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**Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based
solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and
its Sustainable Development Goals for leaving no one behind**

Report of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat hereby transmits the report of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, held from 14 to 16 April 2025 under the theme “Restoring hope, raising ambition”, to the 2025 high-level political forum on sustainable development.

* E/HLPF/2025/1.



Report of the 2025 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development
Restoring hope, raising ambition
14 to 16 April 2025

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Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in partnership with the League of Arab States (LAS) and United Nations system entities operating in the Arab region, organized the 2025 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, the theme of which was “Restoring hope, raising ambition”. The Forum, which was held both virtually and in person in Beirut from 14 to 16 April 2025, was chaired by Iraq.

2. The Arab Forum for Sustainable Development is the high-level regional forum for reviewing and following up on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region. The Doha Declaration on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which ESCWA adopted at its twenty-ninth session (Doha, 13 to 15 December 2016), established the Forum as an annual event at which the Governments of Arab States and sustainable development stakeholders can meet to review national and regional experiences and discuss mechanisms for implementing the 2030 Agenda at the national and regional levels.¹ The conclusions adopted by the Forum are submitted to the high-level political forum on sustainable development, which is held annually in New York in July.

3. The 2025 session of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development was preceded by a series of regional meetings: (a) 2025 Digital Cooperation and Development Forum: Our vision, our world, our future (Amman, 23 to 26 February 2025), (b) 2025 consultative meeting on the environmental aspects of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Inclusive science-based environmental solutions to enhance implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (in-person meeting, Cairo, 25 and 26 February 2025) and (c) 2025 civil society regional meeting on sustainable development (in-person and virtual meeting, Beirut, 12 and 13 April 2025).²

4. The programme of work of the Forum included the opening and closing sessions and three ministerial discussions that were focused on supporting Arab countries in their efforts to put the region on track for the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, the Second World Summit for Social Development and regional implementation of the Global Digital Compact that is annexed to the Pact for the Future. It also included four thematic sessions on the Sustainable Development Goals that will be reviewed at the 2025 high-level political forum on sustainable development and 10 special sessions that covered selected regional priorities in greater detail.

5. In addition, the programme of work included the Arab business round table and the Sustainable Development Goals, the focus of which was financial inclusion; a round table on voluntary national reviews, which covered approaches to and solutions for challenges that hinder the ability of conflict-affected countries to follow up and review implementation of the 2030 Agenda; and a round table on the progress made in implementing the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries (2022–2031) and the way forward in the Arab region.

¹ The Forum’s terms of reference derive from a series of ESCWA resolutions, including resolution 327 (XXIX) on the working mechanisms of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, adopted at the twenty-ninth session of the Commission (Doha, 13–15 December 2016), resolution 314 (XXVIII) on the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, adopted at its twenty-eighth session (Tunis, 15–18 September 2014), and Executive Committee resolution 322 on supporting members States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the Committee at its second meeting (Amman, 14–16 December 2015).

² The meeting was organized by the Arab NGO Network for Development.

6. The Forum produced messages that will be submitted to the high-level political forum on sustainable development, which will be held from 14 to 23 July 2025 in New York under the theme “Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for leaving no one behind”. Those messages reflect the priorities of the region.

I. Key messages of the 2025 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development

7. The Forum produced several messages on reinforcing the 2030 Agenda in times of multiple crises. Following are the most prominent of those messages:

Sustainable development and emerging geopolitical issues

- Given the declining effectiveness of the multilateral international system and the erosion of confidence in United Nations institutions, the Arab States must strive collectively to be an active actor in establishing an international and regional system for negotiation, forming alliances and conflict resolution that is more efficient, just and protective of human rights and the economic, political, social, cultural, and environmental rights of peoples.
- As the use of digital technology in warfare increases, as demonstrated by the war in Gaza, the Arab States must collectively engage in international processes aimed at governing the use of digital technology and artificial intelligence, and they must launch initiatives to control the weaponization of technology.

Technology and artificial intelligence

- The Arab States need to make themselves better prepared to respond to the Global Digital Compact and to ensure that the diplomatic, legal and technical components of the implementation and follow-up mechanisms are complementary. It is imperative to align legal frameworks with the rapid pace of technological development, in order to ensure that all parts of society have safe and reliable access to services and information on the Internet. There is a need to develop ethical guidelines for the use of artificial intelligence that take into account local specificities and are also in harmony with international trends.
- It is necessary to strengthening integration between countries in the Arab region through such measures as the construction of regional data centres and making further efforts to develop a large language model for the Arabic language that promotes the use of generative artificial intelligence applications in Arabic, with a view to ensuring that those technologies respond to the priorities and realities of the region and its peoples.
- Efforts must be intensified to build the digital and life skills that are needed in the digital economy and that enable individuals to keep pace with technological transformations, including by reviewing the educational programmes of universities and technical training institutions in order to make them better suited to the requirements of the digital economy, in particular in the fields of artificial intelligence and cybersecurity.
- Governments, United Nations agencies and local actors are encouraged to build capacity and establish behavioural insights units, and to integrate that approach into the design and implementation of policies, in order to ensure that more effective and contextually relevant policies are developed.

