

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA (ESCWA)

**ESCWA HUMAN RESOURCES ACTION PLAN
TOWARDS GENDER PARITY
2014-2017**

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ACRONYMS

CEB	Chief Executive Board
ESCWA	Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
HR	Human Resources
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
SSS	Security and Safety Section
UN-SWAP	United Nations System-wide Action Plan for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

I. BACKGROUND

The United Nations first called for gender parity in 1970, when the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on the employment of women at senior and professional levels. It also requested all United Nations bodies to take measures to ensure equal employment opportunities for qualified women at senior and professional levels.¹ This was followed by the adoption of a series of resolutions aimed at achieving gender parity. In 1986, the General Assembly reaffirmed the need to increase the overall participation of women in the United Nations system. It set the target at 30 per cent of all posts, subject to geographical distribution, to be reached by 1990.² In 1990, this target was increased to 35 per cent of posts, subject to geographical distribution, particularly in senior policy-level and decision-making posts, to be reached by 1995. Moreover, a goal of 25 per cent for D1 levels and above was also set for the year 1995.³ In 1995, the General Assembly called on the Secretary-General to ensure that women held 50 per cent of managerial and decision-making positions by 2000.⁴ This goal was reaffirmed⁵ and redefined⁶ to include 50/50 gender distribution by 2000 in all categories of posts, especially at the D1 level and above, with full respect for the principle of equitable geographical distribution, and also taking into account the under-representation of women from certain countries, in particular from developing countries and countries with economies in transition. The General Assembly has also stressed the need to respond to the lack of women's representation by developing innovative recruitment strategies to identify and attract suitably qualified women candidates.⁷

In 1999, the Under-Secretary-General for Management issued a series of measures⁸ on recruitment, promotion and placement, with a view to achieving gender parity at all levels and developing an implementation and monitoring mechanism. This was followed by a gender balance strategy for the United Nations Secretariat⁹ that set out a framework for achieving the above-mentioned mandate of the Secretary-General on gender parity. It proposed reforms at various levels to increase awareness among staff; improve recruitment and selection processes; provide increased opportunities for career development; facilitate spousal employment; increase flexible working arrangements; and provide day-care facilities.

In 2006, the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) issued a United Nations system-wide policy on gender equality and the empowerment of women,¹⁰ in which members of CEB committed themselves to advancing gender equality within the United Nations system at all levels. In 2012, the United Nations System Wide Action Plan for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP) was designed as a tool to implement the CEB policy.

¹ General Assembly resolution 2715 (XXV) on the employment of qualified women in senior and other professional positions by the secretariats of organizations in the United Nations system.

² General Assembly resolution 41/206 on personnel questions.

³ General Assembly resolution 45/239 on personnel questions.

⁴ General Assembly resolution 50/164 on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat.

⁵ General Assembly resolution 51/67 on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat.

⁶ General Assembly resolution 52/96 on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat.

⁷ General Assembly resolution 59/164 on the improvement of the status of women in the United Nations system.

⁸ United Nations, *Special measures for the achievement of gender equality* (1999). Available from http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:OuzgivoT3aEJ:https://www.unodc.org/hrsa/staff_assistance/pdf/career/ai1999gendereq.doc+&cd=5&hl=en&ct=clnk.

⁹ Available from www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/ianwge/NEW%20Gender%20Balance%20Strategy_march%202010_Anex%206.pdf.

¹⁰ Available from www.un.org/womenwatch/ianwge/gm/UN_system_wide_P_S_CEB_Statement_2006.pdf.

UN-SWAP set the target to achieve gender parity within the United Nations system by 2017. The Economic and Social Council welcomed its development and called on the United Nations system to actively engage in its roll-out.¹¹

Several UN-SWAP indicators, on which organizations are required to report annually, refer to the management of human resources. The indicator on “gender architecture” requires United Nations entities to reach equal representation of women at the general service level and at the P4 and above levels. To achieve this target, UN-SWAP requires all United Nations entities to develop a realistic human resources plan, including an assessment of staff and special measures to fill the gap in women’s representation. The present document sets out a human resources action plan for the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) to respond to UN-SWAP requirements. It presents the current situation at ESCWA in terms of human resources and proposes possible measures to achieve the goal of gender parity and the advancement of women.

