

# **System-Wide Annual Results Report for the Arab Region | 2020**

As delivered through the UN Development System



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## Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1 Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
A. Background	5
B. Opportunities	8
<b>CHAPTER 2 SDG Progress in the Arab region</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3 Formation and progress of the regional collaborative platform</b>	<b>13</b>
A. Strategic vision	14
B. Formation and progress	14
<b>CHAPTER 4 Results of the Issue Based Coalitions</b>	<b>18</b>
A. Migration	20
B. Food Security, Climate Action and the Environment	22
C. Humanitarian-Development (and Peace) Nexus	24
D. Urbanization	25
E. Gender Justice and Equality	26
F. Adolescents and Young People	27
G. Macro-economic Management and Social Protection	29
H. Quality Social Services	31
<b>Annex. Results achieved by United Nations entities at the regional level</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Endnotes</b>	<b>56</b>

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# 1 Introduction

- Background
- Opportunities



In 2020, like every other region worldwide, the Arab region<sup>1</sup> has had to contend with an unexpected challenge - the COVID-19 pandemic. However, unlike most other regions, the pandemic has exacerbated numerous pre-existing crises, and its impact is likely to be felt for many years to come.

Protracted conflict has reversed decades of development gains for many Arab countries, including Iraq, Libya, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in these countries has become more challenging. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development appears beyond reach for the State of Palestine, primarily owing to the Israeli occupation. The same applies to Lebanon, where a

series of crises continue to hold the country far below its development potential.

While most other regions worldwide have suffered from the economic consequences of the pandemic, Arab oil-exporting countries have been gravely affected by the significant decline in oil prices in early 2020 and their continuing volatility. The pandemic has also badly impacted Arab middle-income countries (MICs) that are dependent on tourism and remittances, both of which have witnessed a devastating decline. Arab least developed countries (LDCs) have not been spared the impact of the pandemic, given their already tight fiscal space and inability to fund COVID-19 response strategies commensurate with the magnitude and impact of the pandemic.

## A | Background

Home to 436 million people, the Arab region spans two continents and is quite diverse in its economies, climate and development challenges. Yet, Arab countries have similar values and traditions, and common development aspirations.

Still reeling from the 2008 global economic slowdown, the Arab region has witnessed dramatic economic and political shocks that have resulted in a continuous downside effect on economic growth in most countries. In addition to these cumulative challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic has hit the region with devastating impact. With over 3 million cases and 8,000 deaths, the full impact on human suffering will not be known until the end of the pandemic. The pandemic's negative impact on the SDGs, and development in general, will likely be felt for a decade, if not longer. The 2014 oil price plunge, and the slow recovery since, further weakened regional economic growth. Although growth

forecasts were slowly moving up in 2018 and 2019, the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the collapse of oil prices stunted growth prospects for 2020. Estimates for 2020 indicate a severe contraction of GDP growth in the range of -3 to -5.7 per cent, compared with the pre-pandemic projected growth rate of 2.5 per cent.<sup>2</sup>

This is equivalent to a contraction of between \$80 billion and \$152 billion of gross domestic product (GDP), owing to the pandemic's impact on oil markets, remittances, tourism, trade and investment.<sup>3</sup> The impact varies, however, by subregion and country group<sup>4</sup> in the Arab region. Countries whose economies were already vulnerable have been impacted the most by the pandemic.

Debt and fiscal pressures vary across the country groups. Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are relatively better off, although they are increasingly using debt-financing as a strategy to fund their expenditure needs

owing to low oil revenues since 2015. Fiscal pressure is high for most Arab MICs that are suffering from significant debt burdens, and for Arab LDCs that rely heavily on aid and external finance to meet liquidity requirements. On average, the region's public debt was about 45 per cent of regional GDP in 2018, which was only a quarter of GDP in 2008.<sup>5</sup>

Arab MICs hold the largest share of public debt in the region. On average, MIC public debt was 78 per cent of their GDP in 2018. Among Arab MICs, debt to GDP in Lebanon was the highest at 151 per cent in 2018. The pandemic has considerably increased debt risks. With large fiscal shortfalls in most Arab MICs and LDCs, debt burdens were expected to increase further in 2020. For instance, Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia, taken together, borrowed over \$10 billion over the period April-May 2020 under IMF short- and medium-term lending mechanisms.

With an increasing share of non-concessional loans and low access to grant finance from developed countries, most Arab MICs are facing increasing debt servicing burdens. Lebanon, for instance, spends nearly 42 per cent of public revenues on debt servicing (on average over the period 2016-2018). Tunisia spent nearly 20 per cent of its revenues on debt servicing over the same period. Egypt, Jordan and Morocco spent over 10 per cent of their revenues on debt servicing. While expanding the fiscal space to mitigate the medium to long-term impact of the pandemic is imperative for most Arab countries, increased debt servicing burdens result in significant resources being diverted away from essential public services.

Compared with \$9.6 trillion in stimulus packages allocated by countries globally, the cumulative fiscal stimulus in the Arab region amounted to only \$102 billion, equivalent to nearly 4 per cent of the region's GDP. With limited fiscal space, Arab MICs and LDCs face severe challenges in meeting expenditure needs to recover better and mitigate the impact of the pandemic. ESCWA estimates that these countries need at least an additional \$50 billion to fight the pandemic.<sup>6</sup>

The pandemic has increased the number of poor people by an estimated 16 million. One quarter of the Arab population can now be counted as poor, based on national poverty lines.<sup>7</sup> As a result of conflict, the Arab region is the only

region worldwide that has seen an increase in extreme poverty, from 4 per cent in 2013 to 6.7 per cent in 2015.<sup>8</sup>

Using a multidimensional poverty lens, poverty rates reach 41 per cent in 10 Arab countries, which constitute 75 per cent of the region's population.<sup>9</sup>

The pandemic might have increased the number of hungry people in the Arab region by between 5 million and 7 million in 2020. Recovery will be slow and may be less complete than in other regions.<sup>10</sup> Over half of the population in Arab countries does not have access to social protection and labour programmes,<sup>11</sup> making their economic situation even more vulnerable.

Already considered as one of the most unequal regions in the world, the pandemic has highlighted this long-standing and worsening situation in the Arab region, where 10 per cent of the population owns 76 per cent of the wealth.<sup>12</sup>

This inequality is also reflected in stark subnational disparities and marked inequalities between rural and urban areas. Almost three quarters of the population resides in low or lower middle-income countries, while the remaining quarter resides in high or upper middle-income countries.<sup>13</sup>

Social attitudes toward women differ dramatically across the region. The economic participation, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment of women in the Arab region is trailing that of women in the rest of the world. All 16 Arab countries in the Global Gender Gap Index ranked in the bottom 20 per cent, with three of the four lowest-ranked countries belonging to the Arab region.<sup>14</sup> The gender parity index for secondary school enrolment in the region still slightly favours boys at 0.95. There is a large range between countries for girls, who are severely disadvantaged in Somalia (0.46) and Yemen (0.73), compared with more girls than boys enrolled in Tunisia (1.14) and the State of Palestine (1.1).<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, young Arab women face the highest unemployment rate in the world at 41.8 per cent, more than double the world average.<sup>16</sup> Widespread violence exacerbates the situation of women and girls, with 37 per cent of ever-partnered women reporting experiencing physical violence in their lifetime. Over half of Arab countries do not criminalize violence against women, and the majority do not criminalize marital rape.<sup>17</sup>

The pandemic is exacerbating all forms of violence against women. In Iraq, for example, 65 per cent of the service provision points surveyed reported an increase in one or more types of gender-based violence (GBV).<sup>18</sup> Of those, 94 per cent reported an increase in intimate partner and family member violence within the household. The Iraq Information Centre received 40 per cent more calls reporting GBV incidents, mainly of domestic violence, after the outbreak of COVID-19 compared with previous months, supporting the findings of the survey. Services for domestic violence survivors, such as shelters and hotlines, have been strained or deprioritized during the pandemic, with already overburdened health-care facilities choosing to prioritize pandemic-related health concerns, leaving survivors with abuse-related health concerns without the care they need.<sup>19</sup> This situation is probably much worse in conflict zones or humanitarian settings, and in contexts with pre-existing movement controls such as the West Bank.

While the region has one of the highest rates of population growth, it has not yet fully benefitted from the energy, talent and potential of its young and relatively well-educated population, where about one quarter of the population is between 15 and 29.<sup>20</sup>

The region continues to face difficulties putting its young population to effective and value-adding work. Around 63 per cent of the population is of working age (15-64),<sup>21</sup> but 10.2 per cent is unemployed<sup>22</sup> and close to 85 per cent<sup>23</sup> of those employed work in the informal sector with poor working conditions and little, if any, social protection measures. While the 10.2 per cent unemployment rate in the region is the highest worldwide, the outlook for women and youth employment is even bleaker, with 19 per cent of women<sup>24</sup> and 23 per cent of working age young people<sup>25</sup> unable to find decent work. The pandemic is expected to result in 1.7 million job losses, with double the amount of job loss for women compared with men,<sup>26</sup> particularly since 89 per cent of the employed in the region work in countries with mandatory workplace closures because of the pandemic.<sup>27</sup>

Health systems and services trail behind the world average and are already overburdened,<sup>28</sup> with the pandemic taxing them further. Moreover, 74 million people in the region

are at increased risk of COVID-19 because they lack to handwashing facilities. In addition, 87 million people lack access to an improved drinking water source in their homes. This exposes them to a greater risk of contagion as they are forced to collect water daily from a public source, making girls and women especially vulnerable.<sup>29</sup> Public health functions, such as surveillance, testing strategies and contact tracing, gained prominence as these disciplines and their tools were promoted to guide the health and non-health measures taken to curb transmission and to respond to the impact of the pandemic.

Given the movement restrictions imposed in many Arab countries, meeting the pregnancy, labour, childbirth and postpartum needs of women has been a significant challenge, since most consultations are conducted in clinics and most births take place in hospitals.<sup>30</sup>

The impact of climate change is disproportionately borne by Arab countries, as temperatures continue to rise and natural disasters and extreme weather become more pervasive. The region has one of the highest rates of freshwater scarcity worldwide, severely constraining agricultural production and increasing dependency on global markets for major staple food commodities.<sup>31</sup> Water scarcity threatens rural livelihoods, and competition for water between different sectors and between rural and urban areas often affect the most vulnerable segments of society. Freshwater scarcity is exacerbated by population growth and increased urbanization, and by transboundary dependency, occupation and conflict, and climate change.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, in a region where oil and gas account for 65 per cent of government revenues, fossil-fuel dependency remains one of the highest globally, and 50 per cent of the rural population in Arab LDCs have no access to electricity.<sup>33</sup>

Mixed migration and cross border movement in search of better economic and social opportunities also impacts development. The Arab region hosted around 40 million migrants in 2019, representing 9.3 per cent of the region's population<sup>34</sup> and almost 15 per cent of all international migrants.<sup>35</sup> Migrants face high recruitment fees, poor working conditions particularly for low-skilled workers, limited access to basic services and justice mechanisms,

and large wage gaps compared with non-migrant workers. The result is increasing inequalities between the migrant and non-migrant populations.

Arab developing countries are less equipped than those in other regions to use ICT to minimize disruption caused by the pandemic. Just 57 per cent of households in the region have Internet, making it difficult to continue work from home.<sup>36</sup> Nearly half of the female population is not connected to the Internet nor has access to a mobile phone.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, 100 million students are currently out of school in the Arab region.<sup>38</sup> The negative impact of school closures will be felt disproportionately by poor and vulnerable children, especially girls who have higher dropout rates (19.1 per cent for girls compared with 15.9 per cent for boys) because they leave school to help their poor families, and risk child marriage, pregnancy, exposure to domestic violence and poverty.

Poor governance and a lack of inclusive, efficient and accountable institutions remain among the chronic challenges facing the region. Corruption, lack of civic space, and arbitrary detention are also major concerns.

Data measuring these issues show regression in the region between 2010 and 2016.<sup>39</sup> Peaceful protests as well as violent demonstrations, mob violence and excessive police force in the face of demonstrations have markedly increased in the majority of Arab countries in recent years. However, most Arab Governments have not prioritized social development issues, such as quality social services, social justice and decent work, which spur many of these protests. The Arab region has the world's highest percentage of military expenditure as a share of GDP (6.2 per cent), almost three times higher than North America (2.06 per cent).<sup>40</sup> In contrast, investment in research and development is just 0.64 per cent of GDP, compared with a world average of 1.73 per cent. These structural governance deficiencies and resulting crises have been major obstacles to achieving sustainable and inclusive development in the Arab region. These negative trends continue to impede the realization of the 2030 Agenda and have led to the largest humanitarian crisis in the world, where 55 million<sup>41</sup> inhabitants need humanitarian assistance to survive and 26 million<sup>42</sup> have found themselves displaced either internally or as refugees in neighbouring countries.

## B | Opportunities

Given existing challenges and the additional burden of the pandemic, there is an opportunity to build back better, addressing disparities and inequalities. Fully adhering to universal human rights across all levels of Government and society and administering an inclusive and participatory development approach are critical for achieving the 2030 Agenda, and eliminating inequalities by gender, age, disability status, and urban and rural residence.

With national Governments at the forefront, decisive leadership is emerging as a necessity in determining the success of the pandemic response. This decisive leadership is driven by science, responds rapidly, ensures good stakeholder coordination, appreciates trusted public

communication, believes in partnerships, and ensures commitment to global solidarity. The approaches and actions taken by Arab Governments have set precedents and clear lessons for successful future responses to health emergencies to overcome challenges, such as communicating uncertainty and risk while addressing public concerns, promoting right behaviours, explaining tough measures, and asking for compliance while reassuring communities.

There is also an opportunity for the region to promote peaceful solutions, exerting all efforts to end conflict and enhance governance structures to build just and peaceful societies. It is critical to support representative, inclusive

and effective institutions at all levels, to expand civic space, and to strengthen the State's role as a guarantor of equal political, social and economic rights. The region should link humanitarian aid with long-term sustainable development, and uphold the rule of law, fight corruption, and promote civil liberties.

In recovery efforts, there is an opportunity to restructure economies to be more sustainable, inclusive, and productive. There is also a great opportunity to capitalize on the demographic dividend from the large proportion of young people who will soon be entering the workforce, resulting in increased economic productivity and growth. However, it is critical to promote job growth and development policies that provide opportunities to young people and women in both rural and in urban areas. Innovation should be valued and harnessed, transferring knowledge and technologies for sustainable development. Furthermore, universal rights-based social protection systems should be implemented, and unequal access to resources and services at the subnational level should be addressed to ensure that no one is left behind.

There is a need to strengthen political commitment to gender equality and introduce and reform legislation to end all forms of discrimination against women and girls, including discrimination in women's economic participation. Women's economic independence and access to resources is a critical focus for their empowerment. Targeted social and behavioural change is necessary to achieve gender equality in the region. Investment should be made in young girls, so that they have equal opportunities to achieve their full potential and contribute to the economy.

Investment in young people is critical, given that they comprise a third of the region's population. The region must guarantee the right to equitable and quality education, while at the same time re-envisioning the role of education

to foster innovation and creative solutions for the future. In a region with such high rates of youth unemployment, especially among young women, it is critical to invest in children and young people and to ensure they can pursue opportunities for sustainable livelihoods, halting the intergenerational transfer of poverty.

Development and adaption of national responses to climate change mitigation in line with global agreements can make the region more resilient and strengthen effective and inclusive water governance. There is an opportunity to adopt and operationalize an integrated nexus approach, linking water, energy and food security, thus enhancing coherence and coordination across social and economic sectors for better development outcomes.

Although the Arab region faces myriad challenges, there are many opportunities to ensure the SDGs contribute to a positive change in people's lives, ensuring that no one is left behind. Capitalizing on the young population and guaranteeing their right to education and gainful employment, realizing women's right to equality and participation in all aspects of society, addressing urban-rural and subregional equalities and access to resources, and creating policies that are inclusive of the region's most vulnerable, including older persons, children and persons with disabilities, are critical initiatives for the prosperity and wellbeing of the region's populations.

One year into the pandemic, it is clear that priorities need to be rethought and dialogues need to be held on the importance of equity, international solidarity, investing in science and technology, accelerating the adoption of digital tools, enhancing investments in public health, and ensuring universal health coverage. These issues are at the core of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and are determinants of other goals for progress towards a just and developed world.

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# 2 **SDG Progress** in the Arab region



## The Arab region is not on track to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

On several critical indicators, the region lags far behind other regions. The reasons for slow progress are often structural and systemic impediments that cut across most Arab countries.

The region lacks quality, regular, harmonized and disaggregated data on almost all SDG indicators. This is evident in voluntary national reviews and United Nations reports on the region, despite multiple capacity-building efforts at the national and regional levels to generate more and better data.

Where data does exist, they highlight insufficient progress under the 2030 Agenda. For instance, considering SDGs 3 and 4, a number of indicators in the region show progress over the past decades, notably those related to maternal and infant mortality or enrolment in primary education. Nonetheless, other critical indicators under SDGs 3 and 4 do not reflect a similar trajectory. As an example, the adolescent birth rate in the Arab region is higher than the world average, and significantly higher than that in East and South East Asia or in Central and South Asia. The proportion of children achieving minimum proficiency in mathematics in lower secondary education is below the world average, and the participation rate in organized learning pre-primary is the second lowest globally.

The proportion of children in the Arab region who have experienced physical punishment and/or psychological aggression is higher than the world average and all other regions except for Oceania, and bribery incidence is significantly higher than the world average (SDG 16). Unemployment in the Arab region is the highest globally, especially among women and young people (SDG 8).



Regional assessments of data availability in August 2020 show that the region produced 37 per cent of country data with sufficient data points from the SDG Global Database. (Arab SDG Monitor)

Data availability at the regional level (that allows for obtaining a regional average) is particularly weak when it comes to gender equality and reduced inequality (SDGs 5 and 10), peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16), and sustainability (SDGs 12, 13 and 14). (Arab Sustainable Development Report, 2020)



Manufacturing value added as a proportion of GDP is significantly low compared with the global average, above only that of Oceania (SDG 9).

Looking at data through the 'leaving no one behind' lens, the picture is bleak. It points to increased vulnerability for a number of social groups, including women, children, persons with disabilities, older persons, migrants, refugees and displaced populations. These groups and others are at risk of being left behind in the region, as social protection systems are often inadequate or fragmented, and not sufficiently targeted to protect these vulnerable groups.

Overall analysis of the SDGs shows that inequality between social groups and different regions at the national level is a pressing concern, including in terms of gender inequality. The pandemic has worsened the situation by increasing the number of poor people, stagnating economies, and exacerbating food insecurity. Health and education systems, already plagued by inequality within and across Arab countries, are now further strained and many can no longer access critical services. The impact will reverberate

across SDG targets and indicators for years to come, impacting the wellbeing of children, women, the poor and other groups.

Inequality between countries is also high in the Arab region. The pandemic has highlighted disparities between Arab oil-exporting countries, oil-importing MICs, and fragile and conflict-affected countries in their capacity to respond to the pandemic and ensuing crises. The differences are most pronounced in the capacity of social protection and health systems.

