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Technical cooperation activities for 2020**Summary**

The present document provides an overview of the technical cooperation activities carried out by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in 2020, within the framework of the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation, the United Nations Development Account, and extrabudgetary resources.

The present document sets out key achievements in supporting member States, focusing on activities that show the interlinkages between the three functions of ESCWA : as a research institution producing studies to support public policy reforms, as a house of expertise providing technical advice to decision makers, and as a regional forum building consensus among member States regarding the challenges they face and ways to address them. The present document highlights the support provided by ESCWA to member States following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, including analysing the economic and social impact of the virus, providing recommendations for response policies and measures, and developing national plans to deal with specific aspects of the pandemic.

The Executive Committee is invited to take note of the implemented technical cooperation activities and to make proposals for their development.

Contents

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
Introduction	1-2	3
<i>Chapter</i>		
I. Examples of technical support provided by ESCWA to member States in 2020	3-30	3
II. Quantitative analysis of technical cooperation activities	31-34	8
A. Advisory services funded from the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation.....	31	8
B. Capacity-building activities funded from the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation.....	32	10
C. Activities funded by the United Nations Development Account.....	33	11
D. Activities funded from extrabudgetary sources	34	11

Introduction

1. The Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC) is an essential tool for implementing the programme of work of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). It allows activities to be designed as requested by member States to meet their needs. ESCWA applies an integrated planning approach in the technical support it provides to member States to improve efficiency, increase impact, and enhance transparency and accountability. ESCWA technical cooperation also supports efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Goals. ESCWA work, through its six specialized subprogrammes that tackle various development dimensions in the Arab region, intersects with most of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2. In general, ESCWA technical cooperation services fall into three categories: advisory services to support countries on issues related to the formulation, development or implementation of public policies; workshops, training sessions, study tours and capacity-building fellowships; and pilot field projects in ESCWA specialization areas, which form a basis for developing larger projects with extrabudgetary funding secured by donors. Under the technical cooperation framework, ESCWA follows a multidisciplinary, results-based approach by providing services in an integrated manner building on its diverse expertise. Technical cooperation activities are financed from three main sources: RPTC, the United Nations Development Account, and extrabudgetary resources. ESCWA aims to achieve integration between these three sources and its normative research work funded from the regular budget.

I. Examples of technical support provided by ESCWA to member States in 2020

3. Undoubtedly, 2020 was an exceptional year that prevented the implementation of field activities, workshops and advisory missions to member States owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. Shortly after the pandemic began to spread in Arab countries, the ESCWA secretariat considered ways to continue providing technical and capacity-building services. It tested remote communication tools to select the most efficient, and thus ESCWA began implementing virtual activities. The technical cooperation activities provided from March 2020 onwards were advisory services and virtual capacity-building activities.

4. However, 2020 also witnessed new types of requests and swift action by ESCWA regarding monitoring the economic and social impact of the pandemic and providing recommendations to mitigate them and protect at-risk groups. The secretariat has issued 15 [policy briefs](#) on the topic since March 2020, and has used them to fulfil over 10 requests from member States for technical cooperation in various areas, including modelling the economic impact of the pandemic; identifying appropriate protection measures for specific population groups, such as women, older persons and persons with disabilities; and examining sectoral issues such as food security and poverty in the context of the pandemic. Member States benefited from recommendations presented in ESCWA policy briefs. A comparison with measures adopted in Arab countries indicated this benefit, and country representatives expressed their satisfaction with the ESCWA response to the global crisis in numerous meetings.

5. In addition to providing direct technical support upon request, the ESCWA secretariat participated in international technical cooperation efforts to monitor and mitigate the effects of the pandemic, such as the [United Nations Observatory on Border Crossings Status due to COVID-19](#) aimed at preventing the spread of the virus. ESCWA worked on including Arab countries in the Observatory. ESCWA also participated in the launch of [three new projects](#) funded by the United Nations Development Account, which were designed to address the effects of the pandemic. ESCWA worked on the projects to obtain more resources for technical support to Arab countries. These new projects are: the “Global initiative towards post-Covid-19 resurgence of the MSME sector”, which ESCWA is leading with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD); a project entitled “Transport and trade connectivity in the age of pandemics”, which was launched by UNCTAD and the five United Nations regional commissions to formulate and implement measures for the continued flow of transport and trade across borders while preventing the spread of pandemics by implementing digital solutions; and a project entitled “Strengthening social protection for pandemic response”

aimed at strengthening social protection systems by covering workers in the informal sector, migrant workers and other at-risk groups, and taking gender issues into account in social protection, especially in the care economy, and improving data collection and analysis to identify vulnerable groups in protection and poverty alleviation policies.

