various levels of education, as well as in educational, teaching and training institutions.

Table 2: Enrolment – Net percentage of females in basic education according to national statistical reports (2010-2013)

Country	Percentage
Jordan	99%
United Arab Emirates	95.4%
Bahrain	100%
Tunisia	94.6%
Algeria	97.91%
Comoros	91.8%
Syrian Arab Republic	70.6%
Djibouti	47%
Sudan	82.3%
Oman	100%
State of Palestine	93.8%
Egypt	94.3%
Morocco	99.1%
Mauritania	100%
Yemen	75.3%

Source: National reports from Arab countries.

- **Obstacles and challenges**

Major obstacles to efforts to combat gender-based discrimination in education and training include: Prevailing cultural attitudes to women’s education; stereotypical views of women presented in curricula; minimal budgets allocated for women’s education; shortcomings in mechanisms to enforce laws; and huge losses incurred by education and training institutions due to armed conflict. The Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories has paralyzed school life, making it difficult for women to move about safely in their pursuit of learning.

The national reports indicated that the greatest challenges with regard to women’s education include eradicating illiteracy and closing the gaps between men and women at all stages of education, especially in vocational and technical education. Challenges also exist in developing educational curricula according to high quality standards, clearing these curricula of discrimination and implicit and explicit gender stereotypes and in ensuring their practical application.

C. Health

- **Legislation and measures**

The national reports indicated that most Arab countries have made progress in health service provision for women, mainly in maternal and reproductive health. Maternal mortality rates have fallen in all countries that submitted reports (table 3) and networks of maternal and child health units and primary health care centres have been expanded. National health strategies have resulted in a general improvement in most countries in gender-sensitive health care (table 4). There has been an overall increase in the number of health centres, medical personnel and mobile clinics in rural areas. Spending on health has risen as a proportion of budget in some countries. However, in certain countries shortcomings in health care and infrastructure were observed, including deficiencies in free health care and the failure of health insurance to cover wide segments of the female population. In some countries, the number of women working in health care has increased.

Table 3: Maternal mortality rate (MMR) per 100,000 live births (2011-2013)

Country	MMR per 100,000 live births
Jordan	19
United Arab Emirates	0
Bahrain	26.2
Tunisia	44
Algeria	86.9
Djibouti	65
Sudan	216
Oman	12.3
State of Palestine	28
Kuwait	1.7
Lebanon	10
Egypt	55
Morocco	112
Saudi Arabia	14
Mauritania	626

Yemen	148
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Source: National reports from Arab countries.

Table 4: Percentage of women using of family planning methods (2011-2013)

Country	Percentage
Jordan	61.2%
Tunisia	62.8%
Comoros	19%
Iraq	46%
Oman	99%
State of Palestine	52.5%
Qatar	38%
Egypt	60.3%
Mauritania	11.4%
Yemen	34%

Source: National reports of Arab countries.

- **Obstacles and challenges**

Numerous Arab countries continue to face major difficulties in providing health care for women and developing services, in part caused by inadequate funding, a focus on motherhood and childbirth, and the absence of a comprehensive concept of women’s health. Harmful traditional practices continue to prejudice the health of females. Health care institutions have been completely destroyed in some Arab countries affected by armed conflict.

Comprehensive and universal physical and mental health care for women is an urgent priority. Health education needs to be improved and Government health budgets should be increased. More needs to be done to counter harmful practices such as female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and child marriage.

D. Violence against women

- **Legislation and measures**

The absence of reliable statistics on gender-based violence makes it difficult to assess the impact of a wave of legal and other measures (including the creation of specialized units and women’s shelters and the increased frequency of training workshops and awareness-raising campaigns) taken in recent years in Arab countries to counter violence against women and children, punish perpetrators and combat human trafficking. However, some trends have emerged, including: an increased understanding of gender-based violence and its repercussions thanks to the work of civil society and greater media attention; improved institutional mechanisms, including dedicated units in hospitals and police stations for women and child victims of violence; the creation of national monitoring agencies to combat violence; a heightened political commitment to combating gender-based violence; and improved judicial handling of such cases of violence.

