

## *Executive Summary*

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# **Subprogramme Evaluation of: The ESCWA Centre for Women Division (ECW)**

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Evaluation commissioned by: UN ESCWA



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## Executive Summary

This is the final report of the Sub-Programme evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) Centre for Women (ECW), commissioned by ESCWA to a team of international evaluators. The evaluation covers the work of the Strategic Frameworks 2012-2013 & 2014-2015. The evaluation takes place in compliance with ESCWA's Evaluation Policy, and as such has an accountability element. However, the primary purpose of this evaluation is lesson learning in order to help identify the strengths of ECW and what has worked well and why, and where the main challenges have occurred. The evaluation focuses on ECW's substantive work and organizational structure, and has a forward-looking dimension to it.

The findings are based on an in-depth document study, key informant interviews over the phone (with over 20 respondents), three evaluation visits to Beirut for face-to-face meetings with relevant stakeholders, along with participation in three events carried out by ECW in Egypt, Tunisia and Lebanon. Methods of analysis included Theory of Change<sup>1</sup>, contribution analysis and the use of evaluation questions. Based on the objectives of the evaluations, as stated by the Terms of Reference, three key evaluation criteria were chosen to structure the analysis. These are Relevance, Effectiveness and Impact.

The key findings were presented to the ECW team in Beirut on 11 December 2015 and a workshop was held to jointly reflect on recommendations. The report has incorporated comments by both ECW and the Strategy, Evaluation and Partnership Section (StEPS). This final evaluation report has been assessed by an external evaluation expert using sections 4.4, 5 and 6 of the ALNAP Quality Proforma, which can be found in the following link <http://www.alnap.org/node/5685.aspx>

## Key Findings

ECW has completed its Programme of Work successfully within a context of rapid unexpected political developments in the region. Nevertheless, the human resources and management of ECW have undergone significant changes, creating a temporary state of instability in the Division, which in turn affected the workflow, timeline of implementation, effectiveness of output delivery and coherence of the overall approach. The evaluation's key findings are:

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<sup>1</sup> A Theory of Change is a specific and measurable description of any initiative aiming to create behavioral change that forms the basis for strategic planning, on-going decision-making and evaluation. Using a Theory of Change approach for evaluation involves testing the assumptions inherent between each step of the theory of change and assessing how likely it is that one step will lead to another. This contribution analysis helps to confirm or revise the theory of change and will provide evidence and a line of reasoning from which a plausible conclusion can be drawn that, within some level of confidence, the project has made an important contribution to the documented results. (<http://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/>)

- ❖ One of ECW's core strengths is its ability to act as a regional platform of knowledge, one that not only focuses on the status of women and gender equality in member States, but also extends to updated information on gender in all Arab states.
- ❖ Through a range of multi-faceted normative, technical and consultative activities, ECW has built a relevant and effective body of knowledge in the area of violence against women, which if sustained, promises to achieve sustainable impact with regards to protection against, and prevention of violence against women in the region.
- ❖ Technical advisory services are a substantive contribution to the development of national women's machineries, and viewed as a niche area to rely on. However, as these services are demand-driven, most are stand-alone activities not linked to the long-term impact of national women's machineries or to the Strategic Frameworks of ECW, which limits their accumulative impact.
- ❖ ECW has a wide range of partners that have contributed to the development of a gender agenda in the region. However, an assessment of partnership models revealed that greater strategic management of partnerships will ensure more effective outcomes.
- ❖ Engagement of civil society organizations (CSOs) would benefit from a more strategic and coherent approach. Although engaging with CSOs was a performance indicator for the 2014-2015 biennium, work with CSOs was limited in scope.
- ❖ The limited dissemination of ECW outputs and studies restricts ECW's outreach, knowledge generation and visibility in the region.
- ❖ ECW is contributing to the engendering role within ESCWA. ECW contributes to engendering ESCWA's substantive work through its participation in ESCWA's Publications and Project Committees, and through collaboration with other Divisions. This is complemented by organization wide efforts on the UN-SWAP on gender equality and the empowerment of women. Such work, which represents a substantial amount, is not captured in ECW's planning or reporting.
- ❖ The follow-up and monitoring of outputs is limited to whether activities are completed, incomplete or in progress. Capturing levels of added value, outcomes of outputs and impact is therefore challenging, as the monitoring system is not designed to capture qualitative results, and the different levels of required reporting do not allow for such a level of analysis.
- ❖ Human resources management in ECW would benefit from a more consistent approach to workload balance, based on a strategy of mentoring, feedback, engagement and contribution. Such an approach could help enhance ownership, the development of staff expertise, and efficient time management.