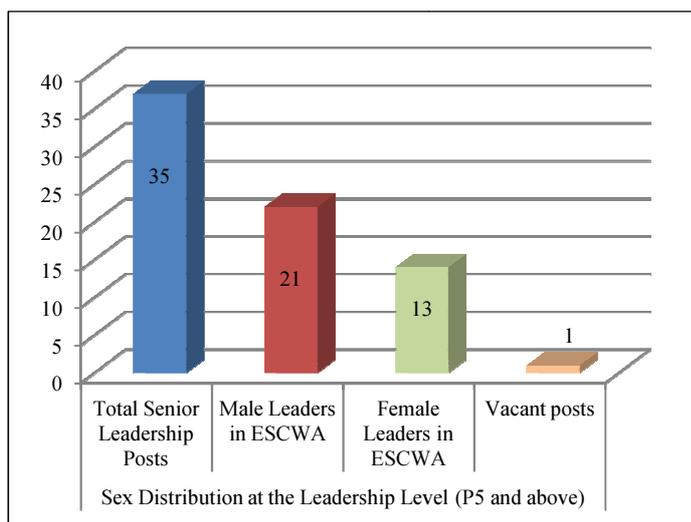
II. STATUS QUO AND ESCWA OPERATING CONTEXT

Human resources data cannot be considered separately from the context in which an organization operates, given that its mandate, geographic location and organizational culture are all factors that influence staff composition. It is therefore difficult to compare staff composition across different organizations or even different offices within the United Nations system. Nevertheless, for the purpose of improving gender equality, it is instructive to look at staffing data and, taking into account specific circumstances relevant to ESCWA, draw conclusions and propose measures that work in its context. Women’s representation at ESCWA as of June 2014 is presented in the following section.

A. REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AT THE SENIOR LEVELS

Figure I shows that ESCWA has 35 posts at the senior levels (P5 and above) of which one is vacant at the D2 level. Of the 34 occupied posts, 13 are held by women (38.2 per cent) and 21 are held by men (61.8 per cent).

Figure I. Representation of women at the senior levels



The relatively low number of women in leadership positions is a challenge faced by agencies throughout the United Nations system. With very few exceptions, most agencies fall short of achieving gender parity in this category and ESCWA is no exception.

¹¹ Economic and Social Council resolution 2012/24 on mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system.

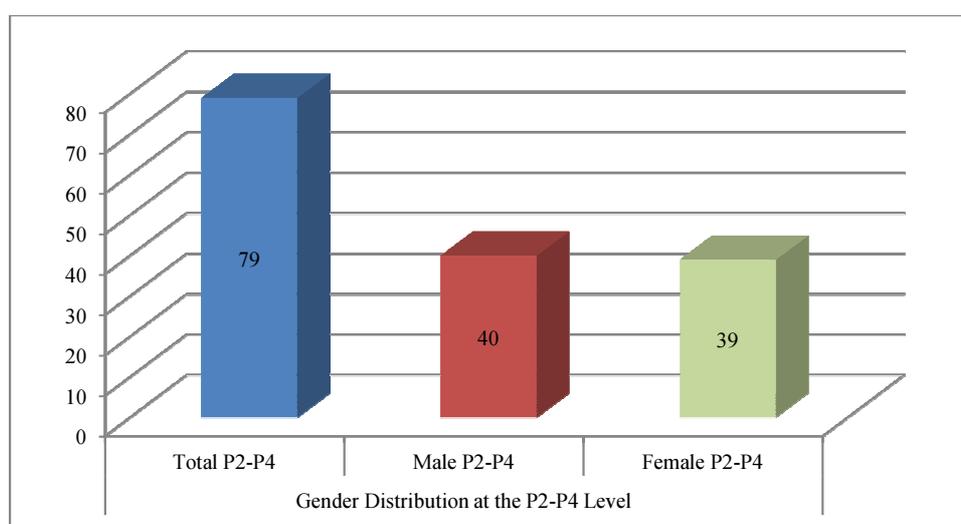
TABLE 1. SENIOR-LEVEL DATA DISAGGREGATED BY GRADE

Grade	Total	Vacant		Men		Women	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
P5	25	0	0	14	56	11	44
D1	8	0	0	6	75	2	25
D2	2	1	50	1	50	0	0
Total	35	1		21		13	

B. REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AT THE JUNIOR AND MID-LEVELS

Figure II shows that women are underrepresented at the junior and mid-levels (P2-P4) at ESCWA.

