

ANNUAL REPORT 2020



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



Solidarity in the Face of Adversity





Shared Prosperity **Dignified Life**



VISION

ESCWA, an innovative catalyst for a stable, just and flourishing Arab region

MISSION

Committed to the 2030 Agenda, ESCWA's passionate team produces innovative knowledge, fosters regional consensus and delivers transformational policy advice. Together, we work for a sustainable future for all.





Shared Prosperity **Dignified Life**



ANNUAL **20** REPORT **20**

Solidarity in the Face of Adversity

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

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FOREWORD



2020 will forever be remembered as one of the most challenging years of recent history. Across the globe, the COVID-19 pandemic took millions of lives and did significant damage to our collective well-being. Almost every country in the Arab region underwent a lockdown, which in some instances lasted upwards of six months, endangering people's livelihoods.

Economies also plunged into a deep recession. Supply chains were halted. Transportation networks were closed. Millions of civilians lost their jobs and those who are most vulnerable - refugees and internally displaced persons, recipients of humanitarian aid, women, persons with disabilities, older persons, young people and workers in the informal sectors - were hit the hardest.

It is often in the face of such profound and universal adversity that the human spirit shines brightest, and that is what we witnessed throughout 2020. Across the Arab region, member States supported each other as well as non-member States in as many ways as they could, with the exchange of needed medical supplies as well as guidelines and frameworks for how to deal with the pandemic.

I was also proud to witness the courage and quick thinking of our staff at ESCWA, who had to adapt to challenging work conditions and were suddenly faced with the impossible task of supporting member States in their handling of the pandemic, all against a backdrop of a deep recession in Lebanon, our host country, which has affected us all.

If there is a silver lining to the hardship experienced throughout 2020, it is in the lessons we can derive from it and the realities that it highlighted for us. Firstly, the pandemic showed us that, for all our wealth, power, and

prosperity, we are immensely vulnerable as a species, which stresses the importance of working for sustainability and protecting the future of mankind.

The pandemic also served as direct proof of our profound ability to unite and work together in the face of a common enemy. This has made me feel hopeful about the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which States worldwide have committed to achieving. Indeed, human solidarity can sometimes be the difference between life and death, and our policy recommendations to member States in response to the pandemic stressed the importance of prioritizing the protection of vulnerable populations.

Though the pandemic is far from over, I am immensely proud to present the extensive, courageous, and creative work we did at ESCWA throughout 2020 to help member States navigate the year's relentless and unpredictable challenges while staying on task with achieving the SDGs.

ROLA DASHTI

Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations
and Executive Secretary of ESCWA



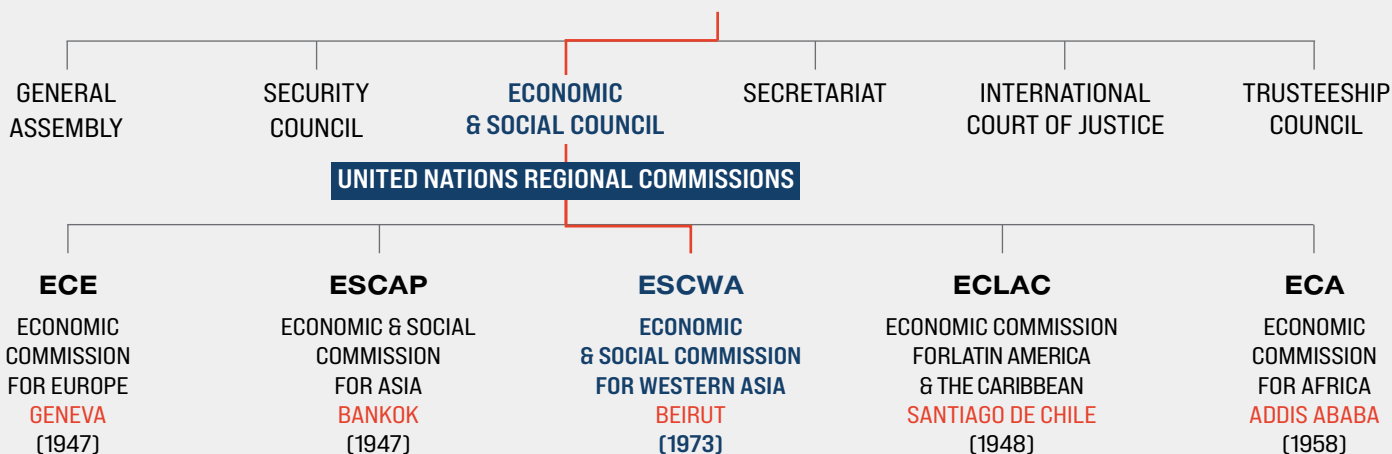


ESCWA IN BRIEF

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) promotes inclusive and sustainable development in the Arab region. It provides a regional presence for the United Nations Economic and Social Council and serves as a platform for Arab countries on the global stage. While its 20 member States differ in some respects, they share a cultural, historic and linguistic heritage and face common development challenges and opportunities, which are most effectively tackled through collective, coordinated and mutually reinforcing action.

ESCWA is one of five regional commissions across the world; its sister commissions are located in Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Geneva and Santiago. The United Nations regional commissions are unique intergovernmental platforms for the advancement of regional integration, the development of regional norms and standards, the exchange of experiences and the fostering of cooperation. Regional commissions are recognized for the critical role they play in promoting a holistic approach to development in their regions, and balancing the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in their member States.

UNITED NATIONS



ESCWA leverages its convening power to promote dialogue and knowledge sharing at the national, regional and global levels, and to foster interregional cooperation and vibrant South-South partnerships. The implementation of global policy frameworks, chiefly the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), are among the top priorities for ESCWA in the region.

How We Work

ESCWA links development knowledge to policy through research and analysis. Bringing together policymakers, researchers, experts and relevant stakeholders through its convening power, transforming this knowledge into constructive dialogue and concerted action. ESCWA plays four essential roles:



01. VOICE OF THE REGION

A regional platform for deliberation, coordination, consensus building and advocacy.



02. THINK TANK OF THE REGION

A source of innovative research, supporting quality data collection and analysis for forward-looking, evidence-based policymaking.



03. ADVISER TO THE REGION

A provider of capacity-building and technical advisory services, strengthening national efforts to adopt norms and policies.



04. PROVIDER OF SUPPORT IN ACHIEVING THE 2030 AGENDA AND IMPLEMENTING ITS GOALS IN THE REGION

A partner to member States in the Arab region in their efforts to implement the SDGs.

The Executive Secretary

The Executive Secretary heads the Commission and holds the rank of Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations. The current Executive Secretary Rola Dashti, who took up the post in February 2019, hails from Kuwait; her predecessors originated from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, the State of Palestine, Qatar, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.



YEAR IN REVIEW

HIGHLIGHT EVENTS

DATE	LOCATION	TITLE
JANUARY		
14-15	Beirut	Accessing Disruptive Technologies for Improved Water Resources Management under Climate Change
21-22	Riyadh	High-level Seminar on the Future of Economic Statistics for the Arab Region
22-23	Cairo	Fifth Arab Internet Governance Forum
23-24	Beirut	First Joint ESCWA-UNCTAD-OECD Competition Forum for the Arab Region
FEBRUARY		
2-6	Amman	Training Course on Price Statistics and the International Comparison Programme
3	Beirut	Youth Meeting: Road to ECOSOC
11-13	Kuwait City	Introducing Web Scrapping in Data Collection
25	Online	Towards a Risk Assessment Methodology for the Arab Region
26-27	Cairo	Workshop on Voluntary National Reviews in the Arab Region: Enhancing Partnerships
MARCH		
2-6	Tunis	Training on Economic Modelling
5	Beirut	Workshop on Supporting Monitoring and Implementation of the SDGs: Transboundary Water Cooperation
5	Beirut	Training of Trainers on Behavioural Insights and Strategic Planning Handbook
APRIL		
21	Online	Launch of the Libya Dialogue Series
22	Online	Policy Response to the Socioeconomic Impact of COVID-19: Social Protection

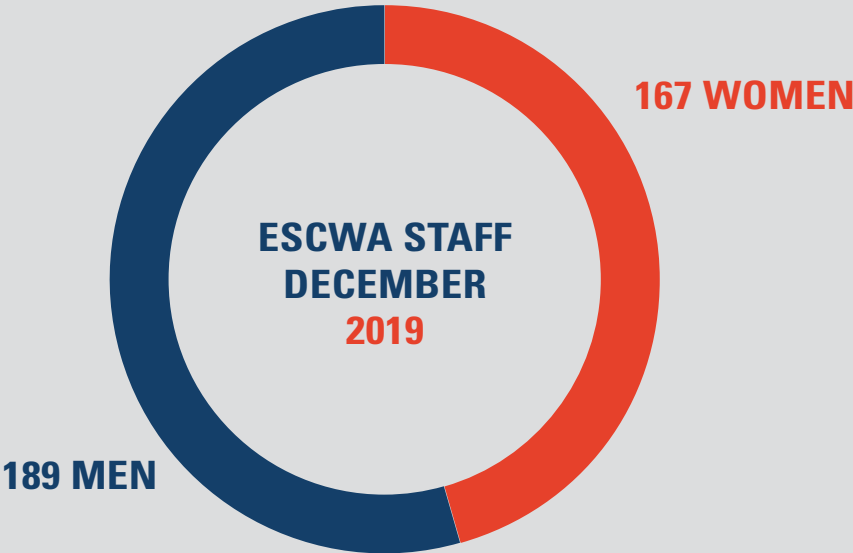
23	Online	Policy Response to the Socioeconomic Impact of COVID-19: Gender Equality
23	Online	Emerging impact of COVID-19 on Food Security in the Arab Region
MAY		
8	Online	Electricity Interconnection in the Arab Region
12	Online	Oil Market Crisis, COVID-19 and Economic Recovery: Implications for Arab Countries
29	Online	15th Saint-Jerome Translation Contest Awards Ceremony
JUNE		
3	Online	Fifth Meeting of the Arab Climate Outlook Forum
16-22	Online	Workshop on the Use of SDMX for SDG Data Reporting
24	Online	High-level Meeting on Support for Persons with Disabilities during COVID-19 in the Arab Region
24	Online	Leveraging Public Governance and Exploring Innovative Solutions to COVID-19 in the Arab Region: Webinar Series
30	Online	Regional Training on Business Environment Legislative Framework
30	Online	World Water Day 2020 Challenge: Our Youth, Our Future – Awards Ceremony
JULY		
1	Online	Launch of the RICCAR Webinar Series on Climate Change Analysis Using GIS Tools
6	Online	Launch of the Sustainable Development Dialogues in the Arab Region
8	Online	Expert Group Meeting on Development Challenges Associated with Forced Displacement
13-16	Online	Meeting of the Technical Advisory Group on Demographic and Social Statistics for Arab Countries

