



Synopsis

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

¹ This document has not been edited in accordance with UN standards. It has been prepared for the purpose of 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. These commitments were reaffirmed during the twenty-third special session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2000.² 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 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector, to take strategic action in the following twelve 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 UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) conducts a review of progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action every five years. Three such reviews were completed in the years 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 next five years.

In 2015, the fifty-ninth session of the CSW will conduct a global review of progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action twenty years after its adoption. 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 UN member nations. All regional reports will be consolidated into the global report to be presented by the Secretary-General of the United Nations before the General Assembly.

To this end, the ESCWA Centre for Women, in cooperation with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women's (UN Women) Arab States Regional Office and the Arab League's Department of Women, Family and Childhood, Social Affairs Sector have worked together to prepare the 2015 Arabic synthesis report. This report combines 21 national reports submitted by Arab Member States: Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Kingdom of Bahrain, Republic of Tunisia, People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, Federal Islamic Republic of Comoros, Syrian Arab Republic, Republic of Djibouti, Republic of Sudan, Republic of Iraq, Sultanate of Oman, State of Palestine, State of Qatar, State of Kuwait, Lebanese Republic, State of Libya, Arab Republic of Egypt, Kingdom of Morocco, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Islamic Republic of Mauritania, and Republic of Yemen.

Methodology

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

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

- 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 on progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 20 years.
- III. A consultative workshop was held for civil society organizations in the Arab region on the progress made in the implementation of the Platform for Action after 20 years. The workshop was rich in presentations and discussions on the priorities and challenges faced in this arena.
- IV. A team of experts held a meeting to review the regional report on the progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 20 years. Male and female representatives of national women's machineries and apparatuses attended from 15 of the Arab countries participating in the report, along with regional experts. The attendees discussed the first draft of the regional report in order to enrich it and verify its contents.⁴ The meeting coincided with discussion sessions recalling processes undertaken following the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 and the course of past global reviews of the Beijing Conference. The status of women in light of recent critical developments and evolving conflict situations in the Arab region were also discussed.
- V. No external data or documents other than the 21 reports by the aforementioned countries were used to prepare the regional report, as outlined in the guidance note. Accordingly, the regional report was based exclusively on the information provided in the national reports, and supported by the findings of experts and country representatives who attended the aforementioned meetings and consultative workshops.

Contents of the Report

In addition to the Introduction, which provides the background and methodology used, the report is divided into four sections (according to 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 in order to build a comprehensive and integrated analysis that reflects the trends, opportunities and long-term challenges faced in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It also addresses the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000), following the first five-year review.
- ❖ Section Two highlights progress in the twelve critical areas of concern outlined in the Platform for Action, focusing on the last five years.
- ❖ Section Three offers data and statistics to complement and validate the results of the global review of gender statistics programmes in countries, which was presented to the UN Statistical Commission in February 2013.

³ This note was prepared by the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and the five United Nations regional commissions. Available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/59/BeijingPlus20-GuidanceNote-en.pdf>

⁴ The administration of the ESCWA Centre for Women conducted this meeting with the participation of UN Women and the Department of Women, Family, and Childhood of the Arab League at the United Nations offices in Beirut on 22-23 October 2014.

- ❖ Section Four handles key emerging 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 systematic steps, the national reports submitted to the committee covered a wide range of experiences in improving the conditions of women in terms of approaches, conceptual bases, size, number, and variety of parties involved, availability of statistical data and information, nature of mechanisms used to address relevant issues, and the degree of discrepancy between planning and implementation.

These unique experiences are the result of variations in political, economic, social, cultural and security conditions in these countries. They are also a reflection of the degree to which these countries are influenced by major global and regional events in recent years. Rapid developments in technology and communications, for example, were accompanied by the globalization of economies, cultures, media and consumer lifestyles, , as well as financial crises, wars, tensions, uprisings, and terrorist acts.

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

Before providing a general overview of the progress made and challenges faced in enhancing gender equality since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, it must be noted that Arab countries have witnessed major upheavals over the past five years. This has had both direct and indirect impacts on the course of women’s advancement and actions to promote women’s rights.

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. This progress was interspersed with setbacks caused by crises and wars, armed conflicts, occupation, and acts of terrorism.

- **International treaties**

Some Arab countries made positive amendments in their policies towards recognizing international treaties, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Some Arab States joined CEDAW, while others raised new reservations to specific articles of the treaty or dropped reservations they had previously made (See Table 1). Arab countries also ratified other agreements concerning human rights, women’s rights and children’s rights.

Table 1: Status of Arab countries with regard to ratification of CEDAW

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
Palestine	--	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: Data gathered from a set of United Nations conventions available at <http://treaties.un.org>

Also available at: www.arabwomenorg.org

Note: The mark (--) indicates that the country did not sign, endorse, or join the CEDAW.

- **Legislation**

In terms of Arab States' legislative frameworks, many laws were newly formulated or modified to address gender equality. Labour laws were amended, especially with regard to equal wages and maternity leave. Some countries issued personal status laws, while others modified their personal status codes to better reflect gender justice and facilitate equality within the family setting. Numerous Arab countries made alterations to their penal codes regarding so-called "honour crimes". In order to enhance protection from domestic violence, some countries issued new laws explicitly criminalizing such violence, while others drew up draft laws that still await approval. The constitutions of some countries were amended to grant mothers the right to confer their nationality onto their children, even if the father is foreign. Other countries are in the process of approving new amendments that give women and men equal status in granting nationality to their offspring. With the aim of combating human trafficking, a number of countries issued laws and formulated regulations to conform to regional and international standards for preventing human trafficking. With regard to political participation, a number of Arab countries enacted legislation that would increase women's representation in the political process, such as quota systems whereby a set share of seats in parliaments and local councils are reserved for women.