6. The secretariat participated in many seminars and workshops at the global, regional and national levels to discuss the effects of the pandemic on sustainable development, at which it provided technical advice to various regional and national bodies, including the League of Arab States, specifically the Council of Arab Ministers of Transport, the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, the Tunisian National Committee for COVID-19 Response, the Supreme Council for Planning and Development of Kuwait, and the Family Affairs Council of Saudi Arabia. In 2020, ESCWA strengthened collaboration with other United Nations bodies to provide integrated support to member States, including the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund, with which ESCWA works in various countries including Lebanon, Libya and the Sudan.

7. The pandemic has highlighted the pivotal role of State institutions in addressing crises. In this context, ESCWA examined the interplay between the various repercussions of the pandemic and the institutional response to them, especially that of public institutions, and developed technical support in the field of institutional reform by focusing on the following two interlinked fundamental dimensions:

(a) The first dimension is knowledge-based. ESCWA held a series of remote seminars with 16 member States, represented by participants from public institutions (such as ministries and parliaments), the private sector, civil society organizations, and regional and international organizations (including the League of Arab States, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Islamic Development Bank, WHO, the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the Regional Hub Office for Arab States of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)), so as to understand structural and institutional challenges and identify gaps and weaknesses in the public governance system's response to challenges raised by the pandemic, strengthen response capacity and explore innovative solutions to build back better. These seminars demonstrated the need to strengthen and develop the role of public institutions, on the one hand, and to enhance cooperation between them and with private sector institutions and civil society, on the other, to tackle crises;

(b) The second dimension is technical. It relates to ESCWA programmes and techniques for reforming the governance system and enhancing the effectiveness of public institutions, which have proved their effectiveness in responding to institutional challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis. These programmes have been enriched by the outcomes and conclusions of the seminars and by discussions held with member States in 2020.

8. The institutional assessment methodology applied by ESCWA with a number of Arab countries has helped identify weaknesses and gaps in institutional structures in terms of responding to specific crises, challenges and priorities, and has facilitated working with member States to develop programmes in line with country specificities and administrative experiences to enhance the effectiveness of public institutions. The last related workshop was held remotely on 2 September 2020, and was attended by members of the General Administration team for career planning and job configurations of the General Personnel Council of the State of Palestine.

9. The launch of a common Arab regional job competencies framework for senior public servants highlighted the importance of managing functional competencies in public institutions, and of developing programmes to build capacity related to crisis management; technology use, digitization and data management; and building partnerships at various levels.

10. In 2020, ESCWA formulated training packages to build the capacity of staff members in public institutions, and developed analytical tools to support member States monitor gaps in social policies and assess

relevant development reforms. ESCWA developed a simulation tool for the Multidimensional Poverty Index that enables decision makers to quickly and accurately form a perception of poverty and deprivation in a country, and of the successes and failures in advancing the development process over time. The tool analyses data according to gender, the education level of the head of the household's, wealth, income level, or geographical areas within a country. Discussions are currently underway for its application in a number of Arab countries. ESCWA also worked with Arab countries to strengthen social protection policies, especially in view of the pandemic, and developed the [COVID-19 Stimulus Tracker](#) of protection policies and stimulus measures announced by 170 countries, which helped transfer knowledge and experiences to member States regarding crisis response.

11. ESCWA provided support to the Ministry of Labour of Lebanon to reduce unemployment rates and integrate young men and women in the labour market. ESCWA designed two training packages, which benefited the Ministry of Labour and other specialized ministries, such as the ministries of education, information and technology. The first training package focused on the digital economy and its role in improving employment opportunities, while the second package focused on financial policies and job creation. The training took place over a period of five days, on 7 and 8 October, and from 14 to 16 October 2020. This effort was complemented by an initiative launched by ESCWA in October 2020, in partnership with the Lebanese Ministry of Labour and Coursera, one of the largest platforms worldwide for distance learning, which provided 25,000 training opportunities for unemployed Lebanese citizens or those seeking to develop their skills. Participants took more than 30,000 courses in various specializations over a period of three months.