Nonetheless, SDG progress prior to the pandemic was also highly variable between Arab countries, especially under SDG 3. For example, in 2018, health-worker density of physicians ranged between 25.3 per 10,000 inhabitants in Kuwait, 24.9 in Qatar, 17.2 in Algeria, 7.1 in Iraq, 4.5 in Egypt, and 1.9 in Mauritania.<sup>43</sup>

The pandemic and protracted conflict are reversing development gains. As the pandemic and its economic impact continue to challenge the region, Arab countries' reduced fiscal space, dwindling investments, and shrinking development aid will further slow progress towards the SDGs. In addition to the United Nations socioeconomic response plans (SERPs)<sup>44</sup> developed at the global level, Arab countries<sup>45</sup> have developed SERPs, or are in the process of doing so. The most frequent Goals being explicitly addressed are SDGs 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 16 for fragile and conflict-affected countries; SDG 3, 5, 8, 10, 16 for oil-importing MICs; and SDGs 3, 5, 8, 10, 16 for oil-exporting countries. In addition, conflict now frames the narrative in a number of countries in the region, including those experiencing violence and unrest like Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, or those hosting refugees like Jordan and Lebanon.

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# 3 Formation and progress of the regional collaborative platform

- Strategic vision
- Formation and progress
  - Regional Collaborative Platform and Issue-Based Coalitions
  - Knowledge and Data Management Hub
  - Transparency and Result-Based Management
  - Back-office Efficiencies

## A | Strategic vision

The Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP) in Arab countries, formally established in July 2020 to ECOSOC resolution A/RES/2020/23, is the main coordination instrument for United Nations entities operating at the regional level to define, articulate and optimize the regional value-added proposition of the United Nations system to support member States in achieving the 2030 Agenda and tackling emerging and unforeseen development challenges.

This regional value-added proposition includes providing member States, directly and through the regional cooperation organizations United Nations country teams, with relevant and innovative knowledge products, policy simulation tools, actionable policy recommendations, and

coherent and meaningful data, including United Nations data and statistics, big data and other innovative data. The value-added proposition relates to the following:

- Tackling transboundary development challenges.
- Ensuring more effective engagement with global and regional agendas.
- Addressing regional issues of common interest to member States.

RCP, intended to be a one-stop-shop, delivers support in an agile, proactive and pragmatic manner directly to member States, if requested, or through regional coordinators and United Nations country teams.

## B | Formation and Progress

Drawing on the five recommendations of the Secretary-General as spelled out in his report (A/74/73-E/2019/14) on the implementation of the General Assembly resolution A/RES/71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, and following Member States' welcoming these efforts in ECOSOC resolution A/RES/2020/23 and in General Assembly resolution A/RES/74/297, the United Nations Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP) for the Arab Region was formally established in July 2020.

Arab countries have made significant progress in each of the following five areas.

### *Recommendation 1: Create the Regional Collaborative Platform*

The Arab region's United Nations Development System had been working closely together since March 2019, following the Secretary-General's development system reform process. Following approval by the Economic and Social Council in July 2020, RCP met formally in September and October 2020. These meetings brought together all regional directors of

United Nations agencies to collaborate and review progress in advancing common priorities. All previous mechanisms, including the Regional Collaboration Mechanism (RCM) and the Regional United Nations Sustainable Development Group (R-UNSDG) have now been transitioned to RCP.

RCP has set up a joint secretariat, organized by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Development Coordination Office and ESCWA. RCP has agreed on the functions and organization of the joint secretariat, including its terms of reference.

RCP developed and agreed its workplan for 2020-2021, which was formally adopted in November 2020. The workplan outlines the RCP strategic vision, key success areas, key results areas, activities, responsibilities and timelines.

RCP established eight issue-based coalitions (IBCs). These dynamic IBCs inform RCP work and are chaired by United Nations entities with relevant mandates and expertise. IBCs produce joint regional public goods in the form of knowledge products, data, tools and policy

recommendations, targeting the most pressing issues in the region. IBCs in the Arab Region include the following:

- Migration;
- Food Security, Climate Action and the Environment;
- Humanitarian-Development (and Peace) Nexus;
- Urbanization;
- Gender Justice and Equality;
- Adolescents and Youth Empowerment;
- Macro-Economic Management and Social Protection;
- Quality Social Services.

IBC's have each developed their own workplans and terms of reference, and are now undertaking substantive work. The results of each IBC is detailed in the following chapter.

*Recommendations 2 and 4: Establish strong knowledge management hubs; and consolidate existing capacity around data and statistics*

A Task Force on Knowledge Management and Data was established, which is currently developing an online knowledge management and data hub called MANARA,

meaning 'lighthouse' in Arabic. This powerful platform is due to launch in early 2021.

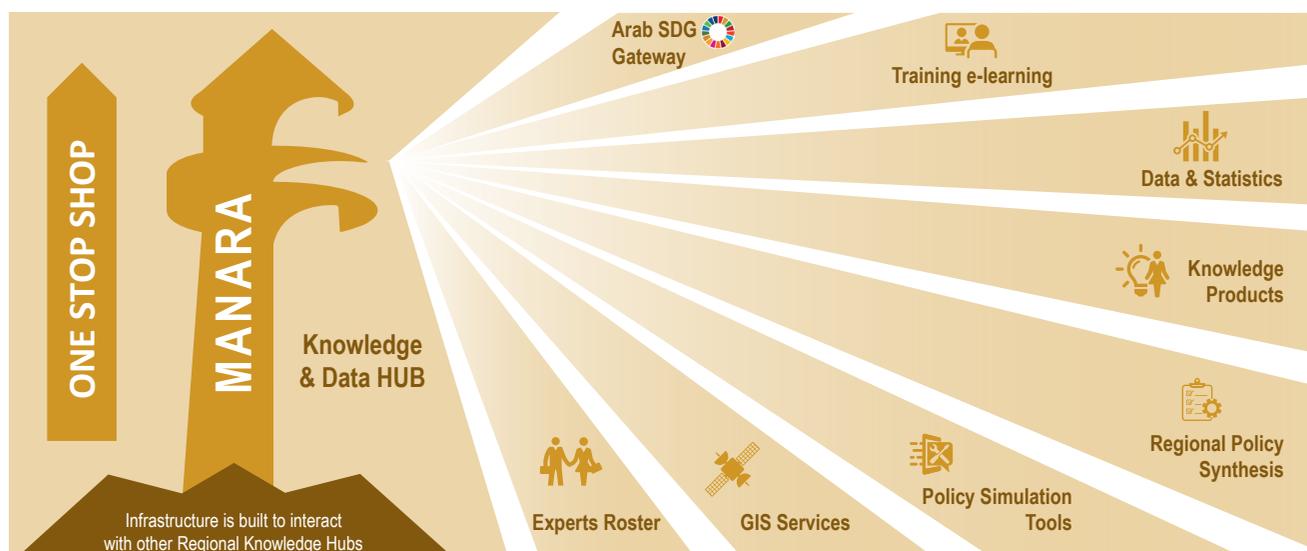
MANARA is intended to be a one-stop-shop for all knowledge and data from United Nations sources, member States and other development actors to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. It is intended to serve and will be accessible to regional cooperation organizations, United Nations country teams and member States, and will include several tools available in Arabic and English, including the following:

- Arab SDG Gateway, featuring the following:
  - An interactive SDG monitoring tool to assess progress on SDG implementation at the regional and national levels, with regional and country SDG profiles;
  - A comprehensive SDG data portal;
  - Specific 'leaving no one behind' data dashboards;
  - An e-handbook on SDG metadata;
  - A section on finance for development;

### Knowledge and Data Hub - MANARA (English & Arabic)

Task Force led by ITU & ESCWA – Members from 19 UN Agencies

ILO, IOM, ITU, FAO, OHCHR, UN-AIDS, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, UNESCWA, UNFPA, UN-Habitat, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNOPS, UNV, WFP, WHO



- SDG knowledge and learning material;
- A calendar of SDG events;
- A repository of evidence-based policy material.
- A comprehensive platform for data and statistics for the Arab region, based on nationally sourced data and data from United Nations custodian agencies. These data will be complemented by estimates (nowcasting) for the most recent time periods and data based on non-conventional data sources – big data. Currently, this data platform comprises over 1.5 million data points forming over 160 thousand timeseries.
- A set of knowledge products including the following:
  - Intelligent search engine tailored to the needs of Governments and United Nations staff members, which can analyse and catalogue millions of documents and provide tailored reports to users, in particular regional cooperation organizations, United Nations country teams and public officials;
  - A document filter and ranking application (ISTISHARA) capable of ranking documents against the SDGs, United Nations resolutions and national development plans or other large collection of reference documents;
  - An assessment building wizard to support users in developing tools for assessments/surveys and analysing data, using the latest education and game theory tools;
  - An e-publishing wizard (in Arabic and English) embedded in the main application to allow those using the search engine to collect information based on pre-established document formats, and thus aid drafting processes and producing documents online;
  - A mind-map wizard that allows users to build transformational maps based on relationships between concept or ideas.
- A regional United Nations development system (UNDS) e-learning platform for development issues, including public policy in Arabic and English, targeting civil servants, regional coordinators, United Nations staff members, and the general public. Courses are being developed in partnership with the United Nations System Staff College, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, the University of Michigan, the International Council for Local

Environmental Initiatives, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and other partners. They will be offered free of charge when possible.

- Comprehensive expert roster to guide regional cooperation organizations and United Nations country teams to existing United Nations regional capacity that can be tapped to support the preparation of common country assessments under the Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and other needs.
- A common UNDS online Arab Geospatial Data Hub to support other functions of MANARA.
- A set of policy simulation tools based on various economic models, including computable general equilibrium (CGE) models to help users in assessing the impact of policies on various population segments and economic sectors.

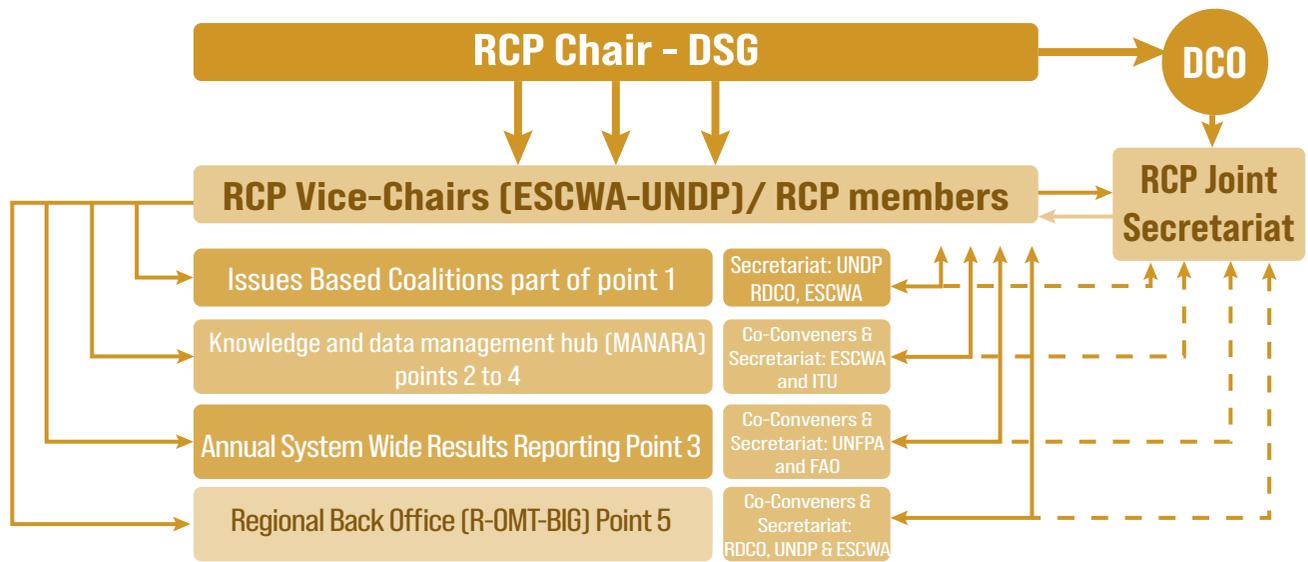
*Recommendation 3: Enhance transparency and results-based management*

RCP has established the Task Force on Annual Reporting, which has supported RCP in monitoring IBC progress and preparing the present annual report, with input and guidance from United Nations agencies.

*Recommendation 5: Improve back-office efficiencies*

Efforts are ongoing to implement back-office services in the region, including adopting modules of the Business Operations Strategy (BOS) as they become available by 2022. The Regional Operations Management Team (R-OMT) is co-chaired by the Regional Development Coordination Office (R-DCO), UNDP and ESCWA. R-OMT has approved its terms of reference and is currently considering a workplan in line with BOS principles. It will align regional BOS strategies with global and national strategies based in part on feedback from regional cooperation organizations, as required. The Regional Common Back Office (CBO) will be established prior to the 2022 global launch date.

### Functional Structure of Arab States RCP



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# 4 Results of the Issue Based Coalitions

- Migration
- Food Security, Climate Action and the Environment
- Humanitarian-Development (and Peace) Nexus
- Urbanization
- Gender Justice and Equality
- Adolescents and Young People
- Macro-economic Management and Social Protection
- Quality Social Services

# Collective Results and Alignment

The Arab States Issue-Based Coalitions have collectively produced:



	SDGs	ASDR Priority Areas	COVID Response	Arab COVID Brief	National Development Plans
Migration	●	●	●	●	●
Food security, climate action and environment	●	●	●	●	●
Urbanization	●	●	●	●	●
Humanitarian-Development Nexus	●	●	●	●	
Gender Justice and Equality	●	●	●	●	●
Youth empowerment and Inclusion	●	●	●	●	●
Macro-economic Management and Social Protection	●	●	●	●	●
Quality Social Services and Community Resilience	●	●	●	●	●



## Migration

In helping to address regional challenges, the IBC on Migration produced the following results:

- Guidance to member States to improve socioeconomic wellbeing of migrants and refugees, with a focus on its impact on women and children, and on trafficking in persons and repatriation measures, through a technical paper and a policy brief on the “Impact of COVID-19 on migrants and refugees in the Arab region” that analysed the effect of the pandemic ;
- Joint advocacy for universal health coverage, especially the safety and health of migrants and displaced populations in the region;
- Support to Governments to undertake a first assessment of progress made in implementing the Global Compact on Migration within the Arab region, with the participation of all relevant stakeholders;
- Mapping the system-wide response of migration-related programmes, projects, publications and other activities in the Arab region, including a survey to create a clear and comprehensive overview of recent, ongoing and future projects to ensure complementarity, non-duplication, gaps, relevance and prioritization of migration-related actions by the United Nations system in the Arab region;
- Accelerating joint data collection and coordination at points of entry.

The IBC on Migration also contributed to the following results, in collaboration with regional United Nations Network on Migration and in partnership with the League of Arab States:

- The first Regional Review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM);
- Capacity-building of Government migration focal points through two workshops, with the participation of United Nations agencies members of the regional and national United Nations networks on migration;

- Technical and policy support and capacity-building were provided to member States to draft voluntary GCM review reports submitted by 10 member States in the Arab region, in addition to the regional review, through a whole-of-government and a whole-of-society approach;
- Two multi-stakeholder dialogue sessions on GCM, where stakeholders exchanged their experiences in national consultation processes and provided suggestions for meaningful engagement of stakeholders at the regional conference;
- An online survey for stakeholder inputs to the GCM Regional Review for the Arab region;
- The Task Force on COVID-19 and Migration/Mobility, which has developed and updated an online repository for all agencies to provide related information, articles and materials to promote system-wide information sharing and coherence.

## Partnerships

In addition to its three United Nations co-conveners, the IBC on Migration invited the League of Arab States to co-convene IBC meetings and activities. This has facilitated coordination with, and political support from, member States on migration issues, especially with regard to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

In this context, IBC provided technical support to the Arab Regional Consultative Process on Migration and Refugee Affairs (ARCP)

In 2021, several activities will be organized, including the following:

- A preliminary assessment on the COVID-19 response for migrant workers;
- Consultations with parliamentarians, regional consultative processes, and other thematic groups;
- The GCM Regional Review Conference, designed to ensure whole-of-society and whole-of-government approaches to incorporate the diverse views and expertise of stakeholders and address specific vulnerabilities of different migrant categories, such as women and children;
- The 2021 edition of the flagship Situation Report on International Migration, which will build on the previous editions (2015, 2017, 2019), provide regional analysis of migration trends and patterns to and from the region, offer an update on policies adopted by member States related to migration governance, and focus on building the resilience of migrants;
- A dynamic platform for the active engagement of different stakeholders, such as civil society organizations, businesses and academia, as well as various categories of migrants, including women and children.



## Food Security, Climate Action and the Environment

In helping to address the challenges of the region, the IBC on Food security, Climate Action and the Environment produced the following results:

- A 2020 assessment report of sustainable consumption and production in the Arab region;
- A policy actions report proposing country and region-specific measures and actions for Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, the State of Palestine and the Syrian Arab Republic to advance sustainable consumption and production;
- A joint United Nations statement on the status of nutrition during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Arab region, which included a number of actions to respond to and recover from the impact of the pandemic on nutrition;
- The Regional Nutrition Strategy 2020-2030, adapted to take into account the pandemic, and disseminated to all member States;
- Three workshops to strengthen capacity on nationally determined contributions (NDCs) were organized for designated national authorities (DNAs) of Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, the Sudan, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates on the Clean Development Mechanism including the following:
  - A virtual workshop on the process and provisions of NDCs, engaging government experts from MENA countries involved in NDC preparation;
  - A virtual workshop on integrating gender into national climate actions and the convening of the eighth Regional Dialogue on Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) for the MENA region;
  - A technical workshop on climate finance for finance experts in Arab countries, in partnership with the League of Arab States;
- A consultative group of experts (CGE) virtual training on existing measurement, reporting and verification (MRV) arrangements and the enhanced transparency framework for MENA countries;

- Three virtual meetings to discuss the Arab position on the June Momentum for Climate Change, in preparation for the United Nations Climate Change Dialogues 2020 and the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference;
- An expert group meeting on resource efficiency in the Arab region, monitoring progress of SDG 12 and building back better from COVID-19, calling for updating the existing Arab Regional Strategy for Sustainable Consumption and Production adopted by the League of Arab States in November 2009 in line with the current status of the Arab region;
- A guide on integrating ACE in NDCs was translated into Arabic to expand outreach in the MENA region;
- Training material, including water aware climate policies, water policies and climate-centric development policies;
- A regional training package enabling countries to set their water-climate action outlook;
- A virtual capacity-building workshop for Arab climate change negotiators on the Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture;
- Joint efforts to integrate disaster risk reduction and climate change considerations into United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks (UNSDCFs) in Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon in 2021. A guidance note on integrating disaster risk reduction and climate change in UNSDCFs was developed along with a training package to equip United Nations country teams with the necessary tools and capacity to implement it.
- Technical support to the League of Arab States in developing a draft of the Arab Regional Strategic Framework and Action Plan for Zero-Hunger (ARSF), which will set the basis for a comprehensive consultation with Governments and relevant stakeholders. Member countries are considering the report for approval in 2021;
- Supporting the business continuity of water utilities to address the pandemic, and conducting consultations with Arab utility regulators;
- First round of training on groundwater governance;
- A draft of the Regional Assessment Report (RAR) on Disaster Risk Reduction was developed and submitted to members of the RAR Editorial Committee and peer reviewers;
- A survey on the review of NDCs and the second phase of the Lima Adaptation Knowledge Initiative (LAKI) was launched to implement actions to close adaptation knowledge gaps identified in the first phase (2015-2017);
- Inter-agency water collaborative platform have facilitated the exchange of information on planned activities to ensure coordinated and joint implementation of similar scope activities for the remainder of the biennium 2020-21, optimizing the comparative advantages of partner organizations and establishing synergies towards achieving unified/common goals;
- Initial coordination meetings on preparing the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade 2018-2028;
- Discussions initiated between the League of Arab States, the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and ESCWA on guidelines for sustainable allocation of water resources for agriculture;
- The 2020 Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition for the Arab States will be published in the first quarter of 2021.