- **Progress in women's education**

Arab countries achieved remarkable progress in women's education. Most notably, they acted to reduce gender and urban-rural inequalities; introduced new education methods for non-formal education; and implemented programmes that aim to improve educational performance. Many Arab countries also developed and expanded illiteracy eradication programmes; worked towards making education mandatory for all; and developed vocational training programmes to address high drop-out rates among female students. One of the most important accomplishments in women's education in a number of countries was the adoption of universal, mandatory and free primary education. Some States also succeeded in eradicating illiteracy, limiting female drop-outs, and working to improve educational quality.

- **Progress in women's health**

In the realm of women's health, some countries, including a number of low-income countries, made advances in health awareness-raising, birth delivery conditions and maternal care. This progress was strengthened by plans and mechanisms that aim to improve women's health services, especially in rural regions. Most countries succeeded in reducing maternal mortality rates.

- **Women's economic empowerment**

With a aim of empowering women in the economic realm, numerous Arab countries launched initiatives to support women in entrepreneurship and empower women of limited incomes, especially rural women, to attain gainful employment and establish small enterprises through microloans. Some countries also worked to create a suitable environment for women's work by taking measures to enhance women's economic participation through appropriate and supportive legal frameworks.

- **Role of associations and non-governmental organizations**

Since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration, the role of associations and NGOs has increased in a number of Arab countries. Their missions vary, but their work mechanisms and impact have improved so substantially that cooperation with these organizations has become necessary in order for official authorities to gain their support in the implementation of national plans and strategies. A number of women's issues were given increasing attention in the media, which was the direct result of awareness campaigns and workshops held by associations and organizations working on women's issues in cooperation with the media sector. The increasing frequency of protests in Arab countries helped raise the voices of women and groups supporting women's rights, which often stood at the forefront of these protests.

- **Gender-responsive budgeting**

In the framework of official commitments to integrate gender issues in legislation and public policy, a number of Arab countries undertook initiatives to rectify their budgets to better address gender issues. Some of the projects launched aimed to modify States' financial systems to be more gender-responsive.

B. Challenges and Obstacles

In spite of achievements in various Arab countries towards improving the conditions of women over the past two decades, these countries still face considerable obstacles and challenges. These include challenges in responding to emerging and unstable security situations, reducing the gap between legislation and application and between planning and implementation, working to combat poverty,

reducing disparities between regions, and in seeking to create a cultural environment conducive to the improvement of women's conditions.

- **Armed conflicts and refugees**

The Israeli occupation and its illegal settlement practices in Palestine, as well as large-scale military actions against the Gaza Strip constitute flagrant human rights violations. Major armed conflicts, wars and terrorist actions in other countries have also caused serious damage to those countries' infrastructures and hurt the quality of official government services. Oscillations in community cohesion and security systems have made women more vulnerable to violence and aggression. War crimes and the incidence of rape have also increased according to the national reports of some countries. Violence in all forms has increased, which poses a serious threat to women's safety. These conflicts have created millions of displaced persons and refugees, the majority of whom are women and children.

- **Institutional challenges**

Despite obvious advancements in legislation and planning to counter discrimination and violence against women, a chasm still divides these efforts from actual implementation on the ground. There are many reasons for this, as mentioned in numerous national reports. For example, countries that experienced instability faced major setbacks in institutional performance; internal political conflicts caused the disruption and stagnation of efficiency in official institutions; and limited government funding in general, limited qualified human resources, and insufficient financial resources to integrate gender issues in national policies undermined institutional efficacy. Slow activation of legislative reforms and the nature of institutional auditing mechanisms for integrating gender issues caused delays and setbacks. In addition, most Arab countries failed to effectively commit to integrating gender issues in public policies and in government and institutional budgeting, although there was some slow improvement in this regard;

- **Cultural environment**

Almost all national reports indicated that societal culture is often the reason for the gap between planning and implementation. Local cultures respond poorly to changes in standards and legislation concerning women, both within and outside official institutions. The traditional perception of women's work as restricted to the domestic sphere, for example, has prevented the effective application of equal employment that most Arab countries have adopted in their legislation and planning. Some reports noted that the radicalization of some groups in countries facing armed conflicts caused major setbacks in gender issues, especially due to the decline in women's protection mechanisms.

- **Poverty and regional disparities**

Gender disaggregated economic statistics are generally rare in Arab countries, effectively concealing the real obstacles women face in various social sectors due to poverty and the deterioration of economic conditions.

Some Arab countries have pursued a variety of initiatives to empower underprivileged women, but the mechanisms for the economic empowerment of women in loans and vocational training institutions are limited in number and resources. Exacerbating the problem is the sluggish modernization of production tools in rural societies. Such tools are usually limited to handicrafts and traditional farming practices. The prevalence of illiteracy among women remains significant in some countries, especially in rural areas. This further constrains rural women's assimilation into the cycle of economic production and hinders their awareness of their rights.

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

Before presenting Arab countries' achievements in implementing the critical areas of concern in Beijing Platform for Action over the past five years, it is worth noting that in this period the region has experienced wars, uprisings, armed conflicts, terrorist acts and societal divisions. All of these events had direct and indirect impacts 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 continued their efforts to combat poverty, the burden of which varies from one country to another, as part of their national strategies and multi-faceted programmes. These programmes included cooperation with various ministries, official agencies, and international institutions. In this context, they gave the highest priority to the economic empowerment of rural women and addressing the conditions of the most poverty-stricken regions. The national reports indicated that a number of countries took legislative steps in this regard, most significantly by facilitating small credit programmes and funding projects that generate income for poor women and their families.

The outcome of these actions was an increase in women's loans and funding in comparison with the total loan processes and project funding in Arab countries. Some countries purposefully worked to increase cash assistance to poor families, in view of the absence of strategies to establish funding and credit programmes that address gender issues and the lack of projects in the most poor regions. Programmes in some countries succeeded in improving infrastructure services in isolated rural areas.