Figure II. Representation of women at the junior and mid-levels at ESCWA



In the United Nations system, the category of junior and mid-level professionals (P1-P4) is not homogenous. There is a marked difference between the P1-P3 levels and the P4 level. At the P1-P3 level, women are usually equally represented or even overrepresented. This however changes at the P4 level, where women's representation is significantly lower.

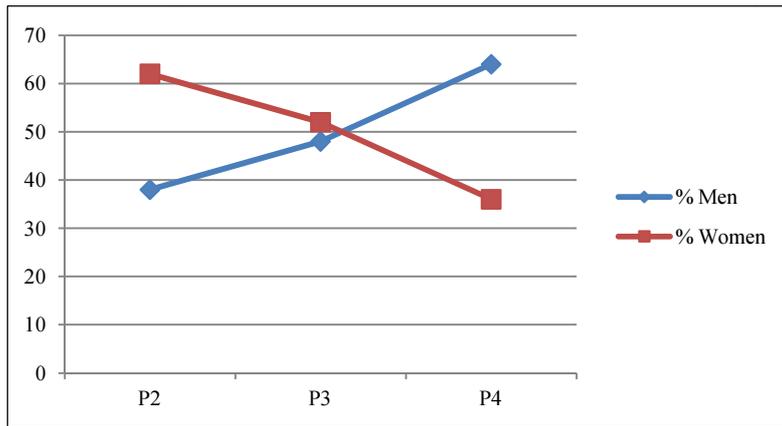
Table 2 shows that women's representation drops significantly at the P4 grade at ESCWA. There are 79 posts at the P2 to P4 grades, of which 40 are occupied by men (50.7 per cent) and 39 by women (49.4 per cent). At the P2 and P3 levels, 27 of 46 posts filled by women (55 per cent). This number drops to 12 of 33 (36 per cent) at the P4 level.

TABLE 2. JUNIOR AND MID-LEVEL DATA DISAGGREGATED BY GRADE

Grade	Total	Men	Women
P2-P3	46	19	27
P4	33	21	12
Total	79	40	39

Figure III shows that women's representation is much higher at the P2 and P3 levels, compared to the P4 level.

Figure III. Representation of women at the P2 to P4 levels

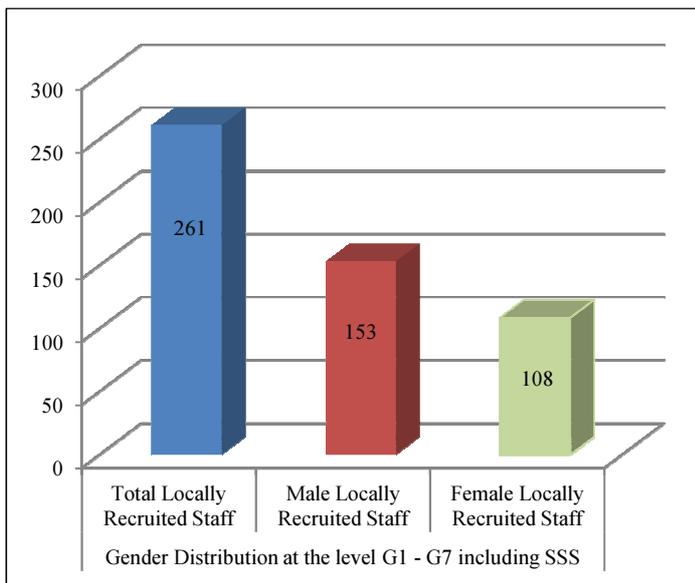


This drop in the number of women at the P4 level and above indicates that they are not progressing into senior positions either because there are issues with their career progression, i.e. women getting stuck at the junior level; or because of problems with the retention of women at the organization, i.e. they are dropping out of the workforce before progressing to the P4 level.

