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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

Committee on Women  
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Item 8 of the provisional agenda

**PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF WORK IN THE FIELD OF THE ADVANCEMENT  
OF WOMEN FOR THE BIENNIUM 2008-2009**

**Summary**

This document presents the draft programme of work for the biennium 2008-2009 in the field of the advancement of women for consideration by the member countries of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) Committee on Women. It forms part of subprogramme 6 of the 2008-2009 draft strategic framework for ESCWA, entitled "The Advancement of Women", which is to be implemented by the ESCWA Centre for Women.

In implementing the proposed programme of work, the ESCWA Centre for Women will rely upon the effective participation of member countries and their moral and financial support.

## Introduction

1. This document contains proposals regarding the activities and outputs to be carried out by the ESCWA Centre for Women as part of the proposed strategic framework for the period 2008-2009,<sup>1</sup> which ESCWA adopted by resolution 269(XXIV) dated 11 May 2006 during its twenty-fourth session, which was held in Beirut from 8 to 11 May 2006. The proposals are submitted to the Committee on Women as a draft programme of work for consideration by member countries. They were formulated on the basis of subprogramme 6 of programme 18 of the United Nations proposed strategic framework for the period 2008-2009,<sup>2</sup> and reviewed by the Committee for Programme and Coordination during its forty-seventh session, that was held in New York from 14 August to 8 September 2006. It was recommended that some modifications should be made thereto,<sup>3</sup> in accordance with the regulations and rules governing programme planning at the United Nations.<sup>4</sup> In November and December 2006, the General Assembly carried out a final assessment of the proposed strategic framework for the period 2008-2009, taking into consideration the recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination. Meanwhile, at the request of the United Nations, ESCWA and other United Nations organizations began the process of preparing a draft programme of work for the period 2008-2009 that defined the main services and outputs from which immediate beneficiaries of the proposed strategic framework programmes would benefit.

2. While preparing the draft programme of work, the secretariat, aware of its own interests and comparative advantages, gave due consideration to the following:

(a) General Assembly resolution 60/1 of 16 September 2005, concerning the 2005 World Summit Outcome, and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), adopted on 31 October 2000, concerning women, peace and security, which focused on the need to increase women's political participation and involvement in conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction;

(b) The final document of the second session of the Committee on Women,<sup>5</sup> to which is annexed the Beirut Declaration on Arab Women Ten Years After Beijing, which defined the aims to be realized over the forthcoming ten years in order to empower women, improve their status and increase their participation in political, economic and social life;

(c) Economic and Social Council resolution 2005/31, adopted on 26 July 2005, concerning mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system.

3. The member countries of the Committee on Women are invited to review the draft programme of work, formulate recommendations and define priorities to be taken into consideration by the secretariat when it prepares the ESCWA programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009, which is to be submitted to the General Assembly for approval at its sixty second session. Furthermore, the Committee on Women is requested to assess the extent to which the proposed services and outcomes respond to the needs of the principal beneficiaries, especially national mechanisms for women in the ESCWA region, and whether they contribute to achieving the expected outcomes included in subprogramme 6 for the advancement of women.

4. It should be noted that provision of those services and outputs is dependent on the availability of regular programme budget or extrabudgetary resources. It is hoped that the Committee on Women will note

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<sup>1</sup> Management issues: draft strategic framework for the biennium 2008-2009 E/ESCWA/24/6(Part III).

<sup>2</sup> A/61/6 (Prog.18).

<sup>3</sup> General Assembly, sixty first session official records, Supplement No. 16 (A/61/16), paragraphs 262-269.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspect of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (ST/SGB/2000/8).

<sup>5</sup> Report of the Regional Arab Conference Ten Years After Beijing: Call for Peace, Beirut 8-10 July 2004, (E/ESCWA/WOM/2004/IG.1/6).

that the current United Nations reform process may affect the amount that ESCWA is allocated under the regular United Nations programme budget, in which case, the secretariat will consult member countries in order to redefine priorities with regard to the products and outcomes proposed in the draft programme of work.

DRAFT PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR THE BIENNIUM 2008-2009 IN THE FIELD  
OF THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

*1. Problems to be addressed*

5. Despite the progress that member countries have made in the field of the advancement of women, women's participation in political, economic and social spheres remains limited because of a lack of political commitment to empowering women and achieving gender equality. The average number of women in parliament and Government in the Arab region is lower than in other regions of the world. Moreover, over 44 million Arab women, almost half the total female population of the region, are illiterate, while the number of Arab women participating in the economic sphere namely, 29 per cent, is one of the lowest in the world. Women's advancement continues to face institutional, legal, social and cultural obstacles, in addition to social discrimination and stereotypes, which prevent women from fully exercising their rights.