## Humanitarian- Development (and Peace) Nexus

In helping to address the challenges of the region, the IBC on the Humanitarian-Development (and Peace) Nexus produced the following results:

- Joint action-oriented note on the Humanitarian-Development (and Peace) Nexus (HDPN) and COVID-19 recovery:
  - Under development: key building blocks have been identified and a detailed outline has been produced;
  - Key points and recommendations from this brief are expected to be further discussed at the regional multi-stakeholder consultation on HDPN and the SDGs;
- Virtual depository of tools and reports:
  - The depository facilitates access for United Nations country teams in the region to relevant guidance, tools and other resources to enhance understanding of the nexus and thereby strengthen the collaboration and cooperation;
  - The depository consists of four folders and a total of 55 documents, and is accessible to UNCTs HDPN focal points;
  - The depository is a ‘living resource’ and will be populated on an ongoing basis;
- In 2021, the joint action-oriented note on HDPN and the COVID-19 recovery will be articulated around recent advances and persistent challenges in HDPN, and challenges and opportunities surrounding the application of the HDPN approach in the context of COVID-19 and related responses;
- In 2021, an online multi-stakeholder consultation on the HDPN-COVID-19-SDG nexus will be conducted as part of a special session of the 2021 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development.



## Urbanization

In helping to address the challenges of the region, the IBC on Urbanization produced the following results:

- A regional event held on 16 and 17 December 2020 to showcase and highlight best practices and lessons learned from developing national urban policies, showcasing experiences from Egypt and Morocco;
- A virtual side event on “Harnessing the force of urbanization to accelerate SDG delivery: the VLR and SDG cities global initiative” was conducted on 30 September 2020 as part of the Urban 20 Mayors Summit to promote city data collection in the region;
- An online webinar on “Arab cities and COVID-19: Disaster preparedness and emergency response” was held on 27 July 2020;
- An online survey on Arab cities’ response to COVID-19 was circulated by IBC in June 2020. The survey sought to capture local level institutional arrangements to respond to the pandemic in the short and medium term. The survey was answered by 47 cities/municipalities from 12 Arab countries;
- Regional launch of the Making Cities Resilient (MCR2030) programme was organized on 5 November 2020, which brought regional partners and cities together to share good practices and express interest in the new MCR2030;
- A regional concept note on the integration of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs into recovery and reconstruction processes in conflict-affected Arab countries;
- A package of tools and knowledge products on SDG11 was compiled to be shared with United Nations country teams in the first quarter of 2021 to support common country assessments and SERP processes, and the mapping of relevant regional events for joint advocacy;
- Non-United Nations members engaged in consultations and product delivery, including the League of Arab State, Cities Alliance and the Islamic Development Bank;
- In 2021, the IBC on Urbanization plans to revamp the State of Arab Cities Report 2020 to reflect issues and challenges resulting from the pandemic.



## Gender Justice and Equality

In helping to address the challenges of the region, the IBC on Gender Justice and Equality produced the following results:

- A policy brief on the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls in the Arab region, released in March 2020;
- A policy Brief on “COVID-19 and Essential services provision for survivors of violence against women and girls - A Snapshot from the Arab States”;
- Follow-up evidence-based brief concerning the recorded impact of COVID-19 on women and girls, responding to the significant public demand for action by policymakers. The brief focuses on the impact of the pandemic on violence against women and girls;
- High-level Regional Dialogue on Violence Against Women and COVID-19, organized with the League of Arab States;
- Situation analysis (SITAN) report on women and girls in the Arab region;
- Online workshop on the UNCT-SWAP gender equality scorecard and gender marker, held in September 2020;
- Cost-analysis for the implementation of SDG 5 in the Arab region;
- Public awareness video on the risk of violence against women owing to COVID-19;
- Webinar on gender-inclusive language for IBC regional communications personnel;
- Diverse communications materials to increase public awareness of the key challenges related to gender equality and women’s empowerment in the Arab region in 2020. The social media assets reached over 225,000 people through UN-Women’s digital platforms alone;
- Generation Equality Forum engagement initiatives across the region;
- A gender equality working group established under the Regional Health Alliance.



## Adolescents and Young People

In helping to address the challenges of the region, the IBC on Adolescents and Youth has produced the following results:

In keeping with Youth 2030 and the United Nations Inter-agency Task Team for Young People (UNIATTYP) 2018-2020 Regional Framework of Joint Strategic Actions for Young People in the Arab States\MENA Region, the IBC has developed interventions in the following five areas:

- Participation and civic engagement:
  - Youth-led digital space developed “MINASSATY”:
    - Brings young people together to join efforts and find ways and opportunities to strengthen youth development in the Arab region;
  - Youth Charter in the Arab Region:
    - Drafted as a main reference document for youth policies, strategies and programmes.
- Health and wellbeing, including continuity of service during the pandemic:
  - Digital solution for youth-friendly services “SHABAB IT”;
  - Adolescent and youth country profiles developed in view of updating evidence to better inform national policies, strategies and programmes. Profiles on HIV/AIDS and are ready for dissemination;
  - Adolescent implementation guidance in selected countries: six virtual webinars were held to provide technical orientation on AHAA to country teams Governments, non-governmental organizations and country offices;
  - Engaging with adolescents, particularly those most at risk, to identify their needs, concerns and risk behaviours during the pandemic. A specific study was started in Jordan and the State of Palestine with adolescents (12-19 years old) and their caregivers to identify the needs of adolescents during the pandemic.

● Education and skills development (quality and relevance of skilling in the pandemic/chronic phase of COVID-19); and employment and entrepreneurship:

- Upgraded Regional Youth-To-Youth Peer Education (YPEER) Manual: Completed and validated through a regional expert meeting;
- Competency-based training manual for practitioners outlining the approach and process of developing CBT programmes, launched by ILO/UNICEF in Arabic and English ([www.ilo.org/beirut/publications/WCMS\\_757836/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/beirut/publications/WCMS_757836/lang--en/index.htm));
- Joint technical support provided to Egypt and the State of Palestine to support GenU country-level partnership formation.

● Peace and security:

- Establishing the Regional Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) in the MENA region.

The launch g took place on 14 December 2020 with the participation of more than 40 representatives of national youth coalitions, ministries of youth, independent experts and regional and international partners;

- Establishing national YPS coalitions in Jordan, the State of Palestine and Tunisia as planned, with additional support provided to Iraq and Yemen;
- Providing support to Somalia and the Sudan, which are eligible for the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) and are currently implementing or applying to PBF projects;
- In 2021, the IBC on Adolescents and Young People will complete a policy brief on the status of adolescent health policies in the region.

# \$ Macro-economic Management and Social Protection

In helping to address the challenges of the region, the IBC on Macro-economic Management and Social Protection has produced the following results:

*Pillar 1: Macroeconomic management, financing for development, trade and debt*

- A macroeconomic modelling tool exploring the impact of COVID-19 on growth and fiscal pressures and debt stabilizing scenarios simulating fiscal and monetary policy changes were presented for Jordan and Tunisia;
- A fiscal policy response to public debt and debt sustainability in Arab countries was proposed to Governments to work out a well-strategized debt stabilizing public expenditure framework in the medium term, including augmenting existing borrowing or new borrowings;
- In parallel, appropriate growth enhancing policies can support growth and improve primary balances by improving revenue buoyancy. A conducive monetary policy can complement and provide necessary conditions towards maximizing the value of fiscal measures;
- An impact assessment of COVID-19 on economic challenges is under development; the macro-economic modelling has been completed;
- In 2021, a policy brief on the impact of COVID-19 on economic challenges will be finalized, and a global/ regional workshop on assessing debt sustainability tools post-pandemic will be held.

*Pillar 2: Social protection*

- Regional capacity-building initiative on social protection (TRANSFORM):
  - Training of an initial cohort of six Arabic speaking master trainers;
  - Arabic master trainers have gathered feedback and comments to better adapt TRANSFORM materials to

the regional context, and are a key resource to take the initiative forward in the region. A large share of the TRANSFORM training material has already been translated and is available in Arabic;

- Mapping of social protection responses to COVID-19 across the region, including social protection measures in humanitarian contexts:
  - Covering social protection responses undertaken by member States and United Nations agencies in the region between March and June 2020, launched in August 2020;
  - The final report can be found [here](#). An Arabic version of the mapping was developed and shared in September 2020;
- In 2021, several activities will be organized including the following:
  - Meeting with senior policy makers and technical networks to share/cross fertilize practice on social protection and a COVID-19/post-COVID-19 responses, building on existing initiatives;
  - Jointly supporting selected countries to contribute to more inclusive and shock-responsive social protection systems, ‘building back smarter’ learning from the COVID-19 responses, and pooling combined technical expertise for more impact;
  - MENA adapted version of TRANSFORM, which is an innovative approach to strengthening national and subnational capacities to implement social protection floors;
  - Advocacy/policy note on more systematic, inclusive and gender responsive social protection responses to economic shocks, humanitarian needs and COVID-19, covering contributory and non-contributory social protection.



## Quality Social Services

In helping to address the challenges of the region, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic, the IBC on Quality Social Services produced the following results:

- An assessment and review of the impact of COVID-19 on reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health-care services. Following the review, a meeting was organized on 17 November with ministers of health on the continuation of essential reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health-care services in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- A webinar organized in May 2020 on “Digital health, innovation and COVID-19 response: Global and EMR perspectives”;
- A partners working group and coordination platform on COVID-19;
- A regional coordination mechanism: regular meetings, enhanced coordination and country support at the regional level between all lead and support organizations;
- Libya and the Sudan identified as priority countries for focused support in the first six months. The purpose is to identify opportunities for country-based collective actions that will contribute to enhancing response capacity to humanitarian crises and outbreaks, as well as progressive expansion of essential health services with a humanitarian-development nexus approach;
- Strengthening information management is under discussion in vulnerable and fragile settings to inform planning and monitoring of humanitarian health operations: collaboration with health cluster on review and validation of key health indicators in countries under humanitarian response plan;
- Humanitarian-development (and peace) nexus for health: technical discussions and contributions in finalizing the guide on implementing HDPN for health;
- Celebrated 2020 as the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife, including a virtual planning

meeting with the International Council of Nurses and International Confederation of Midwives;

- Organized with the International Council of Nurses and International Confederation of Midwives a virtual meeting on 8 and 9 December 2020 to agree on approaches to taking forward the Call for Action, adopted by the Regional Committee in 2019, which urges Governments to invest in nursing and midwifery education, employment and retention;
- Established national (multisectoral) platforms engaging communities and civil society organizations building on successful experiences from other Arab countries;
- Built community capacity on meaningful engagement and performing community-based actions during emergencies and outbreaks/epidemics (to be aligned with RCCE);
- Partnerships with intergovernmental bodies and technical guidance tools for a RCCE multisectoral approach in preparedness and response to epidemics and outbreaks – lead agencies are the World Health Organization and UN-Habitat;
- Success models on community engagement and best practices/lessons during COVID-19, especially related to the support of vulnerable and marginalized
- Developed joint concept notes on a back-to-school regional framework, a podium on regional open science, a science to innovation e-clubs network, and teacher preparedness training. These concept notes were prepared with the intention of launching joint programmes in 2021.
- In 2021, several activities will be organized including the following:
  - Reviewing SERPs and the humanitarian response plan to assess country needs;
  - Establishing a dashboard and dialogue with United Nations country teams to tailor deliverable and products in 2021 for country use and implementation;
  - Revising and updating the IBC workplan, taking into consideration linkages with other working groups or IBCs.

# Annex : Results achieved by United Nations entities at the regional level

## UN HABITAT

### Background

UN-Habitat adopted its Regional Strategic Plan for Arab States (2020 – 2023) in 2020 as a key tool for repositioning UN-Habitat as the global centre of excellence and innovation on sustainable urban development at the regional and country levels while contributing to the achievement of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda and promoting the “One UN” approach. The Regional Strategic Plan is based on UN-Habitat’s four mutually reinforcing and integrated goals or “domains of change”, namely: Reduced spatial inequality and poverty in communities across the urban - rural continuum, Enhanced shared prosperity of cities and regions, Strengthened climate action and improved urban environment, and Effective urban crisis prevention and response.

### Supporting an inclusive COVID-19 response in the Arab region

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to threaten the most vulnerable in cities and urban areas, particularly those living in marginalized conditions such as informal settlements, refugee camps and people living in overcrowded and underserved conditions. To address the crisis, UN-Habitat launched an urgent COVID-19 Response Plan in 2020 focusing on immediate action in poor and densely populated areas in the Arab region. This plan included several interventions to improve

access to water and sanitation services in disadvantaged areas and equip vulnerable populations with WASH facilities in Iraq, Lebanon and Syria. The response plan also included widespread awareness raising campaigns on safety and protection measures as conducted in public spaces and IDP camps in Yemen, Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic and the State of Palestine in addition to a guidance note developed on protection measures in public transport in Egypt, rehabilitation of social centres in Tunisia to serve as shelters for the homeless, and rehabilitation of the National AIDS/TB facilities in Lebanon, ensuring continuity of care and prevention in response to COVID-19

Also, UN-Habitat organized a number of online events to raise awareness on the impact of COVID-19 on cities and urban areas and explore the implications of the pandemic on future planning. This included a series of webinars with multiple regional partners that aimed at enabling a platform for exchange of knowledge, local experiences and peer learning and shedding light on the immediate and medium-term response of cities in the Arab region.

### Promoting sustainable recovery and reconstruction in the Arab region

In 2020, UN-Habitat ROAS worked in collaboration with the World Green Building Council and under the framework of the “SDG-Climate Nexus Facility Project” led by UNDP on

developing Guidelines for Mainstreaming Climate Resilience in Recovery, Reconstruction and Regeneration Processes in the Arab Region. Through a number of online consultations with experts, academics, urban practitioners and civil society organizations, the guideline is able to capture the different views and key themes that contribute to green recovery and reconstruction in the context of crisis and conflict in the Arab region, including: integrative social and economic resilience, efficient resource utilization, environmental and climate resilience, health and wellbeing, sustainable mobility and accessibility, and heritage and identity. The guidelines will be published in 2021 to support efforts towards building back better, greener, safer and more sustainable.

### Addressing the growth of informal settlements in the Arab region

The proliferation of slums and informal settlements has been a continued challenge in the Arab region, and the inadequate state of public services in many cities requires urgent attention. As the commitment to leave no one behind is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda, in 2020, UN-Habitat initiated a regional technical cooperation programme titled “Towards Arab Cities without Informal Settlements” in collaboration UN-ESCWA and the Islamic Development Bank which was launched in the Tenth Session of the World Urban Forum in Abu Dhabi, UAE. The programme is based on a regional study that analyses the state of informal areas in different Arab countries and identifies key cross cutting elements that needs to be integrated in the new participatory city-wide approach with a focus on social, economic, and environmental aspects. The programme kicked off through a call for Arab cities, which resulted in the selection of 12 Arab cities to take part in the first phase of the programme in 2020-2021.

### Towards evidence-based national urban policies in the Arab region

UN-Habitat supports efforts by government authorities at different levels to develop policies, frameworks and actions

to boost the productivity of cities and regions through an integrated territorial development approach. UN-Habitat continued to provide technical support to the governments of the Sudan, Tunisia, Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan that are at different stages of developing and implementing their national urban policies. In Jordan, the draft NUP is almost finalized and 3 thematic guides for mainstreaming Local economic development, transportation and housing into National Urban Policy are under preparation. In Tunisia, UN-Habitat initiated a series of workshops to present the progress of developing Tunisia’s National Urban Policy to representatives of the relevant governmental sectors, international experts in the field of urban planning, sustainable development, climate change and integrated economic development.

### Supporting evidence-based urban crisis recovery through city and neighbourhood profiling

At the regional level, City and Neighbourhood Profiling is considered one of the main tools that UN-Habitat widely utilizes to support urban crisis recovery, urban response and building back better. City and neighbourhood profiling work was undertaken in Iraq, Libya, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, and is used to produce damage assessments, coordinate recovery efforts among humanitarian actors and identify evidence-based priority actions. UN-Habitat ROAS, in collaboration with relevant country offices, has proceeded with the finalization of urban profiles in Yemen, Libya, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic to develop a picture of the status of cities under stress. The analysis found in the profiles has been organized along the lines of the “Urban Recovery Framework” (URF). This URF is currently being implemented in the Syrian Arab Republic as a new process to develop advice for policy and programming to promote better urban recovery.

### Improving security of tenure and promoting sustainable land management

UN-Habitat’s interventions on land and tenure security focused on strengthening capacity of regional and national

governments and other stakeholders to promote inclusive and equitable management and administration of land. Crisis-affected countries in the region (Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Sudan) have taken active steps to develop an issues-based coalition on land, housing and property at country level. The coalitions play an important role in addressing tensions created by competition over land resources, the discrepancies between customary land rights and formal legal systems, forced displacement and accelerated migration. The coalition resulted in an improved understanding among partners of the challenges and the solutions available to improve land tenure security and promoting sustainable land management in conflict-affected contexts. In 2020, UN-Habitat ROAS mobilized key institutions involved in the implementation of inclusive and gender appropriate land tools and approaches and land administration in Arab states.

## Strengthening capacity in the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda

UN-Habitat initiated an inter-regional project in collaboration with UN-ESCWA to advance the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda (NUA). This project aims to increase policy coherence amongst member States across the regions and promote improved capacities of institutions and other agents of change in the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda and the NUA, as well as support their engagement in Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR) processes.



In 2020, UN-Women Regional Office for the Arab States (ROAS) strengthened its relationships with regional intergovernmental, CSO and UNDS partners to achieve results for gender equality and women's empowerment for countries across the region in line with the objectives of the UNDS regional reform. Collaborating with its strategic partners, ROAS focused on working towards solutions for transboundary and regional priorities for Agenda 2030 implementation at country level in the fields of: Women's Political Participation and Leadership; Women's Economic Empowerment (including women's migration for work); the Elimination of Violence against Women, and Peace and Security. In addition to its longstanding partnership with the League of Arab States (LAS), ROAS deepened its partnership with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and supported the establishment of a new regional feminist CSOs network. This latter step was directly in response to the need provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure women's representation and participation in regional response and recovery efforts. A coordinated regional approach was assured through the execution of a joint regional programme with ILO, and other joint initiatives with diverse UNDS entities, directed at facilitating implementation of, inter alia, SDG 3, SDG 5, SDG 8 and SDG 16. UN-Women ROAS ensured that the principle of Leave No One Behind was a foundation of its work, with a particular emphasis on inclusion, and on designing and implementing initiatives to address the rights of women with disabilities, women migrant workers, refugee and IDP women, and women at heightened risk of violence and / or economic deprivation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Intergovernmental partners

- *League of Arab States*

- *Intergovernmental normative leadership*

LAS convened the Arab Women Committee and Arab Preparatory Meeting for CSW 64 under the chairmanship of Saudi Arabia on 8 and 9 February, to develop a common Arab position on CSW64, informed by the priorities identified in the Beijing+25 regional review supported by ESCWA and UN-Women in 2019. LAS endorsed recommendations pertaining to women's empowerment, including under the pillar on advancing WPS commitments in the region. The recommendations include approving the proposal for establishing the Arab Women Mediation Network that was later endorsed by the Ministerial Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

Following the comprehensive and inclusive regional Beijing+25 review process conducted in collaboration with LAS, ESCWA and the Arab Women Organization (AWO), on 9 February, governments, and regional and international organizations from across the Arab States region agreed on a set of priorities and strategies to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. A consensus was reached on key messages that reaffirmed the unified regional position towards the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The AWC brought together heads/ representatives of 21 women machineries in Arab States including the participation of six ministers (Jordan, Algeria, Palestine, Morocco, Lebanon, and Yemen), and members of the regional UNDS.