Decent work

- Pro-employment economic policies that encourage interventions on both the supply and demand sides should be implemented, with a focus on bringing about structural transformation by increasing the contribution of labour in adding value and taking a whole-of-government approach to job creation.
- Governments, national institutions, the private sector, trade unions and other stakeholders need to be involved in the collaborative effort to ensure decent work for all, including migrant workers, and prevent their exploitation by providing fair wages, safe working conditions and social protection, and by recognizing and developing their skills. Data collection should be strengthened in both countries of origin and destination, in line with the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.
- Barriers to women's economic participation must be addressed, and positive social norms need to be promoted, with a view to reallocating unpaid care work equitably between the sexes.

Social development and inclusivity

- The Arab countries are called upon to actively engage in the preparatory process for the Second World Summit for Social Development, as it presents an opportunity to promote Arab priorities, the foremost of which are establishing peace and justice, ending occupation, investing in the human potential of all groups, including women, young people and persons with disabilities, preserving the diversity of the social fabric and responding to emerging climate and technological challenges.
- It is necessary to ensure the financial sustainability of social protection programs and to expand the fiscal space available for social spending by converting debt into development investments that support employment and combat poverty.
- It is necessary to raise awareness of the importance of digital tools, such as mobile banking and financial technology (fintech) platforms, and promote financial literacy, with a view to increasing access to financial services, in particular for underserved groups, including women, persons with disabilities and small businesses.
- It is necessary to achieve financial inclusion for persons with disabilities by putting in place strong laws; bringing about a cultural shift in financial institutions to address the diverse needs of persons with disabilities, such as accessible services; training staff; and focusing on empowerment.
- It is necessary to help small businesses grow and overcome significant barriers to accessing financial services by simplifying procedures, providing alternative methods of credit assessment and designing specialized financial products for small businesses.
- It is necessary to protect children and young persons by creating safe spaces for them, improving road safety, providing mental health programmes and taking legal action against States that violate their rights, in particular during war.
- A gender-responsive approach should be intentionally and comprehensively integrated into all stages of the planning, implementation and evaluation of humanitarian and development efforts. In the Arab region, where the gender equality gap is still evident, women in situations of conflict make up a

disproportionate number of the casualties, displaced persons and victims of sexual and gender-based violence.

- Priority must be given in gender-responsive recovery efforts to women's rights to housing, land and ownership, as those are essential to livelihoods, services and resilience. Transitional justice mechanisms should ensure the full participation and effective representation of women, including by supporting networks of women-led and women's rights organizations. The role of women in conflict prevention and peacebuilding must be strengthened by including women in inclusive mediation and negotiation processes, supporting women-led initiatives and removing structural barriers, in particular at the local level.

Financing for development

- The Arab region calls for the preparation of an ambitious and implementable outcome document for the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development that lays the foundation for a fair and equitable global financing system, addresses the growing funding gaps and contains specific commitments to provide equitable access for Arab countries to sustainable financing for the 2030 Agenda.
- Improving debt sustainability and debt relief mechanisms, including for vulnerable middle-income countries, is a top priority that can be achieved by activating automatic debt service suspension mechanisms during crises, revising credit rating methodologies and conducting debt sustainability analyses, in order to enhance growth and promote debt-for-action swaps on the Sustainable Development Goals.
- In addition to the question of debt, the priorities for the Arab region for the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development include urging developed countries to fulfil their commitments to allocate 0.7 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) to official development assistance; addressing illicit financial flows and trade protectionism; establishing a joint regional sovereign fund for investments that are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals; issuing diaspora bonds; promoting smart national development banks; supporting local currency lending by development banks; leveraging financial technology, green finance, public-private partnerships and blended finance; promoting South-South and trilateral cooperation; and advancing a unified regional vision of financing for development.

Gender equality

- Progressive interpretations and modern juridical reasoning that is built upon the flexibility of divine laws and promote the principles of justice and equality should be utilized when amending family law. A comprehensive review of all legal systems and frameworks (such as family laws and labour and penal codes) should be conducted in order to ensure consistency among them and fill legislative gaps, with a view to improving implementation of laws concerning the empowerment of women and the protection of their rights.
- Programmes for the family, schools and the media should be developed that are aimed at bringing about the societal behavioural change needed to promote equality and the empowerment of women in all fields.
- The production of gender-related data disaggregated by sex, age and disability should be promoted, including through the use of technology and innovation in accordance with international standards and in close coordination with all relevant national stakeholders, in order to guide gender equality planning and

developing policies and monitoring their implementation, with a view to determining their impact and effectiveness.

Governance and localization of the Sustainable Development Goals

- Conflict-affected countries should leverage the voluntary national review process for the 2030 Agenda to strengthen the resilience of their communities and boost development in areas of greatest need by adopting localized approaches, such as using subnational statistical evidence to assess regional progress, using geospatial information systems to guide humanitarian assistance and documenting the means of resilience of displaced and vulnerable groups in their review reports.
- Local, subnational and national reviews should be harmonized in order to ensure policy coherence and complementarity among different stakeholders, support evidence-based decision-making, improve the quality of services and enhance transparency in monitoring the progress made towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Healthcare systems

- Peace and security are essential to achieving sustainable development, and the lack thereof leads to the deterioration of the health system and the loss of skills, in particular in situations where health system infrastructure and the workers who provide healthcare services are targeted.
- It is imperative to invest in the primary healthcare system, train staff and employ multisectoral approaches, in order to make the system inclusive for all groups of society, in particular in remote areas, and integrated, such that it covers sexual and reproductive health services, care for the elderly and services for non-communicable diseases.
- There is an urgent need, in light of the increase in the number of ageing persons in the Arab region, to develop policies that address the social and health needs, including mental health, of older persons in keeping with local culture and that take into account the need to train specialized personnel, mobilize community support and create the structure for providing care in centres or at home.
- Timely and equitable access to medical products for all must be ensured by strengthening regulatory frameworks, supporting local production, improving the supply chain system and establishing a common regional procurement system.