- **Obstacles and challenges**

Despite the procedures and plans devised by most Arab countries to reduce poverty, many obstacles still stand in the way, according to their national reports. Some of the most notable challenges include: imbalanced growth among regions; barriers to service access for rural and poor women; lack of health and economic insurance for women in some countries that suffer serious problems with poverty; negative repercussions of administrative complications; delays in amendments to laws concerning women's economic independence; impacts of economic policies and the global economic crisis; armed conflicts and wars; political divisions caused by economic recession; growth of poverty among various social sectors, especially women; women's limited access to production tools, ownership of property, and resources; and finally, the prevailing cultural landscape that continues to look down on women, gives no value to her invisible work within the household and considers women's work outside the home to be secondary and unbeneficial.

Therefore, the challenges facing most Arab countries, especially those of low income, may be addressed through poverty reduction and eradication, approval of rights-based socio-economic policies, balanced growth among regions, empowerment of women to own production tools, easing women's access to resources and increasing women's economic participation.

B. Women's Education and Training

- **Legislation and Measures**

National reports demonstrated that most Arab countries formulated laws and legislative amendments, adopted mechanisms, established institutions to eradicate illiteracy and improve the performance of educational and training infrastructure in general, prevented gender-based discrimination and facilitated empowerment of women in the education field in particular. The results show that most Arab countries achieved notable progress in illiteracy eradication in general, but particularly with regard to women. Female enrolment rates also noticeably improved at all levels of education (See Table 2). Some reports noted that a number of Arab countries have witnessed female students demonstrating excellence in terms of participation and learning, surpassing their male peers at a variety of educational levels, as well as in teaching and educational and training organizations.

Table 2: Enrolment – Net percentage of females in basic education in Arab countries 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%
Palestine	93.8%
Egypt	94.3%
Morocco	99.1%
Mauritania	100%
Yemen	75.3%

Source: Arab countries' national reports.

- **Obstacles and challenges**

The national reports refer to major obstacles hindering action to combat gender-based discrimination in the education and training sector, including prevailing cultural conceptions of women's education, educational curricula presenting stereotypical views of women, minimal budgets allocated for women's education, shortcomings in mechanisms to enforce laws, and huge losses incurred by education and training institutions due to recent and on-going occupation, wars and armed conflicts. The extremely negative role that the Israeli occupation has played in paralyzing school life was also noted, highlighting that this situation makes it difficult for women to safely move about in their pursuit of learning.

The national reports showed that the greatest challenges to Arab countries with regard to women's education include: working to eradicate illiteracy and closing the gaps between men and women at all stages of education and in the various specializations, 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. Women and Health

- **Legislation and Measures**

The national reports indicated that most Arab countries have made noticeable progress in health service provision for women, mainly in terms of maternal and reproductive health. This led to a general reduction in the maternal mortality rate by empowering health care networks and expanding maternal and child health (MCH) units and primary health care (PHC) centres. On the procedural level, a number of Arab countries formulated executive strategies to tackle the gaps in women’s health. The result was a general improvement in most countries in gender-sensitive health care services. The reports submitted by all Arab countries recorded a decrease in the level of maternal deaths at the time of delivery and an increase in the percentage of women benefitting from specialized health services. There was also an overall increase in the number of health centres and availability of medical personnel and mobile clinics in rural areas (See Tables 3 and 4). Some countries also recorded increases in the ratio of funding for the health sector, while others witnessed shortcomings in health care and its infrastructure. Some national reports more specifically noted deficiencies in free health care, in addition to the failure of health insurance to cover wide segments of the female population. Some countries witnessed an increased engagement of women working in the health care field, in health professions and administrative positions.

Table 3: Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) per 100,000 live births in select Arab countries (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
Palestine	28
Kuwait	1.7
Lebanon	10
Egypt	55
Morocco	112
Saudi Arabia	14
Mauritania	626
Yemen	148

Source: Arab countries’ national reports.

Table 4: Percentage of women using of family planning methods in select Arab countries (2011-2013)

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

Source: Arab countries' national reports.

- **Obstacles and challenges**

Numerous Arab countries continue to face major difficulties in providing health care for women and developing health care infrastructure services. Of the many causes, the most notable are: limited financial resources allocated, a focus on women's health care as limited to motherhood and childbirth, and the absence of a comprehensive concept of women's health. These all add up to the inability of Arab health care systems to meet the varied needs of women in the many stages of their lives. In addition, the prevalence of harmful traditional practices that negatively affect the health of females continue to pose a challenge to health care service providers. War, armed conflicts and crises have also led to the complete destruction of health care institutions in some Arab countries.

The most pressing imperative facing Arab countries in the field of women's health is the universalization and support of physical and mental health care at all stages of a woman's life cycle. Health education poses a major challenge, as does ensuring the sustainability of health care by making it a priority in government budgets, especially during conflict and humanitarian situations. Working to stop practices that are harmful to women's health, such as female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and child marriage, is also a challenge to be addressed.

D. Violence Against Women (VAW)

- **Legislation and Measures**

Recent years have witnessed a tide of legislation concerned with the protection of women and children from violence in a large number of Arab countries, according to national reports. These laws and amendments focus on three fundamental levels: laws that directly address the issue of violence against women, laws delineating punishments for perpetrators of such violence, and laws combating human trafficking. The range of procedures also encompasses strategies to combat violence against women, establishment of specialized units, opening of shelters for female victims of violence and organizing training workshops and awareness campaigns. It is difficult to observe the tangible results of legislation and actions taken to combat violence against women due to the absence of complete and accurate statistics on gender-based violence and the relatively recent adoption of such legislation. In some countries, only a few years have passed since legislation criminalizing violence against women was enacted, but some resulting trends have been identified, including: increased awareness of gender-based violence and its repercussions (whether through the intensified work of civil society organizations

(CSOs) and private associations, or the increased discussion of this issue in the media); development of capacities and institutional mechanisms in terms of creating reception cells; equipping integrated units to receive and care for women and children victims of violence in hospitals and police stations; creation of national monitoring agencies to combat violence, as well as mechanisms for vigilance, reporting, and care; improvement in the degree of official and political commitment to the issue of combating gender-based violence; and improved judicial handling of such cases of violence in order to protect women and not put additional pressure on them.