- **Obstacles and challenges**

Obstacles to progress in combating gender-based violence identified in the national reports include: inadequate programmes for the social and economic reintegration of female victims of violence; insufficient resources to implement national strategies and a lack of trained personnel to care

for women victims of violence; the slow course of legislative change; and barriers to legislation on combating violence against women where it conflicts with religion-based legislation. There is also a dearth of statistical information on the extent of violence against women, especially in the home. Women are generally unaware of their rights and often hesitant to report incidents of violence, harassment or rape. Many women face difficult economic conditions and a lack of choice, which leads many to remain silent rather than report violence, traditional practices such as FGM/C or “honour crimes”. As domestic violence becomes more widely debated in public arenas due to modern technology, pressure is growing on Governments to adapt legislation to international standards and develop mechanisms to combat gender-based violence.

E. Armed conflict

- **Legislation and measures**

A number of Arab countries suffering from armed conflict, occupation, terrorism, the influx of refugees and other crises are acting to apply Security Council resolution 1325 on women and peace.

- **Obstacles and challenges**

The prime obstacle to the protection of women is the worsening security situation in some Arab countries. In the shadow of armed conflict, State institutions and mechanisms disintegrate, war crimes and illegal acts by occupying forces are perpetrated with impunity, neighbouring countries face growing hardship in dealing with the influx of refugees, essential services collapse and freedom of movement is curtailed. During armed conflict, one of the toughest challenges in protecting women is helping them to acquire negotiating skills and engaging them in efforts to restore peace. In response to the challenges posed by displacement and refugees in host countries, international support should focus on women’s need for basic social services, safe housing and freedom of movement.

F. The economy

- **Legislation and measures**

Arab Governments have endeavoured to improve labour laws, combat gender discrimination and encourage the establishment of income-generating enterprises for women. They have adopted mechanisms to integrate rural women in economic activity and launched programmes to improve the professional environment for women. According to national reports, legal amendments have focused on aspects of labour law, such as leave allowances for working women. Although the number of female borrowers and beneficiaries of small and mid-sized enterprise funding has increased, the contribution of women to economic activity has grown tangibly only in a few countries. In some, unemployment among women has risen and their economic activity has diminished, in spite of the high percentage of educated women (see tables 5 and 6).

Table 5: Female unemployment rates according to the most recent available data

Country (year)	Unemployment rate
Jordan (2013)	22.2%
Bahrain (2013)	84%
Tunisia (2013)	21.9%
Algeria (2013)	16.3%
Comoros (nd)	47%
Iraq (2011)	20.7%

Oman (2010)	38.5%
State of Palestine (2013)	35%
Egypt (2012)	24.1%
Mauritania (2008)	44%
Yemen (2013)	60%

Source: National reports from Arab countries.

Table 6: Participation of women in the economy according to the most recent available data

Country	Year	Percentage
Jordan	2013	13.2%
Tunisia	2013	25.6%
Algeria	2013	17.6%
Comoros	--	17.9%
Syrian Arab Republic	2011	23.1%
Sudan	--	29.5%
Iraq	--	38%
Oman	2010	25.2%
State of Palestine	2013	17.3%
Qatar	2012	35%
Kuwait	2013	48.2%
Egypt	2012	22.4%
Mauritania	2008	34.4%
Yemen	2013	10.1%

Source: National reports from Arab countries.

- **Obstacles and challenges**

Considerable obstacles to the equal participation of women in the economy, especially in low- and middle-income countries, remain: The gap between wages for men and women remains in many labour markets, especially in the private sector; discrimination prevents women from obtaining economic leadership positions; obtaining loans is especially difficult for women; and there is little reliable research on the impact of the global economic crisis on women.

More needs to be done to bridge the gulf between men and women in terms of involvement in the economy, promote a balance between working women's home and professional life, enable women to access resources and own land, and to invest in education and vocational training.

G. Women in positions of authority and decision-making

- **Legislation and measures**

As the access of women to education has improved, so they have begun to enter areas previously reserved for men. Women have become more involved in political movements and women's organizations were called upon to contribute to constitutional change. Legislation has been enacted in some cases to guarantee quotas as high as 30 per cent for women's representation in official bodies. Educational and training programmes have been widely implemented in order to encourage greater participation by women in elections and the acceptance of women in leadership positions. Steps have been taken to appoint women to Government positions. Nevertheless, growth in women's political

participation and their presence in decision-making posts has been minimal overall and has even declined in some States.