Marine ecosystems

- The Arab countries are called upon to strengthen partnerships in developing assessment, monitoring and data collection systems for Goal 14 indicators on underwater life, in order to direct efforts towards the integrated management of transboundary marine ecosystems.
- Efforts should be made to involve all components of civil society, the private sector, research centres and beneficiaries in the efforts to conserve marine resources and mobilize resources therefor, with a view to improving the livelihoods of at-risk groups, including coastal communities and women and young persons who depend on marine resources.

Arab least developed countries

- Arab least developed countries are called upon to incorporate the Doha

Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries (2022–2031) into their national development plans, strengthen implementation and monitoring mechanisms, and utilize the technical and financial support tools that are available from the United Nations system in that regard.

- The international community is called upon to effectively implement international regulations, in particular with regard to trade, that have been put in place to protect the interests of the least developed countries. In addition, preferential treatment for countries graduating from the list of least developed countries should continue until those countries are able to develop their productive capacities.

II. Sessions and presentations

A. Opening session

8. Addresses were delivered at the opening session by Rola Dashti, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCWA; Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations (video message); Muhammad Ali Tamim, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Planning of Iraq, in his capacity as Chair of the 2025 session of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development; Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of LAS; and Fadi Makki, Minister of State for Administrative Development Affairs of Lebanon, on behalf of General Joseph Aoun, President of Lebanon and convenor of the 2025 session.

9. The speakers addressed the importance of reducing inequality, building trusted institutions, restoring hope through action and justice, and they reaffirmed the Arab region's ability to face challenges and lead change. They also reaffirmed the need to establish enduring peace in various States of the region and the right of the Palestinian people to live in freedom and dignity on their own land; encourage initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life, in particular in post-conflict countries; and close the region's large funding gap, expand fiscal space and improve the efficiency of social spending. In addition, the speakers addressed the need to close the data gap, design science- and research-driven policies, support innovation and digital transformation, integrate behavioural sciences into strategic planning, adopt evidence-based solutions and activate accountability mechanisms. They noted that the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, to be held from 30 June to 3 July 2025 in Seville, Spain, and the Second World Summit for Social Development, to be held from 4 to 6 November 2025 in Doha, provided opportunities to set priorities for the region.

B. Plenary sessions

1. High-level dialogue: Sustainable development and geopolitical issues in the Arab region

10. The session was facilitated by Noha el-Mikawy of the American University in Cairo. The panellists were Karim Haggag, American University in Cairo; Marwa Fatafta, Access Now (by videolink); Hala Bsaisu Lattouf, former Minister of Social Development, Jordan; Mahmoud Mohieldin, United Nations Special Envoy on Financing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and Nizar Yaiche, former Minister of Finance, Tunisia.

11. The focus of the session was global geopolitical developments and their effect on sustainable development in the Arab region. Speakers discussed major shifts,

including the escalation of great Power rivalry, the decreased effectiveness of the multilateral international system, the erosion of trust in United Nations institutions, the evolving nature of conflicts in the region and the multiplicity of mediation paths. Attention was drawn to the increasing use of digital technology in warfare, surveillance and the collection of personal data in the light of the feeble international efforts to govern such uses of digital technology and the concentration of technological power in the hands of a few corporations. The panellists emphasized the need to develop new regional approaches for negotiation that serve the interests of all Arab countries, and to build effective alliances that are based on a thorough understanding of global realities, in particular in the areas of technology, trade and investment.

2. Ministerial-level discussion: The Pact for the Future and the Global Digital Compact

12. The session was moderated by Lina Oueidat, Presidency of the Council of Ministers of Lebanon. The panellists were Kamal Shehadeh, Minister of Displaced Persons and Minister of State for Information Technology and Artificial Intelligence, Lebanon; Amr Aljowaily, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates, Egypt; Walaa Turki, Ministry of Communication Technologies, Tunisia; and Mounir Tabet, regional expert.

13. Among the items discussed was the Global Digital Compact, which was adopted as an annex to the Pact for the Future and serves a framework for the governance of digital technology and artificial intelligence. The panellists focused on the role of Arab countries in the international discussions that led to the adoption of the Pact. They also discussed the international structures and mechanisms that will be established to follow up on the implementation of the Pact and the need for diverse expertise to link the technical aspect with the diplomatic and legal aspects. In addition, the discussion touched on cyberattacks, data protection, balancing security and safety and the openness of the Internet, with panellists stressing the need to strengthen technical aspects, update laws to keep pace with rapid technological development and raise community awareness regarding the safe and responsible use of technology. The panellists also focused on the importance of the inclusion of the Arabic in large language models and the development of guidelines on the ethics of using artificial intelligence.