14-16	Al-Achaari, Maan, Jordan	Workshop on Good Food Manufacturing Practices and Hygiene Requirements for Food Storage
16	Online	Competition Law and Policy during and after COVID-19: Reflections on the Arab Region
20-23	Online	Developing Budgeted Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks for National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security
AUGUST		
3	Online	Webinar Series on Consumer Protection during and after COVID-19
11	Online	Workshop on Digital Cooperation and Development in the Arab Region
20	Online	Virtual Consultation on Restoring the Social Fabric in Syria: Community Resilience and its Limits during Conflict
25-27	Online	Webinar Series on Shelters for Women Survivors of Violence in the Sudan
SEPTEMBER		
1	Online	Training Workshop on GIS for the Integrated Transport System in Arab States
2	Online	Institutional Gaps Assessment Methodology and Tools for Workforce Planning in the State of Palestine
17	Beirut	Stakeholders Consultation on Revisiting Port of Beirut Master Plan
23	Online	Eighth Meeting of Arab Directors of e-Government Programmes
23	Online	First Subregional Meeting on National Reporting Platforms for SDGs
24-25	Tunis	National Workshop on the Policy Gap Assessment Tool
29	Online	First Regional Workshop on the Arab ICT Strategy
OCTOBER		
6	Online	Non-technical Overview of Economic Modelling Tools for Public Policy and Impact
7-8	Online	Resource Efficiency in the Arab Region: Monitoring Progress on SDG 12 and Building Back Better from COVID-19

13-15	Online	Regional Workshop on Integration of Big Data and Geospatial Information for the Compilation of SDG Indicators
14	Beirut	Launch of the Campaign to Mitigate the Effects of the Beirut Port Explosion on Persons with Disabilities
27-28	Online	Webinar on Voluntary National Reviews in the Arab Region
NOVEMBER		
2	Online	Second Meeting of the Expert Group on Social Protection Reform
2	Online	Launch of the Training Series on Groundwater Management
11-12	Online	Workshop on Policies for Ageing with Dignity in the Arab Region
18	Online	Expert Group Meeting on National Digital Development Reviews
24	Online	Twenty-first Session of the Committee on Transport and Logistics
25	Online	Launch of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence Regional Arts Competition
DECEMBER		
3	Online	Launch of the Campaign for International Day of Persons with Disabilities
3	Online	Second Arab Multi-stakeholders Consultative Expert Meeting on Arab IGF and Digital Cooperation in the Arab Region
8-10	Online	Regional Capacity Development Webinar on Gender Justice and the Law
8-10	Online	Regional Workshop on Collection and Dissemination of Road and Railway Transport Statistics
10	Online	Third Meeting of the Group of Experts on Fossil Fuels
15	Online	Expert Group Meeting on Debt Swap for Climate Finance
21	Online	Seventh Meeting of the ESCWA Executive Committee
22-23	Online	Regional Workshop on Poverty Measurement and Monitoring in the Era of Big Data

ESCWA IN NUMBERS

STAFF ESCWA STAFF MEMBERS WITH GENDER BREAKDOWN (2019-2020)





366

**TOTAL
ESCWA STAFF
DECEMBER**

2019



356

**TOTAL
ESCWA STAFF
DECEMBER**

2020

34%

**OF WOMEN
IN LEADERSHIP
POSITIONS
IN 2019**



43%

**OF WOMEN
IN LEADERSHIP
POSITIONS
IN 2020**





COMMUNICATING ESCWA IN TIMES OF COVID-19

How can we remain relevant and effective, and perceived as such by our member States and other target audiences, in times of acute crisis? All our efforts at the Communication Unit (CU) were geared towards finding creative answers to that difficult question.

To continue supporting our member States in such exceptional circumstances, we swiftly reordered our programme priorities, and, in March 2020, were one of the first UN entities to launch a policy brief series dedicated to the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19. We issued more than 20 policy documents and papers that looked at the crisis from its social and economic angles. We assessed its impact on population segments, such as women, young people and older persons, particularly those living with disabilities. We looked at how it will affect poverty, food insecurity and water needs. We also estimated the economic cost of the crisis for the region, and examined the extent to which it has disrupted its trade and foreign direct investment flows, its transport and logistics sectors, its financial systems, and how it further shrunk its already limited fiscal space. These rapid assessments were complemented with concrete proposals on how to act in solidarity to overcome the crisis.

The briefs were designed in a series, using more infographics than usual to present the information in an effective manner. We created accompanying videos for each of them, in which their authors highlighted their main findings. We launched them widely, in an unprecedented campaign for this type of publications, using both traditional and social media channels, in addition to wide email campaigning to ensure that our assessments and recommendations reach their primary audience: Arab policymakers. We received many testimonials from them about the usefulness of this work. We also gathered evidence of impact from adopted national measures which corresponded to several of our recommendations, demonstrating their uptake.

Although health is not part of our mandate at ESCWA, we found it useful to gather, in one single database created on the ESCWA website, data from the World Health Organization and

national ministries of health in Arab States on virus prevalence, and on the number of deaths and recoveries in the region. We published updates from that database on our social media daily, namely on our Twitter account, and our “COVID Clock” tweets were among the most successful of the year, again showing for the need of information from reliable sources.

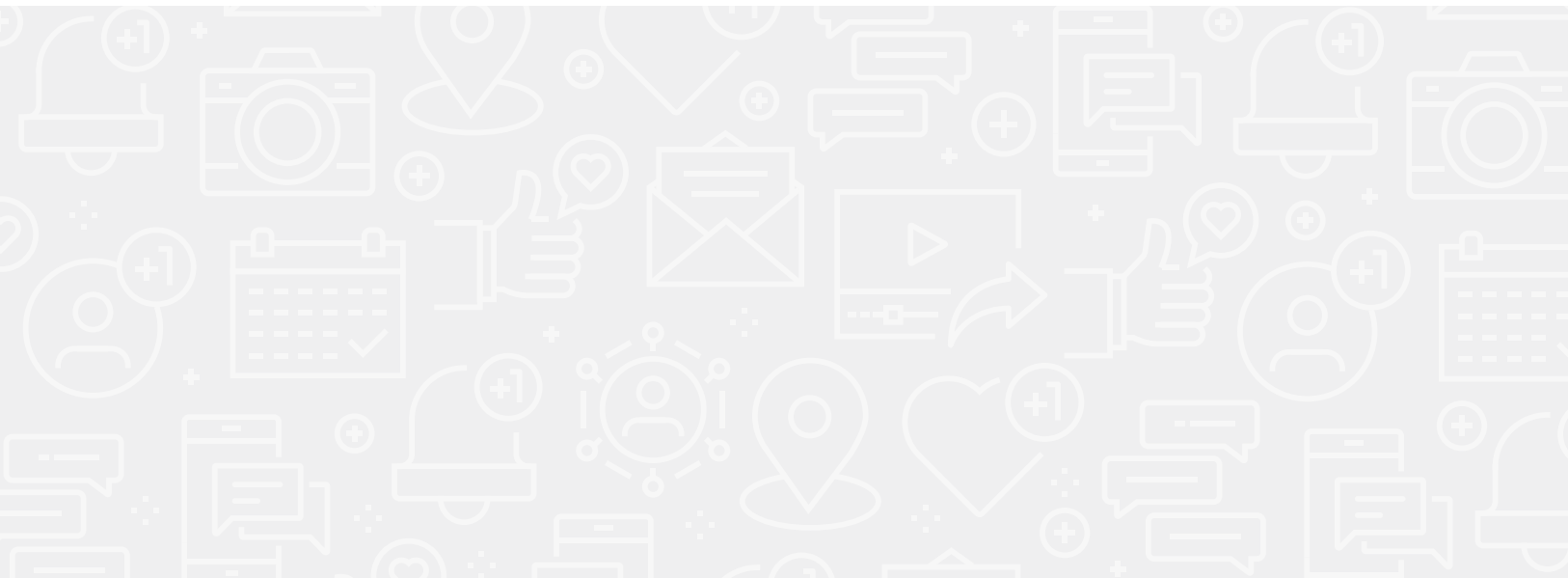
Our communication efforts, although largely redirected to respond to the emergency created by the pandemic, were certainly not restricted to that response. We did not lose sight of our general communication goals for 2020. We pursued our aims of developing our digital communication assets as much as we can, and expanding the reach of the work of our work as widely as possible.