The most notable improvement has come in women's representation in local councils and some public service positions. In some cases, parliamentary and Government representation of women has also improved, and women have entered fields that had previously been the preserve of men (table 7).

Table 7: Women's participation rates in four sectors in Arab States (2011-2013)

Country	Parliament	District	Diplomatic	Civil service
Jordan	12%	15.7%	17.9%	45%
United Arab Emirates	17.5%	-	-	66%
Bahrain	10%	12%	25%	47%
Tunisia	29.95%	33.29%	-	37.4%
Algeria	31.6%	39.53%	-	29.4%
Comoros	3%	-	-	30%
Syrian Arab Republic	12.4%	15%	15%	-
Djibouti	11%	40%	-	-
Sudan	25%	-	11%	29.5%
Iraq	-	-	-	-
Oman	18%	-	38.8%	47%
State of Palestine	12.9%	11.3%	4.3%	40.5%
Qatar	-	-	-	-
Kuwait	6%	-	-	-
Lebanon	3.1%	41%	21%	31%
Libya	16.5%	-	-	-
Egypt	1.97%	-	20%	-
Morocco	16.7%	-	-	38%
Saudi Arabia	-	-	-	-
Mauritania	21%	-	-	-
Yemen	0.6%	22%	10.77%	18%

Source: National reports of Arab countries.

Note: The mark (-) indicates that figures are unavailable.

- **Obstacles and challenges**

In national reports it was noted that Arab women continue to face many obstacles on the path to political empowerment, including: legislative and electoral mechanisms that fail to ensure equal opportunity; the deteriorating political and security situation in some countries; material, media and social restrictions on women who attempt to enter the political arena; a lack of commitment by political forces and parties to support women's access to decision-making positions; fragmentation of the women's movement; limited resources for studies on women's issues; and a tendency among decision-makers to disdain the idea of seeing women in positions of authority. Moreover, cases in which women have advanced in politics or been appointed to higher Government and administrative positions have largely been the result of individual decisions rather than institutional change. The principle challenge remains the need to attribute value to the participation of women in political life and management.

H. Institutional mechanisms to promote women's advancement

Most Arab countries have established Government or quasi-Government mechanisms to achieve gender equality, promote the advancement of women, create equal opportunity units in ministries, launch gender-sensitive budgets and support women's rights and empowerment.

- **Legislation and measures**

The Governments of some Arab countries have established women's ministries, on occasion in combination with development, childhood or family or social affairs. Such ministries and other bodies created to contribute to the advancement of women use a participatory approach based on coordination between relevant Government agencies and NGOs. In some countries, they have led to a rise in the number of associations concerned with women's matters and an increase in related activities and events. In some States, equal opportunity units or focal points for gender issues have been set up in ministries and other institutions, and others have begun integrate gender issues into budgeting.

- **Obstacles and challenges**

The formation of institutions to advance women and develop a participatory approach to planning is significant, but in some national reports it was revealed that implementation and results had fallen far short of declared goals. This has been due to the lack of a gender-sensitive approach to implementation, especially with regard to budgets, and the scarcity of gender-based statistical data. Armed conflict and political insecurity in several countries have hindered such mechanisms and strategies.

National mechanisms for the advancement of women should continue legal reform aimed at social justice and equal opportunities for men and women, and work to fill the gap between planning and execution. To that end, the workings of those mechanisms should be reviewed the collection of statistics and data improved.

I. Human rights

- **Legislation and measures**

Arab countries have taken numerous steps to strengthen the human rights of women, by including articles in their constitutions to guarantee those rights, amending policies with regard to the ratification of international conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, or forming special human rights units and commissions.

- **Obstacles and challenges**

Across the region, women are affected by conflict, creating a fertile ground for the violation of basic human rights in general, and of women's rights in particular. The continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory is a glaring violation of human rights. The view held by many of women as inferior to men encourages violence against and marginalization of women and constitutes a major obstacle to the promotion of human rights in Arab countries. Such views stand in the way of the ratification of international conventions, encourage the voicing of reservations to them, and even lead to violations of international commitments. Institutions should work to protect human rights by developing mechanisms that are difficult to circumvent and promoting awareness of women's rights.