3. Thematic session: Review of Sustainable Development Goal 8

14. The session was moderated by Ms. Hanan Nazier of Cairo University, Egypt. The speakers were Khaled al-Bakkar, Minister of Labour, Jordan (by videolink); Faycal Bentaleb, Minister of Labour, Employment and Social Security, Algeria (by videolink); Enas Dahadha Attari, Minister of Labour, State of Palestine; Najwa bint Abdulrahman Al-Thani, Undersecretary, Ministry of Labour, Qatar; Ibrahim Saif, economist and former minister, Jordan; Maha al-Rawi, Ministry of Planning, Iraq; Najat Simou, Economic, Social and Environmental Council, Morocco; Hind Benammar, Arab Trade Union Confederation; Najoua Azhar, General Union of Arab Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture; and Ali Abdullah Al Ibrahim, Regional Network for Social Responsibility, Qatar.

15. Participants presented national policy experiences, such as the labour market information system in Jordan, the drive to formalize the informal sector in Algeria, partnerships between public institutions and the private sector in vocational training centres in the State of Palestine, reforms aimed at improving the treatment of migrant workers in Qatar, the steps taken to formulate a national employment policy and national development plans to design decent work programmes in Iraq and

entrepreneurship support programmes in Morocco. The discussion was centred on promoting workers' rights, education and training programmes for young people, fair treatment of migrant workers and removing barriers to women's economic participation. The panellists addressed pro-employment macroeconomic policies and structural transformations that can enhance the contribution of labour to value addition. The session concluded with a call for the equitable reallocation of unpaid care work between the sexes.

4. Presentation of the ESCWA Digital Arabic Content Award for Sustainable Development 2024–2025

16. An award ceremony was held to announce the winners of the third round of the ESCWA Digital Arabic Content Award (2024–2025). The ceremony was organized by ESCWA in partnership with the World Summit Awards. The award is given for the best Arabic digital content projects related to the Sustainable Development Goals in the institutions and young entrepreneurs categories.

17. The winners in the institutions category were the Abwaab educational platform, Jordan; Content Style Guide, Egypt; and the FORSA platform, Jordan. The awards in the young entrepreneurs category went to Adam Wa Mishmish, Jordan; Climate School, Egypt; Rouh, State of Palestine; and Wajeez, Jordan. The Shebbak Souri website, Syrian Arab Republic, received a special mention.

5. Arab business round table and the Sustainable Development Goals: Advancing financial inclusion in the Arab region

18. The session was moderated by Mohammad Fheili of the American University of Beirut, Lebanon. The participants in the round table were Nasser Al Kahtani, Arab Gulf Programme for Development; Sherif Lokman, Central Bank of Egypt; Maher Mahrouq, Association of Banks in Jordan; Fatma Triki, Enda Inter-Arabe; Heba Hagrass, Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities; Arafo Barbad, Network of Ambitious Djiboutian Entrepreneurs; and Dani Ibrahim, EA Advisory LLC.

19. The participants discussed the efforts of governments, financial institutions and civil society to overcome the impediments to accessing finance in the Arab region, in particular for women, persons with disabilities and micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises. They also discussed regulatory reforms, innovative digital tools and the growing role of microfinance in reaching underserved populations. Examples from various countries were given to show how targeted policies, partnerships and digital technologies help overcome structural barriers, in particular in fragile contexts and for informal enterprises. The participants stressed the need for more inclusive governance of financial inclusion strategies and stronger cross-sector collaboration.

6. Ministerial discussion: Second World Summit for Social Development

20. The session was moderated by Hania Sholkamy of the American University in Cairo. Omar Hilale, Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations and co-facilitator of the intergovernmental preparatory process for the Second World Summit for Social Development, addressed the session by videolink, and statements were delivered by Wafaa Bani Mustafa, Minister of Social Development, Jordan; Hind Kabawat, Minister of Social Affairs and Labour, Syrian Arab Republic; Buthaina bint Ali Al Jabr Al Nuaimi, Minister of Social Development and Family, Qatar; Haneen Sayed, Minister of Social Affairs, Lebanon; Naima Ben Yahia, Minister of Solidarity, Social Integration and Family, Morocco (by videolink); Ahmed Kouhouk, Minister of Finance, Egypt (by videolink); Maher Johan, Undersecretary, Ministry of Planning, Iraq (by videolink); Heba Hagrass, Special Rapporteur on the

rights of persons with disabilities; Jassim Al-Hamrani, Executive Bureau of the Council of Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf; Hanouf Abdulrahman, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Qatar; and Tarek El Nabulsi (LAS).

21. The participants discussed the status of preparation in the Arab region for the Second World Summit for Social Development. Participants agreed that the Summit presented an important opportunity to advance the region's priorities, including peace, justice, ending occupation, universal access to social protection, empowering all groups, including women, young people and persons with disabilities, and preserving the diversity of the social fabric. The recommendations made included the need to expand the fiscal space for social spending by converting debt into development investments, strengthening the integration between social and economic policies, adopting flexible planning methods in the face of crises, and increasing the participation and openness to the private sector. In addition, the session touched on preparations being made by Qatar to host the Summit, including support for the participation of least developed countries, and the efforts of LAS to organize a regional preparatory meeting in the lead-up to the Summit.