Throughout the year, we built our internal capacity in script writing, video production and editing, animation and design, and in using new shooting and lighting material to increase the quality of our audiovisual products.

We produced a record number of 145 videos in 2020, launching new series such as the Newsletter Video Series which summarizes our bilingual weekly newsletter in a one-minute video, intended for those who live with visual impairments or who have an appetite for audiovisual material.

We also launched a new type of interviews, the #AskESCWAExpert series, in which a journalist member of our communication team hosts an expert staff member for an informal discussion on topics of interest to the general public, so that the work of ESCWA as a think tank and a provider of policy advice becomes more accessible to the public at large. We broadcast these interviews live on Facebook, which allows media and the public to ask questions online and interact with our experts. Throughout the year, we used that new platform to communicate on important events or work products of ESCWA, such as the regional meeting on the Global Compact for Migration, our campaign on inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market, our support to Beirut Port Authorities after the tragic blast of 4 August, or the work of United Nations language staff in translating the core UN value of multilingualism into an every-day reality.

In 2020, we launched more than 15 campaigns on social media to promote different areas of our work, such as campaigns for international days celebrated annually by the United Nations (International Day of Persons with Disabilities, International Translation Day, World Water Day, International Migrants Day, International Day for Older Persons, International Women’s Day, etc.). We also launched campaigns to disseminate widely some of our highlight publications, projects or reports, including the Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020, the Syria at War: Eight Years On report; the Situation Report on International Migration; the Libya Socioeconomic Dialogue Project; and the Annual Competition Forum.



These campaigns garnered wide interest from the public even in times of COVID-19. In fact, they were all occasions to bring to the fore some of our region's long-standing challenges, such as conflict, discriminations or water scarcity, and suggest solutions or actions that the public at large can take to effect change in our societies, a change all the more needed as the pandemic accentuated pre-existing fragilities.

In January, we also launched a visual arts competition on sustainable development in the Arab region and we closed the year in December with a regional arts competition and campaign on the occasion of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence. Both competitions aimed to give our region's young people platforms to creatively express their views on their countries' development challenges and their aspirations for the future. We collected innovative digital material through these campaigns which enrich our digital assets.

In our Host Country, which witnessed compounded crises in 2020, we partnered with Coursera, one of the world's leading e-learning platforms, and Lebanon's Ministry of Labour, to launch in October the #لِزْمِ تَتَعَلَّم Initiative, through which we secured in less than three weeks the registration of 25,000 Lebanese citizens for courses with free-of-charge certification. We used billboards, TV and radio spots, and e-mail and social media campaigning. As a result, Lebanese citizens of all ages took more than 40,000 courses, enjoying more than 500,000 hours of online learning in areas as diverse as leadership and management, communication, entrepreneurship, business analysis, sales, computer networking and operating systems, data analysis and management, finance, statistics, mathematics, etc. We also accompanied the learners throughout their journey, which lasted until February 2021, using a dedicated platform for the initiative through which we responded to their queries and assisted them in solving their technical issues. To close the initiative, we offered training opportunities at ESCWA to the most dedicated learners.

In 2020, in rolling out the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy at ESCWA, we worked on making our communication products more accessible to persons with disabilities. We produced our own internal guidelines on disability sensitive communication, which covered all types of products and channels, and provided simple instructions for making them better adapted for reaching everyone.

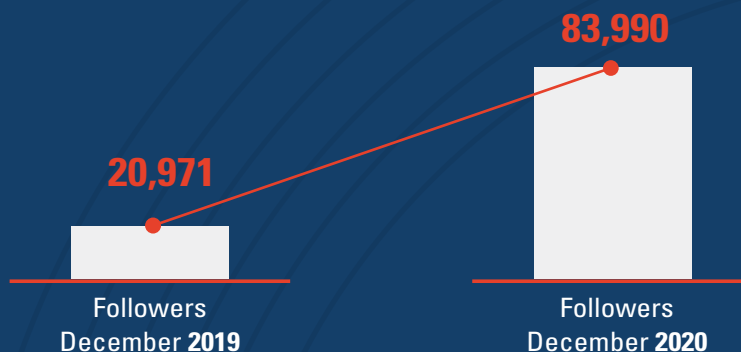
Social media analytics are a testimonial of our progress in digital communication this year. Facebook remained the platform with the highest frequency of activity, recording an increase of followers from 20,971 to 83,990. On Twitter, the number of our followers also increased from 10,428 in 2019 to 15,849 in 2020. We reactivated our account on LinkedIn in the middle of the year and in no time, we grew to some 17,500 followers from all over the world. The numbers of our followers on Instagram, also increased to 5,775. Besides the numbers of followers, the numbers of reach or impressions witnessed a dramatic increase, as can be seen in the infographic.

SOCIAL MEDIA

2019-2020



Facebook



Facebook



LinkedIn



Facebook



	FOLLOWERS DECEMBER 2019	FOLLOWERS DECEMBER 2020	2019-2020 CHANGE (%)	REACH/ IMPRESSIONS 2019	REACH/ IMPRESSIONS 2020	2019-2020 CHANGE (%)
Facebook	20,971	83,990	+63,019 (301%)	1,047,000 reach	28,860,000 reach	+27,813,000
Twitter	10,428	15,849	+5,421 (52%)	4,100,100 impressions	4,200,000 impressions	+99,900
LinkedIn	3,000	17,503	+14,503 (483,4%)	-	360,000 impressions (Starting June 2020)	-
Instagram	1,086	5,930	+4,844 (446%)	-	354,495 impressions	-

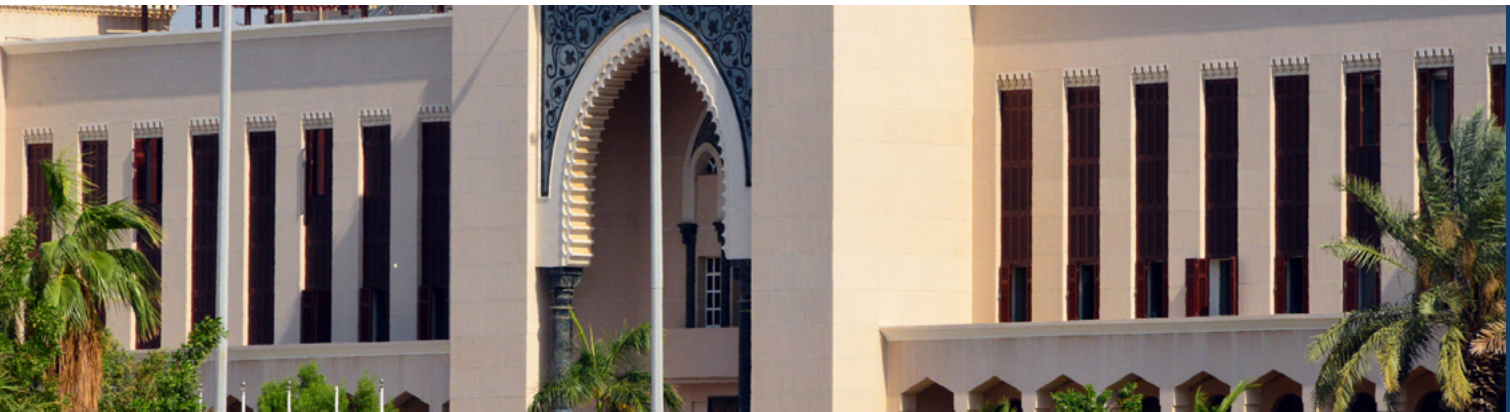
With the year witnessing multiple lockdowns and a dramatic shift towards “life and work online” due to the pandemic, our main aim was indeed to develop our digital communication as demonstrated above. However, we did not neglect “offline media”, such as television and radio stations and print media. We continued to reach out to outlets and journalists, and as a result our work was quoted **2,595** times in 2020, compared with 1,216 times in 2019. We also secured **75** interviews for ESCWA staff on renowned media outlets, among which were: France24, CNBC Arabia, BBC, SkyNews, Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, MTV Lebanon, Al Hurra, compared with only **10** in the previous year.



There are many lessons and wisdoms to derive from the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, not least of which is the fact that unity and solidarity are essential for the human species to continue to thrive. At ESCWA, we were proud to see our member States supporting each other and many other States by exchanging resources and coordinating on joint tasks. We were also reminded of the vast importance of making human life sustainable, and of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which we are committed to achieving.

When the pandemic first began to cause alarm worldwide, most citizens turned to their Governments for guidance, leadership, and protection. For ESCWA staff, this was a reminder of the importance of supporting our Member States in delivering good **Governance**. Here is the late Nobel-prize winner, Naguib Mahfouz:

"The relationship between the governor and the governed is decided in a subtle way, as in love, and one can say that the victory of governors in the hearts of the governed is in the greatest respect for their humanity, and it is not through bread alone that man lives!" - from 'Autumn Quail'.



ON GOVERNANCE AND TOOLS

Indeed, the pandemic has highlighted the importance of having good leaders who respect and prioritize the humanity and well-being of their citizens, which is the ethos of the 2030 Agenda and captures a lot of what we do at ESCWA.

In June, we organized a webinar series dedicated to exploring innovative solutions to address the COVID-19 pandemic in the Arab region. The series focused on structural challenges, gaps, weaknesses, and methods of building back better. About 200 participants from 50 countries took part in the event, with 3,000 views on Facebook live. Government officials from the health, disaster management, and financing sectors of member States attended the webinars, along with representatives from civil society, academia, international organizations, and beyond.

While the pandemic unveiled systemic and structural flaws and challenges, it also presented the region with an invaluable opportunity to rebuild stronger policies. One of the topics stressed during the webinar series was the

importance of not returning to business as usual as the world recovered from the pandemic, but to build back better and introduce serious reforms. Specifically, there was consensus on the need for innovative solutions, coordination among public institutions, and improved accountability and transparency.