- **Obstacles and challenges**

The obstacles that the reports focus on are: limited programmes tackling the social and economical reintegration of female victims of violence; a shortage of government resources allocated for triggering and implementing pertinent national strategies; a lack of specialized cadres to handle women victims of violence; the slow course of legislative changes in some countries; and barriers to legislation and laws that seek to combat violence against women where they conflict with religion-based legislation. In addition, there is a shortage of statistics and studies that demonstrate the extent of women's exposure to violence, especially within the household. Women's lack of awareness of their guaranteed legal rights is widespread, and women are often hesitant to report any incidents of violence, harassment or rape. Other obstacles include women's difficult economic conditions and the lack of choices before them, which may make them prefer silence over confronting the violence committed against them, and the perpetuation of traditional practices in some communities that may be considered gender-based violence, such as FGM/C and so-called "honour crimes", in spite of progress made in preventing these practices.

Based on the reports' assertions, the greatest challenge to combating violence against women is the lack of a definitive separation between the private and public spheres. New forms of technological communication make it difficult to define the division between the two spheres. In other words, the violent discriminatory practices taking place within the household have become a public matter as a result of new forms of publicity. This leads to the challenge of continued development of legislation based on international standards, the development of capacities and institutional mechanisms to combat gender-based violence, monitoring the implementation of plans and strategies to ensure adoption of holistic, participatory, multi-faceted approaches, and continuing work to raise awareness of the consequences of gender-based violence.

E. Women and Armed Conflicts

- **Legislation and measures**

Women's suffering is a key focus in a number of Arab countries that live under the pressures of occupation, crises, wars, armed conflicts or terrorist attacks on their lands, as well as countries that have become hosts of large numbers of refugees or displaced persons. The great burdens these situations place on countries is more than they can bear alone. In terms of engaging women in restoring peace and settling disputes, a number of Arab countries have begun to take measures towards applying UN Security Council Resolution 1325 concerning women and peace, which exhorts the increase of women's representation in positions of decision-making and all national institutions to prevent and settle disputes.

- **Obstacles and challenges**

The national reports indicate the security situation to be worsening in several Arab countries. This is the most obvious obstacle to the protection of women. In the shadow of armed conflicts, state

institutions and mechanisms disintegrate, war crimes and illegal practices by occupation forces are perpetrated with impunity, neighbouring countries face growing hardships in dealing with the influx of refugees, coverage of essential services falls back and freedom of movement is curtailed.

During armed conflicts, one of the toughest challenges in protecting women is helping them to acquire skills for negotiation and handling difficult situations, as well as engaging women in efforts to restore peace. This includes activating international mechanisms to deter perpetrators of violence against women and children, as well as developing international mechanisms to reduce women's suffering, protect them, and ensure service provision for them. In response to the challenges created by displacement and refugees in host countries, international support should focus on women's need for social and basic services, safe housing and freedom of movement.

F. Women and the Economy

- **Legislation and measures**

Arab countries continued their march towards equality and ensuring women's rights. They strove to improve labour laws, combat gender discrimination and create a legal environment that encourages microloans and income-generating enterprises for women. They adopted mechanisms to integrate rural women in economic activities and launched strategies and programmes to improve the professional environment for women. Mechanisms were put in place to ensure balance between working women's family life and professional life. According to national reports, legal amendments focused on several aspects of labour laws, such as leave allowances for working women. Even though the number of female loan takers and beneficiaries of small and mid-sized enterprise funding increased, women's contribution to economic activities only witnessed tangible growth in a few countries. At the same time, some countries experienced a rise in unemployment rates among women and a drop in women's economic activities in spite of the high percentage of educated women (See Table 5 and 6).

Table 5: Female unemployment rates in select Arab countries (according to the most recent data provided in the national reports)

Country (year)	Unemployment rate, female
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%
Palestine (2013)	35%
Egypt (2012)	24.1%
Mauritania (2008)	44%
Yemen (2013)	60%

Source: Arab countries' national reports.

Table 6: Women’s economic participation rates in select Arabic countries (according to the most recent data provided in the national reports)

Country	Year	Percentage
Jordan	2013	13.2%
Bahrain	2013	47%
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%
Palestine	2013	17.3%
Qatar	2012	35%
Kuwait	2013	48.2%
Egypt	2012	22.4%
Mauritania	2008	34.4%
Yemen	2013	10.1%

Source: Arab countries’ national reports.

- **Obstacles and challenges**

Although most Arab countries enacted legislation and measures to improve the work environment for women, national reports detailed a number of persistent obstacles significantly slowing the progression of Arab women’s economic participation, especially in low- and middle-income countries. These obstacles highlight connections between institutional challenges and prevailing traditional concepts of women’s work, namely: the gap between women and men’s wages in many labour markets, especially in the private sector; practices of gender discrimination in employment that prevent women from obtaining economic leadership positions; traditional investment options that dominate women’s economic initiatives; complications in obtaining loans that are especially difficult for women; and poorly monitored indicators and research on the effect of the global economic crisis on women, especially in low-income countries.

Moving forward, the challenges before Arab countries in engaging women economically are, as stated in the national reports, the continuation of work in reducing the gaps between women and men in economic participation, setting up mechanisms to support balance between the working women’s home and professional life, enabling women to access resources and own land, and continuing to invest in education, especially by expanding training and vocational opportunities.

G. Women in positions of authority and decision-making

- **Legislation and measures**

Women’s educational capacities grew in a number of Arab countries. Some women were able to access realms that were previously reserved exclusively for men. Women noticeably participated in political movements in recent years and voiced their demands. Some countries that went through phases of establishing new constitutional legislation were keen to involve women’s associations and

organizations in national conferences, incorporation boards and formulation committees. This helped increase women's representation in political processes and integrate gender issues into countries' legislation. New legislation was enacted in some countries to guarantee a quota for women's representation, ranging between 20 and 30 per cent. In terms of work to increase women's participation in public life, numerous countries implemented educational and training programmes and projects to raise the level of women's participation in nominations and elections, encouraging the acceptance of women in leadership positions. Other Arab countries took steps to appoint women within government apparatuses. In spite of these efforts, growth in women's political participation and presence in decision-making offices remains minimal, even declining in some States, according to the national reports.