7. Ministerial discussion: Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development

22. The high-level session was moderated by Ibrahim Elbadawi of the Economic Policy and Research Centre. Yassine Jaber, Minister of Finance of Lebanon; Abbas Kadhom Obaid, Chair of the Group of 77 and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Iraq to the United Nations; Jesús Santos Aguado, Ambassador of Spain to Lebanon; Mahmoud Mohieldin, Special Envoy on Financing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; Navid Hanif, Department of Economic and Social Affairs; and Dima Al-Khatib, United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation, participated in the session.

23. Participants reviewed the first draft of the outcome document of the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development to determine how it aligned with regional priorities in the face of widening financing gaps. Strengthening debt sustainability and debt relief mechanisms, including in middle-income countries, was a key priority highlighted. Proposals included automatic suspension of debt service payments during crises, review of credit rating methodologies, development of more growth-sensitive debt sustainability analyses and strengthening of the debt-for-Sustainable-Development-Goal swap mechanism. Other priorities included urging developed countries to meet the target of 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product for official development assistance; addressing illicit financial flows and trade protectionism; leveraging fintech, green finance, public-private partnerships and blended finance; strengthening South-South and triangular cooperation; and developing a unified regional vision for financing for development.

8. Thematic session: Review of Sustainable Development Goal 5

24. The session was facilitated by Salma Nims of Inclusive Scopes Advisors, Jordan. The panellists were Wafa Bani Mustafa, Minister of Social Development, Jordan; Naima Ben Yahia, Minister of Solidarity, Social Integration and Family, Morocco; Inaya Ezzeddine, Member of Parliament, Lebanon; Intisar Al Wahaibi, Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf; Marwa Sharafeldine, Musawah (global movement for equality and justice in the Muslim family); and Manar Zaiter, lawyer and gender justice consultant, Lebanon.

25. Participants emphasized the importance of political will as a key driver of progress on gender equality and on the reform of family laws that affected women's

status in general, including their rights to citizenship and personal decision-making, and their freedom of movement and political action. Reference was made to the experience of Jordan in modernizing its electoral law and its political parties law, which had improved women's political representation in parliament, and to legislative measures to support women's economic participation. Participants considered the gradual approach adopted by Morocco in amending the Family Code to align with international standards and ensuring ongoing legislative reforms. They emphasized the importance of individual reasoning in amending the Family Code. They discussed the experience of Lebanon with respect to the importance of effective committees in parliaments to support gender-sensitive legislation and evaluate its implementation, and the experience of the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf in developing an index to measure the participation of women in the Gulf, which showed points of strength and areas that needed to be developed in order to guide policies.

9. Thematic session: Review of Sustainable Development Goal 3

26. The session was facilitated by Sawsan Abdelrahim of the American University of Beirut. The panellists were Khuloud Al Mufarji, Ministry of Health of Oman; Arash Rashidian, Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean of the World Health Organization (WHO); Jilali Cherrouk, High Commission for Planning, Morocco; Mohannad Al Nsour, Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network, Jordan; and Shereen Hussein, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

27. The session addressed the health situation in the Arab region, in particular in the context of challenges resulting from chronic crises, ongoing emergencies and determinants of health such as environmental factors and water scarcity. It was focused on health system preparedness and the importance of strengthening primary health care and facilitating affordable access by all segments of society, including in rural areas. Emphasis was placed on the need to allocate resources to strengthen emergency preparedness, build structures or centres for emergency management and collaborate with communities in response efforts. As the region rapidly aged, it was important to develop and implement integrated policies and plans to create health services for older persons that took gender-specific needs into account, trained caregivers and mobilized community support. The session also touched on multisectoral approaches to service delivery and the development of digital infrastructure and regulatory frameworks for the use of technology, including artificial intelligence, in the health sector.

10. Thematic session: Review of Sustainable Development Goal 14

28. The session was moderated by Manal Nader of the University of Balamand. The panellists were Mohamed Juma Alrezaiqi, Environment Authority of Oman; Lara Samaha, Ministry of Environment, Lebanon; Ali El Kekli, Ministry of Environment of Libya; Mohamed Said Abdelwarith Attea, Environmental Affairs Agency of Egypt; Mohammad Dawood Al-Ahmad, Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment; and Mehdi Aissi, World Wildlife Fund North Africa.

29. Interventions by States were focused on the risks and impacts of climate change on coral reefs in Oman and efforts to restore them; activities organized under the protected areas strategy in Lebanon, and field surveys of marine biodiversity and coordination to establish a network of marine protected areas; the marine protected areas strategy in Egypt and its incorporation of the rights of local communities in coordination with relevant sectors; and the draft law on marine protected area management in Libya, which recognized the importance of the role of local authorities. The session highlighted the challenge presented by the lack of target 14

data in the region; the need to collaborate with regional organizations to develop an integrated data management policy for prioritization and policymaking; the full field survey of marine areas planned by the Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment; and the marine shoreline conservation initiative of the World Wildlife Fund North Africa in Tunisia, which was based on volunteer work by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and schools and funding contributions from private bank partners, and the plan to replicate the initiative in neighbouring countries at their request.