On 3 August, we also organized a virtual meeting dedicated to consumer protection amidst the outbreak of the pandemic, which caused havoc in the health and economic welfare of consumers as markets were disrupted. During the early months of the pandemic, many consumers did not always have access to essential goods and services, with vulnerable and disadvantaged people being especially affected. At the same time, the pandemic has caused a surge in the digital economy, wherein the protection of consumers is unique and especially nuanced. Challenges include the proliferation of price gouging, deceptive online marketing, financial fraud, and fishing schemes. The virtual meeting hosted speakers from Lebanon, Morocco, and Jordan, representing the ministries of economy and trade, who specialize in consumer protection.

As the pandemic entered what was considered a ‘second wave’ across the Arab region, our team jointly organized – along with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) - a virtual conference in November centered around agile government responses to the pandemic in the Arab region. The conferences revolved around three main areas wherein government responses to the pandemic could use improvement, namely public service delivery, digital transformation, and open data and government.

The importance of digital transformation has been particularly highlighted during the pandemic. In many Arab countries, public services are still delivered to citizens traditionally, requesting them to spend huge amounts of time collecting documents and moving from one agency to another to get the required service. This, of course, was particularly difficult, if not impossible, during lockdowns. Using digital technologies, however, these services are delivered efficiently through Internet portals and smartphones.

Without a doubt, delivering public services digitally is beneficial for all sectors of society, and all Arab countries have committed to digital transformation in recent years. In 2020, we carried out an assessment of Government Electronic and Mobile Services (GEMS) maturity across the region in order to inform policymakers on the impact of actions already taken and to help them assess action plans. Such policymakers are representatives from the ministries of information and communications technology (ICT), and administrative reform.

We also convened national research workshops to help governments assess their National Digital Development Reviews (NDDRs). The targeted support of ESCWA led to elaboration of thematic strategies/policies on ICT-related issues by Jordan, Morocco, Sudan and Palestine. In November and December, two regional expert group meetings were convened to develop and endorse the Digital Development Framework and Process Manual, which we developed.

Indeed, much of our work at ESCWA entails assisting policymakers from all sectors of governance across the Arab region. One common need for policymakers is an easy-to-use tool that can simulate the potential real-world impact of specific policies before they are actually implemented. On 10 December, we organized a meeting with relevant policymakers and delegates to inform them about the ISPAR simulator: a software that covers widely adopted, international indicators related to economic integration, business environment, gender, innovation and digital technology. The simulator allows policymakers to compare the outcome of their planned reforms and policies.

Another tool we developed to assist our policymakers focused on poverty. Major strides have been made in the Arab region over the past few years toward adopting, formalizing, and streamlining the calculation of multidimensional poverty indices (MPIs). In 2020, we built a web-based tool, the MPI Assist Tool (MAT), which helps compute MPIs, compare them with those of other countries and across time, and simulate policy choices to assist with policy design and evaluation.

Beyond poverty, another area where we assisted member States with a dynamic policymaking tool was social justice. The process of public policymaking in various Arab countries suffers from serious gaps in knowledge, coordination, and collaboration in the face of ever-changing socioeconomic realities. This undermines their ability to achieve social justice. The Policy Gap Assessment Tool (PGAT) assists member States in examining the gaps in their socioeconomic policies using a systemic participatory approach, which then allows member States to adopt concrete steps to remedy such gaps. On 24 and 25 September, we held a pilot workshop for PGAT in Tunisia, in close cooperation with a team from the Ministry of Social Affairs. The workshop was held virtually and brought together stakeholders from various key ministries. Following the success of the pilot workshop, we organized a high-level regional meeting that gathered officials from several Ministries of Social Affairs and Labor to present and vet the PGAT tool (online, 22 December). Moving forward, we also developed an online interactive version of the PGAT that will allow officials to carry out self-assessment.

Without a doubt, one of the areas that is most essential to effective governance is informed and efficient **Financing**. Here is Secretary-General António Guterres at a high-level event on financing the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda:

“The world generates trillions in savings every year. But today, almost US\$50 trillion of citizens’ savings are earning low or negative financial returns, instead of flowing to finance the 2030 Agenda that will generate inclusive, sustainable growth. Set against the imperatives underlying the 2030 Agenda, today’s global financial system, which manages some US\$300 trillion in financial assets on our collective behalf, is simply not fit for purpose.” – 18 September 2017.



ON FINANCING

Such is the reason why we actively focus on helping the region improve and optimize its financial systems. When our member States were faced with the task of protecting their citizens from the wrath of the pandemic, one of their main challenges was the allocation and mobilization of financial resources. It was in this context that we produced a report titled ‘Financing for Development in the era of COVID-19 and Beyond: Menu of Options for the Consideration of Ministries of Finance’. The report aimed at providing member States with different policy recommendations for ensuring that they are better geared to overcome five major financing rifts: financing insolvencies, funding shortfalls, fiscal space constraints, debt-financing overhangs; and severe financing inequalities.

In 2020, we continued to support member States in identifying avenues to finance sustainable development, including through fiscal consolidation and domestic resource mobilization. We published a Fiscal Policy Review of Arab States that provides a baseline for the tax and expenditure reforms needed to mobilize domestic public resources. We also provided technical expertise to governments in matters of fiscal policy reform, which included the provision of economic modelling tools to support governments with the formulation of socially acceptable reform proposals focused on decreasing fiscal deficits. As an example, we supported Jordan in addressing tax base erosion and adopting optimal tax policies. We also contributed to the adoption by Tunisia of a subsidy reform proposal in its financial law.

Another financial issue we dedicate a lot of effort to helping our member States with is social expenditure. Across the region, citizens’ demands for a new social contract rooted in equity and justice have placed additional pressure on Governments to adequately balance expenditure priorities that explicitly address social policy gaps. In 2020, we were proud to produce a Social Expenditure Monitor (SEM) which provides a comprehensive monitoring of public social expenditure that could improve efficiency of allocations and effectiveness of budgeting. The monitor covers seven areas concerned with social policy: education, health and nutrition, housing, labour and employment, social protection and food security, and environmental protection. We hope that member States can commit to the adoption of the monitor and help build its data infrastructure for the purpose of optimizing their social expenditure.

We also hope that member States can optimize their calculations of the real relative values of currencies and their respective purchasing power. Most countries across the region still rely on official exchange rates as an indicator of the size and performance of their economies relative to others. Most market exchange rates, however, are often distorted by price level differences. In order to bypass this problem, there needs to be an indicator of a currency’s real value which is not distorted by price level differences between countries. In December, we published an interactive online publication on ‘Purchasing Power Parities and the Real Size of Arab Economies’, which provides indicators and a comparative analysis of the real sizes of the economies of 12 Arab countries, namely: Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the State of Palestine, the Sudan, and the United Arab Emirates.

In 2020, we began to develop Integrated National Financing Framework (INFFs) for a pilot group of middle-income Arab economies that indicated interest during the first meeting of the Committee on Financing for Development. The INFFs offer a detailed anatomy and analytical diagnostics of the financing instruments, channels and non-financial means of implementation that make up the aggregate mix of financing available for national authorities to finance national sustainable development goals and targets.

During the pandemic, limited fiscal space due to high debt burden put States across the region at risk of being unable to recover and rebuild. Many Arab countries are facing fiscal stress from high and increasing debt, which consequently drains a large share of revenues used to finance the SDGs and climate-resilient projects. This is why we launched the Climate/SDGs Debt Swap Initiative which aims to relieve member States from their high debt burdens by converting national debt serving payments on foreign debt into domestic investment for implementing climate-resilient projects. This, of course, is only possible through a collaboration between the debtors and creditors. For creditors, the amount of the debt swap allocated for climate-resilient projects increases official development assistance (ODA) disbursement and climate finance pledges they have made.

In March, one of the elements that made the COVID-19 virus so intimidating was the lack of knowledge we possessed about it. What was the mortality rate? Who was vulnerable? How fast was it going to spread? Here is Ahlam Mosteghanemi, long before the pandemic, in 1976:

“How strange that we so quickly get accustomed to big numbers, forgetting that each unit marks the end of a life” – from ‘Writing in a Moment of Nudity’.

Therein we were reminded of the vitality of **Data and Statistics**, which do not only provide numbers but arm us against the problems we continuously try to solve.



ON DATA AND STATISTICS

It is in this context that our team spent a large part of 2020 actively building our Data Portal, the United Nations Data Hub for the Arab Region. The Portal aims to centralize data dissemination for the Arab Region in the various domains of statistics. The data covers economic, social, environmental, gender, and all SDG

domains and are available for all 22 countries of the Arab region. Besides raw data, the portal provides carefully tailored data visualization dashboards. It also works as a substitute to paper publications, thus providing a digital solution that is interactive and user-friendly. Currently, the portal holds 26 databases containing more than 800,000 data points available for filtering, download, and visualization. The development of the portal is ongoing, with content development happening at ESCWA while software is developed by Smart Analytics, based in Russia.

In recent years, the term ‘big data’ has assumed somewhat of a negative connotation, as revelations have been made regarding its use in the manipulation of consumers worldwide. But it is important to remember that the power of big data can and has been used for positive means. At ESCWA, we set out to ask whether big data could be used by policymakers and humanitarian practitioners in Lebanon to deal with the socioeconomic challenges resulting from the massive and protracted influx of Syrian refugees which the country has undergone since the onset of the Syrian conflict. The pilot project and subsequent report *Big Data for Good: Can Big Data Illustrate the Challenges Facing Syrian Refugees in Lebanon?* explored the potential use of unconventional data sources such as social media and telecommunication records in this manner. The project won a Champion Prize at the World Summit on the Information Society Forum 2021.