6. In addition to those obstacles, other factors have particular impact on women, including unstable social conditions and armed conflicts, both of which affect several ESCWA member countries. Similarly, the dearth or sheer lack of the practical mechanisms necessary to formulate and implement gender-related policies and strategies hinders the advancement of women which, is further impeded by the lack of properly trained officials in the field and the inadequacy of funding. Therefore, an integral course of action needs to be adopted in order to ensure the advancement and political, economic and social empowerment of women in the Arab region.

*2. Aims, expected accomplishments and indicators of achievement*

7. The logical framework of subprogramme 6, in accordance with the ESCWA draft strategic framework for the biennium 2008-2009, is set forth in the following table:

<b>Aim:</b> To increase the participation of women in public life and achieve gender equality by reducing the disparities between the sexes and empowering women.	
<b>Expected accomplishments</b>	<b>Indicators of achievement</b>
(a) Strengthening the capacities of national mechanisms and civil society institutions relevant to the empowerment and advancement of women to deal with disparities between the sexes and mainstream the gender perspective in major activities, with particular emphasis on the participation of women in the legislative and executive authorities.	(a) (i) An increased number of countries that pursue policies for the empowerment and advancement of women;  (ii) An increase in the number of measures that countries take with a view to enhancing the participation of women in policy- and decision-making.

*3. Strategies*

8. The ESCWA Centre for Women is responsible for executing the subprogramme. Taking into account the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action, Beijing +10 and the Beirut Declaration on Arab Women Ten Years after Beijing: Call for Peace,

which the Commission adopted at its twenty-third session, the work of the subprogramme will focus on public policies and capacity-building in order to increase the number of women in Parliament and at the executive level, as a way of enhancing the proportion of positions allocated to women in decision-making roles. Such action has proved to be a useful short-term tool for dealing more effectively with gender-related issues in several countries. Greater attention will be paid to encouraging partnership between Governments and civil organizations, in order to increase awareness and follow-up and evaluation measures will be continued in order to strengthen issues relating to women's empowerment, women's rights, and the mainstreaming of the gender perspective. Such measures will include using the various forms of the media to raise awareness in the region of women's rights and correct flawed conceptions that distort representations of women.

9. As part of the subprogramme, regional components of the programme of work will be addressed, including the achievement of consensus, the strengthening of common regional attitudes regarding the international programme of work and the performance of joint activities in association with relevant regional organizations, especially the League of Arab States and such subsidiary organizations as the Arab Women Organization (AWO), which functions under the auspices of the League of Arab States, and the Centre for Arab Women Training and Research (CAWTAR), and relevant United Nations organizations, specifically the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), which is a branch of the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs, the other regional commissions and the United Nations Development Fund for Women.

10. On the basis of new jurisdictions that are dealing with women's issues in conflict regions and women's role in peace-building, and building on previous success, albeit limited, in providing support for women in areas afflicted by wars and conflicts, the subprogramme will focus on devoting the requisite attention to identifying the needs and building the capacities of women. The matter merits particular concern in the ESCWA region, where instability is rife.

11. The subprogramme will realize its expected accomplishments by engaging in analytical and normative projects, convening meetings, developing networks, knowledge-sharing, organizing training workshops and offering advisory services in the field of women's empowerment and gender-related issues. Similarly, the programme will offer support to member countries in order to help them bridge the gap between their commitments in respect of international agreements and conferences and their actualization; a gap exacerbated by the inefficiency or sheer absence of the institutional mechanisms, legislation and practices necessary. The subprogramme will aim to achieve that objective by promoting links and facilitating networking between Governments and civil society institutions by exchanging and reinforcing good practices. Similarly, the programme of work will provide a forum for the exchange of experience and consolidating good practices at both the regional and the international levels.

#### 4. *External factors*

12. It is possible for subprogramme 6 to achieve its expected accomplishments provided the following conditions are fulfilled:

(a) Member countries promptly provide the relevant information required by ESCWA;

(b) Member countries demonstrate the necessary political will to strengthen the gender perspective and empower women;

(c) Member countries display a willingness to take the necessary measures for fulfilling the commitments they made in respect of international agreements and conferences and laws, systems and practices;

(d) There is no further deterioration in the political situation in the region.