C. WOMEN’S REPRESENTATION AT THE GENERAL SERVICE LEVEL

The analysis of gender distribution at the general service level must take into account that ESCWA has an unusually high number of security personnel, who are predominantly men. Figure IV shows the distribution of staff by sex, including the Security and Safety Section (SSS). It shows that ESCWA has 261 staff members at the general service level, of which 153 (59 per cent) are men and 108 (41 per cent) are women.

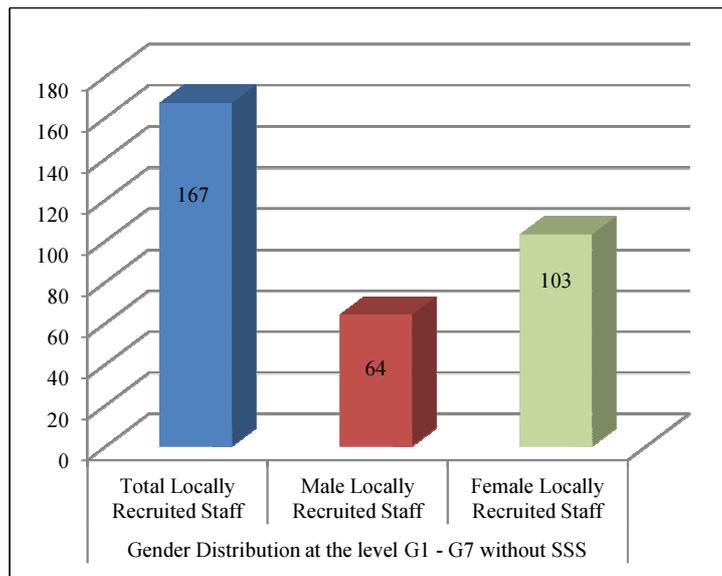
Figure IV. Representation of women at the general service level, including SSS



Women’s representation in the local staff category is usually significantly higher than that of men throughout the United Nations system. However, at ESCWA, because of the high number of predominantly male security staff, the sex distribution of local staff is inverted.

Figure V shows the distribution of staff by sex without SSS, reflecting the high number of women at the general service level. Of 167 staff members, 64 (38 per cent) are men and 103 (62 per cent) are women.

Figure V. Representation of women at the general service level, excluding SSS



The above numbers reveal that there is room for improvement at all levels and special measures should be taken to achieve gender parity.

In terms of human resources rules, policies and practices, ESCWA operates within the broader framework of the United Nations Secretariat rules, where a number of measures are prescribed to achieve equal representation of women. Within this framework, ESCWA should establish practices to increase women's representation at all levels, while ensuring that relevant rules are followed.

III. PROPOSED ACTIONS TO PROMOTE GENDER PARITY AT ESCWA

To promote gender parity in all staff categories, the following measures are proposed for ESCWA.

A. RECRUITMENT

The following are possible areas of action at the recruitment level:

(a) Outreach/recruitment

In order to shortlist and select qualified women candidates, they must first be encouraged to apply to ESCWA positions. ESCWA should therefore take proactive steps to attract qualified women candidates, by identifying sources where such candidates can be approached and by strengthening existing partnerships with government entities and universities to increase the pool of women applicants. The following measures should be considered:

- Creating an inventory of potential sources where qualified female candidates can be approached, in collaboration with the ESCWA Strategic Directions and Partnerships Section. This should include universities, research institutes, Governments, non-governmental organizations and regional and international recruitment websites;
- Creating/updating the distribution list of partners, conducting outreach missions and holding events. The list should be used to create long-term collaborations in the area of talent sourcing. Vacancies should regularly be distributed to partners and visits should be organized to market ESCWA in these institutions as an employer of women;

- Placing targeted advertisements in different outlets to increase ESCWA visibility;
- Emphasizing on the Commission's website and in advertisements that ESCWA and the United Nations are family-friendly employers. This may require a revamp of the employment page, which could be done in collaboration with the ESCWA Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Policy Section;
- Explicitly encouraging women to apply to vacancy announcements by adding a relevant statement in them;
- Actively monitoring and managing the existing Inspira (United Nations job listings) pools. Qualified female candidates who were not selected for posts should be added to a female talent pool that the Human Resources Management Services can refer to for similar vacancies. They might not apply a second time because they were discouraged by failing once, but if approached, they might still be interested;
- Using existing materials and tools of the Office of Human Resources Management outreach unit, such as presentations and social media.