In Lebanon, we supported the UN Country Team in developing the analytical background for some aspects of the response plan to the port explosion, including technical support to the authorities on a comprehensive strategy tying the rebuilding of the Port of Beirut to the larger transport requirements.

We also developed an interactive COVID-19 Stimulus Tracker, which presents information in a user-friendly way to map and visualize world-wide fiscal and social protection policy responses to the pandemic, covering all countries in the world. The tracker facilitated peer learning and dialogue on fiscal policy and social protection options.

Similarly, we developed a skills monitor for the Arab region that enables member States to predict the demand for newly needed skills. It uses big-data mining to create a more dynamic and agile monitoring platform for demanded skills to cope with the dynamism of the fourth industrial revolution. When matched with the supply of skills, the monitor identifies the skill mismatch and provides information disaggregated by gender, youth and disability. The monitor also provides information on sector development, job growth predictions and SDG mapping.

One of the areas in which the Arab region can seriously benefit from better data collection and analysis is road traffic. Many of the countries across the region suffer with high rates of road fatalities and road traffic congestion. For this reason, we developed a project focused on strengthening the statistical capacity of the national statistical offices across the region on volume of road traffic statistics. The project entailed a preparatory meeting of member States on 29 September and a regional workshop from 8 and 10 December, both of which yielded an agreement to produce a regional guideline on best practices in 2021.

It can seem too obvious to state, but everything we do at ESCWA is ultimately aimed to improving the livelihoods of human beings across the region and world. More specifically, we care about helping those who need help the most. Here is Nelson Mandela, reminding us of the importance of leaving no one behind.

“Let there be justice for all. Let there be peace for all. Let there be work, bread, water and salt for all. Let each know that for each the body, the mind and the soul have been freed to fulfill themselves”.



ON SOCIAL JUSTICE AND INCLUSION

Indeed, **Social Justice** is one of the pillars of our work and essential to sustainable life.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, certain social groups experienced increased vulnerability as the world transformed in the matter of weeks. With many populations across the Arab region locked inside their homes for months, rates of domestic violence against women went higher. Persons with disabilities and older persons saw their access to medical care put at risk. Outbreaks occurred in densely populated refugee camps where medical services are sparse. This came as a reminder to all of us at ESCWA of the importance of fighting for and protecting vulnerable social groups.

Between September and December, we supported the development of a National Plan to Support Persons with Disabilities during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Libya. Persons with disabilities are at greater risk of contracting COVID-19 and developing serious illness or dying from the disease. They have also faced, during the past year, increased barriers to access adequate health care. In Libya, such challenges were further exacerbated by the armed conflict the nation experienced in 2020. This prompted us to bring together stakeholders from the ministries of social affairs, health, and education to establish a national collaborative working mechanism towards the development of a national plan to support persons with disabilities. The first action item agreed upon was the development of a national disability strategy in Libya in 2021.

Similarly, we also supported the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs in the development of a national strategy for older persons from 2020 to 2030. Lebanon is among the Arab countries witnessing a fast pace of demographic change resulting in increased numbers and proportions of older persons, who are among the most vulnerable social groups at risk of disease, ill health, disability, poverty, and isolation. Despite positive policy developments, Lebanon is in need of more cohesive and dynamic policies related to older persons. The National Strategy for Older Persons 2020 – 2030, which we helped

develop, was adopted in December of 2020 after three years of collaborative work. The strategy offers a comprehensive framework that is in line with best global practices.

When countries began to adopt national lockdowns and enforce social distancing measures, it was evident that rates of domestic violence and violence against women may rise as a consequence. In April 2020, the United Nations Secretary-General urged all Governments to make the prevention and redress of violence against women a key part of their national response plans for COVID-19. UN agencies and other international organizations across the Arab region did, in fact, experience increased reporting in violence against women in all its forms. In response to this, our team worked on a report titled ‘Violence against Women and Girls and COVID-19 in the Arab Region’, which aimed to examine the provision of services to survivors and sufferers of violence across the region. The report also provided policy recommendations to policymakers, human rights organizations, and UN agencies revolved around improving such services.

Building on the work of the report, we collaborated with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in a series of 12 webinars held between October and December of 2020, which looked specifically at service provision for women and girl survivors of violence during the pandemic in Saudi Arabia. The series aimed to increase the capacity and knowledge of service providers and criminal justice professionals in their responses to family violence and violence against women, during the pandemic and beyond.

We also strengthened our efforts to help member States operationalize the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM). We designed knowledge products and tools, including an online database aimed at facilitating access to migration-related policies in the region, and the “Situation Report on International Migration,” which presented data on migration patterns and trends in Arab countries. We also helped build regional dialogue platforms to enhance collaboration in migration. We led the regional review of the GCM and brought member States together to discuss progress made, challenges faced, and possible solutions. Furthermore, we organized a series of workshops to build the capacity of policy makers to operationalize the GCM and follow up/review its implementation at national level.

One of the many ways that 2020 was a year like no other was that, throughout most of it, the vast majority of citizens across the globe had to deal with a lot of the same challenges. The loss of loved ones. The loss of jobs. Social distancing measures which negatively affected well-being and mental health. There is arguably no other time in recorded history wherein the human race dealt with something so collectively—not that there were no pandemics before but there were no means of global communication on the shared experience similar to those we enjoy today. The pandemic was a reminder of just how connected we are, and just how urgent it is for us to deal with another problem that puts our collective well-being at risk: **Climate Change**. As former UN Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon once reminded us:

“Climate change does not respect borders; it does not respect who you are – rich and poor, small and big. Therefore, it is a global challenge, which requires global solidarity.” – 6 December 2011.



ON CLIMATE CHANGE

One of the areas concerned with climate change wherein policymakers across the region face challenges is assessment and modelling. In other words, what is the science? How exactly are different parts, populations, and industries in our respective nations at risk when it comes to climate change? How might certain policies prevent or alleviate such risk? These are some of the questions which RICCAR (the Regional Initiative for the Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Water Resources and Socioeconomic Vulnerability in the Arab Region) aims to help member States with. ESCWA is one of the partners behind the initiative, and we helped develop the RICCAR Regional Knowledge Hub. Climate data was deeply lacking in the region and the Hub, being a data portal, has helped bridge the knowledge gap by providing region-specific knowledge products, methodologies, and analysis on climate change impacts and vulnerability. Between March 2018 and August 2020, there were nearly 34,900 visits to the RICCAR Knowledge Hub, and the total number of pageviews has exceeded 154,200.

Between July and August, we also organized a RICCAR webinar series on Climate Change Analysis using Geographical Information System (GIS) tools. There were over 550 registered participants from all ESCWA member States. Feedback from participants on the series indicates expanded utilization of RICCAR climate modelling outputs to help policymakers with the implementation of climate action.

Another initiative ESCWA has worked on has been the Lima Adaptation Knowledge Initiative (LAKI): a global joint action pledge which aims to close climate adaptation knowledge gaps across the globe. Climate adaptation is a priority for the Arab region, especially in the fields of water resource management, food security, coastal and marine ecosystems, and drought management. Despite improved adaptation knowledge, some gaps have been identified as barriers to widespread and successful adaptation actions. ESCWA has been supporting Arab countries on how to better prioritize adaptation actions in their policies. In 2020, we worked with the LAKI partners to identify 18 priority adaptation knowledge gaps in North Africa and 10 in West Asia and to identify potential collaborative actions that can address such gaps.

In order to truly mobilize our region in the fight against climate change, we must completely reassess the largely unsustainable consumption and production patterns that exist across the Arab region. We must also examine our methods of extracting natural resources and managing waste. In December, we carried out an assessment of sustainable consumption and production in the Arab region. The assessment analysed progress and challenges faced by member States in achieving sustainable consumption and production (SCP) targets and indicators. It also highlighted the indicators which are in need of the urgent action in order to remedy their negative progress. Specifically, 2030 target or benchmark values were identified for 14 official SDG indicators relating to SCP.

A specific area of consumption and production wherein the Arab region faces many governance challenges is water management. Particularly, member States have been struggling to align national water strategies with SDG 6 (to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all). This is a problem of particular importance because the Arab region is one of the most water scarce regions in the world, with over 360 million people living in countries characterized as water scarce. With most countries in the region relying on groundwater for about 50 per cent of their water supply, groundwater is being significantly depleted and groundwater levels are dropping beyond sustainable limits. We, at ESCWA, are determined to provide substantive technical support to member States on ways to better coordinate and integrate water resource policies, plans, and programmes. In November and December, we organized a series of 11 webinar sessions on groundwater in integrated water resources management (IWRM), which was attended by over 280 participants representing most ESCWA member States.

Without a doubt, the fight against climate change will require continuous reassessment of the way we consume and produce everything. Specifically, it will require the reassessment of our approaches to **Food and Agriculture**. And here's Twfiq Youssuf Awad, to ask:

*"- Which is worse: to die of hunger or of hanging?
- The gallows are a horrible thing (he immediately added) but hunger too is a horrible thing". – Bread, 1939.*



ON SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

In 2020, some Arab countries and population groups are still struggling with hunger and malnutrition, others with food waste and obesity.

Our team at ESCWA is dedicated to helping member States rethink and improve practices related to agriculture, food processing, packaging, and labelling, so that they can better align with the SDGs. Throughout 2020, we held a series of capacity-building workshops on these practices around Tunisia (Mahdia) and Jordan (Maan and Al-Karak). The workshops were based on findings of assessment reports produced by ESCWA's REGEND team (Regional Initiative to Promote Small-Scale Renewable Energy Applications in Rural Areas of the Arab Region); they aimed to improve the knowledge and skills of rural communities in Jordan and Tunisia, especially rural women, and help them grow their economic activities while being energy efficient.