The most notable procedures and legislation enacted by the majority of Arab countries were embodied in improved women's representation in local councils and some public service positions that involve decision-making, in addition to some cases of improvement in parliamentary and government representation of women. Still other Arab countries saw women entering new fields and assuming positions that had previously been the realm of men (See Table 7).

Table 7: Women's participation rates in 4 basic 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%	-	-	47%
Tunisia	29.95%	33.29%	-	37.4%
Algeria	31.6%	39.53%	-	29.4%
Comoros	3%	-	-	30%
Syria	12.4%	15%	15%	-
Djibouti	11%	40%	-	-
Sudan	25%	-	11%	29.5%
Iraq	-	-	-	-
Oman	18%	-	38.8%	47%
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%

(--) Refers to unavailable figures.

Source: Arab countries' national reports.

- **Obstacles and challenges**

Some national reports noted that Arab women continue to face many obstacles in their path to political empowerment and access to decision-making positions. These include: deficiencies in legislative and electoral mechanisms that ensure equal opportunities between genders; deteriorating political and security situations in some Arab countries;; material, media, and social restrictions that women face when they attempt to enter the political arena; lack of commitment on the part of political forces and parties in supporting women's access to decision-making positions; fragmentation of the women's movement; limited resources to support specialize studies on women's issues; and the prevailing mentality among decision-makers that views women in positions of authority negatively. Additionally, most political empowerment projects for women and appointments of women in higher government and administrative positions addressed individual cases rather than institutionalized actions.

The basic challenges facing Arab countries with regard to women's political and administrative empowerment and access to positions of authority and decision-making are embodied in the institutionalization of empowerment projects. Value must be attributed to women's political participation by accepting the perspective of women as an important tool needed to improve political performance and enrichment management approaches.

H. Institutional mechanisms to promote women's advancement

Since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, most Arab countries began the official establishment of national mechanisms that aim to achieve gender equality, taking gender issues into consideration by way of government or quasi-government institutions. This was manifested in some countries that established independent ministries, commissions, authorities, or boards concerned with women's issues. These mechanisms were established with diverse goals, including the formulation of national plans and strategies for the advancement of women, establishing equal opportunity units in ministries, launching gender-sensitive budgets and coordinating and networking in support of women's rights and empowerment among the various concerned parties.

- **Legislation and measures**

The governments of some Arab countries developed ministries of women's affairs, either independently or in combination with ministries of family affairs, development, childhood, or social affairs. In other Arab countries, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women are managed by government or quasi-government institutions whose tasks, specializations, and nomenclature vary from one country to another. Through these ministries, councils, commissions and authorities, Arab countries have adopted national plans and strategies to improve women's conditions and achieve gender equality. Most of this institutions use the participatory approach based on coordination between relevant governmental agencies and NGOs. In some countries, these national, institutionalized mechanisms for women's advancement resulted in an increase in the number of associations concerned with women's affairs and an increase in related activities and events. Some of these national mechanisms established equal opportunity units or focal points for gender issues within various ministries and government institutions, and some began work on integrating gender issues into budgeting.

- **Obstacles and challenges**

While the formation of institutional mechanisms for women's advancement and development of the participatory approach in formulating plans and strategies are significant, some national reports indicated that implementation and results fell far behind the declared goals. This was due to the nature

of social and institutional approaches to gender issues; the lack of gender-sensitive approaches to implementation in ministerial and government units in some countries, especially with regard to budgets, most of which remain unguided in this direction; and the scarcity of gender-based statistical data. Wars, armed conflicts and political insecurity in several Arab countries adversely affected institutional performance and the effectiveness of mechanisms and strategies aimed at improving women's conditions.

The priorities facing national mechanisms for the advancement of women moving forward include continuing to develop legal reforms to realize social justice and equal opportunities for men and women, and working to fill the gap between planning and execution. In order to respond to these challenges, consideration must be given to the infrastructure of these mechanisms, institutional problems related to the distribution of powers and resources, and the collection of statistics and data.

I. Human Rights of Women

- **Legislation and measures**

Arab countries have taken numerous steps to strengthen women's human rights. In some cases, they included basic articles in their constitutions to guarantee these rights. In other cases, States made positive modifications in their policies towards international conventions, or developed plans and formed special human rights units. With regard to international conventions that guarantee human rights, some Arab countries amended their policies concerning CEDAW, and some countries ratified other conventions related to human and women's rights. According to their national reports, several Arab countries established human rights units and commissions at various institutional levels, and some of the countries formulated plans that encompassed human rights.

- **Obstacles and challenges**

The obstacles facing the human rights of women persist. At the forefront of such obstacles in the Israeli occupation, one of the most prominent manifestations of human rights violations in Palestine. Women in Palestine are exposed to numerous direct and indirect violations of their internationally-guaranteed rights. Across the region, women are affected by wars and internal armed conflicts that rock the foundations of many Arab countries, creating a fertile ground for the violation of basic human rights in general, and of women's rights in particular. Other obstacles to the realization of women's rights include prevailing cultures that are dominated by an inferior view of women. This enables violence against and marginalization of women, constituting a major obstacle to the prioritization of human rights in the policies and procedures of Arab countries. This also prevents some countries from ratifying international conventions, allows them to voice reservations on fundamental articles, or even facilitates violations of their international commitments.

The main challenge facing Arab countries in enhancing the human rights of women is institutions' efforts to address the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action. The aims include: protecting the rights guaranteed by constitutions and international charters and conventions without fragmentation, developing work mechanisms that are difficult to violate, and spreading the culture and awareness of women's rights among women and men on an equal basis.