○ *Gender-responsive COVID-19 response and recovery*

On 17 June, LAS convened the virtual meeting of the AWC (at Ministerial level), on the “Effects of COVID-19 Virus on Women and Girls: Opportunities and Challenges” chaired by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The meeting was attended by 8 Ministers, five United Nations agencies and representatives from 18 LAS member States. Knowledge on the impact of COVID-19 on gender equality and women’s empowerment to support a gender-sensitive response was shared by UN-Women. The final statement underlined the importance of member States ensuring effective social protection programmes to support women workers in the informal sector and on the frontline of the pandemic response. The final statement also included a range of recommendations to protect the rights of women, including access to medical services and the establishment of emergency hotlines for survivors of violence. A cross-regional dialogue on the specific impact of the pandemic on women with disabilities was facilitated by UN-Women in partnership with the Arab Organisation of Persons with Disabilities and WHO.

○ *Draft Arab convention to eliminate violence against women*

The draft Arab Convention to Eliminate Violence against Women was presented by LAS during the February meeting of the AWC. Several reservations were expressed by Member States and hence it was agreed to re-circulate the draft convention for final comments. While delays were incurred due to the pandemic, comments received by a number of member States during the year have informed further discussion with LAS towards expected finalization in 2021.

○ *Women, peace and security agenda*

UN Women supported LAS efforts to develop the strategy of the Arab Women Mediators Network and the first training for mediators, to support increased women’s participation and leadership in peace processes. UN-Women also supported

LAS to formalize and operationalize the work of the Emergency Committee for Protection of Arab Women during Armed Conflicts. Following its endorsement by LAS Ministerial Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in March 2019, UNW provided technical and financial support to convene the first meeting for the member of the committee nominated by LAS member states. The strategy of the emergency committee is currently being drafted.

○ *Gender, climate change and migration*

UN-Women partnered with the Arab Water Council (AWC) to roll out a joint research initiative on Gender, Climate change and Migration in Jordan and the Sudan, that will contribute to jointly organized policy dialogues and technical support that seek to engender climate security frameworks, policies and programs in the Arab region. This initiative is part of the SDG Climate Nexus Facility developed under the auspices of the League of Arab States and funded by the UNDP Project on Climate Security in the Arab Region.

● *Organization for Islamic Cooperation*

*Establishment of the Development Agency for Women (DAW)*

Following the 2019 resolution of the Organization Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to establish the DAW, UN-Women provided technical support agenda-setting and organizational set up within the OIC, including a strong focus on PVE. Internal rules and organigram for the new structure were adopted through an online meeting in October. A ratifying in-person meeting of OIC Ministers of Women Affairs is planned for February 2021.

**Regional civil society partnerships**

● *Establishment of the Arab States CSOs and Feminist Network*

At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the region, the establishment of the Arab States CSOs and Feminist

Network was facilitated by UN-Women to ensure CSOs' meaningful participation, knowledge sharing and advocacy in COVID-19 Response and Recovery; and CSOs' coherent and coordinated engagement in the Generation Equality Forum and Action Coalitions from the region. The establishment of this network built on the successes of the Regional Beijing+25 Review and the meetings held by UN-Women in Amman in November 2019. The network's membership is in line with the Leave No One Behind principle, bringing together representatives of youth; people with disabilities; women migrants; advocates for the women, peace, and security agenda; and the LGBTIQI community. With technical assistance by UN-Women, the Network elaborated a regional response to the gendered impact of COVID-19, highlighting four priority issues: violence against women; bodily integrity and SRHR; economic justice and decent work for women; and the women, peace, and security agenda.

Sharing of knowledge on key issues of concern to the network was supported by ROAS through the establishment of a knowledge platform for the Arab States CSOs and Feminist Network. ROAS also supported a six-month inception plan to, *inter alia*, define the longer-term role of the Network with regards to the Generation Equality movement and engaging stakeholders in COVID-19 response and recovery. With ROAS's technical assistance, CSOs shared knowledge and experience to offer local solutions to inform policy and programme responses to the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic. Policy briefs on VAW and WPS were prepared by the Network with technical support by UN-Women. Members of the network informed the Generation Equality movement Action Coalitions leadership structure and participated in stakeholder discussions to ensure a comprehensive representation of Arab States' voice in the movement.

In partnership with the network, ROAS led a regional study to assess the impact of COVID-19 on violence against women and the work of CSOs in the region, with the participation of 220 women's organizations from 15 countries. The results were launched during the 16

Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. ROAS also supported the establishment of a CSO Partnership Coordination Group which serves as an advisory group and aims to advance partnerships, resource mobilization for the network. The group comprises of international organizations including ILO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, and INGOs.

● *Women 20 Summit on WEE in COVID-19 recovery*

UN-Women partnered with Women 20 (W20), an official G20 engagement group comprised of women's organizations, women entrepreneurs' associations and thinktanks, to mainstream gender-responsive economic COVID-19 recovery into the outcomes of the G20 Finance Ministers Summit in November, hosted by the Government of Saudi Arabia. A Joint Statement addressed to G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors on 'Women as Drivers of Economic Recovery and Resilience during COVID-19 and Beyond' was released ahead of a High-Level Roundtable for G20 Finance Ministers on Gender-responsive economic recovery post-COVID-19, co-organised by UN-Women and W20 at the W20 Summit in October. Recommendations spoke to inclusive decision-making and governance in COVID and beyond, women's sustainable employment/entrepreneurship and increased labour force participation, expanded social safety nets for women, and inclusive, quality, sustainable health care systems and gender-based violence services. UN-Women also provided inputs on this issue to the W20 communique.

● *CSO Partnerships on Climate change, Disasters and Migration*

UN-Women contributed to enhanced strategic normative and technical capacities of two major migrant networks: the Cross-Regional Centre for Refugees and Migrants, and the Migrant Forum for Asia. Following UN-Women's technical inputs to the Global Network on Disaster

Reduction strategic planning workshop, the Network's global strategy indicated gender as one of six pillars to be addressed in climate change, disasters and migration in a synergized manner.

Further to UN Women's partnership with the Arab Water Council (AWC), UN-Women co-chaired with the AWC the Voluntary Stakeholder Group on Gender, Climate Change, DRR and Migration under the aegis of UNDRR. In 2020, UN-Women produced knowledge on social drivers of vulnerability to climate change and disasters and their impacts.

### Joint programming and initiatives with other UNDS entities<sup>1</sup>

#### ● *Women's Political Participation and Leadership*

UN-Women worked closely with Ra'edat, the regional network of female parliamentarians. The capacity of trainers from 11 member States to support national training for aspiring women political candidates was enhanced through a training of trainers workshop based on UN-Women's 'Women's Political Leadership and Candidate training manual'. This training was conducted in partnership with Ra'edat, ESCWA and SNP WFD. Dialogue on the women's public leadership was advanced through a regional discussion convened in partnership with Ra'edat and WHO, UN-Women that identified priorities and recommendations for action for policy-makers. The institutional capacity of the nascent Arab Network for Women in Elections was enhanced with capacity development in partnership with UNDP and International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEAS). The Network Roadmap was developed and approved by the Membership.

#### *Gender Justice Phase 3*

Updated knowledge of existing national legislative protections and gaps in the field of gender justice is

available following an expanded scope of the review of gender responsive laws in partnership with UNDP, UNFPA and ESCWA. In Q4 the emerging findings were presented to the heads of the National Women's Machineries.

#### ● *Women's economic empowerment*

##### ○ *Regional Joint Programme with ILO: Work for Women*

The UN-Women – ILO regional joint programme continued to support legal and policy reform and contributed to COVID-19 response, including through country-level generation of data on the impact of COVID-19 on women's economic empowerment, and recommendations to foster gender-responsive response and recovery. To support this process, three policy tools on COVID-19 response were rolled-out in the region. A number of tools for the private sector were developed at the global level and were used to promote the role of the private sector in the pandemic response in the three JP countries (Egypt, Jordan and Palestine). Data and analysis on the care economy in Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and Tunisia, also touching upon implications of COVID-19, was made available through a regional study, the results of which were launched in December.

##### ○ *UN-Women/UNDP COVID-19 Gender Response Tracker*

The global UNDP-UN Women COVID-19 Gender Response Tracker was launched in Q3 and will be rolled out in the Arab states as an evidence and tracking tool for governments, fed by available data in the region. The tracker supports analysis of how States have integrated a gender equality perspective in their post-COVID-19 economic recovery plans, including fiscal stimulus packages.

##### ○ *UN-Women/ESCWA SDG 5 costing study*

The regional study on SDG5 costing identifies

existing approaches used both globally and regionally to estimate the cost of SDGs and budget allocation for SDG targets 5.1, 5.3 and 5.4. The main objective of the costing to provide evidence and support countries to devise SDG-centric budgets, to support governments in financing the SDGs and specifically SDG 5. The study is projected to be launched in January 2021.

- *UN-Women, UNIDO and FAO Conference on Women in Industry and Innovation (WII)*

This conference facilitated exchange amongst public and private sector representatives, experts, and other relevant stakeholders on solutions for women’s empowerment as drivers of industry and innovation. The conference was organized in July 2020 within the framework of technical assistance provided by UNIDO, UN-Women and FAO to promote women’s economic empowerment through the second phase of the project Promoting Women’s Empowerment for Inclusive and Sustainable Industrial Development in the MENA Region.

- *Violence against women*

During the 16 days of activism campaign, UN-Women and UNFPA launched an interactive map highlighting the services available for women survivors in 14 countries in

the Arab States. The map was developed based on a joint effort of mapping existing services in the region against international standards.

- *Women, peace and security*

UN-Women ROAS partnered with UNDP on the organization of online consultations on women, peace and security and COVID-19 recovery: “Engaging Women in Post Conflict Economic and Political Decision-Making: Lessons for Responding to COVID-19”. UN-Women provided moderation support and contributed technically to the UNDP-led consultations in May and June. This led to the publication of several briefs and insights (<https://www.sparkblue.org/wpsrecovery>) showcasing contributions from women civil society leaders and WPS practitioners.

In partnership with the Counter Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED), UN-Women continued to create space for dialogue on gender equality and the prevention of violent extremism. UN-Women and CTED convened a discussion of the UN-Women/CTED joint North Africa Platform on Gender and Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism, on the consequences of the pandemic on the work on gender and P/CVE in the North Africa region. The importance of countering hate speech and extremist narratives appearing in the context of COVID-19 was highlighted.



### ● *Regional challenges*

The COVID-19 pandemic with its scale and scope continues to push more people into severe hunger globally due to its socio-economic impact. The crisis is making the poorest poorer, and the hungriest hungrier. It is a multiplier of vulnerability, compounding threats to food insecurity, while exposing weaknesses in food and health systems.

In the Arab region, conflict and insecurity remain the main drivers of hunger, yet the added dimension of COVID-19 is exacerbating the ability of affected communities to cope. Poorer countries and the most vulnerable households are being disproportionately affected. The cost of a basic food basket increased by more than 10 percent on top of reduced incomes in 6 Arab countries during the second quarter compared to the first in 2020, namely in Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. Food prices are exceptionally high in Syria, Yemen and Lebanon. The devastating impact of the pandemic continues to drive unemployment, shatter livelihoods, and increase hunger. The lockdown measures significantly decreased commodity movement, market function and cross-border trade, and compromised livelihoods, daily labour opportunities, reducing household purchasing power and food access of the vulnerable population.

### ● *WFP key regional achievements in 2020*

#### ○ *Overview*

Although the Arab region was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, WFP continued to deliver and expand assistance to meet new and emerging food security

needs in 14 Arab countries<sup>2</sup>, and to respond to the longer-term socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 crisis on food security. WFP was able to preposition food commodities, ensure continuity of cash-based programmes, sustain its operations, and reached 31 million people<sup>3</sup> in 2020.

A key component of WFP's response is to support Arab government efforts to respond and build back better by enabling expanded social protection measures, while contributing to the establishment of more comprehensive social protection systems that enable people to meet their essential needs and strengthen their resilience to future shocks and stresses. WFP is adopting a more integrated approach to strengthening food systems. Working on both food demand and supply sides, WFP is supporting national governments in our region and partners to identify and address food system risks and disruptions, in order to protect and sustain functioning systems, while working to analyse the complex, long-term effects of the COVID-19 crisis to build back food systems that are more efficient, green, and resilient. WFP is supporting Arab governments to analyse the impact of the crisis on nutrient-intake gaps, identify groups at increased risk of malnutrition, and design appropriate interventions for treatment and prevention of malnutrition.

#### ○ *Migration*

WFP developed its first regional strategic framework on migration, recognizing the importance of migration to humanitarian and development work in the region. The framework defines WFP's role and develops how WFP can contribute in addressing the needs of migrants and supporting countries to respond appropriately to humanitarian needs

of mobile communities. In this respect, WFP developed a partnership with IOM and other relevant actors at the regional level, to work together on Migration Data and Programmatic responses. Within the Triple Nexus framework (humanitarian – development – peace), these responses not only focus on inter-linkages between key drivers of mixed migration but also adopt a route-based approach, especially the inter-play between food insecurity, conflict and climate change. WFP is also exerting additional efforts related to advocacy, policy and technical support to governments to expand national social protection systems and include vulnerable migrants.

○ *Conflict sensitivity*

WFP and FAO have committed to a collaborative exercise to reflect on conflict sensitivity in joint programmes in specific MENA countries, in an effort to improve the cohesion of food security actors on assessing and monitoring conflict sensitivity and informing Nexus planning.

○ *Vulnerability assessment and monitoring*

Since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, WFP produced a number of reports to provide a better regional understanding of its impact. A monthly regional comprehensive analysis of COVID-19 in the Arab Region is conducted in different areas: food security, vulnerability, macroeconomy, nutrition, gender, livelihood activity, as well as Government and WFP response to the pandemic. A Regional interactive web-based COVID-19 Monitoring Hub dashboard is continuously updated to allow users to access key indicators, including daily updates on number of cases, fortnightly updates on WFP programmes and status, monthly updates on vulnerability and economic indicators, and ad-hoc updates for Logistics and other categories.

○ *Resilience-building*

WFP has partnered with the Arab Organization of Agricultural Development (AOAD) on expanding the use of the Three-Pronged Approach (3-PA) in the Arab region, a tool used to strengthen evidence-based programme design, planning and implementation of longer-term resilience building projects at national level. This helps to develop multi-sectoral programming and interventions aiming to improve the overall living conditions of communities, by putting people at the centre of the analysis. The enhanced national capacity to conducting 3-PA analyses at the national, sub-national and community levels will support community-based participatory planning, foster coordination and partnership at sub-national level and improve national assessments of food security and nutrition, to ultimately improve the overall livelihoods of rural communities and status of food security in the region.

○ *Gender*

WFP and FAO regional gender teams conducted a series of capacity building workshops in July and October 2020 for the Syria Food Security Cluster. The workshops included interactive sessions on gender analyses, gender in value chains, and gender responsive monitoring. In the context of the 16 days of activism, WFP and FAO also held a regional joint webinar in December on masculinities and the role of men and boys in the elimination of gender-based violence. WFP and FAO are also collaborating with CARE International to conduct a Rapid Gender Analysis on the impact of COVID-19 on Food Security, Nutrition, and Livelihoods, to contribute to the provision of data and knowledge support to the countries involved.

WFP collaborated with UNDRR on a series of knowledge products and case studies from the region about gender in the implementation and

practice of building resilience to disaster and climate risks. WFP submitted four case studies including Algeria, Iraq, Egypt, and the Sudan, each describing a different initiative and approach to respond to the disaster and climate risks, and how these interventions have contributed to gender equality, women empowerment, and women's participation in implementation and monitoring.

WFP is also engaged with the "Regional Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group", where the group will serve as the main coordination, knowledge management, and advocacy platform on the integration of gender into humanitarian action in the region.

○ *Cash assistance and technology improvements*

In an effort to enhance the regional inter-organizations collaboration between United Nations sister agencies on the disbursements of humanitarian cash assistance, working closely with the Cash Learning Partnership, the Cash-Based Transfer team has been able to initiate joint action on mapping and capacity assessments with UNICEF, and UNHCR. This initiative will over time incorporate other United Nations agencies and NGOs to ensure best practices are broadly adopted beyond humanitarian response and be embedded in national social safety nets.

The complex refugee crisis within the region with projected movements of populations across borders, creates unique challenges in consistently ensuring that the right people get the right assistance at the right time. One of the limiting factors is beneficiary

identity management with different identification protocols in place. The broad adoption of technology (biometrics) as well as assistance collaboration platforms will limit challenges of duplication of assistance. Regional collaboration platforms, like the emerging regional cash expertise forum, will contribute to provide programmatic assurance to all stakeholders.

○ *Logistics and air service*

In response to the international flights suspension in the period between April and June 2020 due to the Coronavirus pandemic, WFP launched its global air passenger service on first of May to provide a lifeline for health and humanitarian workers across the world, including six countries in the Arab region (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates). In addition, WFP continued to support partners in getting their staff to and from Libya, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen via the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service.

Moreover, WFP stepped up to provide cargo movement services during the crisis on behalf of the humanitarian community, including through its United Arab Emirates regional cargo hub in addition to the usual support to partners via existing in-country mandated services (including active Logistics Cluster operations in the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen), alongside services provided through the United Nations Humanitarian Response Depot (including through the hub in the United Arab Emirates) and WFP's bilateral service offering.



Please note this note covers (sub-)regional efforts of UNICEF together with other partners undertaken in 2020 and which are not being reported under the IBCs. The year 2020 has been defined by the unprecedented COVID pandemic and its sweeping impact on all countries in the region. Especially the most vulnerable communities, especially children, have been severely affected in terms of vulnerability to the virus as the impact in socio-economic and other terms. For that reason, the focus of UNICEF's contribution is on the collaborative work undertaken to respond to the COVID crisis.

Throughout the year, UNICEF has worked in close collaboration with the WHO, UNESCO, UNFPA, WFP, ILO the WB and other (United Nations) partners to provide regional level support a comprehensive regional and national response to the pandemic, using its technical and operational expertise in risk communication and community engagement (RCCE), infection prevention and control (IPC), multiple pathways to learning, systems strengthening, supply procurement, and evidence generation.