12. ESCWA also developed a tool to assess the compatibility of public policies with the principles of social justice and to propose necessary reforms in that regard, in line with the [Tunis Declaration on Social Justice in the Arab Region](#) adopted in Tunis on 18 September 2014, at the closing of the twenty-eighth ESCWA session. This tool was tested on the Tunisian national strategy for the reintegration of vulnerable young people, through a consultative process that culminated in a virtual meeting on 24 and 25 September 2020, which highlighted gaps in the existing policy. The tool was endorsed by the Ministry of Social Affairs of Tunisia, which recommended it for approval by other ministries. ESCWA is currently working with the Ministry to develop a plan to address the identified gaps.

13. Based on its experience in supportive fields such as statistics and technology, ESCWA developed the Social Expenditure Monitor in 2020 at the request of several countries, including Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait and Egypt. The Monitor reflects the social and economic aspects of government spending on seven social dimensions according to beneficiary groups. What distinguishes this Monitor is that it is a practical framework that unifies concepts, standards, definitions and measurement methods among all parties concerned with social spending, and links their outputs to the State's budget and the SDGs. The Monitor develops models that present scenarios for any type of social spending, allowing the State to choose the type of spending in line with the fiscal space.

14. In 2020, data collection for the Monitor was completed, the necessary international standards, definitions and classifications were applied to it, and a database was established. ESCWA will also launch a statistical platform for Monitor data. This stage is important because applying statistical standards to data will enable countries to benefit from these numbers directly, on the one hand, and to link them to other statistics such as national accounts, government finance statistics, household surveys and the SDGs, on the other. ESCWA has endeavoured to ensure that the definitions and concepts on which the Monitor was built are compatible with international standards, concepts and classifications, especially the concepts of national accounts and government finance statistics.

15. ESCWA developed a training package to build the capacity of institutions to mainstream gender equality in their work. ESCWA has completed the training sessions it started in 2019 on this topic. ESCWA also worked on building the capacity of Arab countries to lead an institutional audit of gender equality through two training packages. The first package was implemented online over six weeks, and covered five training modules. This

intensive training programme resulted in the accreditation of representatives from 10 national women's machineries as audit facilitators for gender equality by ESCWA and the International Labour Organization.

16. ESCWA provided support to the Ministry of Social Affairs, Childhood and Family of Mauritania through three female trainees from Jordan and Morocco, who were accredited in the regional training programme. A participatory audit on gender equality was carried out at the Ministry in August and September 2020, despite the Ministry's numerous staff members (exceeding 400) and its various specializations. The results of the participatory audit were used to prepare an integrated training programme for the Ministry's employees, implemented from 26 October to 4 November 2020, on mainstreaming gender equality in the Ministry's work and specializations.

17. ESCWA also helped national women's machineries to address the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls by drafting policy briefs on the impact of the pandemic, which took into account the gender equality perspective (see paragraph 4 of the present document). On 23 April 2020, the secretariat held a special online meeting of the ESCWA Committee on Women, as part of its ninth session, to present the preliminary results of country responses and share successful experiences.

18. Since April 2020, ESCWA has supported the National Family Safety Programme of Saudi Arabia through a series of training workshops, in collaboration with United Nations partners, to protect women from violence in view of the pandemic. ESCWA also provided support to the Sudan to improve shelter services for women survivors of violence, which concluded with a workshop from 25 to 27 August 2020. In several countries, including Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen, ESCWA analysed the impact of the pandemic on the most affected sectors, and provided a comprehensive analysis and recommendations through six working papers for Iraq and Yemen to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on women's economic and political participation and social protection. ESCWA collaborated with UN-Women, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), CARE, and ABAAD in Lebanon to demonstrate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Beirut port explosion (4 August 2020) on gender equality in the country.

19. In the same context, the ESCWA secretariat is working with Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Saudi Arabia to study the responsiveness of available care services (caring for children, older persons and people with disabilities) to the pandemic, so as to provide recommendations for countries on appropriate responses to the negative effects of the pandemic and related measures for women in general, and working women in particular.

20. With regard to older persons, ESCWA provides technical support to a number of Arab countries, including Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, in developing strategies, policies and comprehensive action plans. ESCWA also collaborated with the League of Arab States and UNFPA to provide a virtual training workshop on 30 November 2020 to build the capacity of Arab parliamentarians in protecting the rights of older persons and ensuring that laws take their needs into account.