Another way we helped improve agricultural practices in the region was when our team developed five technical factsheets on agricultural green technologies. This was produced through an online assessment we carried out with the ministries of agriculture in three target countries (Jordan, Lebanon, and the State of Palestine), through a questionnaire which was filled out by 55 representatives from these ministries. We found that the main barriers to the adoption and use of green technologies in the target countries are a lack of adequate knowledge on these technologies, which highlights the importance of producing and distributing such factsheets.

With the pandemic changing and challenging the economic landscape, food security was put at risk in different countries across the Arab region. In this context, we acted early, on 23 April, by organizing a virtual dialogue on the emerging impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Food Security in the Arab Region. The dialogue was attended by the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations - Regional Office for the Near East, officials responsible for food security issues in relevant ministries of the Arab countries, as well as a group of regional and local experts. The dialogue aimed at exchanging experiences and information to benefit from successful experiences at the local and regional levels. This laid the groundwork for a forthcoming report on food security in the wake of the pandemic.



ON CONFLICT

Given the brutal cost that the pandemic has inflicted on most citizens across the world, it is especially difficult to imagine the experiences of those who not only saw their lives jeopardized by the virus but also had to simultaneously endure the hardships of **Conflict** and **Occupation**. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres said in his call for a global ceasefire on 23 March:

“The fury of the virus illustrates the folly of war”.

Without a doubt, the health and economic crises precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic posed and continue to pose an unprecedented threat to well-being in conflict-affected countries such as Iraq, Libya, the State of Palestine, Somalia, the Sudan, and the Syrian Arab Republic. In support of the call for a ceasefire and suspension of violence, we prepared a technical paper, in collaboration with the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and New York University’s Centre for International Cooperation (CIC), titled ‘COVID-19, Conflict and Risks in the Arab Region’. The paper backed the call by highlighting the ways in which the pandemic was and still is exacerbating the humanitarian and economic devastation caused by prolonged conflict in the region.

At ESCWA, we have also developed The Libya Socioeconomic Dialogue Project, which is aimed at providing Libyans – through dialogue sessions – with a platform to discuss their national priorities and challenges. In 2020, the team implemented eight dialogue sessions with Libyan experts and stakeholders (such as women, youth, and representatives from Libyan non-governmental organizations), with the goal of developing a Libyan-owned holistic socioeconomic vision as the country recovers from conflict. We also produced two reports related to the Libyan conflict: ‘The Economic Cost of the Libyan Conflict’ and ‘The Impact of Peace on Neighboring Countries.’ The first measures the direct effect of the war economy on Libya, while the second estimates the opportunities generated by peace and reconstruction in Libya for neighboring countries.

All in all, we were proud to be able to continue our work despite the incredibly challenging circumstances that we were faced with. The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda is more urgent and critical today more than ever, and at ESCWA we have found a renewed and strengthened motivation to continue serving our member States in their journey to achieving the SDGs.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR DEVELOPMENT

We maintain our approach to multi-stakeholder engagement at the national and regional levels and continue to create unique regional platforms wherein government representatives, parliamentarians, civil society and the private sector can collaborate and identify innovative solutions.

In July, the Arab-States Regional Collaborative Platform (AS-RCP) was formally established under the Chairmanship of the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations. The AS-RCP is the main coordination platform for UN entities operating in the region. Our Executive Secretary is one of its two vice-chairs. Throughout 2020, we contributed to ensuring that the AS-RCP delivered support to member States in an agile, proactive, and pragmatic manner, through resident coordinators and UN Country Teams. Such support came in the form of knowledge products, policy simulation tools, actionable policy recommendations, and coherent and meaningful data.

We also continue to lead the development of the AS-RCP's Regional Knowledge and Data Hub "Manara" (meaning Lighthouse in Arabic), as the main platform for accessing knowledge and data produced by the United Nations at the regional and global levels. Manara is a one-stop-shop for all sustainable development knowledge and data from UN sources, member States and other development actors. It hosts The Arab SDG Gateway, The Data Portal, an intelligent search engine tailored to the needs of users, an application capable of assessing documents against the SDGs, UN resolutions and national development plans, an assessment building wizard to support users in developing tools for assessments/surveys, an e-learning platform for development issues, a roster of regional expertise, an online Arab Geospatial Data Hub, and policy simulation tools based on various economic models.

In 2020, the AS-RCP also established a Joint Secretariat, including the Regional Office of United Nations the Development Coordination Office (R-DCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and ESCWA. We work closely with these partners to serve the AS-RCP, proving briefing materials, organizing the AS-RCP Workplan, arranging its meetings and ensuring its ongoing operations.



In addition, the AS-RCP has established eight issue-based coalitions (IBCs) which focus on:



ESCWA co-convenes the first three IBCs from the list above.

In 2020, we also provided analysis for common UN country assessments and strategic documents for Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and the Syrian Arab Republic. Our support typically focused on macroeconomic analyses, provision of data and analysis of transboundary issues and of governance systems.

In addition, we provided 10 UN country teams (UNCTs) with unique access to the Data Portal, with a tailored and password-protected area to access all available data from national statistical offices. We also provided training to staff of UNCTs on how to make best use of the Data Portal and manipulate the data to present it in graphical formats.

To support country level capacity, we provided training and support to UNCTs and on various socioeconomic issues. In Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt, support has been provided for the development of the national multidimensional poverty indices, using global methodologies and adapting them to national contexts.

In Egypt, we supported the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) in assessing the impact of COVID-19 on household poverty and determining mitigation measures.

In the Syrian Arab Republic, in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), we organized training on the SDGs and human rights.

In Bahrain, we supported the RCO with technical advice on disability, older persons issues, and road safety.

Throughout 2020, we also consolidated our strategic and historic partnership with the League of Arab States. The partnership focuses on monitoring and reporting on progress made in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, supporting member States on climate change issues through the ESCWA-based Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies, and jointly working to measure multidimensional poverty.

Our partnership with the Islamic Development Bank included work on transport corridors as trade facilitators that would lead to increased economic activity and job creation, mainstreaming climate action in national development plans, and promoting the role of parliaments in monitoring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

In parallel, we partnered with the World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and other global and regional actors to jointly support Arab States in mitigating the impact of COVID-19.

All five regional commissions and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) worked together on transport and trade connectivity in the age of pandemics, to formulate and implement measures of preventing the spread of COVID by implementing digital solutions in the sector.

We also continued to collaborate with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) on developing the eTIR system in the Arab region, which aims to ensure the secure exchange of data on the international transit of goods, vehicles or containers between national customs systems.

Finally, we remain closely engaged with academic institutions and think tanks, in particular through its Academic Network for Development Dialogue, with the aim of promoting dialogue, collaboration and knowledge sharing.





ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Throughout 2020, we have taken significant steps to optimize the allocation of ESCWA assets, realize significant cost savings and support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda more efficiently. To that end, we have expanded the provision of administrative services to other United Nations entities at the regional level in various areas such as conference services, translation, printing, banking, medical services, travel, and human resources. We have embraced technology in automation and delivery of services, and in recruitment.

Regular Budget

ESCWA	TOTAL
Advancement of women	1,407,709
Conflict mitigation and development	1,770,018
Economic development and integration	4,283,252
Integrated management of natural resources for sustainable development	3,422,745
Social development	3,155,102
Statistics for evidence-based policymaking	2,255,838
Technology for development and regional integration	1,512,088
Executive direction and management- Policymaking organs- Programme support	18,022,059
Grand Total	35,828,810

Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation

ESCWA	TOTAL
Advancement of women	343,645
Conflict mitigation and development	408,858
Economic development and integration	500,905
Integrated management of natural resources for sustainable development	445,501
Social development	847,208
Statistics for evidence-based policymaking	355,926
Technology for development and regional integration	540,215
Grand Total	3,442,257

Development Account

ESCWA	TOTAL
Advancement of women	167,571
Conflict mitigation and development	351,246
Economic development and integration	638,080
Integrated management of natural resources for sustainable development	168,550
Social development	424,360
Statistics for evidence-based policymaking	380,803
Technology for development and regional integration	13,169
Executive direction and management-Policymaking Organs-Programme support	325,723
Grand Total	2,469,503

Extrabudgetary Projects

ESCWA	TOTAL
Advancement of women	14,873
Conflict mitigation and development	769,479
Economic development and integration	2,363,462
Integrated management of natural resources for sustainable development	1,637,766
Social development	121,656
Statistics for evidence-based policymaking	134,706
Executive direction and management-Policymaking Organs-Programme support	307
Grand Total	5,042,248



FEATURED PUBLICATIONS

ON COVID-19

In 2020 and in reaction to the gravest global crisis since the beginning of the century, ESCWA swiftly adjusted its work plans to support member States in assessing the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 and provide them with recommendations to mitigate it. Throughout the year, it issued a series of dedicated policy briefs, and sometimes technical papers with more in-depth research, of which we retained 20 issuances in the below list of featured publications.



Regional emergency response to mitigate the impact of COVID-19

This regional emergency response is not about bailing out countries, industries or financial institutions – it is about saving thousands of lives. Human welfare and social solidarity must be at the core of any recovery initiative to eradicate this contagion, and allow Governments to resume their efforts towards a secure, just and prosperous world for all.