● *Primary health care strengthening and continuity of health and nutrition services*

The MENA approach for continuity of essential health and nutrition services in the context of COVID was formulated and is being rolled-out in relevant countries of the region. This promotes collective multi-sectoral action to avoid preventable additional deaths among children under the age of five years which were estimated to increase compared with a baseline data without the COVID-19 pandemic, by placing the continuation of essential health and nutrition services for women and children at the centre of the COVID response.

- UNICEF and WHO issued a technical brief which summarizes the results for the MENA/EMRO

region, of a global study by the John Hopkins University on the potential impact on child mortality and nutrition of health care disruptions due to the COVID-19 crisis. This contributed significantly to the evidenced based advocacy on the urgency of the immediate resumption of primary health care services impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.

- High level regional advocacy addressed the Ministries of Health through the technical brief and joint letter to Ministers of Health from the Regional Directors of UNFPA, WHO, and UNICEF. The general public was extensively reached involving the multiple media. Once, evidence demonstrated that services for women were not recovering as quickly as services as, for example, immunization for children, UNICEF, UNPFA and WHO reinforced the message in regional high-level advocacy efforts including the Joint Virtual Meeting with Ministers of Health: Continuation of essential reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health care/ services in the context of COVID-19 pandemic.
- UNICEF also collaborated with WHO, UNFPA, UNAIDS, UNHCR and WONCA (World Organization of Family Doctors) to develop an online training course for the frontline Primary Health Care workers to support maintaining essential health services and controlling the Pandemic while ensuring their own safety as well. UNICEF also led a session on "Mainstreaming Gender in UNICEF COVID-19 Health Response" for the Interagency health coordination platform to boost gender

- dimension of the health response, and contributed to establishment of A Gender Equality Working Group, co-lead by WHO and UN-Women, to implement the Global Action Plan on Healthy Lives and Well-being launched in December 2020.
- Responding to the impact on mental health COVID and the context around it has in many people. UNICEF, in a partnership with the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth and WHO, organised a webinar to hear from the youths in the region on their mental health challenges and questions as part of the global webinar series for young people titled "#CopingWithCOVID".
  - Combining advocacy and evidence building, FAO, UNICEF, WHO and WFP issued an advocacy paper to highlight the importance of continuation nutrition services. Especially in the MENA region plagued by protracted crisis, discontinuation of these services is likely to lead to alarming food insecurity and nutrition crisis. Through collective efforts UNICEF has made available to countries an essential tool for malnutrition screening while ensuring appropriate infection prevention in the context of COVID: the disposable mid-upper arm circumference (MUAC) tape which will be rolled out with assistance of partners.
  - Additional regional support for Jump-starting health and nutrition services included infection, prevention and control (IPC) measures such as procurement of PPE and IPC training development and roll-out for health workers and partners to maintain quality of care for mothers, new-born infants and children, as well as technical guidance for accelerating communication and community engagement.
  - UNICEF and WHO co-lead the Regional Working Group for COVAX (COVAX RWG) which include many other regional partners, and which supports national governments to prepare for introduction for an eventual vaccine. UNICEF with WHO and others will be supporting government planning and developing a national vaccine deployment plan, with UNICEF continue to lead on procurement, demand generation and community engagement (co-lead the demand and RCCE COVAX sub-working group with WHO) and the World Bank and GAVI on financing. The COVAX RWG has ensured a special focus on potential excluded groups to guarantee that most high-risk groups, such as IDPs, refugees and migrants are covered. Although the full population within the jurisdiction of a national government should be included in the national plans there are scenarios where this might be challenging, and mitigation measures are discussed at regional level.
- *Education, promoting continuity of learning*
    - United Nations organizations (UNICEF, UNESCO, UNRWA, WFP) and the WB committed to a regional plan of action building on the Global Framework for Reopening Schools, that guided regional and national coordinated action. Together the agencies organized a series of regional webinars for and with ministries of education to promote continuity of learning, whether face-to-face or remotely. As part of the "back to learning" campaign to initiate the new school year 2020/2021, a Ministerial Meeting was organized during which the "Rej'et El Sineh" ['Learning is Back'], song was launched to encourage the return to learning for all children and youth across the region. The meeting resulted in a call for better regional collaboration in terms of using (tech-based) solutions to ensure all children remain engaged in learning beyond the classroom.
  - *Social protection*
    - In addition to the work undertaken by the relevant IBC which covers crucial work in social protection triggered by the COVID crisis, a regional research on the role of Social Protection in enabling Young People's Transition to Work – in collaboration with ILO, and also as part of the UNICEF agreement

with IPC-IG – was finalized and launched in November 2020. This builds on a series of regional reports UNICEF has developed on mapping non-contributory social protection, fiscal space for social protection, shock-responsive social protection and social protection legislation. UNICEF is also working on technical notes on topics of regional relevance post COVID-19 such as on Social Protection Financing (with UNDP), as the fiscal impacts of COVID-19 will pose challenges to meaningful social protection responses for the most vulnerable.

● *Risk communication and community engagement*

Disseminating life-saving information widely and engaging with communities to sustain practice of preventive behaviours has been proven crucial in the COVID context. Regional and national campaigns involving children, youth, leaders and multiple influencers with cross-country appeal have been mobilized and engaged to spread messages. To encourage people around the region to wear masks, UNICEF launched a campaign featuring children and influencers to engage the public to wear masks and highlight how to properly use them and dispose of them safely which was joined by many (UN) partners. So far, UNICEF has reached nearly 200 million people – close to 40 per cent of the region's population - with material and information on COVID-19.

- UNICEF in its role as co-lead of the regional EM/MENA RCCE Inter-Agency Group (IAG) together with WHO convened partners for coordinated efforts and technical assistance to country teams to help children, families and communities adopt COVID prevention practices, learn from their experiences, respond to rumours and misinformation, and build trust in public health authorities. Together with wide range of partners, including UNFPA, UN-Women, IOM, UNDP, UNHCR, and INGOs such as Internews the regional RCCE IAG has produced technical standards, joint guidance, and a framework for coordinating work.

It also supports evidence generation activities and technical assistance across countries to strengthen national RCCE plans ensuring alignment with global RCCE standards and approaches.

● *Preventing gender-based violence*

To address the impacts of COVID-19 on women and girls, UNICEF collaborated with other United Nations agencies and regional actors to ensure coherent response and advocacy efforts. Co-led by UN-Women and ESCWA, UNICEF contributed to the development of regional advocacy resources to influence response plans, efforts included:

- The development of an initial inter-agency Policy brief on the gendered impact of COVID-19 in the Arab States region to highlight the anticipated impact of COVID-19 on women and girls in the Arab States region ; as well as the development of an evidence-based brief “ Violence against Women and Girls and COVID-19 in the Arab Region” drawing on data and analysis by diverse members of the IBC-GJE (including UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNAIDS, UNV, FAO, WHO, WFP, UNODC and OHCHR).
- In collaboration with UNESCO and Brookings Institution Centre for Universal Education teams, UNICEF contributed to the global webinar ‘Advancing gender equality in education in the Middle East and North Africa. The webinar highlighted the results of “2020 Global Education Monitoring Report” which had a focus on the impact of COVID on Girl Education in the region and current efforts to address the implications.
- UNICEF also contributed to the “Girls Empowerment Forum” organized by League of Arab states and UNFPA to address harmful practices against girls within the region. The forum targeted government partners, UN Agencies and NGO representatives and was an

excellent opportunity to galvanize commitments for the girl child agenda beyond harmful practices including for economic and civic engagement opportunities.

- To understand impact of COVID-19 on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in the Region UNICEF and UNFPA have jointly organized a webinar to share experiences on how the pandemic has impacted the practice of FGM as well as to identify promising practices in responding to FGM.

The two agencies jointly launched report on Child Marriage in Humanitarian settings to discuss the prevalence and drivers in humanitarian emergencies in the Arab States Region.

- Furthermore, the annual Regional Accountability Framework (RAF) members' meeting was held on 15 December to share learnings and experiences across organizations programmatic interventions for ending child marriage in the context of COVID-19. This

webinar discussed cross sectoral recommendations such as cash transfers, education, digital platforms and other areas, for improving interventions during COVID pertaining to child marriage.

#### ● *Child protection*

To emphasize the need for child protection even in most challenging circumstance UNICEF MENA in collaboration with the International Association of Youth and Family Judges and Magistrates (AIMJF), conducted two webinars in French on access to justice for children in times of COVID-19. The webinars created a platform for practitioners to share innovative solutions for the release of children of children from detention and to ensure the continuity of justice for children services. The main challenges highlighted concerns regarding the reintegration support for children released and the availability of face-to-face services to deal with serious child protection cases.



**Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations**

## Background

FAO held its thirty-fifth Regional Ministerial Conference for the Near East and North Africa (NERC35) in virtual format in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Regional Conference, which included a series of preparatory thematic dialogues, agreed on a set of priorities aimed at transforming food systems to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in the region as well as a response and recovery plan to address the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak on the agriculture and rural sectors. FAO's work in support to countries will focus consequently on four priorities, namely (i) reducing the urban-rural divide and boosting smallholder farming; (ii) ensuring healthy diets and food security for all; (iii) greening agriculture; and (iv) building resilience to shocks and crises.

## COVID-19 response and recovery

COVID-19 has had an impact on food and agriculture since the initial days of the pandemic outbreak. Food systems have been disrupted, informal employment stopped for millions, markets have closed and remittances have dried up and the most vulnerable have found themselves struggling to procure food. As smallholders are increasingly unable to access the critical inputs they need to continue producing, food availability is emerging as a major concern.

FAO has focused its immediate response on mitigating the effects of COVID-19 to protect food security and livelihoods. FAO's programme focuses on four key components to save lives and livelihoods in countries in crisis, which consist of (a) monitoring and analysis; (b) ensuring access to food for the most acutely food-

insecure populations; (c) ensuring continuity of the critical food supply chain for the most vulnerable populations, and (d) protecting food supply chain actors from transmission risks.

A Regional Task Force was formed to support countries in responding to the COVID-19 crisis, focusing initially on information and assessment of COVID-19 impacts, then on adapting FAO programming to the post-COVID-19 context and on assisting countries on designing and implementing tailored responses. Monitoring and assessment activities were carried out in 13 countries. The majority of these activities being undertaken in collaboration with Rome-based agencies, in-country UN partners, the World Bank, and other partnering institutions. FAO Technical Cooperation resources were committed for COVID-19 impact assessments as well as in support of digital agriculture, and towards direct intervention to the most vulnerable smallholders. By year-end, 15 COVID-19-related Technical cooperation projects were approved totaling USD 2.5 million, i.e. 27 per cent of the biennium's allocation.

At the thirty-fifth NERC, countries of the region agreed on twelve actions to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and build back better and more resilient food systems, as part of the FAO Response and Recovery Plan. These actions include inter alia a focus on immediate humanitarian response; enhanced trade for food security; protecting value chains; and strengthening the resilience of smallholder farmers to shocks and crises. Water also features as a priority for recovery and resilience building.

In this context, FAO strengthened new and existing partnerships to address the pandemic. A good example of effective collaboration on food security monitoring and

surveillance in the context of COVID-19 comes from Iraq. The FAO Representation in Iraq joined forces with WFP, IFAD and the World Bank to monitor the impact of the pandemic on food security in the country and stepped-up collaboration with other partners such as IOM, ITC and NGOs operating under the Food Security Cluster.

### Zero hunger initiative for the arab Region

FAO, in collaboration with IFAD, WFP, WHO, UNESCWA and UN Women provided technical support to the League of Arab States (LAS) in developing a draft of the “Arab Regional Strategic Framework and Action Plan for Zero-Hunger (ARSF)”, which has been submitted to a comprehensive consultation process with national governments and relevant stakeholders for approval in 2021. The Action plan, which covers the entire set of SDG 2 Targets, will offer a platform to build a comprehensive response to the issue of food security and nutrition in the countries of the Arab Region.

The “2020 Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition for the Arab States” was prepared in collaboration with WFP, WHO UNICEF and UNESCWA for publication in the first quarter of 2021.

### Addressing water scarcity and climate change

Through its Regional Initiative on Water Scarcity and with the support of Sweden’s government agency for development cooperation (SIDA), FAO conducted a large capacity-building programme for the countries of the region on water accounting, water productivity and evapotranspiration measurements using remote sensing with a view to enhance water management. Activities also included farmer field school on irrigation water efficiency. The Initiative provided support to cross-sector coordination and policy coherence between water and agriculture through the organization of the second meeting of the League of Arab States High-Level Joint Committee (HLJC,

water and agriculture) in October 2020, the drafting of an action plan and the elaboration of guidelines on sustainable allocation of water resources for agriculture. A regional water collaborative platform was established, involving 15 regional organizations.

With regard to climate change, a training workshop on the Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture was organized, with the collaboration of LAS and UNESCWA, to help build the capacity of negotiators from the Arab States on issues related to agriculture and climate change. In partnership with the Green Climate Fund, the Adaptation Fund and the Global Environment Facility, FAO promotes climate smart agriculture in the countries of the region so as to increase resilience and adaptability as well as mitigate the adverse effects of agriculture on GHG emissions.

### International Decade of Small Scale Family Farming

Through its Regional Initiative on Small Scale Family Farming, FAO launched, in partnership with IFAD, the regional chapter of the UN Decade of Family Farming (UNDF). The associated Action Plan will now serve as an instrument for dialogue with countries on implementation of the UNDF at country level.

### International Forum on Innovation in Agri-Food Systems

Together with its partners (the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture (MoEWA) of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, UNESCWA, ICARDA, ICBA, IFAD, ITU and the World Bank) that were engaged in the organization of the “2020 International Forum on innovation in agri-food systems to achieve SDGs” (which was postponed to 2021 as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak), FAO co-organized a series of ‘Zoominars’ addressing the role of innovation and digital technologies for agri-food systems. The Zoominars brought together more than 2000 participants from across the

region and beyond and focused in particular on digital agriculture. They led to a number of action-oriented recommendations to be implemented both at country and regional levels.

FAO supported young entrepreneurs and innovators through regional and global initiatives including the Global Agrilnno Challenge 2020 and the 'AI for development hackathon'.

### Building resilience to shocks and crises

Through its Regional Initiative on Building Resilience for Food Security and Nutrition, FAO implemented a regional project aimed at piloting disaster risk reduction (DRR) approaches in conflict-affected contexts in Iraq, Syria and Yemen. The results of this project will inform DRR programming across the region. FAO also contributed to the Regional Assessment Report on DRR in the Arab Region, which will influence the development of risk management policies in the region. In addition, FAO supported Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon in facilitating a dialogue towards DRR policy development, and countries have been further supported in this context in the establishment of early warning systems for drought and transboundary plant and animal pests and diseases. Iraq, Mauritania, Palestine and Yemen have received support on addressing threats and crises.

### Transboundary pests and diseases

A Regional strategy to manage the risks of transboundary plant pests and disease was developed through four main pillars focusing on (i) improving the coordination and knowledge sharing among countries; (ii) improving surveillance, monitoring and early warning systems for transboundary pests and diseases; (iii) developing appropriate quarantine measures and (iv) harmonizing

the system for production of certified plant propagation materials. FAO also supported countries of the region to control Fall Armyworm through technical support, capacity development, awareness raising and development of knowledge products. FAO continued to lead the regional efforts in controlling Red Palm Weevil. Finally, countries of the region received assistance in preventing the introduction and spread of *Xylella fastidiosa* where FAO collaborated with the World Bank through 2020 initiative and a regional webinar.

The year 2020 was characterized by unprecedented Desert Locust crisis in the Great Horn of Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and in Southwest Asia. This crisis continues to afflict the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula despite great efforts deployed by FAO to support affected countries, halt the crisis in southwest Asia, reduce the impact of upsurge on food security in the Horn of Africa and reinforce the capacities in western Africa to cope with locust invasion.

In partnership with the Arab Organization for Agriculture Development (AOAD), FAO supported Surveillance and Transboundary Animal Diseases control in 10 countries of the region (Sudan, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Iraq). In addition, countries were supported in Foot and Mouth Disease and Similar Transboundary Animal Disease (FAST) control in cooperation with Eu-FMD through regional/country FAST training workshops on Risk based strategies. The FAO/OIE Global Framework for Transboundary Animal Diseases (GF-TADs) was revitalized in the region and a Regional Consultative Technical Meeting was organized on One Health approach for managing animal diseases and zoonosis and the impact of COVID-19 on the livestock sector. Countries have also received technical assistance in PPR, Rift Valley fever, Foot and Mouth Disease and Lumpy Skin disease, Crimean Congo Hemorrhagic Fever control. Moreover, with a regional consultative expert group for vaccination being established.



## Health

- UNFPA partnered with WHO and UNHCR to conduct a global training on clinical management of rape and intimate partner violence. This training targeted 27 participants from 15 countries. Amongst them were frontline health care providers (HCP) and health managers of GBV units.
- UNFPA also partnered with Save the Children UK to facilitate a global training on clinical management of rape and intimate partner violence training for 32 participants in 25 countries. Amongst them were health care providers and managers
- UNFPA partnered with WHO at the country and regional office level to conduct a training for Libya CO. The training targeted 30 frontline HCP mainly from MOH public health facilities.
- The Ministers of Health of the Region and the RDs of UNFPA, WHO and sister UN agencies met together virtually in April to review the national and regional plans and efforts to coordinate an effective response to the new coronavirus (COVID-19).
- In July 2020, AWAN (Arab World Advocacy Network for SRH & RR, co-founded by UNFPA ASRO and IPPF AWR) issued a joint advocacy statement calling on decision makers to keep SRH and RR on the top of their priority during the COVID-19 pandemic. The statement, signed by several regional and national institutions, is available in English and Arabic.
- Under the Global Action Plan for Health and Welfare's regional health alliance, in collaboration with WHO, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNAIDS, WONCA and IOM developed a joint online training programme for PHC physicians on COVID-19 at PHC level to build national capacity based on the Online training package: primary health care practice in the context of COVID-19 pandemic. The course is accessible here (<https://covid.emro.who.int>). The course is made available in English, Arabic and French.
- To advance Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, Adolescent Health (RMNCAH) policy dialogue in the region, together with WHO and UNICEF ROs, organized a high level virtual meeting on 17 November with the 3 RDs and Ministers of Health from nine high burden countries and developed a regional understanding on the criticality of protecting RMNCAH workforce and maintaining RMNCAH services during the pandemic and beyond.
- UNFPA, in collaboration with the League of Arab States and WHO-EMRO, initiated the development of a strategy for 'Health-Friendly Budgeting' following the decision of the Arab MoH council. The strategy aims to help increase the budgets dedicated to health on the national levels in order to achieve universal health coverage, including universal access to SRH across the region.
- Considering that all Arab countries have been affected disproportionately by the COVID-19 epidemic and are facing the challenge of maintaining essential health

services including SRH services, UNFPA/ASRO, the League of Arab States and MENA Health Policy Forum, collaborated to assess the impact of COVID19 on SRH. This study comes as a follow-up to the decision of the Arab Health Ministers' Council during the extraordinary session held in June 2020 to discuss the effects of COVID-19 in the Arab world. It will inform health policies and systems, suggest strategies and timely planned actions to maintain SRH services and protect reproductive rights in the Arab region.