## Key Recommendations

### The key recommendations for ECW are:

- ❖ To increase effect, and for ECW to have clear-cut long-term impact in the region, partnerships and collaborative relationships should be more strategic and institutional. Building on the wide range of organisations that ECW has approached, cooperated and partnered with in the past, ECW must develop a clear and strategic partnership strategy, mapping women- and gender equality-related academia, NGOs and UN agencies that serve the ESCWA region to ensure long-term engagement and partnerships, efficient resource mobilisation (including human resources), and potential thematic synergies.
- ❖ For the purpose of effective outreach and expanded knowledge sharing, it is recommended to design a Division-specific dissemination plan, to be interlinked with partnerships and stakeholders and the whole planning process of ECW. This should include extending to potential networks available in the region, such as the UN-Women gender network and UNFPA's gender hub, in addition to academic and civil society channels.
- ❖ To ensure effective engagement with CSOs, there is a need to build an internal policy/strategy for ECW, based on an actual mapping of CSOs in the region, to identify mutual areas of expertise and contribution, along with creating a mechanism for their regular engagement.
- ❖ ECW should develop a strategy for capacity-building and advisory services linked to its Expected Accomplishments and outputs, in order to bring more coherence to the overall Programme of Work.
- ❖ ECW should review its in-house monitoring systems for capturing added value, qualitative outcomes and in general to assess progress. This should include regular reviews, documentation and reporting against all outputs. A follow-up mechanism should be associated with the monitoring system, in order to track not only the possible utilisation of outputs and changes due to technical advisory services, but also consultants' contractual commitments and deliverables.
- ❖ Given that the nature of gender equality and mainstreaming is such that it does not yield immediate results, and in order to effectively capture qualitative and quantitative results, there is a need to design an internal monitoring system that ensures the documentation of the direct or indirect contribution of ECW to the development of national women's machineries and other partners, as well as to the promotion of gender equality in the region. The internal monitoring system could also ensure monitoring beyond the duration of the funding agreement.
- ❖ Given the mandate of ECW to engender the work of the ESCWA Divisions and lead the UN SWAP, ECW needs to reconsider an integrated approach to its mandate to ensure accountability and coherence to gender equality at the level of ESCWA and ECW work in the region. This would include ensuring that the gender marker created

under the SWAP is fully activated, and reviewing the Publication and Project Committees' templates and mechanisms to ensure a gender dimension is present.

- ❖ Given the instability of staffing and the continued staff movement during the past two biennia, together with the change of management of the Division, there is a need to rebuild the team and increase their engagement and ownership. ECW management must rebuild the team and focus on an equitable division of labour, according to rank and responsibilities, as well as aligned with staff expertise, in order to enhance ownership and to ensure the smooth running of the Division.

**Key Recommendations to ESCWA:**

- ❖ ESCWA should further support the mandate and coherence of gender equality within ECW. This should include exploring an increased level of deliverables from the gender focal points network, as well as increasing financial resources.
- ❖ ESCWA should support establishing linkages between advisory services, technical cooperation and the Division(s)' Programme of Work. ESCWA must make a decision on how it wants to use the Regional Advisory function in order for it to be strategic, consistent and systematically contribute to the overall objectives of the Divisions and ESCWA as a whole.
- ❖ ESCWA should become a learning organisation, documenting the outcomes and impact of its work both from an accountability perspective and a learning perspective. ESCWA should work on creating a system for capturing the essence of outputs in general, and gender equality and human rights in particular. Any reporting system developed should allow reporting on qualitative indicators, as well as quantitative ones.