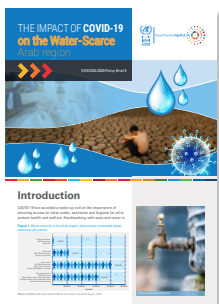
COVID-19 economic cost to the Arab region

Global growth rates are expected to be dramatically low and the world economy is on the verge of a recession. As per an initial estimate by ESCWA of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the Arab region would lose at least \$42 billion. As the virus contagion spreads to the European Union, the United States of America and major economies, and with the compounding effect of low oil prices, the losses in income could escalate.



Mitigating the impact of COVID-19: Poverty and food insecurity in the Arab region

The economic slowdown caused by COVID-19 is expected to negatively impact jobs, incomes, businesses and the flow of remittances in the Arab region, resulting in a shrinking middle-income class. Consequently, an estimated 8.3 million people will fall into poverty, meaning that a total of 101.4 million people in the region will be classified as poor. The consequences of the crisis could be particularly severe for vulnerable groups.



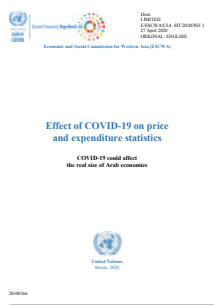
The impact of COVID-19 on the Water-Scarce Arab region

COVID-19 has sounded a wake-up call on the importance of ensuring access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene for all to protect health and welfare. Handwashing with soap and water is now globally understood as the best prevention against COVID-19 transmission. What seems like a simple recommendation, grounded in basic hygiene principles, becomes much more complicated in the water-scarce Arab region where over 362 million people live with less than 1,000 cubic metres of fresh water per person per year, and 18 of the 22 Arab countries are considered water scarce.



The impact of COVID-19 on Arab Economies: Trade and Foreign Direct Investment

COVID-19 has had a devastating effect on economies worldwide, disrupting supply chains and production networks, and restricting the flow of goods and services, capital and movement, thus severely impacting trade and businesses in the Arab region. Decline in foreign direct investment inflows and a substantial drop in the market capital of Arab stock markets have compounded the losses of businesses and economies in the region.



Effect of COVID-19 on price and expenditure statistics

The GDP expenditure structure is expected to shift in most Arab countries due to COVID-19, which is also having an impact on prices, especially in categories of household consumption necessities. The pandemic will therefore strongly affect the purchasing power of currencies, and consequently the real sizes of economies.



The impact of COVID-19 on Arab Financial Systems

The combined impact of COVID-19 and a historic drop in oil prices has placed some Arab countries' financial systems on the brink of collapse. The Arab region is experiencing an unprecedented drop in demand for equities and commodities, tightened financial conditions, higher risk premiums, and low banking sector resilience. This requires immediate measures by Arab Governments and central banks to sustain financial sector liquidity and facilitate necessary credit at any cost during the relief period tailgated by additional financial measures during recovery.



Impact of COVID-19 on Young People in the Arab Region

In the Arab region, the pandemic could not have hit at a worse time for 110 million young people (aged 15-29), who suffer from pre-existing structural inequalities. Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, young people in the Arab region were already reeling from discrimination, exclusion, restricted access to services, high unemployment, and from the devastating effects of ongoing conflict in some countries. ESCWA has assessed the impact of COVID-19 on young people, and is proposing policy recommendations to mitigate the socioeconomic fallout of the pandemic.



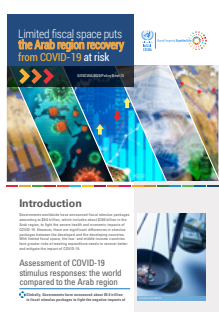
A solidarity tax to address the impact of COVID-19 on poverty in the Arab region

High poverty rates coupled with a high concentration of wealth in the Arab region have highlighted the need for stronger civic solidarity and shared responsibility by the general public, the private sector and the State for lifting marginalized people out of poverty. ESCWA proposes a solidarity tax, independent of Arab countries' existing fiscal space, to close the poverty gap and usher in civic equity.



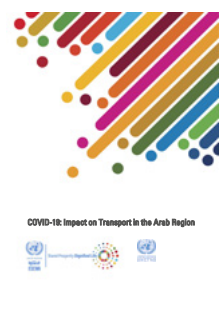
The impact of COVID-19 on older persons in the Arab region

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all aspects of life in the Arab region. Older persons and older persons with disabilities, especially women, will bear a double burden reflected in the health risks posed by the virus and in weak social protection systems, which leave a large group of older persons without protection.



Limited fiscal space puts the Arab region recovery from COVID-19 at risk

Governments worldwide have announced fiscal stimulus packages amounting to \$9.6 trillion, including about \$100 billion in the Arab region, to fight the severe health and economic repercussions of COVID-19. However, there are significant differences in stimulus packages between developed and developing countries and limited fiscal space puts recovery in low- and middle-income countries at great risk.



COVID-19: Impact on transport in the Arab region

In the Arab region, disruption to transport and trade due to COVID-19 has varied across countries and modes of transport, with air transport experiencing its worst year ever. Meanwhile, land transport is expected to suffer a relatively smaller shock, and maritime freight transport has shown some resilience despite the wide-ranging adjustments introduced by shipping companies and ports.



Mapping of government measures taken to protect persons with disabilities from COVID-19, and efforts to provide accessible information and awareness materials (Arabic only)

ESCWA conducted a mapping of disability-inclusive precautionary measures taken by Arab Governments, and of accessible awareness materials for persons with disabilities and published on governmental and non-governmental platforms, including social media.



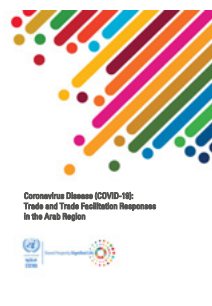
COVID-19, conflict and risks in the Arab region: Ending hostilities and investing in peace

Levels of conflict in the region remain mostly unchanged, with intermittent spikes of violence. Arab countries and the international community must act swiftly to halt the bloodshed, contain the coronavirus, and pave the way toward an enduring peace.



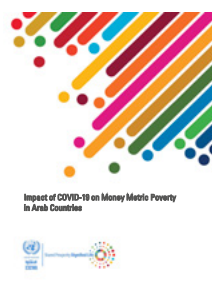
The Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Refugees in the Arab Region (technical paper and policy brief)

The technical paper and policy brief examine the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrants and refugees in the region, focusing on health, income security, the economy and education. It also addresses return and voluntary repatriation, and trafficking in persons during the pandemic.



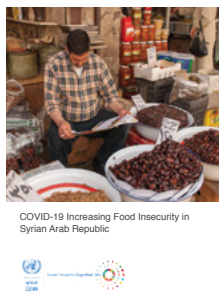
Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Trade and trade facilitation responses in the Arab region

This study reviews the performance of logistics and supply chains in the Arab region during the COVID-19 pandemic. It examines supply chain resilience strategies applied by impacted companies and organizations, based on a survey of 100 international companies in 10 Arab countries.



Impact of COVID-19 on Money Metric Poverty in Arab Countries

The COVID-19 pandemic exposes and accentuates existing structural deficiencies driving poverty and inequality in the region. Its impact is stronger in the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen concerning extreme poverty rates, with an estimated additional 9 million people in the Arab region living under the \$1.9 poverty line by 2021.



COVID-19 increasing food insecurity in the Syrian Arab Republic

Food security challenges in the Syrian Arab Republic have been further exacerbated since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, adding more pressure on the country's stability. The country is currently witnessing an unprecedented currency devaluation, with skyrocketing food prices and diminished household purchasing capacity. The brief suggests policy recommendations to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on food security in the Syrian Arab Republic.



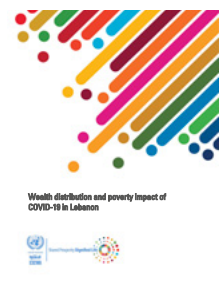
Is food security in Lebanon under threat?

Civil unrest, sudden restrictions on access to foreign currencies, a reduction of financial flows since October 2019, and the outbreak of COVID-19 and its containment measures have raised concerns over food security in Lebanon. Given that the country relies heavily on food imports, the massive explosion that destroyed a significant part of the Port of Beirut on 4 August 2020 is expected to worsen the food security situation.



Poverty in Lebanon: Solidarity is vital to address the impact of multiple overlapping shocks

Lebanon is experiencing the impact of multiple growth shocks, including a recent spike in COVID-19 cases and an explosion that killed over 200 people and destroyed the Beirut Port, warehouses storing food and other vital resources, and vast residential and business areas. These shocks reinforce the ongoing financial crisis that had already increased headcount poverty, exacerbated extreme poverty, and reduced the middle-income group.



Wealth distribution and poverty impact of COVID-19 in Lebanon

Lebanon is de facto experiencing the impact of three reinforcing growth shocks: a long-term recession post-Syrian crisis as a result of gradual decline in tourism receipts and private investment from the GCC; domestic political instability since 2019; and the COVID-19 pandemic which induced a growth GDP shock. These overlapping shocks have led to an increase in the headcount poverty rate from 28 per cent in 2019 to an estimated 55.3 per cent in May 2020.

ON OTHER TOPICS

The COVID-19 response did not stop ESCWA from implementing planned activities. Below is a list of featured publications on topics other than COVID-19.



Green Technologies, Innovations and Practice in the Agricultural Sector

Ten different technologies, innovations and practices are presented in the factsheet, addressing common issues and challenges in the region's agricultural sector.



Reducing Gas Flaring in Arab Countries: A Sustainable Development Necessity

The paper reviews the gas flaring situation in Arab countries and identifies related challenges, making recommendations to reduce associated gas flaring in the region and proposing opportunities to monetize associated gas that would have otherwise been flared.