(b) *Selection process*

The selection process at the United Nations Secretariat is designed to ensure that the most qualified candidate is selected for any given vacancy. Nevertheless, biases can affect the ultimate outcome. For example, the number of female applicants is generally significantly lower than the number of male applicants (usually by 50 per cent at ESCWA) and selection panels are dominated by men (currently ESCWA requires the presence of at least one woman). This may lead to biased results in favour of male candidates. Moreover, certain fields, such as ICT, tend to be predominantly male staffed, which might also discourage women from applying for such jobs. It is therefore important to ensure that a sufficient number of female candidates apply for each post, so that the hiring manager has a balanced pool. Furthermore, the selection panels should be more evenly balanced, both in terms of gender and geographic distribution. The following measures should be considered:

- Extending vacancy closing dates by two additional weeks when the number of women applicants is below 30 per cent at the original closing date;
- Providing support and encouragement to hiring managers so that they identify at least one woman on the shortlist for each selection process. If a woman cannot be identified, justification from the hiring manager should be provided;
- Requiring a justification from the hiring manager to the Executive Secretary if a suitable woman candidate is not selected;
- Ensuring an equal number of men and women on each selection panel.

B. STAFF RETENTION

Throughout the United Nations system, it appears that women are not retained at the same rate as men. At the stage where they should enter the more senior ranks of professional staff, many women drop out of the system. The following measures should be considered to retain female staff at ESCWA:

- Promoting flexible working arrangements to ensure a work-life balance;
- Conducting exit interviews to assess whether the reasons for leaving are related to work-life issues or perceived disadvantages for female staff. Results of exit interviews will feed into the development of new measures to ensure the retention of qualified women;
- Updating the human resources plan every five years to respond to new developments in the organization.

C. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

As the above figures show, the number of women in senior positions is significantly lower than that of men, and that this imbalance does not exist at the junior professional levels (P1-P3). At ESCWA, as in most other United Nations entities, the striking deterioration of female representation occurs at the career progression from P3 to P4.

The phenomenon of women either dropping out or getting stuck can be addressed through the following measures:

- Providing leadership training opportunities for women: In many respects the workplace challenges faced by women are different from those of men. A multitude of targeted personal development and training programmes have been developed and are used widely in international organizations. They can be useful to help talented women obtain or retain leadership roles;
- Advertising and enforcing work-life policies for all: Effective work-life policies benefit mainly women who often carry out double duties as working mothers. The United Nations Secretariat has a number of such policies in place but they are not consistently applied. ESCWA will promote work-life balance policies to ensure that all staff – men and women – have equal access to them;
- Establishing a mentoring programme and targeted career counselling for female professionals at ESCWA: Aspiring female leaders may benefit from the experience of more senior women already in leadership positions. Sharing their experiences could help develop the careers of younger women;
- Designing and administrating mandatory gender training for all staff to re-enforce gender awareness and interaction between male and female leaders;
- Disseminating the ESCWA Human Resources Action Plan widely within the Commission to encourage women employees to benefit from the special measures proposed. This will contribute to an organizational culture that welcomes women’s participation in senior positions.

IV. PROPOSED TARGETS

To implement the action plan and allow ESCWA to track its success, the following targets shall be applicable for the period 2014-2017.

TABLE 3. TARGETS AT THE SENIOR LEVELS

	Status quo		Target 2017		Target female staff 2014	Target female staff 2015	Target female staff 2016	Target female staff 2017
	Female	Male	Female	Male				
P5, D1, D2	14	22	18	19	14	15	16	18

TABLE 4. TARGETS AT THE MID-LEVEL

	Status quo		Target 2017		Target female staff 2014	Target female staff 2015	Target female staff 2016	Target female staff 2017
	Female	Male	Female	Male				
P4	12	21	16	17	13	14	15	16

Achieving the above targets will depend on a number of factors, some of which are not under ESCSWA control. While vacancy rates are predictable between 2014 and 2017 (approximately four at the levels P5 and above and seven at the P4 level), turnover rates are more difficult to estimate. Increasing the number of women requires a corresponding reduction in the number of men. However, this is only possible if

the turnover rate of men is higher than that of women, as replacing women with women will not increase the overall number of female staff. Therefore, to achieve the targets, it is necessary to reduce the dropout rate of women at the relevant levels and increase the turnover of men, who are then replaced by women.