21. Persons with disabilities are one of the social groups most vulnerable to exclusion in efforts to confront epidemics. ESCWA has launched several initiatives to support them, based on a survey it conducted on precautionary measures taken by Arab Governments to address the repercussions of the pandemic on persons with disabilities, and on awareness materials they prepared to ensure that information is easily accessible to them. ESCWA, in cooperation with the League of Arab States and in coordination with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility, held a virtual consultative meeting on 24 June 2020 for senior officials in Arab countries concerned with the issues of persons with disabilities, so as to coordinate with partners and Governments on addressing the repercussions of the pandemic and its impact on persons with disabilities, and identifying national initiatives.

22. In this context, ESCWA supported the efforts of some countries upon their request. For example, it provided advisory services to Libya on facing the repercussions of the pandemic on persons with disabilities. It also made unprecedented efforts to form and coordinate a national working group that included representatives of WHO, UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, Handicap International, the Libyan ministries of social

affairs, health and education and the National Centre for Disease Control in Libya. The group developed a comprehensive action plan for the health, social and education pillars, in a consultative manner. ESCWA, in collaboration with the Ministry of Communications and Technology in the Syrian Arab Republic, held a workshop on the use of technology for persons with disabilities on 29 January 2020, at which it presented best practices in digital access policies and assistive technologies.

23. ESCWA collaborated with UNDP to support Lebanon in mitigating the effects of the economic crisis, the pandemic, and the Beirut port explosion on persons with disabilities through an initiative that provide for their immediate needs to maintain their health and well-being, and to ensure that areas affected by the explosion are rebuilt in a manner that provides improved accessibility for persons with disabilities to public institutions, streets and private facilities. The initiative provides a framework for rebuilding the Beirut Governmental Hospital in Karantina, and equipping 650 square meters of clinics to be used as physiotherapy and service facilities to support marginalized groups. ESCWA is also supporting the Lebanese Government in designing an early intervention package for children with disabilities and their families, in addition to a mental health programme. Moreover, ESCWA is collaborating with UNDP to provide support to Lebanon in developing a strategy for the inclusion of persons with disabilities, based on an analysis of the current situation in the country.

24. ESCWA worked with Jordan and Lebanon to evaluate national legislation related to the inclusion of persons with disabilities, and their compatibility with international standards. It held two meetings on this topic with representatives of the two countries on 8 October and 10 October 2020, respectively. Based on these evaluations and on the results of surveys of business owners conducted by ESCWA and the concerned Governments on barriers to inclusiveness, ESCWA will help the public and private sectors in both countries to introduce the necessary reforms.

25. Within the framework of supporting Lebanon after the catastrophic Beirut port explosion, ESCWA received a request for support from the Beirut Port Administration to prepare a study that would review the existing master plan for the port and take into account the changes resulting from the explosion, and consider a different location for facilities, warehouses and equipment, with the aim of submitting a proposal to improve the capacity, efficiency and competitiveness of the port under a unified strategy for the development of the maritime transport sector in Lebanon.

26. The study presented a number of general principles for the development of a master plan for the port, including a review of the occupancy plan for the affected areas, taking into account the increasing role of information technology and digital solutions in the management of ports, in reducing the wait time for containers, in improving internal traffic at the port and connecting its roads to the city of Beirut, and in providing future opportunities for a multimodal link across the wide landmass towards both Iraq and the Arabian Gulf.

27. In 2020, as part of its efforts to support member States in the context of digital transformation, ESCWA provided technical services to member States in the field of technology for development under the following three themes: digital government and digital transformation; technology transfer and innovation; and new technologies. For example, under the first theme, ESCWA provided an advisory service to the Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship of Jordan to analyse national performance in the 2020 E-Government Development Index, and submitted proposals in October 2020 to promote digital transformation in the country. In November 2020, ESCWA developed a legal framework for the Ministry to enhance e-participation in three phases: accessing information electronically, electronic consultation, and electronically supporting decision-making. ESCWA is also working with the Ministry to identify appropriate legal systems to implement the Personal Data Law by the end of 2020. In November 2020, ESCWA also developed an integrated vision for the digitization of social programmes under the Jordanian National Aid Fund, so as to make those services available to individuals during the pandemic.