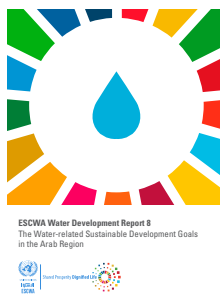
Advancing SDG7 in the Arab Region

The policy brief provides an overview of progress towards achieving SDG 7 in the Arab region, along with the required policy actions over the coming four years. Significant advancements in renewable energy and in decoupling regional growth from energy consumption are required. They can be achieved by improving energy efficiency and energy use productivity.



Climate/SDGs Debt Swap Mechanism

ESCWA has launched its Climate/SDGs Debt Swap Initiative to support debt relief and improve climate finance in Arab middle-income countries that are facing high and increasing debt burdens. It has developed a debt swap mechanism and is working on a road map for operationalizing it.



ESCWA Water Development Report 8: The Water-related Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab Region

This eighth issue of the Water Development Report examines the water-related SDGs from the perspective of water security and scarcity in the Arab region. It identifies ways to assess and address present and projected water scarcity at the regional and national levels for various climate change scenarios. The report shows how water-related SDG targets and indicators can guide the development of policy measures to tackle water challenges in the Arab region.



The Social Justice Policy Gap Assessment Tool (PGAT)

The Policy Gap Assessment Tool analyses the extent to which the principles of social justice are integrated into public policies and development programmes in the Arab region by identifying the gaps and deficits in policies that are considered key to achieve social justice. The tool enables government institutions to conduct a self-assessment of their capacities to integrate social justice principles into policy-making processes in a participatory manner.



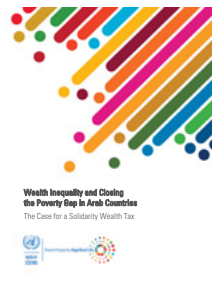
Bridging the Inequality Gap among Youth in the Arab Region

The policy brief discusses selected dimensions of inequality among Arab youths and highlights the gaps and challenges that affect youth policy development and implementation.



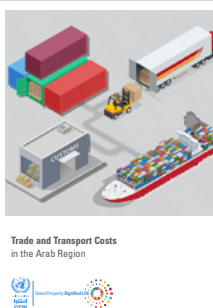
The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration: the promise of making migration work for all in the Arab region

This issue of the Social Development Bulletin presents the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration: the history of its adoption, and its principles, objectives and relevance for the Arab region. It also provides an overview of the related follow-up and review process.



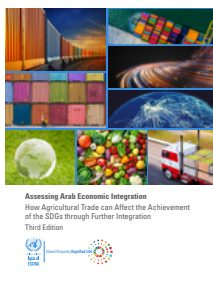
Wealth Inequality and Closing the Poverty Gap in Arab Countries: The Case for a Solidarity Wealth Tax

High poverty rates coupled with high concentration of wealth in the Arab region have highlighted the need for a stronger civic solidarity and the shared responsibility of the public, the private sector and the state for uplifting the downtrodden out of poverty. The case for taxing top wealth is strong, as a solidarity wealth levy independent of the Arab countries' existing public fiscal space would go a long way toward closing the poverty gap and promoting civic equity and unity.



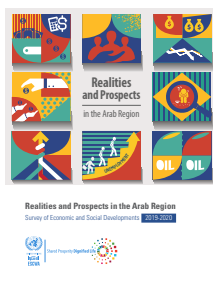
Trade and Transport Costs in the Arab Region

The Arab region has high trade costs, resulting in low trade integration at the regional and global levels. The study investigates trade costs in the region, both at the national economy level and the sectoral level. It shows that, overall, these costs remain an obstacle to expanding the region's participation in international trade, and to intraregional integration.



Assessing Arab Economic Integration, Third Edition: How Agricultural Trade Can Affect the Achievement of the SDGs through Further Integration

The report examines trends in integration across the Arab region, focusing on the potential of agricultural integration to spur growth, employment and welfare, even in times of crisis. The third edition of the report continues to make the case that economic integration is a realizable goal and an imperative for the Arab region in its path towards peace and shared prosperity.



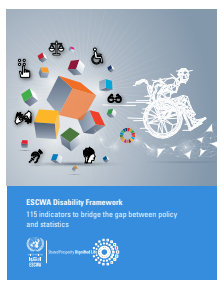
Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region 2019-2020: Realities and Prospects

The COVID-19 shock began in the context of a global economic slowdown. International trade was negatively impacted by fears of protectionist measures, which also affected supply chains, global demand and manufacturing activities, especially in China, Africa and the Middle East. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in broad lockdowns that exerted extensive pressure on the global economy, which is expected to contract by at least 3.2 per cent in 2020.



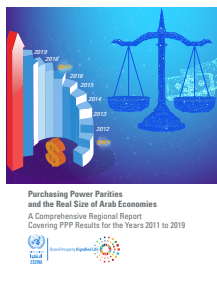
Syria at War: Eight Years On

Almost a decade of conflict has radically transformed all aspects of Syrian society. The purpose of the report is to trace these transformations at the social, economic and governance levels. It provides a framework for moving forward, proposing principles, priorities and pragmatic steps toward an inclusive and sustainable economic recovery and peacebuilding process.



ESCWA Disability Framework: 115 Indicators to Bridge the Gap between Policy and Statistics

The Framework and its 115 indicators embody a major step forward in bridging the gap between policy and statistics. It will facilitate reporting on the situation of persons with disabilities in critical disability-inclusive development goals.



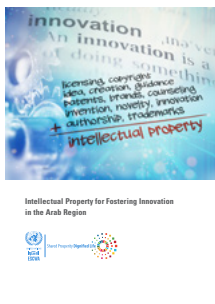
Purchasing Power Parities and the Real Size of Arab Economies

ESCWA established an annual regional series of actual purchasing power parities (PPPs) extending from 2011 to 2019. PPPs are used in monitoring progress on several indicators of SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9 and 10.



Arab Society: Demographic and Social Trends, Issue No. 14

Issue No. 14 is the latest in a series of biennial compendiums that present a broad description of Arab society, focusing on population dynamics, household composition and family formation, housing conditions, health, education, labour, poverty and inequality, culture and social participation.



Intellectual Property for Fostering Innovation in the Arab World

The report is a desk review of intellectual property laws and practices in some Arab countries. It explores the link between intellectual property, innovation, competitiveness, and progress on the SDGs. It also proposes solutions for the dilemma of implementing strong or weak intellectual property protection for either protecting innovators or ensuring openness.



Legal aspects of open government and open data

The study investigates the laws that have an impact on fostering open government, specifically the right to access information, and those that impact accountability, such as the laws related to integrity, anti-corruption and protection of whistle-blowers. The study provides also two legislative frameworks, one on open data and one on citizen participation.



Big data readiness assessment: National guide

The advantages of using big data in the age of abundance of information and connected devices are countless, including efficiency, productivity and timely knowledge for effective decision making. However, when big data projects are attempted without mature readiness, there are lasting negative effects. The guide is intended for deployment through customization to local contexts in different Arab countries.



Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020

Five years into the era of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, the report is a reminder that the starting point for implementation and the horizon for achievement must be aligned for change to be transformative. It is only through the alignment of policies and other interventions with the overarching framework of the 2030 Agenda that the region, and the world, can hope to achieve the Agenda. How close, or how far, the Arab region is from this alignment is the story that the report aims to tell.



Arab Report on the Periodic Review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 Years

The document provides a summary of the Arab report on the periodic review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 years, which reviews achievements by Arab countries in fulfilling their commitments under the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and analyses the challenges facing the region in that regard.



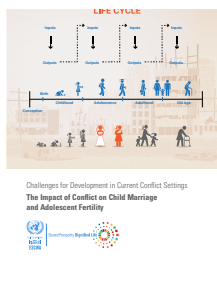
Shelters for Women Survivors of Violence: Availability and Accessibility in the Arab Region

The study provides a snapshot on the provision of shelter services for women victims of violence in the Arab region. It is based on a desk review and responses from countries in the region on a questionnaire designed for collected data and information on the availability, accessibility and services offered within shelter services in the Arab region.



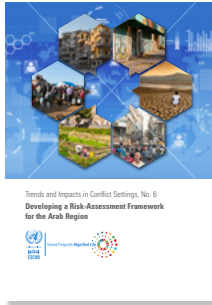
Employing a gendered approach to transitional justice in the Arab region: Potential role of national women's machineries

The policy brief introduces the concept of 'transitional justice' and its key mechanisms that may influence post-conflict reconstruction or political transition. It argues that gendered concerns should be incorporated into transitional justice and reconstruction endeavours in the same manner as women's involvement.



The Impact of Conflict on Child Marriage and Adolescent Fertility

The report considers the growing adversities faced by women and girls in conflict-affected Arab countries, noting that younger girls are increasingly disadvantaged by heightened perceptions of insecurity and exposure to violence in their communities, including child marriage.



Trends and Impacts in Conflict Settings, No. 6: Developing a Risk-Assessment Framework for the Arab Region

This publication proposes a methodology for understanding and communicating the risks of violent conflict, humanitarian crisis, and political instability in the Arab region; the sources, drivers, and interactions of these risks; and their potential future trends. The framework aims to help member States allocate resources more efficiently, take steps for prevention and mitigation, and prioritize the people and assets that are most exposed.



Towards a Common Arab Regional Job Competencies Framework for Senior Public Servants within the Context of Agenda 2030 and Public Policy (Arabic only)

Arab countries are committed to enhancing the effectiveness of their public institutions. They are allocating resources to improve the quality of services provided to citizens. To support them in those efforts, ESCWA has launched the development of a job competencies framework for civil servants by a group of experts in human resources management and other related specializations serving in various Arab public sector entities.



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