J. The media

- **Procedures and outcomes**

A broad range of initiatives has been undertaken in order to strengthen the position of women and raise awareness of gender issues in the media, boost professionalism and encourage the media to produce images that reflect the diverse reality of women rather than reiterate exploitative or

stereotypical representations. They have included amendments to the law, the establishment of media watchdogs and agencies to monitor the image of women in the media, the formulation of codes of media ethics, encouragement for women to specialize in media, and the involvement of national institutions in media work. Although the number of women working in the media has grown, their access to decision-making positions remains limited. As noted in some national reports, improvements have tended to be ad hoc rather than part of any strategy. Improvements in media content, albeit minimal, have been brought about not only through the growing presence of women in the media, but also through efforts of national mechanisms to launch monitoring agencies, produce media material, develop communication skills, build websites, conduct studies and organize training.

- **Obstacles and challenges**

According to national reports, most Arab countries lack gender-sensitive media laws or even laws that address human rights. This is compounded by the absence of monitoring mechanisms and a weak sense of social responsibility on the part of media outlets. Some national mechanisms concerned with women's issues lack communication and media skills. Moreover, resources allocated to improving the role and standing of women in the media are inadequate; mechanisms are ill-equipped to monitor media content; coordination between institutes, university media departments, national institutions, media outlets and civil society to develop gender training programmes is lacking; and continuing education and training for media workers is insufficient.

Priority goals include: increasing the presence of women in the media; training women to benefit from interactive media; empowering women through employment in the public sphere; encouraging women to participate in the drafting of legislation and media ethics codes that include a gender perspective; and developing mechanisms to increase networking among various parties concerned with women's advancement, including the media.

K. The environment

- **Procedures and outcomes**

The Arab countries have generally failed to address the issue of women and the environment through legislation, although some have included clauses in broader national strategies for women's empowerment or created committees within national institutions. Some national environment plans likewise include clauses concerning women. The participation of women in the work of environmental groups in Arab countries has been marked.

- **Obstacles and challenges**

Little has been done to produce studies with a gender perspective on the environment and sustainable development. What environmental agencies there are have generally been set up only recently. In poorer Arab countries, particularly those facing environmental challenges, the authorities have been unable to secure suitable health and housing conditions in all regions. In general, the main challenge is to integrate gender issues in to environmental development and to promote coordination between national women's mechanisms, Government and non-governmental actors concerned with the environment, and the media.

L. The girl child

- **Procedures and outcomes**

Some progress has been made in protecting girls from exploitation, violence and harmful social practices. The steps taken by most Arab States have been in aid of children in general and included the

signing of international conventions, enacting legislation, passing resolutions to protect the rights of the child, and implementing measures and creating institutions to combat harmful practices.

- **Obstacles and challenges**

Certain traditional practices, such as FGM/C, child marriage and forcing girls to drop out of school, which are especially prevalent among poor families, continue to hamper institutional efforts to improve the lot of girls. Other obstacles include: Limited funding for girl child protection programmes; inadequate training of workers in the field; the lack of knowledge about childhood issues; the absence of statistics disaggregated by gender; the lack of laws and strategies that address childhood issues from a gender perspective; poor coordination between sectors concerned with childhood matters; and the lack of awareness-raising on the rights of the child. The national reports show that child marriage remains common in a number of countries, especially where no laws against the practice have been passed. The phenomenon of child marriage and “hidden” trafficking of children is growing in countries hosting large numbers of displaced people and refugees and is exacerbated by the shortage of resources in children’s agencies.

With the security situation and socio-economic conditions deteriorating in some countries and communications technology developing, key challenges include: The integration of gender issues into legislation, plans and mechanisms regarding the protection of children, especially girls, from all forms of violence and exploitation; preventing misuse of the Internet and harmful social practices; capacity-building of workers in childhood issues; and the creation of gender-sensitive childhood databases.

Section Three – Data and Statistics

A. National progress indicators

Several countries have moved to develop national baseline indicators from a gender perspective, as a rule centrally administered by official statistical bodies and, on occasion, in cooperation with international organizations and private associations. The nature and effectiveness of those efforts has varied from one country to another. In some, statistical frameworks to measure women’s conditions in many areas, based on indicators from related fields, have been devised. In others, data has been collected with a gender perspective on a plethora of indicators in order to monitor progress on gender equality and women’s rights. Some States depend on a narrow set of indicators without a gender focus, such as national progress reports on the Millennium Development Goals.

