

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

Committee on Women
Eleventh session
Beirut, 10–11 October 2023



Item 8 of the provisional agenda

**Women's economic empowerment as a catalyst
for prosperous national economies**

Item 8 of the provisional agenda contains six sub-items for discussion by the Committee on Women, with reference to the following documents:

1. Legal reforms for advancing women's economic empowerment in the Arab region (E/ESCWA/C.7/2023/7(Part I)).
2. Safe, accessible, efficient and affordable transport systems as enablers of women's economic empowerment (E/ESCWA/C.7/2023/7(Part II)).
3. Addressing sexual harassment in the public sphere (E/ESCWA/C.7/2023/7(Part III)).
4. Access to land, property and immovable assets and women's entrepreneurship (E/ESCWA/C.7/2023/7(Part IV)).
5. Advancing care policies in Arab countries (E/ESCWA/C.7/2023/7(Part V)).
6. Gender-inclusive social protection for fostering women's economic empowerment (E/ESCWA/C.7/2023/7(Part VI)).

These sub-items represent the substantive focus of the current session, namely women's economic empowerment as a catalyst for prosperous national economies.

Economic empowerment is a cornerstone of gender equality that refers both to the ability to succeed and advance economically, and to the power to make and act on economic decisions. Women's economic empowerment is a right that is essential for realizing gender equality and achieving broader development goals, such as economic growth, poverty reduction, and improvements in health, education and social well-being. Women make up 50 per cent of the world's population, but account for only 37 per cent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP).¹ This means that, in general, women are not reaching their full potential in terms of their contribution to the global economy.

¹ McKinsey Global Institute, [The power of parity: how advancing women's equality can add \\$12 trillion to global growth – executive summary](#), 2015.

The Arab region consistently ranks at the bottom of global indices on women's engagement with the public sphere. For example, women's labour force participation dropped to 18 per cent in 2021,² a decline partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, regardless of the pandemic's impact, the region continues to underperform in that indicator, despite relatively high female primary school enrolment (94 per cent)³ and moderate secondary school enrolment (71 per cent) in 2020.⁴ In the political sphere, women in the region hold just 16.3 per cent of parliamentary seats, the lowest share globally.⁵

Under the above-mentioned six sub-items, the Committee on Women will consider areas that can influence women's ability to realize their full potential, by heightening their sense of safety, expanding their choices, and increasing their access to and control over resources. This will, in turn, contribute to fostering more prosperous national economies.

The first document provides a threefold approach to legal reforms: creating a decent work environment to enhance women's participation in the labour market; establishing a legal entrepreneurial ecosystem that enhances women's entrepreneurship and incentivizes their employment; and setting an overall legislative framework that strengthens gender justice within the family and society, so as to allow women the ability and freedom of choice to access opportunities. The second and third documents focus on access to and safety in the public sphere and in the world of work as cornerstones of women's mobility and ability to access education, employment and all other public services and activities. The fourth document presents the link between women's entrepreneurship and their access to property and assets, which is a challenged right in practice in the region. The fifth document addresses the pressing need for comprehensive care policies for children, older persons and persons with disabilities, which would support women in seeking opportunities and advance economic growth at large. The sixth document advocates for gender-inclusive social protection policies that not only meet the needs of poor women, but also increase their access to social insurance and pension regardless of their employment status.

This set of six documents presents several policy tools and approaches developed and implemented by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in the region. The Committee on Women is invited to review their content and provide comments thereon.

² World Bank, [Labor force participation rate, female \(% of female population ages 15+\) \(modeled ILO estimate\) - Middle East and North Africa](#).

³ World Bank, [School enrollment, primary, female \(% gross\) – Arab world](#).

⁴ World Bank, [School enrollment, secondary, female \(% gross\) – Arab world](#).

⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union, [Women in parliament in 2022: the year in review](#), 2023.