J. Women and the Media

- **Procedures and outcomes**

The legislation and procedures pursued in Arab countries varied greatly. They aimed to strengthen the standing and role of women in the media and its organizational infrastructures, improve the professional performance of media outlets and enable them to produce images that realistically reflect women's diverse situations, rather than reiterate exploitative or stereotypical representations. They also aimed to sensitize media professionals to gender issues and build their communication capacities and skills in national institutional mechanisms. These procedures varied depending on the country but included amendments to laws; establishment of entities and central organizational frameworks to guide media work; formulation of honour codes that attend to media work, encourage women to specialize in media, and train media persons in gender issues; and involvement of some national institutional mechanisms in media work through the production of media material, sponsorship of programmes, construction websites, and launching of agencies to monitor the image of women in media. The actions Arab countries took to improve the image and standing of women in media resulted in an increase in the number of female professionals in media outlets. Nevertheless, their access to decision-making positions remained limited, while women's presence and issues addressed in media content varied greatly from one institution to another. Such developments also tended to be connected to a specific situation or event, rather than as part of a long-term strategy, as noted in some national reports. The improvement in media content, albeit minimal, was not only due to the growing ratio of women in media outlets, but also due to measures taken by concerned national mechanisms that coordinated with official media outlets. In some cases, these mechanisms made amendments to laws or contributed to formulating honour codes in the media sector. In other cases, they launched monitoring agencies, produced media material, developed communication skills, built websites, conducted studies, organized training courses, and prepared training guides for trainers.

- **Obstacles and challenges**

According to national reports, most Arab countries lack gender-sensitive media laws or even laws that address human rights in general. This leaves space open for practices that offend both women and men due to the absence of monitoring mechanisms and a weak sense of social responsibility on the part of media outlets focused on commercialism. In addition, some national mechanisms concerned with women's issues lack competencies and communication skills, which constrains their ability to coordinate and network with media outlets. Other constraints include: inadequate financial and human resources allocated to improve the role and standing of women in the media; unsustainability of these mechanisms in monitoring and evaluating media content; lack of coordination between institutes and media departments in universities, national institutional mechanisms, media outlets, and civil society organizations to develop training programmes that primarily address gender issues; the shortage of continuing institutionalized training and education for media personnel that aims to improve and develop their professional performance; and the failure of national mechanisms concerned with women's issues to utilize information technologies and social media networks.

Based on Arab States' national reports, a set of priorities in this field could be extracted as follows: work to increase the presence of women in media outlets, which would reflect positively on professional work mechanisms and on the quality of media products; work to train women to benefit from the interactive media system; empower women through employment that gives them a place in the public sphere; encourage women to participate in the formulation of laws within organizational frameworks, as well as codes of ethics that foster media work from a gender perspective; and develop

work mechanisms to increase interaction and networking among various parties concerned with women's advancement, including the media.

K. Women and the Environment

- **Procedures and outcomes**

With few exceptions, Arab countries did not prepare special strategies and legislation to address the issue of women and the environment, although a few did include clauses within broader national strategies for women's empowerment or create committees within their national institutions. Some national strategies and plans for the environment likewise included clauses concerning women. Most Arab countries witnessed marked female participation in the work of associations and institutions that address environmental affairs.

- **Obstacles and challenges**

The main obstacles in this area of concern in most Arab countries are: the shortage of studies and statistics with a gender perspective on the environment and sustainable development, the fact that efforts and mechanisms in this field are generally only recently established, and the fact that some poor Arab countries, particularly those facing environmental challenges, are unable to secure suitable health and housing conditions in all regions.

The primary challenge that all national reports agreed upon is in action to integrate gender issues in environmental development and in coordinate between national mechanisms concerned with women's issues and various government and non-governmental actors concerned with the environment, as well as various media outlets to raise awareness on environmental challenges from a prevention perspective.

L. The Girl Child

- **Procedures and outcomes**

Some Arab countries made progress at both the legislative and executive levels in improving the conditions of the girl child and protecting girls from exploitation, violence and harmful social practices. The steps taken by most Arab states were in aid of children in general, not necessarily from a gender perspective. These steps include the signing of international conventions, preparing draft laws, adopting laws and legislation, making resolutions to protect child rights, and implementing measures to reduce harmful practices, such as establishing committees and authorities concerned with childhood issues, and the development of strategies and work plans.

- **Obstacles and challenges**

The obstacles blocking the efforts of national institutional mechanisms to improve the girl child's conditions in many Arab countries, according to the national reports, are certain traditional practices that directly harm girls, such as FGM/C, child marriage and forced school drop outs among girl students, especially among poor families. Other obstacles include the limited financial resources allocated for girl child protection programmes, shortcomings in capacities of workers in this field, absence of a clear database covering specialized childhood issues in every phase, lack of statistical data from a gender perspective, and lack of child laws and strategies from a gender perspective. In addition, poor coordination between sectors concerned with childhood and lack of attention to awareness-raising in child rights have proven problematic. The national reports show that the problem of child marriage

remains prominent in a number of Arab countries, especially those that have not yet formulated laws prohibiting this practice. In the countries that host large populations of displaced persons and refugees, far more than they can handle, the phenomenon of child marriage and “hidden” trafficking of children is growing, exacerbated by a shortage of human and financial resources in agencies that address children’s issues.

In light of deteriorating security situations and complicated socio-economic conditions in Arab countries, as well as developments in technology and communications, the main challenges moving forward with regard to protection of girls are: integration of gender issues into legislation, laws, plans, and work mechanisms regarding child protection, especially for girls, from all forms of violence and exploitation, misuse of the internet, and harmful social practices; capacity-building of workers in childhood issues; and creation of a gender-sensitive database addressing all stages of childhood.

Section Three – Data and Statistics

A. National indicators to monitor progress

Several Arab countries took steps to develop national baseline indicators from a gender perspective, but these efforts tended to be centrally-administered by official statistical apparatuses, occasionally in cooperation with international organizations and private associations. The nature and effectiveness of these efforts varied from one country to another.

In terms of developing indicators aimed at assessing progress in enhancing gender equality, a number of countries devised special statistical frameworks to measure women’s conditions in many realms, based on indicators from related fields.