11. Round table: Voluntary national reviews

30. The session was moderated by Ola Sidani of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of Lebanon. The session included interventions from Wafaa Al Mahdawi, Ministry of Planning, Iraq; Khaled Ismail Mohammed, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, the Sudan; Khaled Abu Khaled, Central Bureau of Statistics, State of Palestine; Mohamed Al-Hawri, Deputy Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, Yemen; and Nada El Agizy, LAS.

31. The interventions were focused on national experiences in drafting voluntary national reviews on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in conflict-affected and fragile settings. Successful approaches were highlighted, such as the use of statistical evidence to analyse local-level development achievements and perseverance in reducing gaps among localities; documenting of the coping mechanisms of displaced and vulnerable groups in collaboration with civil society organizations; the use of geospatial information systems to target aid and promote resilience in conflict areas; the development of ambitious but feasible scenarios for a surge in development; and the development of capacity to apply the triple nexus approach (humanitarian action, development and peacebuilding). It was emphasized at the session that preparation of voluntary national reviews on conflict settings contributed to institutional and community awareness of the Goals, mobilization of resources and partnerships and promotion of participatory and risk-responsive planning.

12. Round table: Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries (2022–2031)

32. The session, conducted in two parts, was moderated by Ziad Abdel Samad of the Arab NGO Network for Development. The following spoke in the first part of the session: Mohamed Abdul Alim, Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States; Omar Ahmed Mohamed Ali, Minister of Trade and Supply, the Sudan; Mohamed Al-Hawri, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Yemen; Abderrahmane Deddi, Ministry of Economy and Finance, Mauritania; Hassan Adam Hosow, Chief Economic Adviser to the President, Somalia; and Hassan Mohamed Ali, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Somalia.

33. The first part dealt with progress in the implementation of the Doha Programme of Action, in its six areas of focus (investing in people; sustainable use of resources; trade; technology; capacity-building; and partnerships). Speakers highlighted the priorities and support needs required for accelerating progress, including boosting trade, supporting food security, creating jobs, enhancing infrastructure investments and building institutional capacity.

34. The second part of the session was addressed by Kinda Mohamadieh, Third World Network; Nader Kabbani, Middle East Council on Global Affairs; and ESCWA experts Mustafa Khawaja, Hammou Laamrani and Karam Karam. They addressed international legal regimes for protecting the interests of least developed countries,

such as trade preferences, while emphasizing the need for their effective implementation. The experts emphasized the role of economic diversification and employment strategies, investment in the development of statistical systems, and resilient and climate-smart food systems in supporting least developed countries.

C. Special sessions

1. Special session 1: Women's roles in recovery and post-conflict reconstruction

35. The session was facilitated by Nadya Khalife of ESCWA, and opening remarks were delivered by Moez Doraid of the Regional Office for the Arab States of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). The panellists were Hilde Haraldstad, Ambassador of Norway to Lebanon; Ahmed Luabei, Ministry of Justice, Iraq; Samia Qasem Melhem, Warjin Foundation for Women and Media, Iraq; Amal Hamidosh, Snack Souri, Syria; Loubna Ezzedine, leader, mediator and social and environmental activist, Lebanon; and Fadia Jouma'a, journalist, mediator and environmental activist, Lebanon.

36. Interventions were focused on urgent humanitarian needs and gender-based challenges in conflict-affected areas, with experiences shared from the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and Lebanon. Speakers presented the concept of quality of life as a framework for reconstruction, emphasizing the importance of dignity, inclusion, resilience and rebuilding of infrastructure. The discussion contained an emphasis on the need to integrate women's land and property rights into national recovery strategies, especially in contexts of displacement and loss of documentation; the development of inclusive and gender-sensitive transitional justice mechanisms to contribute to justice for women survivors of genocide; the full and meaningful participation of women; the mainstreaming of gender equality in all humanitarian and development efforts; and the protection of women's rights as essential pillars of post-conflict transformation and sustainable peace and recovery.

2. Special session 2: Behavioural science as a pathway to development impact in the Arab countries

37. The session was moderated by Marc Rubin of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa. Speakers included Fadi Makki, Minister of State for Administrative Development, Lebanon; Josh Martin, UNICEF Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa; Dennis Chimenya, UNICEF Sudan; and Lilian Abou Zeki, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Lebanon.

38. The discussions underscored the importance of behavioural science as an evidence-based, human-centred approach that addressed the gap between intention and behaviour, enhancing the impact of policies and programmes. Examples illustrated the impact of gender-sensitive messaging in increasing women's vaccination uptake (Sudan) and behavioural science focused campaigns in deepening understanding of the fair division of household labour (Lebanon). Participants urged Governments and development partners to integrate behavioural science into policy design and implementation, establish behavioural insights units and build multidisciplinary partnerships. Behavioural science, a key pillar of the United Nations 2.0 quintet of change, provided a practical pathway for inclusive and sustainable progress toward the Goals.

3. Special session 3: A youth-led special session. Children's voices, resilient futures: protecting child rights in times of conflict

39. The session was moderated by Maya Abou Samra of Save the Children, Lebanon, and featured the following youth representatives of the Save the Children Advisory Committee, from various regions of Lebanon: Yaman Abu Siyam, Lara Al Malla, Shahed Mekhleif, Ali Al Haddam, Sarah Yaseen and Jad Hamid.