B. Minimum set of gender indicators

The monitoring of a minimum set of gender indicators divided into five basic areas of concern has been plagued by major time and sector gaps, despite progress made in recent years in collecting information and regularly producing data in those fields.

The national reports showed that most of the participating countries have failed to commit themselves to presenting gender indicators in line with the minimum set declared by the United Nations. Many indicators reflect considerations unique to the countries concerned, making it difficult to consolidate the data to present a unified regional analysis. Although most cover an acceptable ratio of the proposed minimum indicators in a variety of fields, the fields most deficient in indicators have been those concerning the human rights of women and their participation in public and economic life.

C. Data on specific groups

A number of countries have worked to produce data on specific groups using a gender perspective. Those groups include: rural women, refugees, women with disabilities, older persons,

incarcerated women and female victims of armed conflict and landmines. Some of them have devised questionnaires and indicators specifically, while others have used results of prior surveys and general censuses.

Section Four – Emerging priorities

In spite of the efforts and accomplishments of the various participating countries, gender gaps remain. Many women are still affected by marginalization, discrimination, poverty and violence, exacerbated by conflict, social divisions and crises. Based on the national reports, it has emerged that priorities in combating gender discrimination and empowering women can be divided into four key themes: official frameworks and institutions; socio-economic empowerment; protection of women from violent practices; and knowledge, cultural development and media empowerment.

A. Official frameworks and institutional mechanisms

This theme may be divided into two parts: institutional coordination between parties concerned with women's issues, and the enhancement of women's role in institutions and decision-making departments.

As indicated in the national reports, most Arab countries continue to face difficulties in enhancing gender equality. Among the causes of this are: deficient executive frameworks; gaps in coordination between the various bodies concerned with women's issues; the scarcity of data disaggregated by sex; slow incorporation of gender issues in public policy, legislation and budgets; and a lack of funding and human resources. Arab States need to bridge the gulf between women and men in terms of access to decision-making positions, which persists despite the remarkable advances of women in educational achievement. The following priorities and actions emerge from the national reports:

Development of institutional mechanisms to address women's and gender issues by:

- Adopting a multi-disciplinary, participatory approach to improve coordination, strengthen networking and build strategic partnerships with a variety of institutions and encourage the effective utilization of information technology
- Integrating gender issues in to sustainable development plans, legislation, policies and budgets at all levels of government and training personnel by activating gender issue units
- Making organizations working for the empowerment of women models of good governance, quality control, integrity, information management, funds generation and partnership building
- Creating mechanisms, including gender monitoring bodies in the public service, for follow-up and evaluation and collecting data on women of all groups, including older women
- Developing incentives for partnerships and institutions to incorporate the concept of joint participation and social responsibility
- Refining laws to comply with international conventions, amending legislation and systems that are unjust to women and taking into account older women and those with special needs in the law-making; defining frameworks to help stakeholders working to protect women
- Institutionalizing statistical research in women's matters and gender issues at official and academic arenas, developing the relevant indicators organizing training workshops to follow up on their preparation

Increasing women's participation in management and decision-making by:

- Adopting quotas for women’s parliamentary and local representation as an interim measure; training women to participate in elections; educating women in their political rights and the significance of their role in political and public life for all of society
- Encouraging women to work in various fields, especially those traditionally considered exclusive to men, by establishing a minimum level for the placement of women in decision-making and public service positions
- Highlighting the experience of women in balancing public and private life; studying women’s experiments in local governance councils; and rewarding good practices
- Integrating the gender dimension in peace efforts and settling armed conflicts, enhancing the role of women in negotiations and building their capacities to manage difficult situations
- Integrating the gender dimension in to environment issues

B. Social and economic empowerment

Considerable efforts have been made in some countries to improve women’s economic conditions and help them to enter the labour market. Nevertheless, significant problems remain. Structural adjustment policies, financial crises and deteriorating economic conditions have had a major impact on the position of women, many of whom lack even the minimum conditions for a decent livelihood, especially in poor regions. Women bear extra burdens in the workplace and little value is attached to their invisible household work. Their use by disputing parties as an instrument of pressure between them (sometimes resulting in kidnapping, murder, rape, displacement and isolation from the labour market) is a further aggravating factor. More intense efforts will be needed in coming years, as summarized in the following matrix of priorities and corresponding actions:

- I. Activation of funding channels for small and medium-sized projects by:
 - Passing appropriate legislation to facilitate funding and a sound competitive environment for women’s small businesses; creating agencies to provide management, investment, banking and technical assistance, and electronic services, for women running such enterprises
 - Teaching women about investment and helping them to broaden their interests beyond roles traditionally assigned to them
- II. Rehabilitation of the education and training system based on gender concerns and equality in order to:
 - Expand formal education networks to rural, remote and poor regions and eradicate illiteracy among women
 - Improve the performance of female students, increase female enrolment and combat the problem of school drop-outs
 - Create departments of women’s studies and gender issues in universities and research centres
- III. Improvement of conditions for women in the labour market by:
 - Preparing economic programmes, budgets and projects from a gender-based perspective
 - Diversifying training and employment options for women, including flexible, part-time and temporary work, work from home, remote professional training, electronic marketing and computer literacy programmes; and developing women’s capacities in technology and promising professions

- Continuing efforts to remove discrimination from labour laws, and pursuing affirmative action in favour of women in areas such as maternity leave and child care
 - Entrenching a culture of women's work and productive activities, particularly among women with limited access to the labour market
- IV. Provision of health care to as wide a sector of women as possible through:
- The development of women's sexual, reproductive and emotional health care services, appropriate training for health care workers and awareness-raising efforts
 - The development of health and social insurance services, especially for specific groups such as women working in the informal economy, and poor, rural and elderly women
 - Programmes for displaced women and refugees and mechanisms for the provision of social protection and safe housing for poor women, especially female heads of households

C. Protection of women from violence

In spite of legislative and institutional progress, improved research and greater public awareness of the problem, violence against women continues to plague Arab societies. Initiatives to combat the problem and strengthen guarantees of women's rights could include:

- Amendments to personal status laws in line with women's rights in the public and private spheres
- Laws against child marriage and FGM/C, and mechanisms to apply them
- Criminalizing domestic violence and "honour crimes" and amending legislation under which rapists are pardoned if they marry their victims
- The bringing of law into conformity with international conventions
- Clear criminal definitions of acts that constitute violence against women (including such acts as forced marriage) and mechanisms to monitor such violence
- The creation of a continually updated guide of agencies dealing with and counselling women victims of violence, including the courts and police station and a manual for professionals working with such women
- Specific training for law enforcement officers, in particular to boost the sensitivity of community police to violence against women, and encouragement for women to join the police force
- The creation of databases and mechanisms for collecting data on gender-based violence, its perpetrators and its victims, and to measure to what extent women seek help from specialized bodies
- Education for women about their rights, encouraging them to report any acts of violence, free legal assistance and mechanisms to help them obtain qualifications and pursue their lives
- Efforts to ensure that all States fulfil their international obligation to protect women and children in times of armed conflict, and strengthening of international protection mechanisms in order to deter perpetrators

- Strengthened International monitoring and protection mechanisms to document violations of the rights of women and children in times of conflict, deter perpetrators and refer violations to specialized international bodies
- Coordination with local and international civil society organizations to exchange expertise and train local personnel to assist target groups living in difficult circumstances

D. Knowledge, culture and media empowerment

Most of the national reports attributed the poor conditions in which women live and the violence to which they are exposed to customs, patriarchal culture and media that promote stereotypical images of women. Seen in that light, the empowerment of women through the dissemination of knowledge is crucial. Initiatives could include:

- Curricula reform with a gender-based perspective
- Inclusion of information technology in national strategies on women's issues, social media training for women and encouragement for them to build media platforms
- Employment of women in the media and communications outlets and their involvement in drafting media ethics codes
- The creation of mechanisms to monitor discrimination and how women are portrayed by the media and training in gender-based rights for media workers
- Training in communications and information technologies for NGOs
- The establishment of university gender studies research centres, scholarships for women and databases for female experts, and provision for the creation of new, specialized, gender-oriented courses
- Promotion of greater participation by women in cultural initiatives and innovation and improved documentation of innovation and creativity by women
- Investment in theatre, interactive media and film production and the promotion of artistic and sports events that highlight women's issues
- Mechanisms to focus on family issues in the light of technological developments and protect children from pornographic websites and images of violence
- The establishment of advocacy groups to combat violence emanating from extremists who promote stringency in the name of a return to authenticity