- In response to the decision of the Council of Arab Health Ministers in February 2020 to re-activate the regional technical advisory committee on nursing and midwifery, UNFPA and WHO collaborated with League of Arab States in the regional consultation that attempted to address critical issues including the role of nurses and midwives in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and achieving universal health coverage in the Arab region. The meeting also addressed issues related the quality of midwifery and nursing education as well as the crucial nature of maintaining maternal and reproductive health services during emergencies.
- On 9 November, the League of Arab States, in partnership with the UNFPA ASRO Sexual and Reproductive Health unit, convened a virtual event to celebrate the first anniversary of the Pink Tank campaign for advancing breast cancer awareness in the Arab region. The campaign was launched in 2019 by the Director of Social Sector at LAS and UNFPA Arab States Regional Director to advocate for breast cancer early detection. This year's celebration witnessed presentations delivered by a number of Arab countries on their efforts to increase public awareness about breast cancer early detection and available treatments, an intervention by WHO, and a testimonial by a woman survivor on her journey in fighting breast cancer and experience sharing from a leading civil society organization that specializes in breast cancer programmes.

## Population and development

- UNFPA partnered with LAS on discussing ICPD PoA and Cairo Declaration related population policies and strategies/programs at the Arab Population Council (APC) meetings with outcome recommendations supporting population centred SDG agenda especially during the time of COVID and other anticipated crisis moments. Population centered planning for development is an important recommendation coming out of the APC.
- To generate data for measurements of SDG indicators, UNFPA is working on strengthening census conduction and in humanitarian settings through capacity building of national statistical offices on modern technology using the GIS and for difficult to reach areas using small area estimation methodology. UNFPA's prime regional partner is ESCWA and AITRS in that regard.
- UNFPA ASRO is also strengthening CRVS in a coordinated activity with HQ for data generation for SDG and Population indicators measurement. Linkages of CRVS to maternal mortality data have been the focus for a recently developed guidance note to help national partners as well as COs.
- UNFPA ASRO has developed a composite indicator that measures progress on ICPD related issues using population centred SDGs to visualize a people-centred SDG agenda. This in turn magnifies the equity and leaves no one behind lenses.
- UNFPA ASRO partnered with LAS and Arab countries on the development of a regional strategy for older persons with both a monitoring and evaluation framework as well as a legal framework. The strategy aims to fulfil the demands of the changing age structure in the Arab region with future projections of a bigger cohort of older people. This requires more attention from governments to ensure development and the SDG agenda is on track hence leaving no one

behind. within the frame of the Arab ageing strategy, and to ensure that no one is left behind, UNFPA supported assessment of older persons strategies from the right perspective. This assessment will be an opportunity for the Arab countries to better address needs, rights and expectations of older people within their countries.

### Adolescents and young people

- In 2020, and in view of scaling up attainment of SDGs with adequate participation of youth, UNFPA ASRO particularly invested in conducting research on adolescents and youth at country and regional levels as well as development of knowledge products to inform evidence-based advocacy, policy development, and design\implementation of programs meaningfully responding to needs of adolescents and youth in the Arab Region. This included the following key results\ products:
  - Regional mapping and analysis of Youth Policies in the Arab Region; Regional Research and Country Profiles on HIV/AIDS; Regional Research on Comprehensive Sexuality Education; Upgraded Youth to Youth Peer Education Capacity Building Manual; Regional SITAN on Girls and Women; Guidance on COVID-19and Youth; as well as, Life Skills and Citizenship Education Model\ Manual.
- UNFPA led advanced joint programming through the concrete model of the Youth Forum in the Arab Region whose outcomes included 6 regional flagship projects also benefiting from joint pooling of funds including UN-to-UN transfers. In 2020, this included The Regional Youth Platform “MINASSATI”, Digital Tool on Youth Friendly Services “SHABAB IT”, Regional Youth Centre, ICPD\SDGs’ Youth Accountability Framework; Regional Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security and the Youth Charter. In addition, UNFPA ASRO continued to co-lead the UN Inter-Agency Thematic Group on Adolescents and Youth that has been revamped into the Regional IBC on Adolescents and Youth and includes 17 UN partners. Joint interventions cover the following areas: Participation and Civic Engagement; Health and Well-being; Life Skills and Education; Employability and Entrepreneurship; Youth, Peace and Security. In partnership with the UNSG Envoy on Youth’s Office, ASRO has also supported the effective roll over of the UN Youth Strategy on Youth as a solid framework guiding joint programming at regional and country level. In addition, UNFPA partnered with UN ESCWA and UNDOC on “Education Re-invented: The Future We Want after COVID-19” an initiative aiming to provide a platform for dialogue and exchange of views among Arab Youth on the issues they are facing due to the breakout of COVID-19 pandemic, and how the pandemic presents unprecedented challenges to education in the region, as well as its adverse effects on the socioeconomic situation and the ability to uphold social justice and the rule of law.



## Background information

As the leading international organization and the only United Nations agency with a sole mandate for migration, IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. With the overwhelming adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, orderly and regular Migration (GCM), the UN Secretary-General decided to establish the UN Network on Migration as a collaborative community of United Nations entities coming together to ensure effective and coordinated system-wide support to Member States in its implementation, follow-up and review. In its creation, the Secretary-General named IOM as the Network's Coordinator and secretariat. In addition, IOM is supporting Member States in the GCM implementation follow-up and review through its field presence at national level as well as through its Coordinator role of the UN Regional Network on Migration in the Arab region.

The IOM overall approach to migration in the Arab region is described in the new Regional Strategy for 2020 – 2024 which sets out a number of strategic priorities around three main pillars of work: Resilience, Mobility and Governance.

## Resilience

IOM is working with member States to prepare for higher numbers of people moving in and out of vulnerable situations, stemming from a range of complex drivers, including climate change, instability, poverty and exploitation. IOM adopts a long-term and holistic approach to emergency response, integrating development

objectives, and acknowledging changing drivers and vulnerabilities. Considering the driving forces of migration in the region, which include protracted conflicts, socio-economic challenges, including economic transformation, demographic trends and climate change, IOM promotes a cross-thematic and multisectoral approach to address the needs of communities, migrants and displaced populations. Beyond its solid role in enhancing preparedness and resilience in crisis situations, the Organization aims to enhance the interlinkages between emergency response and long-term development through effective transition and recovery programming. It partners with governments and other actors to assess the drivers of migration and ensure that migrants, displaced populations and communities of migrants abroad are adequately included and not left behind in the development plans of countries, as outlined in the objectives of the Global Compact for Migration.

Empowering communities, migrants and displaced populations ensures their participation in and contribution to the Decade of Action and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and resolves bottlenecks with respect to relevant SDGs. Empowerment of vulnerable groups is likewise a key goal of the African Union Agenda 2063. In 2020, IOM completed the draft version of The Attainment of SDGs in Conflict-Affected Countries in the Arab Region, a report produced in partnership with the League of Arab States (LAS), the United Nations Economic Commission for West Asia (UNESCWA), and the UN Human Security Trust Fund (UNHSTF). The overall objective of the report is to contribute to addressing the multifaceted and unique challenges faced by countries affected by conflict to achieve the goals set by this international development framework.

## Mobility

IOM pursues innovative approaches to design and implement systems to manage migration, based on its existing knowledge of migration dynamics and trends as well as migrants' profiles and vulnerabilities. In response to the diverse and complex migration patterns in the region, IOM is working towards enhancing safe, orderly and regular migration providing advisory and technical support to Member States, whether relating to selection, identification, entry, stay or return. IOM also seeks to create a balance between ensuring effective mechanisms to address displacement and unsafe mobility and promoting regular and safe alternatives, while at the same time acknowledging that mobility can be a necessity and life-saving strategy in times of crises. For example, in November 2020, IOM and ICAO jointly collaborated with the Narif Arab University for Security Sciences (NAUSS) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) to organize the first virtual event in collaboration with on airport security during the COVID-19 pandemic.

IOM promotes voluntary, safe and orderly return and sustainable reintegration, as well as sustainability of durable solutions for displaced populations. Moreover, IOM continues to support the safe and dignified resettlement of refugees and the protection of migrants through case management and identification of long-term solutions for each individual, health assessment and related voluntary assistance; and movement management and operations, and by integrating pre-departure and post-arrival measures, as well as promoting durable solutions for displaced populations. IOM promotes alternatives to detention for irregular migrants encouraging countries of the region to scale up and implement community-based and non-custodial alternatives, in a way that prioritizes families, children and other migrants in vulnerable situations. Furthermore, IOM prioritizes the harnessing of migrants' skills in order to amplify their social and economic contributions to benefit wider sustainable development outcomes in both countries of destination and countries of origin.

## Governance

With the overwhelming adoption of the GCM in the Arab region, IOM has further strengthened its technical support to Member States and other relevant stakeholders involved in its implementation, follow-up and review. In particular, IOM is leading numerous capacity building activities and is striving to build stronger cooperation promoting the adoption of a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach as well as enhanced inter-state collaboration on migration issues. In addition, IOM actively engages with interregional, regional, subregional and national stakeholders to promote good migration governance in the region. IOM partners with regional bodies, and works through active inter-State consultation mechanisms (ISCMs), such as the Arab Regional Consultative Process on Migration and the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational and as an observer organization in the 5+5 Dialogue on Migration in the Western Mediterranean and the Abu Dhabi Dialogue. IOM also works closely with various national-level stakeholders, including ministries, national councils and parliaments as well as local authorities. Furthermore, IOM actively engages with a broad range of stakeholders such as civil society organizations with the support provided in the delivery of basic services to migrants and vulnerable communities, as well as academia for the development of strong research and data collection capacities, to support decision-making in the region.

● *UN Network on Migration in the Arab Region and GCM implementation*

IOM, as the Coordinator and Secretariat of the UN Network, played a pivotal role in the establishment of the UN Regional Network on Migration in the Arab Region as well as numerous National UN Networks, notably in Bahrain, Djibouti, Jordan, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Mauritania, Morocco, and the UAE. These UN National Networks have allowed for stronger support in the implementation follow-up and review of the GCM, of which the SDGs are part and parcel. In a number of

countries, the establishment of national UN National Networks on migration has also contributed to placing migration in the center of the CCA and the USNDCF thus enhancing system-wide coordination and programming on migration issues. Furthermore, National UN Networks contributed to enhancing Member States' capacity to report on the contributions of the GCM (based on Target 10.7) at the country level. For example, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Networks were invited to present at the Global UN Network on Migration Annual Meeting. These National UN Networks have also allowed for increased partnerships and collaboration through enhanced information exchange and coordination at the national level. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, IOM has facilitated meetings of the UN Networks of KSA and Bangladesh to look into the impact of the pandemic on labor migration and enhance coordination and partnership. Similar meetings also took place between the Network of KSA and Ethiopia. In addition, a policy paper was developed on the Safeguards in Return Management Paper as well as with regards to SOPs on the accommodations of migrant workers in the country, both documents were presented to the Government of the KSA to support its response to the COVID-19 pandemic particularly concerning migrants.

IOM has deployed important efforts to lead the preparations for the first Regional Review of the GCM in the Arab region. Together with the League of Arab States (LAS), UNESCWA and members of the Regional UN Network on Migration, IOM has adapted the Guiding Template of the Voluntary GCM National Reports from the UN Network Secretariat to help Member States prepare for their national inputs of Voluntary GCM National Reports. At the national level, IOM has provided support to a number of countries in the elaboration of their GCM Voluntary National Review (VNR) and encouraged countries to adopt a whole-of-government and whole-of-society in the process of reviewing the progress implemented. To date, 13 reports were received by the governments of Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco,

Qatar and Tunisia. Based on the VNRs received, a report highlighting the main opportunities, challenges, and areas for enhanced engagement in the implementation of the GCM in the Arab region will be presented during the Regional Review. In addition, two consultations were held with Member States in October on the modalities of the Regional Review Conference. Furthermore, two sessions of the Multi-stakeholders Dialogue were also held in late October and early November 2020. In view of increasing the engagement with the upcoming Regional Review, numerous dialogues were also organized with multiple stakeholders in the Arab region with relevance to migration issues. Two dialogues with Inter-State Consultation Mechanisms (ISCMs) and Parliamentarians were organized to discuss and optimize their contributions to the GCM Regional Review in the Arab Region. Stakeholders were provided with an overview of the recent developments on migration governance and the new structures in place for coordination, they were also briefed about the regional review process and the progress towards the 2021 Regional Review Conference. In addition, these dialogues aimed to encourage peer learning and cooperation as well as exchange of experiences and stocktaking regarding their involvement and contributions to the implementation, follow-up and review of the Global Compact. IOM also prepared and coordinated an online survey on the status of implementation of the GCM for the Regional Review in the Arab region on behalf of and in close coordination of the Regional UN Network. It was disseminated across the region to collect information from all relevant stakeholders regarding their involvement in the implementation of the GCM at the national level and to highlight the progress made and the remaining challenges since its adoption in 2018.

## COVID-19 Response

Due to the breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic, IOM has intensified its advocacy with governments and various partners for the inclusion of migrants in national response plans, including vaccination when available, as well as broadly for migrant-sensitive health services.

IOM has also developed an online migrant assistance portal that allows for IOM and partners to refer migrants for assistance online and allows migrants to self-register for support. Furthermore, to support the mainstreaming of gender considerations in COVID-19 response, IOM developed a 'Gender Checklist for COVID-19 Response at Points of Entry'. This tool, available in regional relevant languages (English, Arabic and French), provides an overview of considerations to ensure gender is integrated into border management activities, as well as a list of tools to improve the mainstreaming of gender. IOM has also actively advocated for alternatives to detention, promoting and advocating for regularization, especially of the most vulnerable, in the context of COVID-19. Positive measures towards regularization have taken place in a number of MENA countries. Moreover, IOM developed a tool aiming to systematically study how and to what extent COVID-19 affects the socio-economic outcomes of migrants and displaced populations throughout the region. The findings of the study have shown that, across the region, migrants and displaced persons' socio-economic outcomes are severely and disproportionately impacted by negative effects of COVID-19. Key negative impacts of the pandemic on migrants and displaced persons in the MENA include loss of livelihoods, constrained access to health services; diminished capacity to afford food, health and other basic expenses; increased use of (negative) coping strategies, diminished capacity to send or receive remittances. This study will help in elaborating evidence-based policy recommendations to counter the adverse socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on migrants.

## Research and evidence base

IOM programming and policy advice are driven by evidence, relying on strong data and research at the regional and national levels. IOM is coordinating the bi-annual production of the Situation Report on International Migration in the Arab region together with UNHCR and UNESCWA, and members of the Issue Based Coalition on Migration. The publication includes the latest migration figures and provides an analysis of migration trends. The 2019 edition contextualizes

and highlights the relevance of the GCM objectives for the region. Additionally, IOM was also a lead author in drafting the chapter on fragility, conflict, disaster, mobility nexus for the UN Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) Regional Assessment Report for the Arab region, also participating in the editorial committee for the report.

IOM, through its Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC), works in knowledge management and capacity-building in data collection and analysis and aims to support Member States in the collection of data and analysis for migration governance. In particular, the Migration Governance Indicators (MGI), which supports Member States in taking stock of their migration dynamics, assess their migration governance structure and identify priority policy fields. It also constitutes a strong source of information for Member States in view of conducting their voluntary stocktaking with respect to the GCM implementation, follow-up and review. The MGI initiative implemented in close coordination with governments has supported a number of Member States in the Arab region to launch national migration governance strategies as well as develop National Migration Profiles (NMP) to further reinforce the body of evidence with relation to migration. In addition, through its extensive field presence and operational capacity deployed especially in emergency and post-conflict contexts, and using the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) and other primary research tools, IOM routinely collects and disseminates data and information on internal displacement and migration trends and routes.

## Gender mainstreaming

Gender has an important influence on the reasons for which people migrate, it also impacts their journeys, determining the networks they use, the opportunities and resources available to them at destination, and their relations with the country of origin. Risks, vulnerabilities and needs are also shaped in large part by gender, and often vary drastically for different groups. Given the gendered nature of migration, the following are central to the work of IOM: (a) advocating for equal rights under the law in employment

and mobility; (b) combating discriminatory migration practices; (c) understanding how gender impacts and is affected by migration; (d) responding based on how gender influences access to services, economic growth, individual capacities, risks and vulnerabilities, and access to services; (e) ensuring diversity and inclusiveness

in consultations and participation in activities; and (f) addressing how migration influences gender roles and relationships. Given the prevalence of displacement in the region, IOM is working towards reducing gender-specific vulnerabilities during displacement.



The unprecedented scale and impact of the pandemic on our work and on our societies have set back the clock as the impact on the SDGs is yet to be fully assessed and as the conviction that to push forward and accelerate the pace towards the achievement of the SDGs will require a reset of several programmes as building forward better and enhancing resilience will need a careful review of global, regional and countries priorities.

The work of WHO and agencies in Arab countries to respond and manage the COVID 19 pandemic is described in several key documents and publications, covering the following topics.

- Development of preparedness, response and contingency plans across health and several sectors.
- Analysing health and mobility data, developing guidance and communication material, disseminating through different platforms and sharing best practices.
- Supporting and enhancing capacities for risk communication, community engagements and the management of misinformation (infodemics).
- Advocacy and establishment of partners platforms, regional working groups and task forces calling for regional solidarity and facilitation of cross border activities.
- Enhancing the procurement of essential supplies, medicines, and equipment and jointly transporting through improved supply mechanisms and platforms.
- Calling for and supporting the continuity of essential health services and designing, supporting and documenting key innovations in digital and mobile health, telemedicine, equitable access coverage.

## Mitigating the impact on health systems and ensuring continuity of essential health services

Many countries have started to implement some of the WHO recommended strategies to mitigate service disruptions, such as triaging to identify priorities, shifting to on-line patient consultations, changes to prescribing practices and supply chain and public health information strategies. However, only 14% of countries reported removal of user fees, which WHO recommends to offset potential financial difficulties for patients.

WHO published a first indicative survey on the impact of COVID-19 on health systems based on 105 country reports. Data collected from five regions including the Eastern Mediterranean Region over the period from March to June 2020 illustrated that almost every country (90%) experienced disruption to its health services, with low- and middle-income countries reporting the greatest difficulties. Most countries reported that many routine and elective services have been suspended, while critical care - such as cancer screening and treatment and HIV therapy – has seen high-risk interruptions in low-income countries. Potentially life-saving emergency services were also disrupted in almost a quarter of responding countries.

Working with UNICEF, UNFPA and ministries of health several programmes had to be resumed despite the challenges imposed on health services by the pandemic. Guidance and support for redesigning and for accessing services for immunizations, reproductive health, prevention and management non communicable diseases, overcoming the disruptions to TB , HIV and Malaria programs, enhancing and facilitating the outreach towards mental health support

are among the main interventions conducted. The most commonly cited reasons for health service disruptions included parents avoiding health centres for fear of infection; transport restrictions; suspension or closure of services and facilities; fewer healthcare workers due to diversions or fear of infection due to shortages in personal protective equipment such as masks and gloves; and greater financial difficulties.