28. Given that digital transformation and the extensive use of digital platforms, in the context of the pandemic and before it, are fraught with security risks, ESCWA reviewed the draft national cybersecurity

policy for the Communications and Media Commission of Iraq in July 2020, to ensure its compatibility with international and regional best practices. ESCWA is currently working with the National Information Centre of the Sudan to review its draft cybersecurity policy.

29. Under the technology transfer and innovation theme, ESCWA continues to provide technical support to member States to strengthen their national systems. In February 2020, it provided technical support to the Higher Commission for Scientific Research of the Syrian Arab Republic by preparing a report on a proposed structure and legal framework for a national technology transfer system. The draft report was discussed at a national workshop attended by representatives of academic, research and economic bodies, which was held in Damascus on 12 February 2020. In March 2020, ESCWA prepared a comprehensive report of all activities related to the country's technology transfer system, in collaboration with the Higher Commission for Scientific Research. In February 2020, ESCWA also developed a vision for establishing a technology business incubator at the request of the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, in addition to a vision on the structure and internal system of a software incubator (Nabta) at the National Software Centre in the Sudan in July 2020.

30. Under the new technologies theme, ESCWA reviewed the national policy for the Internet of Things for the State of Palestine in April 2020, and prepared a study on the national readiness for big data in October 2020. ESCWA also developed a draft national policy on artificial intelligence and a draft national policy on government cloud computing in Jordan. The latter was approved by the Jordanian Cabinet. Moreover, ESCWA developed a draft national strategy on artificial intelligence for Lebanon in February 2020. ESCWA also held a capacity-building workshop on blockchain policies and applications, at the request of the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Qatar, on 26 and 27 February 2020.

II. Quantitative analysis of technical cooperation activities

A. Advisory services funded from the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation

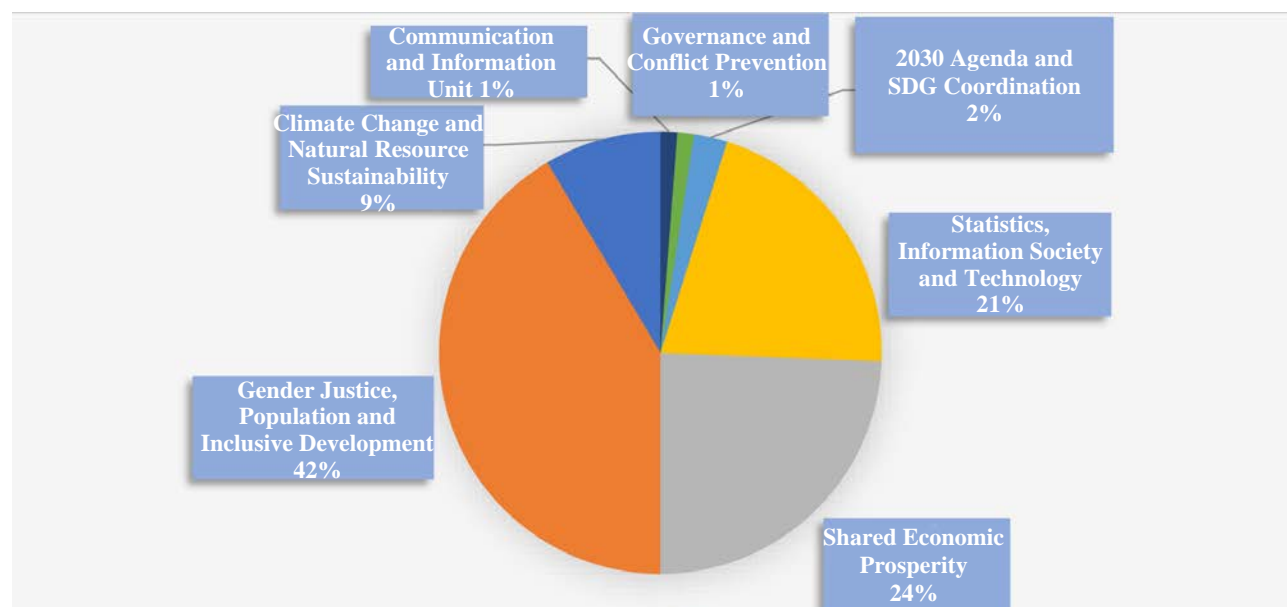
31. In 2020, ESCWA provided 82 advisory services to member States under RPTC, as shown in table 1 and figure 1.