40. Six children and young persons prepared and led the session, focusing on good health and well-being and quality education as primary goals. They highlighted the effects of the 2024 war in Lebanon on progress toward those goals. Interventions called for the protection of children's rights; legal action against States that violated their rights, especially States that were involved in wars and responsible for killings; the creation of safe spaces for children; and the importance of focusing on mental health, which remained a taboo topic in many societies, making it difficult for children to seek help. The importance of the effective participation of children and young people in decision-making, especially in relation to education and healthcare, was emphasized.

4. Special session 4: Promoting a human-centered approach to artificial intelligence and digitalization in the Arab region

41. The session was moderated by Aya Jaafar of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Regional Office for the Arab States, Beirut. It was addressed by Hind Benammar, Arab Trade Union Confederation; Maher Mahrouq, Association of Banks in Jordan; Hoda Al Khzaimi, Strategic Consultant, United Arab Emirates; and Lina Oueidat, Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Lebanon.

42. The session addressed the impact of automation and the platform economy on workers' conditions, and the uneven ability of enterprises, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, to adopt new technologies due to financial, organizational and human barriers. The session included discussion of the importance of digital justice and the need to protect the most vulnerable. It was emphasized that the design of digital policies should be accompanied by effective implementation and monitoring mechanisms. Participants emphasized the need to involve representatives of governments, employers and workers in the formulation and implementation of digitalization strategies to ensure that the transformation was fair, inclusive and compliant with decent work laws. They emphasized the importance of protecting workers and leaving no one behind, including by building comprehensive and accessible social protection systems that kept pace with technological changes.

5. Special session 5: Reimagining the future of women in food systems: harnessing science, technology and partnership to advance the Sustainable Development Goals

43. The session was moderated by Khaled Eltaweel of the United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub. Welcoming notes were delivered by Raed Hattar, Arab Organization for Agricultural Development; Reem Najdawi, ESCWA; and Veronica Quattrola, Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The session was addressed by Dina Najjar, International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas; Inaya Ezzeddine, Member of Parliament of Lebanon; Dounia El-Khoury, Deir Al-Ahmar Women's Association, Lebanon; Samar Abu Safia, expert on women's participation and empowerment in agriculture, State of Palestine; Naema Abu Yahya, Greening the Desert Project, Jordan; and Dani Ibrahim, Founder of the company EA Advisory.

44. The session highlighted the challenges faced by women in Arab food systems and emphasized the importance of science, technology, innovation and partnerships in addressing them. Women played key roles in food and agricultural systems, natural resource management and domestic labour. Arab women faced limited employment opportunities, exclusion from decision-making and difficulties in accessing land, technology, finance and training. Leveraging technology and innovation, collecting socially disaggregated data and scaling up proven interventions were necessary for changing social norms, policies and laws that perpetuated gender inequality.

6. Special session 6: Supporting young people's learning, skilling and transition to decent work in the Arab countries

45. The session was facilitated by Mhamed Chamseddine Abdelmalek, Youth Advisory Group, Algeria; Mbarka Taleb, Ministry of Economy and Planning, Tunisia; Sayed Bou Francis, General Directorate of Vocational and Technical Education, Lebanon; Montoura Nakad, University of Balamand, Lebanon; Hasan Jaafar, YY ReGen, Lebanon; Bassma Abdulkhaleq, Youth Advisory Group, Yemen; Mohammed Zaid, Libotex, Libya; and Carlos Ayvazian, Coordinator, Global Shapers Beirut Hub.

46. The session assessed the progress made towards the national commitments made at the 2024 Regional High-level Meeting on Young People's Learning, Skilling and Transition to Decent Work. The representative of Tunisia presented the national multisectoral strategy for young people, which included practical initiatives to promote learning and earning pathways. The representative of Lebanon emphasized the growing demand for technical and vocational education as a key driver of youth employment, stressing the importance of strengthening partnerships with the private sector. A representative from the University of Balamand highlighted efforts to reform the curriculum by incorporating sustainability skills based on student feedback. Speakers pointed to skills gaps and obstacles, such as early marriage, that prevented young women from entering the labour market. The discussion stressed the importance of providing hands-on training opportunities, entrepreneurship programmes and skills development in the environmental and digital fields, and empowering girls.

7. Special session 7: Migration, employment and the future of work: changing dynamics in the Arab region

47. The session was facilitated by Ayman Zohry, an expert in population and migration studies. Speakers included El Sayed Torky, Federation of Egyptian Industries; Mohammad Maaytah, Arab Trade Union Confederation; Nader Kabbani, Middle East Council on Global Affairs; Sophie Nonnenmacher, Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa, International Organization for Migration (IOM); Noura Sadki, Higher Council for Youth, Algeria; and Nouha Benchikh, Ministry of Economic Inclusion, Small Business, Employment and Skills, Morocco.

48. The interventions addressed the interrelationship between the future of labour and migration in the Arab region during the fourth industrial revolution, and the role of migration in filling the skills gaps caused by those rapid transformations. Participants discussed tools for predicting future skills to be contemplated in educational policies. They called on Governments, the private sector, trade unions and stakeholders to cooperate to ensure decent work for all working men and women, including migrant workers, by recognizing their skills, investing in their development and guaranteeing their human and labour rights. They recommended action to improve labour market information systems and strengthen data collection in countries of origin and destination.