At the same time, other countries implemented various measures, planned strategies for collecting data from a gender perspective on a plethora of relevant indicators in order to monitor progress made in advancing gender equality and women’s rights. Other countries depended on a small set of indicators noted in reports that do not focus on women’s issues in particular, 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 witnessed major time and sector gaps in a number of Arab countries, despite progress made in recent years in collecting information and regularly producing data in these fields.

The national reports demonstrated that most of the participating countries did not commit to presenting gender indicators that conform to the minimum set declared by the United Nations. Many indicators reflected considerations unique to the concerned countries, which made it difficult to consolidate the data to present a unified regional analysis. Nevertheless, through their statistical activities, most countries covered an acceptable ratio of the proposed minimum indicators in a variety of fields. Nonetheless, it must be noted that the fields most deficient in indicators were the human rights of women and women’s participation in public and economic life.

C. Data concerning specific groups

A number of Arab countries worked to extract data and indicators of specific groups using the gender perspective. In particular, these groups include: rural women, refugees, women with disabilities, older persons, incarcerated women and female victims of armed conflicts and landmines.

Some of these countries devised questionnaires and indicators specifically for this purpose, while others depended on the results of prior surveys and general censuses.

Section Four – Emerging priorities

In spite of the efforts exerted towards the advancement of women and the diverse accomplishments achieved in the various participating countries, gender gaps remain. A wide segment of women still suffer from marginalization; discrimination; poverty; and violence of all forms, exacerbated by conflict, social divisions and crises. In this context and based on the foci of the national reports, emerging priorities in combating gender discrimination and facilitating women’s empowerment can be divided into four key themes: official frameworks and institutional mechanisms; 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: first, institutional coordination between parties concerned with women’s issues; and second, women’s empowerment and enhancement of women’s role within institutions and decision-making departments.

As indicated in the national reports, most Arab countries continue to face difficulties in enhancing gender equality. The causes of this are the deficient executive frameworks; gaps in coordination between the various bodies concerned with women’s issues; scarcity of data and statistics disaggregated from a gender perspective; slow integration of gender issues in public policies, legislation, and budgets; and shortcomings in financial and human resources in some countries. The challenges that remain before Arab States are in filling the gaps between women and men in access to decision-making positions despite women’s remarkable advances in educational achievement. In this context, two emerging priorities may be gleaned: developing institutional mechanisms and improving women’s participation in management and decision-making. Based on this, the courses of action can be defined, including actions that can be completed and actions to be devised, according to the national reports.

Emerging priority 1: Development of institutional mechanisms to address women’s and gender issues

- Adopt a multi-faceted, multi-disciplinary participatory approach in order to improve coordination, strengthen networking, and build strategic partnerships with a variety of institutions and encourage the effective utilization of information technology.
- Integrate gender issues in sustainable development plans, legislation, policies, budgets and legal frameworks to develop budgets on a variety of government levels; train ministerial institutions in this practice by activating the role of units specializing in gender issues.
- Institute development of organizations working in women’s empowerment to become models in the following areas: good governance, quality control, integrity, information management, funding generation, and partnership building.
- Create institutional mechanisms for monitoring, follow-up, and evaluation; establish gender monitoring bodies in public service positions; extract data and indicators regarding all women’s groups, including older women.

- Develop incentives for partnerships and institutions to incorporate the concept of joint participation and social responsibility in their plans to achieve a balance between commercial and social factors.
- Refine laws to comply with international conventions; continue the development of legislative frameworks; review laws and systems that are unjust to women's rights; define exact conceptual frameworks to facilitate the work of those who intervene to protect women; include older persons and people with special in legal considerations.
- Institutionalize statistical work and research in women's affairs and gender issues at various official institutional and academic levels; develop indicators based on this perspective and organize training workshops to follow up on their preparation.

Emerging priority 2: Increasing women's participation in management and decision-making

- Adopt a quota for women's parliamentary and local representation as an interim measure; train and qualify women to actively participate in candidature and elections; educate women in their political rights and the significance of their role in public life; uphold the feminine perspective in political work; highlight how political work can activate and develop political life to serve the whole society.
- Develop legislation and take action to expand women's participation and empower them to work in various fields, especially those that were traditionally considered exclusive to men, by setting a minimum percentage of women's participation in decision-making and public service positions.
- Highlight women's experiences in balancing public and private life and how these experiences could give new meaning to political participation; study women's experiments in local governance councils; reward good practices in order to benefit from and build upon them.
- Integrate the gender dimension in peace efforts and settling armed conflicts; enhance the effective role of women in negotiations; build women's capacities to enable them to manage difficult situations and handle the consequences.
- Integrate the gender dimension in addressing environmental issues; invest in women's capacities for the prevention of environmental risks; spread environmental education among upcoming generations.

B. Socio-economic Empowerment

Great efforts have been exerted in various Arab countries to improve women's economic conditions and empower them to enter the labour market. Nevertheless, a number of factors have converged to perpetuate gaps between Arab productive and economic progress and global echelons. These include: the impact of structural adjustment policies, financial crises and, primarily, deteriorating economic conditions on women's economic conditions. A wide segment of women lack even the minimum conditions of a decent livelihood, especially in poverty-stricken regions. In addition, women suffer from: extra burdens in the labour market; lack of value attributed to their invisible work within the household; exploitation by some disputing parties as an instrument of pressure between them (which may result in kidnapping, murder, rape, displacement and isolation from the labour market). All these problems call for more intense efforts in the coming years that could be summarized in the following matrix of emerging priorities and their corresponding practical actions:

- I. Activate funding channels for small and medium-sized projects
 - Prepare appropriate legislative frameworks to avail a funding environment that embraces women's small economic enterprises, particularly with regard to financial and tax laws and prerequisites for guarantees on loans; create a sound competitive environment and sufficient legal protection for small economic projects run by women; create integrated economic support agencies to provide management, investment, banking, technical assistance and electronic services to empower women to pursue enterprises.
 - Educate women in investment processes and greater diversification of interests to go beyond traditional fields that women have customarily been involved in.
- II. Rehabilitation of the education and training system based on gender concerns and equality.
 - Improve women's educational conditions at all levels, especially in higher education, by focusing on expanding formal education networks to cover rural, remote, and poor regions; improve female students' performance; fight the problem of school drop-outs and increase female enrolment; eradicate reading, writing and computer illiteracy.
 - Create departments of women's studies and gender issues in universities and research centres.
- III. Improvement of women's conditions in the labour market
 - Prepare economic programmes, budgets, and projects from a gender-based perspective.
 - Work to diversify and enrich socio-economic and training and employment options available to women, such as creating flexible part-time and temporary work systems, work from home programmes, remote professional training, electronic marketing, and computer literacy programmes; and developing women's capacities in technology and promising professions.
 - Continue efforts to remove all forms of discrimination from labour laws in order to ensure congruence with women's rights; pursue affirmative action measures in favour of women such as maternity leave and establishment of child care programmes.
 - Entrench the culture of women's work and productive activities, particularly among women who suffer difficult conditions that hamper their participation in the labour market.
- IV. Provision of health care to as wide a sector of women as possible
 - Develop the services of institutions and organizations concerned with women's sexual, reproductive and emotional health through expanding care networks, qualifying specialized cadres, and promoting awareness and training efforts.
 - Develop health and social insurance services, especially for specific groups such as women working in informal sectors, poor women, elderly women, rural women, and displaced women.
 - Activate programmes concerned with displaced women and refugees; open paths to sustainability, economic production, and social protection; create institutional mechanisms to provide safe housing for poor women, especially female heads of households.

C. Protection of women from violence practices

In spite of the forward movements in the participating countries, albeit to disparate degrees and varied methods, in setting up laws and procedures to combat violence against women, and in spite of

improvements in the work mechanisms of institutions and associations, legal research and reviews, and media reform, violence against women continues to be one of most serious phenomena facing Arab countries. With this reality, the importance of continuing work to update legal frameworks to guarantee women's rights may be addressed through the following:

- Work to make personal status laws conform to all women's rights in both the public and private spheres.
- Approve laws that prevent child marriage and FGM/C, and formulate mechanisms to apply such laws.
- Make necessary amendments to penal codes, such as criminalizing domestic violence and amending laws regarding "honour crimes" and those that pardon rapists from punishment if they marry their victims.
- Update laws to conform to international conventions and constitutions; define precise conceptual frameworks to help interventionists monitor and distinguish actions and behaviours that fall under the category of violence against women.
- Protect women from all forms of violence throughout all stages of their life; develop legal monitoring systems to review violence perpetrated against women by employing expert psychologists to verify cases; expand the legal classification of criminal acts to encompass new manifestations of violence against women (such as forced marriage).
- Develop and constantly update a national institutional map of places to receive and counsel female victims of violence, such as courts, police stations, etc.; prepare a guide for interventionists handling of violence against women; strengthen the approach of community police responding to violence against women; universalize the women's police experiment; train law enforcers in applying gender-sensitive approaches and the laws that uphold them.
- Establish a database on violence against women; create an institutional information system on gender-based violence for collecting data and information; conduct field studies to measure the prevalence of this phenomenon and determine its type and probability of occurrence; identify perpetrators and victims, and measure to what extent women seek help from specialized bodies.
- Educate women about their legally-guaranteed rights; disseminate legal knowledge to fill the gap between legal rights and their application; encourage women not to stay silent about any violent practices they are exposed to in either their private or public lives; offer women free legal assistance; create mechanisms to qualify them and enable them to get on with their lives.
- Work to make the protection of women and children and the insurance of their daily needs during wars and conflicts to be the responsibility of all countries without exception; accentuate international protection mechanisms to protect women and children and mechanisms to deter perpetrators of violence in order to fulfil the responsibility of all countries and concerned parties as defined in international conventions and standards.
- Establish and activate international monitoring mechanisms to observe and document violations of women and children's rights by conflicting parties, and refer them to specialized international bodies.

- Coordinate with civil society organizations at the local and international levels to exchange expertise, train associations working on the ground, and teach male and female actors the skills to handle target groups living under difficult circumstances.

D. Knowledge, Culture, and Media Empowerment

Most of the national reports attributed the bleak conditions of women and the violence to which they are exposed to the prevailing traditional culture and customs, to the dominance of patriarchal culture, and to the media that promotes stereotypical images of women in a purely commercial, consumer context. Considering this reality, the importance of empowerment of women through knowledge becomes crucial. This should be through intensifying education, research, media and awareness efforts to achieve equality such as:

- Reform educational curricula from a gender-based perspective.
- Include the subject of information technology in national strategies on women's issues; encourage women to construct media platforms for their issues; train women in how to invest in social media networks.
- Work to engage women in the organizational structures of media outlets and communications, and in the preparation of codes of ethics for media outlets using a gender-based perspective.
- Establish media monitoring units to ensure monitoring and accountability of the media's display of discriminatory attitudes towards women.
- Establish university research centres specialized in gender studies to produce concepts and coordinate approaches; orient towards issues of scientific research and study scholarships for women; provide sufficient support for enrolment in new study specializations; construct a database to support female experts.
- Encourage women to participate in influencing cultural and innovative action by steering, producing, and promoting; document women's innovation, creativity and perseverance; invest in interactive theatre, interactive media systems, and film production; collect signatures and organize artistic and sports events that highlight women's issues; build women's capacities in technology and access to information and in setting up and accessing linkage networks.
- Focus on family issues in light of the technological revolution and its ever-renewing inputs; protect children from pornographic websites and from images of violence they may be exposed to.
- Set up advocacy groups for human and women's rights to combat violence emanating from extremists who promote fashion in the name of consumption, or extremists who promote stringency in the name of returning to authenticity.
- Establish and activate training centres for media personnel to train them in gender-based rights media; train organizations and associations in communication skills and support programmes that aim to build capacities of NGOs in information technologies.