Immunizations are an essential health service that protect susceptible individuals from vaccine-preventable diseases (VPD). Committing to sustaining immunization systems is essential with approaches that respect the principle of do-no-harm and limit transmission of COVID-19. Immunization visits were also used as opportunities to disseminate messages to encourage behaviours to reduce transmission risk of the COVID-19 virus, to identify signs and symptoms of COVID-19 disease, and to provide guidance on what to do if symptoms emerge.

WHO and UNICEF have signed a new collaborative framework which will accelerate joint public health efforts that put the most marginalized and vulnerable populations first. The new Strategic Collaboration Framework builds on a robust 70-year collaboration between the two organizations, and prioritizes four strategic areas for immediate attention and action at all levels of the organizations: universal health coverage, through a primary health care and health systems approach; mental health and psychosocial wellbeing and development; public health emergencies; and maternal and child nutrition.

In most settings, however, COVID-19 is interacting with non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and inequalities to form “the perfect storm” of avoidable death and suffering, contributing to overrun health systems, economic contraction and wider sustainable development setbacks, particularly for people who are already vulnerable. Almost one fourth (22%) of the world’s population is estimated to have an underlying condition that increases their vulnerability to COVID-19; most of these conditions are NCDs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted or halted critical mental health services in 93% of countries worldwide while the demand for mental health is increasing, according to a new WHO survey. The survey of 130 countries provides the first global data showing the devastating impact of COVID-19 on access to mental health services and underscores the urgent need for increased funding. WHO has previously highlighted the chronic underfunding of mental health: prior to the pandemic, countries were spending less than 2 per cent of their national health budgets on mental health, and struggling to meet their populations’ needs.

## Water and sanitation

Good hand hygiene is a highly cost-effective public health measure, and a cornerstone of safe and effective health care. It is crucial to protecting against a range of diseases, stopping the transmission of COVID-19, and preventing other outbreak-related diseases. It is also critical to combatting antimicrobial resistance (AMR). The Hand Hygiene for All Global Initiative aims to implement WHO’s global recommendations on hand hygiene to prevent and control the COVID-19 pandemic and work to ensure lasting infrastructure and behaviour. This WHO and UNICEF-led initiative calls for countries to lay out comprehensive roadmaps that bridge together national COVID-19 preparedness and response plans with mid- and long-term national development plans to ensure hand hygiene is a mainstay beyond the pandemic, as part of infection prevention and control (IPC) as well as water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) efforts

## Displaced, refugees and migrants

According to the latest statistics there are 18 million internally displaced people in the Eastern Mediterranean Region – an increase of 2 million on last year’s total. There are also 46 million professional and low-income labour migrants in the Region. Many migrants and displaced people live in crowded conditions where physical distancing and access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene are luxuries, creating a ripe environment for COVID-19 outbreaks.

WHO, IOM and other international agencies have been monitoring the situation among these vulnerable populations, and are raising the alarm in countries where the number of COVID-19 cases continues to rise, particularly among temporary contractual workers. UN agencies and partners recommend that during the COVID-19 pandemic, migrants and displaced people should have voluntary access to testing as well as isolation and treatment, in the case of positive diagnosis, with full respect for their dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms

### Supplies and medicines

WHO, in collaboration with the UN World Food Programme (WFP), UNICEF and other UN partner agencies, have shipped substantial volumes of essential supplies to 159 countries to support the global COVID-19 response. As the COVID-19 pandemic increasingly affects countries with under-resourced health infrastructure and services, it is an ethical imperative to ensure that all people in all countries of the world are able to access essential medicines. This includes those medicines that are under international control. There is a need to ensure access to controlled medicines such as sedatives and analgesics for intubation protocols for the treatment of patients with COVID-19. Non-COVID patients continue to require controlled medicines for the management of pain and palliative care, surgical care and anaesthesia, mental health and neurological conditions, and for the treatment of drug use disorders.

To assist countries as they work to find solutions to the lack of access and availability of controlled medicines, WHO, the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have issued a “statement on access to internationally controlled medicines during COVID-19 pandemic” with suggested technical assistance and support documents

### Travel and commerce

Working with IATA and partners on travel and public health measures to prevent transmission remain an important concern to all and approaches should be multisectoral and ensure

coordination of the measures implemented by national and international transport authorities and other relevant sectors and be aligned with the overall national strategies for adjusting public health and social measures.

Despite the pressures on economies and on commerce, the gradual lifting of travel measures should also be based on a thorough risk assessment, taking into account country context, the local epidemiology and transmission patterns, the national health and social measures to control the outbreak, and the capacities of health systems in both departure and destination countries, including at points of entry.

### Data, digital health and innovations

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the urgent need for timely and reliable data to drive strategic health action. Accurate health data are necessary to understand specific country needs in order to improve health and save lives. Data also helps direct scarce resources to where they are needed most. But too many countries still lack both the infrastructure to routinely gather health data and the analytical capacity to use these data for effective health actions and emergency response.

The COVID-19 pandemic has become a global emergency with devastating consequences. Mounting evidence demonstrates that the collection, use, sharing and further processing of data can help limit the spread of the virus and aid in accelerating the recovery, especially through digital contact tracing. Mobility data derived from people’s usage of mobile phones, emails, banking, social media and postal services, for instance, can assist in monitoring the spread of the virus and support the implementation of the UN System Organizations’ mandated activities.

Any data collection, use and processing by UN System Organizations in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic should be rooted in human rights and implemented with due regard to applicable international law, data protection and privacy principles, including the UN Personal Data Protection and Privacy Principles. Any measures taken to address the

COVID-19 pandemic should also be consistent with the mandates of the respective UN System Organizations and take into account the balancing of relevant rights, including the right to health and life and the right to economic and social development.

As part of its commitment to strengthening health information systems and improving health, WHO has announced a new approach to improving access to life-saving data: the SCORE for Health Data Technical Package. The SCORE (Survey, Count, Optimize, Review, Enable) package aims to improve the availability of timely, reliable, validated, and comparable health data. It puts together for the first time in a single, harmonized package all the key elements for optimized health information system performance

### Partnerships

Twelve multilateral health, development and humanitarian agencies in the Eastern Mediterranean/Middle East and

North African Regions will virtually launch the Regional Health Alliance. This partnership aims to support countries to accelerate progress towards the health-related SDGs and facilitate implementation of the Global Action Plan on Healthy Lives and Well-being for All.

The partnership is based on the firm commitments made by the agencies to harmonize their internal strategies, policies and approaches, and to ensure mutual accountability and strengthen collaboration with countries and each other under seven accelerator themes: primary health care; sustainable financing for health; community and civil society engagement; determinants of health; innovative programming in fragile and vulnerable settings; research and development, innovation and access; and data and digital health. Ensuring gender equality as a fundamental human right cuts across all the seven themes.



## International Labour Organization

### Fair labour migration

The International Labour Organization (ILO) supported the launch of the ESCWA-ILO-UNHCR technical paper and policy brief on the Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Refugees in the Arab Region (December 2020). By launching the online My Fair Home campaign, ILO was able to reach 4.1 million people to raise awareness on the protection of migrant domestic workers. In the “Ethical Reporting on Labour Migration in the Arab States”, ILO proposed three actions that journalists and editors can take to make their reporting on migrant workers more ethical. These included avoiding the use of discriminatory terms to describe migrants, understanding challenges facing migrants in the pandemic, and avoiding language that contributes to stigma and discrimination that migrants face.

### Occupational safety and health

In collaboration with ILO International Training Centre (ITC), ILO organized a comprehensive 25-week virtual training programme on Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) and COVID-19, which included participants from Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). The ILO COVID-19 and Health Facilities Checklist and the Practical Guide to Telework were translated to Arabic in order to promote OSH in the health sector and teleworking in the Arab region.

### Skills development

ILO developed a training manual titled “Competency-Based Training (CBT): An Introductory Manual for Practitioners”,

which is the first of its kind in the region to provide TVET trainers and developers with an introduction to the process of developing, implementing, evaluation, and updating a competency-based programme. The manual was designed to be relevant for the Arab states and aims to support the progressive reform of the TVET system, reduce skills mismatches, and enhance the labour market.

In collaboration with the ILO International Training Centre (ITC), ILO organized a series of webinars, titled “What Skills for the Future of Work in the Middle East and North Africa Region?: A South-South tripartite consultation with a focus on job rich sectors”. The first webinar took place in December 2020 and invited representatives of workers, employers and governments of five MENA countries – Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, Morocco- to improve their understanding of the technological and other changes affecting job-rich sectors, the impact of COVID-19 on the contents and organization of work, the new skills that are required, and the importance of an innovative policy framework for a human-centred future of work.

### Social protection

ILO developed a live repository of social protection and income (wage) support measures taken by respective Arab countries. A policy brief titled, “Social protection responses to the COVID-19 crisis in the MENA/Arab States region”, was also published, which maps the social protection measures, benefits and services which were provided

by the governments and UN agencies for nationals and non-nationals, including refugees, of 21 countries in the region. ILO also published a Briefing Note titled, “COVID-19: Labour Market Impact and Policy Response in the Arab States,” which provides an overview of the impact of COVID-19 on Arab States along with policy recommendations to best address the repercussions of the crisis in the region. The Briefing Note also includes a section examining the specific impact of COVID-19 on migrant workers, who have been acutely affected by the pandemic. ILO also supported its constituents and development partners in the Arab States region to bolster social protection mechanisms that are crucial for alleviating the social and economic costs of the pandemic. At the same time, ILO promoted non-discrimination and equal treatment in social protection provisions and ensured that vulnerable groups are not excluded.

## Gender equality and non-discrimination

As a result of a joint effort by OECD, ILO and CAWTAR, a study entitled “Changing laws and breaking barriers for women’s economic empowerment in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia” was produced, which highlighted the potential of the Arab region in promoting increased economic empowerment of its women citizens. The report analyses recent legal, policy and institutional reforms in favour of women’s economic empowerment in the aforementioned countries and identifies the factors behind the success of these reforms. It also proposes actions and tools that policy makers can use to improve women’s economic empowerment.



*Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.*

As a supplement to the results reported within the frame of the IBCs, the present annex provides an overview of select results and achievements supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the Arab States region together with United Nations and regional partners in 2020.

Over the course of 2020, UNDP supported integrated responses to the impacts of COVID-19 across the region, while continuing and adapting critical work in support of accelerating sustainable and inclusive growth in the region, while strengthening its coordination across the UNDS as well as partnerships with regional and national institutions with a view to support building forward better in line with Agenda 2030 and its call to leave no one behind.

As part of its strong commitment to United Nations reform, UNDP worked closely together with sister agencies towards solutions for regional and sub-regional development challenges and at country level in the following priority areas:

### COVID-19 response

UNDP supported an integrated UN response to the impact of COVID-19 in the region. As the technical lead on the UN socio-economic response to COVID-19, and in support of the Resident Coordinators, UNDP engaged with United Nations agencies, international financial institutions, and other national and international partners to develop 34 thematic Socio-Economic Impact Assessments and 16

Socio-Economic Response Plans. Both the assessments and response plans highlighted vulnerabilities and incorporated a leaving no one behind approach in line with the five pillars set out in the UN Secretary-General's report *Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the Socio-Economic Impacts of COVID-19*. Assessments and response plans are guiding UNCTs' COVID-19 responses with monitoring taking place through the UNINFO data base. Furthermore, UNDP worked with partners to produce and disseminate knowledge on priority areas related to COVID-19 in the region, including analysis and research to inform policy discussions on the response to and recovery from the impacts of the pandemic.

In close coordination with sister agencies at the country level, ongoing initiatives such as the development of Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs) with funding from the UN Joint SDG Fund were updated to address emerging COVID-19 related issues at the outset of the crisis, providing a strong platform for joint UNCT responses.

### Supporting anti-corruption measures and corruption risk management

UNDP collaborated with UNODC and the OECD in 2020 to promote and support anti-corruption measures and policies across the region. In Lebanon, UNDP partnered with the OECD on the development of the National Action Plan to Implement the Access to Information Law in Lebanon that

was approved by the Government's Ministerial Committee on Anti-Corruption, supported the implementation of the country's first-ever National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2020-2025) in cooperation with UNODC, and engaged in an inclusive review of Lebanon's compliance with the UN Convention Against Corruption. In Algeria, UNDP partnered with the African Development Bank, UNODC, the World Bank and the OECD to inform the development of the national anti-corruption strategy, and in Iraq UNDP cooperated with UNODC to review the draft national anti-corruption strategy.

### Promoting knowledge-based transformations and decision-making

In the wake of COVID-19, UNDP worked with partners in the Arab States region to deepen the application of innovation and new technologies to the collection, analysis and visualization of data, to foster evidence-based policy making.

To promote data and statistical literacy among youth, UNDP in partnership with WHO, UNEP, WFP, UNESCO and the Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism Network (ARIJ), organized the Visualize 2030 data camp, in which young women and men from the region developed innovative audio-visual data products addressing the impact of COVID-19 within the framework of the SDGs.

UNDP also supported the institutional capacity of the League of Arab States (LAS) through the design of its digital strategy and by upgrading the LAS's Information Technology infrastructure. The League of Arab States (LAS) has successfully switched to the new system, enabling it to advance connectivity with Member States and partners to support its critical mandate in region-wide recovery from COVID-19. UNDP and the LAS also organized a COVID-19-focused dialogue series convening stakeholders and experts to assess the impact of the pandemic in the Arab States region and to discuss policy responses towards an effective

and sustainable recovery, with the participation of UNESCWA and UN agencies including WHO, UNICEF, WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO, ILO, and UNDCO.

### Strengthening regional capacities to advance Gender Justice and Equality

Gender has been a high priority in the United Nations Development System's response to COVID-19. In this context, UNDP has continued its strong collaboration with UN-Women, UNFPA and UNESCWA to enhance information sharing and policy support to promote women's empowerment in the Arab States region. The joint engagement included expanding the research on the joint Gender Justice Matrix to include SDG 5.1.1 indicators, and enabling the existing network of ministries of women to become fully engaged in sharing information about legal and administrative measures across the Arab States region which hinder or enhance women's empowerment.

UNDP, in partnership with UN-Women, initiated from the region a global online consultation launched on women, peace and security as a contribution to engagements on the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325. The consultation contributed to raising awareness across the region and globally, and specifically with key policy makers and UN agencies on the actions and views of women peacemakers on the ground. In addition to UNDP and UN-Women, the global engagement was held in partnership with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN).

In addition, in collaboration with UN-Women and the OECD, UNDP hosted a high-level webinar on women's economic empowerment as part of the COVID-19 response to inform analysis in the region and draw attention to steps necessary to ensure that governments build back more equally.

## Enhancing climate action and regional efforts towards a greener economy

Under the auspices of the LAS, UNDP, together with World Food Program (WFP), United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative (UNEP-FI), UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), UN-Habitat and the Arab Water Council (AWC), laid the ground for the establishment of a regional SDG Climate Facility. The Facility aims at promoting integrated solutions for climate action that bring benefits across the SDGs, enhancing crisis prevention and recovery efforts with a climate and sustainability lens, and scaling-up of local and regional partnerships and finance mechanisms towards such efforts.

Under the framework of the SDG Climate Facility: Climate Action for Human Security regional project, the first Regional Climate Security Stakeholder Dialogue was conducted under the theme “Towards an Integrated Climate Security Framework for the Arab Region” with the contribution of all partner UN agencies involved in the project. The dialogue brought together over 70 participants including senior governmental officials, policymakers, as well as experts from multilateral regional and international organizations. This resulted in a jointly-developed Climate Security Vision 2030 and in the operationalization of a Regional Climate Security Network, to serve as an entity for developing and implementing climate security policies and activities across the Arab region.

## Fostering inclusivity, civic engagement and spreading awareness on the SDGs

UNDP has continued to promote the youth agenda in the Arab region in line with the overall UN regional youth strategy, and together with UNICEF and ILO, has laid the foundation for a new broader regional initiative to promote youth entrepreneurship and civic engagement. This joint collaboration builds on UNDP’s ongoing work on youth, which in 2020 saw the engagement of hundreds of young women and men from the region and 45 youth-serving organizations across 16 Arab countries in initiatives related

to electoral processes, awareness-raising on Agenda 2030, access to data, and knowledge, offering networking opportunities within and outside the region.

In addition, UNDP, jointly with DPPA’s Electoral Assistance Division, worked with the Electoral Affairs Department of the League of Arab States to enhance its capacities to serve as a regional body of knowledge and expertise on matters related to elections, including training for LAS Member States on disability rights.

UNDP engaged with UN partners to bring the issue of inclusion of persons with disabilities in the COVID-19 response to the forefront, with increased focus and progress across the region in this stream of work. In addition to specific country level activities, UNDP together with ESCWA organized a joint regional information sharing and learning event on Building Forward Better: Towards a Disability-Inclusive and Sustainable Post-COVID-19, on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. The dialogue engaged UN and civil society partners, as well as UNDP’s Regional Goodwill Ambassador Michael Haddad, to build momentum around disability-inclusion work across sectors, at the policy and programme levels.

## Enhancing sub-regional cooperation for rapid recovery from crisis

UNDP and UNCHR are co-leading the Regional Resilience Refugee Plan (3RP) to respond to the regional impact of the Syria crisis, bringing together over 270 partners including UN agencies, civil society, donors and both national and international development actors. The 3RP serves as a model for the integration of humanitarian and development assistance under a single response to address the needs of refugees, host communities and host countries. In 2020, through the 3RP Joint Secretariat, the UNDP Sub-Regional Response Facility for the Syria Crisis (SRF), a unit of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States, coordinated with UNHCR to pilot a 3RP Regional Needs Overview, which contributed to inform the 3RP 2021-2022 cycle. In the run-up to the fourth Brussels Conference on Syria and the Region,

UNDP also organized a side-event on resilience, which brought together more than 180 regional and country-level representatives from the United Nations, governments, NGOs and civil society to discuss the future of resilience responses in host countries in the context of COVID-19 and other compounding crises. In collaboration with FAO and UN-Women, UNDP also supports the development of 'communities of practice' on resilience measurement to advance the adoption of standardized, gender-sensitive measurement tools, such as "Resilience Index Measurement and Analysis Model" (RIMA). Together with WFP, UNDP has also spearheaded a new workstream under the UNHCR-led Regional Durable Solutions Working Group to provide a platform for evidence building and advocacy on livelihoods programming and refugee return preparedness.

In addition, the joint UNDP-UN-Habitat municipal resilience programme in countries affected by the Syria crisis registered important progress towards addressing the needs of vulnerable host and refugee communities, and enhancing the capacity of subnational authorities and municipalities to provide services in Lebanon and Iraq. The partnership between UNDP and UN-Habitat in this multi-country programme leverages the complementarity of the

two agencies' specific sectoral expertise to support both livelihood interventions and the rehabilitation of damaged infrastructure to strengthen the self-resilience of affected communities. In 2020, this included the rehabilitation of damaged houses and water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure, as well as sustainable job creation and promotion of entrepreneurship through the launch of a grant scheme that generated employment gains for affected communities in Iraq.

### Fostering the interconnectedness of Arab markets

UNDP continued its partnership with LAS by strengthening the capacity of its Secretariat, technical bodies and Member States to manage processes of and develop policies conducive to regional economic integration, and the modernization of the supply/value chain in preparation for the Arab Customs Union. UNDP and the LAS also collaborated to support the improvement of regulatory frameworks in trade measures and support was provided to the Economic Sector and Economic Social Council (ECOSOC) of the LAS to adopt transparent notification procedures on trade policies.