Table 1. Advisory services provided to member States, 2020

Field Beneficiary	Climate change and natural resource sustainability	Gender justice, population and inclusive development	Shared economic prosperity	Statistics, information society and technology	2030 Agenda and SDG coordination	Governance and conflict prevention	Communication and Information Unit	Total
Bahrain				3				3
Egypt		2	4					6
Iraq				1	1	1		3
Jordan	3	1	1	2				7
Kuwait	1		1	2				4
Lebanon		5	2	3			1	11
Libya		4						4

Field Beneficiary	Climate change and natural resource sustainability	Gender justice, population and inclusive development	Shared economic prosperity	Statistics, information society and technology	2030 Agenda and SDG coordination	Governance and conflict prevention	Communication and Information Unit	Total
Morocco		1	1					2
State of Palestine		3		2				5
Qatar		1	1					2
Saudi Arabia	1	1		1				3
Sudan		2		1				3
Syrian Arab Republic		1		1				2
Tunisia		3	1					4
United Arab Emirates		1						1
Yemen		2						2
Regional services	2	6	5	1	1			15
League of Arab States		1	4					5
Total	7	34	20	17	2	1	1	82

Figure 1. Advisory services funded from RPTC by subprogramme, 2020



B. Capacity-building activities funded from the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation

32. ESCWA organized 26 capacity-building activities funded by RPTC, as shown in table 2 and figure 2 and figure 3.

Table 2. Capacity-building activities provided to member States, 2020

Field Beneficiary	Climate change and natural resource sustainability	Gender justice, population and inclusive development	Shared economic prosperity	Statistics, information society and technology	Governance and conflict prevention	Total
Bahrain				1		1
Jordan			2			2
Kuwait		2				2
Lebanon	1	3	1	1		6
Qatar				1		1
Saudi Arabia		1				1
State of Palestine					1	1
Sudan		1				1
Syrian Arab Republic		2		3		5
Tunisia		2	1			3
National activities	1	11	4	6	1	23
Regional and subregional activities	1	2				3
Total						26

Figure 2. Capacity-building activities provided to member States by subprogramme, 2020