TABLE 5. TARGETS AT THE GENERAL SERVICE LEVEL (EXCLUDING SSS)

General service staff	Status quo		Target 2017		Target male staff 2014	Target male staff 2015	Target male staff 2016	Target male staff 2017
	Female	Male	Female	Male	70	75	80	83
	103	64	84	83				

Table 5 shows that the number of men needs to be increased at the general service level. ESCWA advertises around 10 vacancies yearly for locally recruited general service staff. Therefore, under normal circumstances, the above targets should be achievable. However, as mentioned earlier, there are a number of factors outside ESCWA control that influence the gender ratio.

V. IMPLEMENTING AND MONITORING THE ESCWA HUMAN RESOURCES ACTION PLAN

Accountability for overseeing the Human Resources Action Plan rests with the ESCWA Executive Secretary, with support from the Director of the Administrative Services Division. Monitoring the implementation of the Plan through human resources tools, such as gender scorecards to measure progress, is the responsibility of the Chief of Human Resources Management Section. Hiring managers are equally responsible for ensuring that the Plan is implemented in ESCWA divisions.

TABLE 6. RESPONSIBILITIES

Task	Division/Person responsible	Resources required
Outreach/recruitment		
Creating an inventory of potential sources where qualified female candidates can be approached	Human resources (HR)	Not applicable (N/A)
Creating/updating distribution lists of partners and conducting outreach missions and events	HR	
Allocating funds for targeted advertisements to increase ESCWA visibility among the target audience	Hiring Division	Advertisement fee (could be covered from the post allocated funds)
Emphasizing ESCWA and the United Nations as family-friendly employers on the Commission's website and in advertisements	HR, ICT Policy Section, United Nations Information Centre, SWAP Coordinator	N/A
Explicitly encouraging women to apply for vacancies by adding a relevant statement in job listings	HR, hiring manager	N/A
Actively monitoring and managing existing Inspira pools	HR	N/A
Working with the Office of Human Resources Management outreach unit to use United Nations social media platforms, etc.	HR	N/

TABLE 6 (continued)

Task	Division/Person responsible	Resources required
Selection process		
Ensuring that at least 30 per cent of applicants for vacant posts are women (if not, readvertising or extending the deadline)	Ensuring that at least 30 per cent of applicants for vacant posts are women (if not, readvertising or extending the deadline)	Ensuring that at least 30 per cent of applicants for vacant posts are women (if not, readvertising or extending the deadline)
Ensuring that at least one woman is shortlisted for each vacant position	Hiring manager	N/A
Ensuring an equal number of men and women on each selection panel	Hiring manager/HR	N/A
Requiring a justification from the hiring manager to the Executive Secretary if a suitable woman is not shortlisted/selected	Hiring manager/HR	N/A
Staff retention		
Promoting flexible working arrangements to ensure a work-life balance	Senior management, division directors and section chiefs	N/A
Conducting exit interviews to assess if discrimination or harassment was a reason for leaving the organization. Results of exit interviews should feed into the development of new measures to ensure the retention of qualified women	HR section, ESCWA focal points on women/alternates	N/A
Updating the HR Action Plan every five years to respond to new developments at ESCWA	HR	N/A
Staff development		
Designing and offering opportunities to train women for leadership positions	Senior management, HR	N/A
Advertising and enforcing a work-life policy for all	HR	
Establishing an internal mentoring programme and targeted career counselling for female professionals at ESCWA	HR	N/A
Introducing improved working-from-home policies	HR, hiring managers	N/A
Designing and administering mandatory gender trainings for all staff to raise gender awareness and enhance interaction between male and female leaders	SWAP Senior Coordinator in coordination with UN Women/HR	to be determined
Encouraging female employees at ESCWA to benefit from the special measures by widely disseminating the Plan and sending a broadcast announcement	HR	N/A