## 5. Services and outputs proposed to the beneficiaries

13. With a view to achieving the expected outcomes of subprogramme 6, the secretariat proposes a diverse set of activities, services and products to be provided in the biennium 2008-2009, to the concerned beneficiaries and, in particular, national machinery for the advancement of women in the ESCWA region, provided the necessary resources are available. The following list outlines those services and outputs:

### (a) *Servicing of intergovernmental and expert bodies*

#### (i) *The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia*

Parliamentary documentation: the report presented to the Commission on the third session of the Committee on Women (2008).

#### (ii) *The Committee on Women*

- a. Technical services for the six meetings of the fourth session of the Committee on Women concerning the preparatory regional review of Beijing +15, in association with AWO, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and CAWTAR (2009);
- b. Documents of alternative organizations: reports on the progress achieved in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the Arab region during the period following Beijing +10, in association with AWO, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and CAWTAR; and fundamental issues in the field of the advancement of women in the Arab region (two reports in 2009).

#### (iii) *Expert group meetings*

- a. Review of the guiding principles for increasing the effectiveness of national machinery for the advancement of women in the ESCWA region (2008);
- b. Women's control of economic resources and access to financial resources, including microfinance (2008);
- c. Expert review of joint ESCWA/AWO studies on the status of Arab women: ways of strengthening the role of women in conflict resolution and peace-building (2008);
- d. Review of progress achieved in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the Arab region since Beijing +10, in association with AWO, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and CAWTAR.

### (b) *Other technical activities (regular budget)*

#### (i) *Recurrent publications*

- a. The studies jointly conducted by ESCWA and AWO on the status of Arab women: ways of strengthening the role of women in conflict resolution and peace-building (2009);
- b. The women and development series: women's control of economic resources and access to financial resources, including microfinance (2009).

(ii) *Non-recurrent publications*

- a. The key principles for protecting women's rights in the ESCWA region, by appropriate implementation of United Nations resolutions and international protocols regarding armed conflicts, in association with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2008);
- b. The revised key principles for increasing the effectiveness of national machinery for the advancement of women in the ESCWA region (2009).

(iii) *Technical material*

The Social and Economic Situation of Palestinian Women (2008): five institutes are working on the study, namely, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the League of Arab States, AWO, CAWTAR and ESCWA.

(iv) *Electronic issuances*

- a. A special page on the ESCWA website, to be updated regularly, with information on the advancement of women (2008-2009);
- b. An electronic magazine about Arab women, in association with AWO, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and CAWTAR (every two months in 2008-2009);
- c. The newsletter of the ESCWA Centre for Women (every month in 2008-2009);
- d. A video about the advancement of women in the Arab World to be screened at the fourth session of the Committee on Women, concerning the preparatory regional review of Beijing +5 (2009).

(v) *Films*

A film about the Social and Economic Situation of Palestinian Women, to be screened during the session of the Social and Economic Council (2008).

(vi) *Booklets, fact sheets, wall charts and information kits*

- a. An information kit for the preparatory regional review of Beijing +15 during the fourth session of the Committee on Women (2009);
- b. Information kits on the advancement of women in the ESCWA region: the vision and the possibilities, to be distributed during the fifty second and fifty third sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women (2008 and 2009);
- c. Poster on the preparatory regional review of Beijing +15 during the fourth session of the Committee on Women (2009).

(vii) *Special occasions*

Launch of the studies jointly conducted by ESCWA and AWO on the status of Arab women: ways of strengthening the role of women in conflict resolution and peace-building (2009).

(viii) *Databases and programs*

- a. Development and improvement of Arabic technical terms related to the advancement of women (2008 and 2009);
- b. Establishment of electronic networks for the exchange of information between national machinery for the advancement of women in the ESCWA region, including best practices and lessons learned, by making use of the electronic network of national machinery in Africa, in association with the Economic Commission for Africa and the DAW (2008 and 2009).

(c) *Technical cooperation (extrabudgetary)*

(i) *Advisory services*

- a. Mainstreaming the gender perspective and gender-based analysis (2008 and 2009);
- b. Preparing national reports on the advancement of women (2008 and 2009).

(ii) *Training sessions, seminars and workshops*

- a. Training workshops to strengthen the capacities of national machinery for the advancement of women in the ESCWA region (2008 and 2009);
- b. Workshops on means of addressing the media regarding women's candidacies for parliamentary positions (2008 and 2009).

(iii) *Field projects*

- a. Strengthening capacities to eliminate violence against women in the ESCWA region (2008 and 2009);
- b. Training for trainers programme for national machinery for the advancement and empowerment of women in the ESCWA region, in partnership with the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the United Nations Development Project (UNDP), including extra-regional resources provided by UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund and AWO (2008 and 2009).