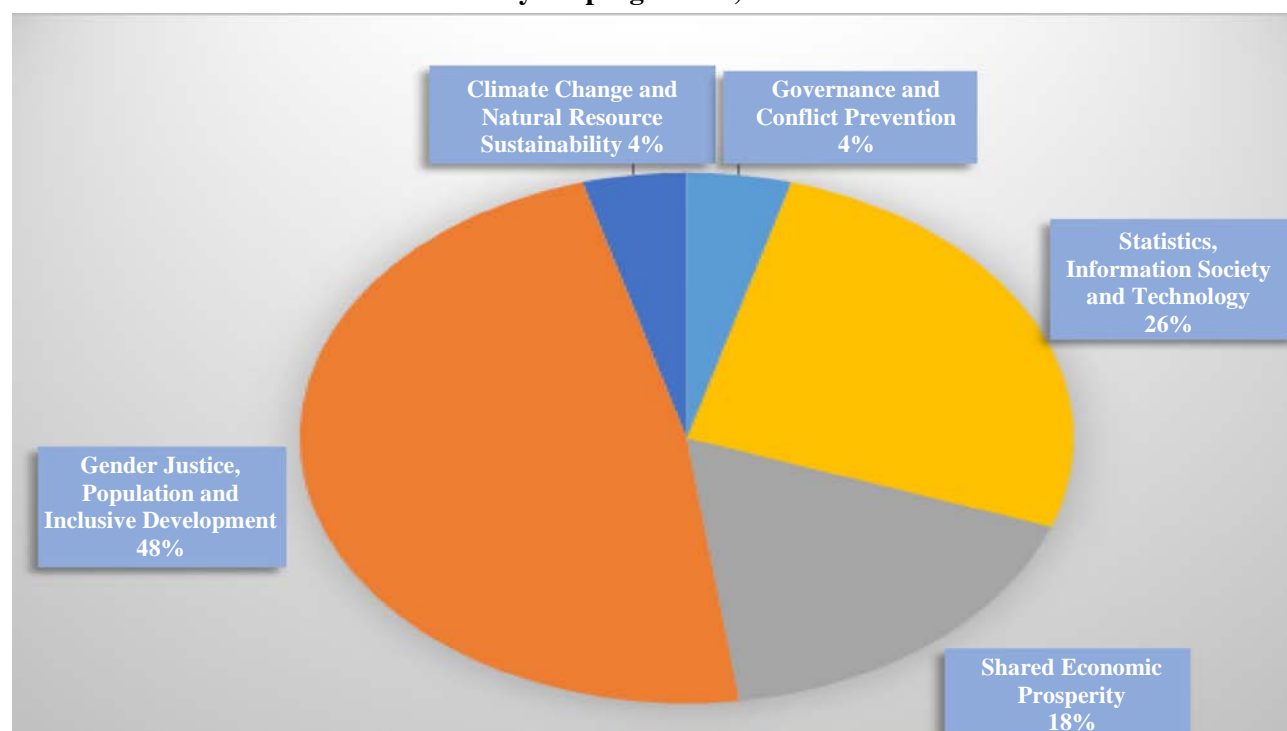
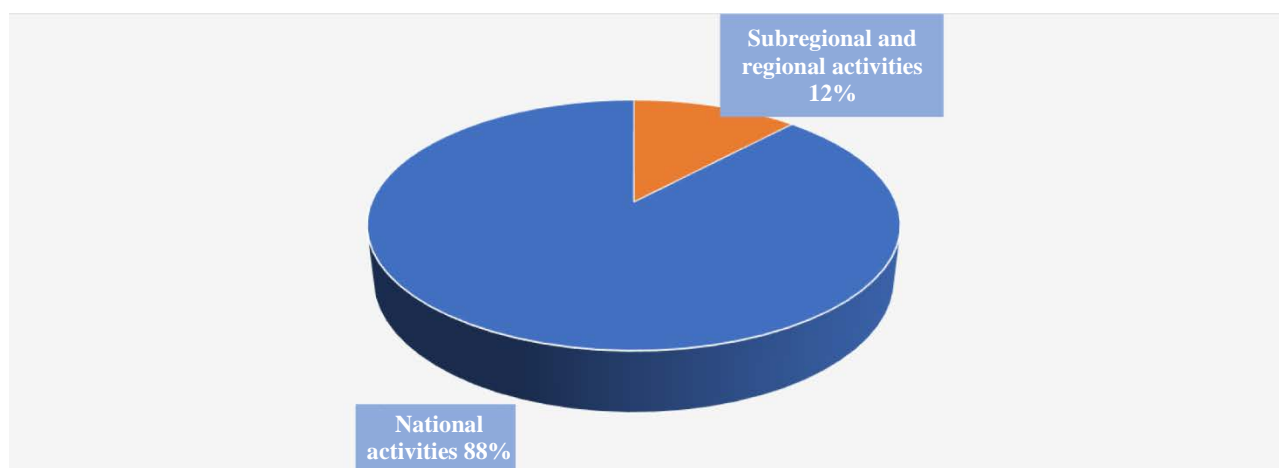


Figure 3. Distribution of capacity-building activities funded from RPTC in 2020 by levels: national, and subregional and regional



C. Activities funded by the United Nations Development Account

33. Within the framework of projects under the United Nations Development Account, ESCWA carried out over 100 activities, including sending advisory missions, holding capacity-building workshops and expert group meetings, and preparing training manuals (table 3).

Table 3. ESCWA activities funded by the United Nations Development Account

	Number
Advisory missions	34
Training workshops	27
Expert group meetings	11
Training manuals	32
Totals	104

D. Activities funded from extrabudgetary sources

34. In 2020, ESCWA implemented several extrabudgetary projects, three of which involved technical cooperation activities. The first project enhanced water and food security in view of climate change in the Arab region. The second project, also related to natural resources, was the Regional Initiative for Promoting Small-Scale Renewable Energy Applications in Rural Areas of the Arab Region (REGEND). Within the framework of these two projects, ESCWA issued publications and training manuals on transferring knowledge related to the sustainable use of resources, and held expert group meetings and capacity-building training workshops in that regard. Under the third project, aimed at strengthening policymaking capacity in the Arab region through performance monitoring and evaluating by using simulations of a series of international indicators, ESCWA held two expert meetings. Table 4 lists the extrabudgetary technical cooperation activities for 2020.

Table 4. ESCWA extrabudgetary technical cooperation activities, 2020

	Number
Training workshops	17
Expert group meetings	11
Training manuals	2
Publications	7
Total	37