8. Special session 8: Delivering quality, driving equity from policy to access: a regional vision for medical products

49. The session was facilitated by Houda Langar of the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean of the World Health Organization. The panellists were Ali Ghamrawy, Egyptian Drug Authority; Lara Al-Halabi, Aramoun Primary Health Care Centre, Lebanon; Hassan Abdourahman Elmi, Supply Centre for Equipment and Medicines, Djibouti; and Rasha Hamra, World Health Organization, Lebanon Office.

50. The discussion was focused on promoting the local production of medicines, supporting relevant national systems and strengthening procurement and supply systems. Interventions addressed the achievements of the Egyptian Drug Authority, local medical product manufacturing capacity and modernization initiatives to improve access to medical products in Egypt; community perspectives on challenges and solutions related to equitable access to vaccines and other biomedical products in Lebanon; promoting accountability, transparency and traceability, including through digitalization of the pharmaceutical supply chain; measures to develop the health system in Djibouti; and the role of supply systems in ensuring the availability and accessibility of reproductive health products.

9. Special session 9: Sustainable Development Goals: a gender snapshot in the Arab region

51. The session was facilitated by Nora Isayan of the Regional Office for the Arab States of UN-Women. Opening remarks were delivered by Moez Doraid of the Regional Office for the Arab States of UN-Women and Tarik Alami of ESCWA. The session was addressed by Dominique Kanobana, Regional Office for the Arab States, UN-Women; Mustafa Khawaja, ESCWA; Maha Ali, National Commission for Women, Jordan; Khalid Abu Khalid, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics; Ali Fakh, Lebanese American University; and Aya Matsuura, Regional Office for the Arab States, ILO.

52. An overview of gender in the Arab region was presented, drawing on the 2024 report on that subject. Data were available for only 39.5 per cent of Goal indicators related to gender. National statistical offices were called on to prioritize the production of sex-disaggregated data and to close existing gaps over the coming five years. It was recommended that women's employment be increased in Arab countries by at least 5 per cent by 2030 through initiatives that addressed structural barriers and that were focused on high-growth sectors, backed by accountability metrics. There was an emphasis on the need to double care services and related infrastructure by 2030, including through public-private partnerships and the promotion of positive social norms.

10. Special session 10: Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals: accelerating progress and evidence-based action

53. The session was facilitated by Sukaina Al-Nasrawi of ESCWA. Rania Hedeya, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat); Akram Khraisat, Municipality of Greater Amman; Mohammed Ali Habouha, Governor of Berkane Province, Morocco; Ahmed AbuLaban, City Director, Ramallah, Palestine; Aya Nawwar, Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, Egypt; Nagwa Lachine, UN-Habitat Regional Office; and Tehmina Akhtar, UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States, participated in the session.

54. The session was focused on the urgent need to localize the Goals in the face of rapid urbanization. Voluntary local reviews were viewed as diagnostic tools that aligned with local and national priorities, supported evidence-based policymaking

and promoted citizen participation. Speakers emphasized the importance of data quality and the use of digital tools to detect gaps and guide recovery efforts. The discussions addressed the need to align local planning with national strategies and the importance of inclusive governance that ensured the inclusion of marginalized groups and the private sector. The Arab Mayors Academy was highlighted as a pivotal platform for building local capacity and connecting local needs with global frameworks.

D. Closing session

55. At the conclusion of the forum, Maisaa Youssef, leader of the cluster on the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals Coordination at ESCWA, shared an overview of the key messages from the Forum.

56. On behalf of the Chair of the Forum (Muhammad Ali Tamim, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Planning of Iraq), Saher Abdul-Kadhim Mahdi, Director of the Department of International Cooperation at the Ministry of Planning of Iraq, thanked ESCWA, LAS and the United Nations system entities operating in the region for organizing the Forum. He stated that Iraq would convey the messages of the Arab Forum to the high-level political forum on sustainable development, to be held in New York from 14–23 July 2025.

III. Participants

57. The Forum was attended by about 1,145 participants (637 in person at United Nations House in Beirut and 508 virtually), with high-level representation of Governments; parliaments; civil society; youth groups; think tanks; the private sector; regional, Arab and international organizations; supreme audit institutions; funds from the Arab region; universities; experts; media entities; and the organizers, namely ESCWA, LAS and United Nations agencies and organizations operating in the Arab region).

58. Twenty Arab countries were represented by delegations from their Governments or embassies in Lebanon: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Yemen and State of Palestine.

59. The United Nations and its organs were represented at the Forum by the Deputy Secretary-General of the Organization (by recorded video message) and representatives of: UNDP; Development Coordination Office; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; United Nations Population Fund; UN-Habitat; FAO; UNICEF; ILO; United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction; United Nations Office for Project Services; World Food Programme; United Nations Environment Programme; IOM; United Nations Industrial Development Organization; United Nations Volunteers; International Telecommunication Union; United Nations Global Compact; UN-Women; World Health Organization; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs; United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development; Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States; special envoys and special rapporteurs of the United Nations; and a significant number of United Nations representatives resident in Arab countries.