On 19 July 2013, ESCWA Director of the Emerging and Conflict-Related Issues Division Tarik Alami presented to the UN Economic and Social Council the Note of the Secretary-General on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan, which is prepared by ESCWA on yearly basis. “Israel had been implementing policies that discriminated against Palestinians in a manner equated to de facto segregation, including establishment of two separate legal systems and sets of institutions, one for Israeli settlers and another for Palestinians living under occupation,” he said. Discrimination also extended to planning and construction. Palestinians were forced to build without permits and consequently faced the threat of demolition of property, he added. Alami noted that Israel revoked the residency status of more than 250,000 Palestinians between 1967 and 1994 from the West Bank and the Gaza strip and was still doing so in East Jerusalem. Israel continued to use disproportionate use of force against Palestinians. Its security apparatuses continued to deny thousands of Palestinian prisoners, including children, many of their rights and utilized practices that amounted to torture. Israel’s systematic use of administrative detention amounted to a policy of arbitrary detention which prompted hunger strikes by Palestinian prisoners throughout 2012. Forced displacement of Palestinians continued due to Israel’s practices and policies, including the policy of home demolitions.

According to the Note, the settlements and Israeli policies regarding them amounted to the illegal transfer of its population to an occupied territory and appeared to reaffirm Israel’s intention to maintain control over these territories. Unabated, settler violence and intimidation against Palestinians had been increasing with the aim of forcing Palestinians off their lands. The International Court of Justice concluded that the wall and its associated regime were illegal and that Israel had to dismantle it and provide reparations. Still, the 708 kilometre wall continued to be the single largest obstacle to movement for Palestinians who faced daily obstacles and humiliation during their daily movements. Economic growth in the West Bank and Gaza strip continued to be unsustainable and restricted by the policies of the Israeli occupation. More than 40 per cent of Palestinian households were classified as food insecure or vulnerable to food insecurity. Alarmingly high rates of anaemia in Palestinian children and pregnant women were recorded. Israel continued its de facto annexation policies in the Syrian Golan, as well as discrimination of the population. This included restrictions on building permits, essential services and water allocation, especially for irrigation. The Note concluded that in addition to social and economic impact, the prolonged occupation violated United Nations resolutions and international law and should not be allowed to persist with impunity. All efforts should be exerted by the international community to ensure the implementation of United Nations resolutions and international law, and support initiatives that seek to end Israeli violations in the occupied territories.

Upon the conclusion of the presentation, representatives of around 25 member countries, including the State of Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic and Israel made official statements in response to the Note. Furthermore, the representative of Fiji introduced a draft resolution, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, as well as Turkey on the agenda item related to the Note, which was consequently adopted by the Council, by a roll-call vote of 43 to 2, with 1 abstention. The resolution demanded that Israel ceases its violations. It also requested the SG to submit this note the General Assembly and present a report to the next Substantive Session of the Economic and Social Commission in 2014.
ESCWA implemented between 2009 and 2012 a project entitled “Regional Harmonization of Cyber Legislation to Promote the Knowledge Society in the Arab World”, which aimed to enhance regional integration and strengthen the capacity of member countries in drafting and enacting comprehensive cyber legislation. The project’s main output was the ESCWA Cyber Legislation Directives, which are the first in the Arab region in terms of scope and completeness.

To enhance the outreach and availability of the Directives, which are available in print and PDF formats, ESCWA developed and published an iPad application that allows access to the text of the directives. The app is categorized into channels providing access to each of the Directives’ six modules. It also provides general information on the project, relevant newsletters, media items, and brochures. The app offers users the flexibility to modify some of its features according to their needs such as selecting favorite articles, sharing a link using social media, changing the text size, and turning channels on and off.

The app is downloadable on iPad devices through the App Store or at the following URL: https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/escwa-cyber-legislation-directives/id623227894?mt=8

It is worthy to note that all documentation related to the project is available on the ESCWA Information Society Portal (ISPER) including the framework for applying the directives on the regional level as well as a project digest published in English for international outreach. The same page also includes newly updated tables that compare cyber laws in the member countries. All these and more are available at: http://isper.escwa.un.org/FocusAreas/CyberLegislation/Projects/tabid/161/language/en-US/Default.aspx

Discussions and ongoing debates on women’s rate of economic participation, which is lower in the Arab region than in any other region of the world, have emphasized the failure to turn the educational gains of the past decade or so into the increased participation in the labour force. The ESCWA study “Addressing Barriers to Women’s Economic Participation in the Arab Region” offers a new reading of current data and key indicators on women’s employment and education attainments to identify structural barriers that have impeded the process of fostering women’s employment. The study draws attention to current economic policies that fail to take women’s needs and concerns into account and examines the long history of reactionary policies that reflected shifting paradigms in the region but were not based on a long-term and strategic vision to empower women economically.

The study challenges the prevailing argument that the mismatch between women’s skills and labour market demands accounts for their low economic participation, and contends instead that the socialization process is responsible. The study highlights the critical role that the early years of education can play in fostering women’s employment. It offers a panoramic view of weak government commitments to adhere to international labour standards aiming to enhance gender equality in the world of work, and warns that in the absence of protective, regulatory and organizational measures, women’s opportunities in the labour market will remain limited. Therefore, the study calls for a multi-dimensional framework to remove barriers to women’s economic participation that intersects with the significant challenge of high unemployment, especially among youth.