## Background

The United Nations for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) - Regional Office for the Arab States (ROAS) is mandated to support the implementation of Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) 2015-2030 in the Arab region, in line with the UNDRR Strategic Frameworks. SFDRR is a voluntary, non-binding agreement that aims to reduce existing disaster risk, prevent the emergence of new risks and strengthen resilience of societies.

Towards this, UNDRR ROAS worked closely with the League of Arab States, Arab Governments and other stakeholders to develop the Arab Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (2030) which was endorsed at the Arab Summit in Riyadh in April 2018. UNDRR ROAS convenes Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction every three years at ministerial level to review progress, prioritize actions and ensure political commitment towards implementation of the SFDRR. It also organizes bi-annual Arab Partnership Meetings that bring together all Arab government, regional DRR stakeholders, UN and international organizations to review progress made in implementing the Sendai Framework and the Arab Strategy for DRR. The Arab Partnership for DRR continuously takes a stock of progress and challenges in implementation of risk reduction measures in countries and collectively resolves possible way forward in accelerating the implementation of the Sendai Framework in the region. In November 2020, UNDRR organized the Fifth Arab Partnership Meeting for DRR with focus on reviewing the achievement of Target (e) of SFDRR, which calls for a substantial increase in the number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies by 2020 using

capacity development, technical assistance, and knowledge products as key tools.

As the disaster risk reduction focal point within the UN System, UNDRR (ROAS) worked closely at regional, national, and local levels to ensure an all-of-society approach to reducing disaster risk and ensure coherence of DRR policies and strategies with Paris Agreement and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## Supporting an Inclusive COVID-19 Response in the Arab region

In view of the COVID-19 pandemic and its challenging impact on all countries in 2020, a need for adequate understanding of biological hazard risks to enhance their prevention, mitigation, preparedness, and effective response has surfaced. Therefore, it has become imperative that governments are supported in reviewing their national strategies for disaster risk reduction to ensure that such biological hazards are not disregarded and are properly addressed.

At an early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNDRR Regional Office for Arab States highlighted the importance of engaging its National and Local government Focal Points and the diversified Arab DRR Stakeholder Groups through the organization of regional webinars to share experiences and lessons learnt in managing the pandemic amid other simultaneously occurring hazards. This was conducted in line with the Sendai Framework (2015- 2030) being an agreed roadmap for reducing risk as it recognizes the health aspects in DRR and biological risk as a key area of focus for disaster risk management. In addition, UNDRR-ROAS

reviewed 13 national strategies for DRR to verify the extent to which biological hazards, including epidemics and pandemics are addressed in national policies and strategies for DRR. This effort fed into the ongoing development of a guide on integrating biological hazards in national DRR strategies which will be annexed to the published UNDRR's Words into Action (WiA) Guidelines on the Development of National Strategies for Disaster Risk Reduction.

### Sendai Framework Regional Implementation

In 2020, UNDRR ROAS continued to provide remote technical support to Arab states on the use of the Sendai Framework Monitor (SFM) to monitor and report on their achievement of the seven global targets of Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR).

A regional review was conducted in September 2020 with 14 national Sendai focal points to examine progress and challenges in SFM reporting and collectively decided on actions towards increasing reporting efforts and improving the quality of data. More specifically, the participating national governments reviewed progress in reporting -especially on the achievement of Target E, discussed barriers to and recommendations for reporting disaggregated data by hazard, location, sex, income, and disability on SFM and examined preparedness to report on COVID-19 impact and losses in advance of the upcoming milestone of 31 March 2021.

### Implementation of the Sendai Framework and Coherence Across Agendas

As part of the effort towards global coherence between international agendas such as the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, UNDRR (ROAS), in 2020, embarked on assessment of policy landscape towards enhancing coherent DRR national policies and strategies Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania and Sudan.

In addition, during the Fifth Arab Partnership Meeting for DRR, a session with UN partners including UN-HABITAT, FAO, IOM, ITU, UNESCO, UN-ESCWA, UN-Women, UN-OCHA, WFP, and UNDP discussed regional efforts in advancing the coherent implementation of the three global agendas including ongoing joint UN programmes (such as the SDG-Climate Facility Project). In addition, the session introduced opportunities for UN coordination in DRR including through direct support to UNCTs and HCTs to implement; a) the recently developed Guidance Note on Integrating DRR and Climate Change in UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) and b) the Recommendations and Checklist for Scaling Up DRR in Humanitarian Action.

### Regional Partnerships for DRR

While recognizing the remarkable progress made by the governments and all stakeholders in implementing the Arab Strategy for DRR 2030 and its Prioritized Action Plan 2018-2020, the Fifth Arab Partnership Meeting for DRR called for more collective and coordinated effort to advance DRR in the region. In view of the colossal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting concluded several agreements including the development of a "Guidance Note on Integrating Biological Hazards in DRR Action in the Arab Region" through cooperation between UNDRR and the League of Arab States and in consultation with the Arab governments.:

The Arab Partnership Meetings for DRR are also the forum where technical discussions are held in preparation of the Regional Ministerial-Level Platforms for DRR. In the last quarter of 2021, the Fifth Arab Platform for DRR will be organized, preceded by several consultation webinars to prepare the key outcome documents that will be endorsed at the Platform. Those include a political declaration, Prioritized Action Plan 2021-2024 for implementation of the Arab Strategy for DRR 2030 and revised Voluntary Commitments of the Arab DRR Stakeholder Groups. Those are: 1) Arab Science and Technology Advisory Group for DRR, 2) Arab Civil Society Organizations Group, 3) Arab

Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Group, 4) Arab Major Children and Youth Group, 5) Arab Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and 6) Arab Media Group. In addition, UNDRR supported the establishment of the private sector alliance for DRR in the UAE as the first such alliance in the Arab region.

### Implementation of the UN Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience by UN System Partners

UNDRR (ROAS) improved policy alignment with the international development agenda for increased impact and effectiveness on a regional level. As a result of its advocacy efforts and policy inputs, 2020 witnessed greater political recognition to accelerate the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction through the UN Plan of Action on DRR for Resilience at the global, regional, and national level.

The Arab States region was the first to activate the Joint Statement of Intent that was signed by UNDP and UNDRR in February 2020. In order to translate this Statement of Intent into actionable work plans, UNDRR and UNDP (ROAS) ran a series of thematic virtual consultations to facilitate the development of a joint work plan for 2020 and 2021. This resulted in a summary report reflecting all joint actions. UNDRR ROAS coordinated with UNDP Regional Bureau for the Arab States on ensuring active engagement in the Arab Partnership Meetings for DRR and the upcoming Fifth Arab Regional Platform for DRR.

To maximize the support to Member States on reporting on the implementation of the Sendai Framework, including the DRR-specific indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals, a “Third Training of Trainers (ToT) Webinar” series on Sendai Framework Monitoring and Disaster Loss Accounting was organized in October-November 2020. In line with the joint workplan, UNDRR and UNDP co-organized two orientation sessions for UNDP DRM Focal Points in country offices to equip them with the knowledge and skills to support their national counterparts.

### Regional Assessment Report (RAR) of DRR – A joint effort of regional UN and development organisations in Arab states

● *Analysis of risk trends and patterns, progress and challenges in disaster risk reduction*

The Regional Assessment Report (RAR) 21 is a first attempt to bring together DRR, CCA, urbanism and SDGs topics in a coherent manner in the Arab region, albeit from a DRR lens, while accounting for emergent approaches and risks including recognizing the large degree of uncertainty characterizing the era we are living in, and the associated cascading and systemic risks within and across vital sectors. It is envisaged that this will signal the beginning of a process of RAR reports for the Arab region, with future reports focusing on region-specific areas of priority as identified in this RAR. While this work has a regional scope, the RAR21 recognizes that risk management requires global cooperation and strong global risk governance mechanisms, given the interdependency of systems.

The RAR 21 was a collaborative effort of a number of regional UN and international/ regional organizations and DRR stakeholders. An Editorial Committee (EC) that was established in 2019 guided the scope of the report and contributed to the drafting of its eight agreed-upon chapters. The zero-order draft of the report was developed by 4 October 2020, following which it underwent internal UNDRR review and external EC and Peer Reviews in the last quarter of 2020 and will be published by end of May 2021.

### UNDRR (ROAS) and the Issue-Based Coalitions in the Region

As a member of the Regional Collaborative Platform, UNDRR (ROAS) joined hands with number of other UN agencies in channeling its support to UNCTs through the Issue-Based Coalitions (IBCs) on Food Security, Climate Change and Environment and on Urbanization.

Being a member of (IBC) on Food Security, Climate Change and Environment, ROAS worked closely with UNDP and UNEP Regional Offices and RC Offices in Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon to initiate cooperation on the integration of DRR and climate change into UNSDCFs for joint implementation in 2021. Under this IBC, UNDRR was able to develop a first draft of the Regional Assessment Report on DRR in the Arab Region in close partnership with regional/Arab UN and non-UN agencies and organizations.

As member of the regional IBC on Urbanization, ROAS developed and shared a survey on preparedness and response of cities to COVID-19 that articulated the “Lessons Learned: Arab States Cities Preparedness and Response to COVID-19” webinar in partnership with UNHABITAT, UNEP, WHO and ESCWA and b) Cities Recovery and Build Back Better (BBB) after COVID-19” in partnership with UNHABITAT, ESCWA, IOM, WHO, UNOPS & UNEP.

### Promoting Resilient Cities under the Making Cities Resilient (MCR) 2030

The Arab States Office for Disaster Risk Reduction led the regional launch of the Making Cities Resilient (MCR) Programme 2030, succeeding the UNDRR’s MCR Campaign (2010-2020). The programme as a unique cross-stakeholder initiative with a profound partnership

of organizations such as the C40 Cities, Resilient Cities Network, ICLEI, IFRC, JICA, UCLG, UNHABITAT, UNDRR, UNOPS, World Bank and World Council on City Data aims at ensuring cities become inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable by 2030. The programme aims at achieving cities resilience through advocacy, sharing knowledge and experiences; establishing mutually reinforcing city-to-city learning networks; injecting technical expertise; connecting multiple layers of government; and building partnerships. The ambition is that Arab Cities would have the ability to withstand and recover from the multiple risks and shocks faced and transform into sustainable, smart, and resilient cities. Through consistency and commitment towards mainstreaming inclusive disaster risk reduction in local development, strengthening risk governance and enhancing community resilience the region will showcase more success stories in the field of DRR and resilience. UNDRR-ROAS is committed to supporting cities in the region to implement the Sendai Framework, through accessible knowledge, guidance, capacity building and facilitating peer-to-peer learning. A Regional Coordination Committee for the MCR Programme 2030 with UNHABITAT Regional office for Arab states as Co-Chair was formed in December 2020 comprising UNDP, UNOPS, UNESCO, ICLEI, IFRC, World Bank, Islamic Development Bank, UAE ARISE Network for DRR, Arab Science and Technology Advisory Group for DRR, Arab Towns Organization, and local government focal points of Aqaba and Dubai.



United Nations  
 Educational, Scientific and  
 Cultural Organization

In 2020, while the COVID-19 pandemic created the largest disruption of education systems in history, UNESCO continued to support young people, leveraging the great opportunity to capitalize on the demographic dividend of children and young people in the Arab region.

### Open science

Following the UNESCO General Conference in November 2019 that agreed to prepare an international standard-setting instrument on Open Science, in 2020, the Arab region reflected this endeavour by exploring the Open Science opportunities among the Arab States. UNESCO facilitated discussions and consultations for addressing challenges in the area of Open Science development and promoted best practices from global and regional perspectives. The approach was also of great significance, whereby a particular focus was placed on engaging and involving young researchers in forming Open Science policies and practices. The discussions highlighted the societal impact of scientific enterprises as an essential aspect of Open Science transition and the need for comprehensive technical, strategic, and policy actions.

### Big data and e-learning for universities

In November 2020, UNESCO and International Centre for Higher Education Innovation (ICHEI) organized an IIOE Big

Data in Higher Education Training within the International Institute of Online Education (IIOE) framework. A two weeks-certified training on Big Data and e-Learning was offered to 131 universities from 16 countries in the Arab region, comprised of 383 participants (40 per cent female). The training benefited lecturers, assistant/associate professors, and teaching assistants to support the digital transformation in higher education through enhanced general knowledge on Big Data and digital awareness.

### Regional Framework for e-Learning and Quality Assurance for Higher Education Institutions

Following a regional meeting with Heads of Arab Universities from Mauritania, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, UAE, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, and Syria, UNESCO developed a referential framework: Regional Framework for e-Learning and its Quality Assurance for the Arab Higher Education Institutions. The referential framework outlines the standards for e-learning on governance and management, curriculum, technological infrastructure, learning and evaluation, student services, quality assurance procedures, information security, intellectual property, and ethics.

### Policy brief – Distance Learning in the Arab States

UNESCO Beirut developed a Policy Brief on distance learning to provide guidance and recommendations for policy-makers and educators in the Arab region for their

swift transition from traditional teaching methods to the new educational modalities on distance learning. The Policy Brief outlines guidance including, a clear definition of distance learning, opportunities and key challenges, elements of transition, list of tools, the role of E-learning facilitators, the importance of blended learning, and recommendations.

### Distance Learning in the Arab World: Report on the responses of Arab countries to educational needs during COVID-19 pandemic

UNESCO assessed distance learning by collecting inputs from 19 countries in the Arab region through a survey. The survey consisted of three folds; countries with advanced technical capabilities, countries with intermediate technical capabilities, and countries in crises with minimal technical capabilities. Inputs were received from 13,000 respondents across the region, including educational stakeholders and officials responsible for distance learning at the Ministry of Education, principals and directors of schools, universities, institutes, teachers, parents, and learners. The analysis contributed to bridging the gaps between technical supports and identified needs at the national level that drew policy recommendations on distance learning in different national contexts.

### Developed regional education/learning platform (Kodrat)

On the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNESCO developed an Arab regional online learning tool, Kodrat. Kodrat platform aims to support teachers, education practitioners, and education decision-makers by building their distance learning capacities through a free online self-learning platform. Catered specifically for the Arab region, Kodrat provides online courses in Arabic that support professional development in diverse education fields, including distance learning, inclusive education, and lifelong learning.

### Joint United Nations efforts among UNICEF, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNRWA, WFP and the World Bank

The agencies were committed to a regional plan of action building on the Global Framework for Reopening Schools, that guided regional and national coordinated action in support of quality learning for all. Together the agencies organized a series of regional webinars for and with ministries of education to promote continuity of learning, whether face-to-face, remotely or through blended solutions. The recommendations of the latest Ministerial Meeting on 14 October 2020 constitute a basis for orientating UN development agencies' joint-support in 2021 and beyond.

### Series of technical webinars

Leveraging the technical expertise, UNESCO organized multiple technical webinars and studies in 2020. The Webinars focused on ways to ensure inclusive education during the global pandemic, Distance Education, Adjust Education, and the future of education beyond COVID-19.

### A focus on teachers and their role in curriculum adjustment

Based on UNESCO HQ's collaboration, a series of webinars on teacher support in the context of COVID-19 crisis were conducted for the Arab Region in June and September 2020. A regional webinar was conducted focusing on teacher leadership on the occasion of World Teachers Day 2020. UNESCO Beirut also contributed to several global and regional policy briefs, issue notes, and leaflets on teachers' roles in maintaining quality learning for all in the context of the COVID-19 crisis while catering for students' wellbeing.

### Tarbiyah21 - Main channel for networking, communication, knowledge management and partnerships during COVID-19

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, Tarbiyah 21 newsletter is being utilized as a knowledge-generating and sharing

channel for the region to widely disseminate COVID-19 education response and bridge regional communities both within and outside of the Arab region. A newsletter is sent out twice a week to mitigate education disruption and cope with COVID-19.

### Development of an Arab educational alliance

Against the backdrop of the global pandemic, UNESCO (regional, field, and cluster offices), UNESCO Category II Centres (RCEP, RCQE, RCECCE), regional education partners (ALECSO, ABEGS, ICESCO) and UN agencies in the region (UNICEF, UNRWA) formed a regional alliance. AEA is followed by regional task force equipped for COVID-19 educational responses and aims to rearrange the assistance to support the Member States build more resilient, innovative, and open education systems aligned with UNESCO's global education agenda.

### Adult learning and education snapshot

UNESCO analysed the status of adult education in 15 counties in the Arab region through a survey. Based on the gathered data and information, the Regional snapshot Arab States: Adult Education and Literacy for the Arab states in the COVID-19 Crisis and Beyond assessed the status of available Adult Education opportunities, qualities of services, and gaps that require further enhancement.

### Online leadership training programme for Arab youth on ESD and Green TVET

Reflecting the newly developed Global Education Sustainable Development (ESD) Roadmap, Between September – December 2020, UNESCO launched an online leadership training for Arab Youth on ESD and Green TVET, co-organized with Organisation de Développement Durable (ODDD NGO). More than 60 participants from 18 Arab countries took part in the virtual launching event. The online programme aimed to empower young Arab men and women through an online initiative. The initiative offered an innovative and empowering opportunity to learn and

contribute ideas for creating solutions on ESD and Green TVET for the Arab region. The intervention is expected to prioritize and stimulate transformative actions in policy, learning environments, youth mobilization, and local level actions, especially in the Education field, including the TVET sector.

### Webinar on education for sustainable development, Arab youth and COVID-19: Reflecting, sharing and planning

In May 2020, UNESCO conducted an Arab regional webinar in collaboration with Organisation de Développement Durable (ODDD) that prioritized young people's voices. The event aimed to reflect on the impacts of the COVID-19 confinement on the current practice of ESD, focusing on youth-led stories and experiences from the Arab region. The webinar also sought to address challenges, opportunities, and the needed support toward youth activists post COVID-19. Young people shared their stories and discussed the impact of COVID-19 confinement on the practice of ESD.

### Social and human science - Rethinking social transformations: Inequalities in the Arab region in light of COVID-19

UNESCO, Arab Alternatives Forum for Social Studies (AFA), and Department for Sociology, Anthropology at the American University of Beirut (AUB), and Media Studies developed a partnership to produce a regional analysis to understand the social transformations and inequalities in the Arab region in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The themes covered in this analysis are as follows:

- Economic Inequalities in the Arab world in the aftermath of COVID-19;
- Rethinking Public Policy and State Responses (Labour market, healthcare system, Housing, and Education);
- Rethinking "War" and "Occupation" in light of COVID-19: Syria and Palestine; and

- Rethinking the citizenship and human rights of vulnerable populations groups (women, Refugees, Persons with Disabilities).

### Webinars and video messages on “Ethical perspectives of COVID-19 responses and impact in the Arab region”

In April 2020, UNESCO organized four webinars on Ethical dilemmas in COVID-19 responses with the participation of Arab experts in medicine, public health and philosophy. Fifteen focused video messages were produced to reflect the ethical aspects of COVID-19 response and widely

disseminated through the regional network of National Bioethics/Ethics committees in the Arab region.

### Virtual youth consultation on “Ethics of artificial intelligence”

In July 2020, UNESCO organized a virtual consultation on “Ethics of artificial intelligence” for 89 Arab young people from 10 countries, in partnership with Beirut Arab University (BAU) to reflect youth perspective in the normative document on “Ethics of artificial intelligence” in progress.


**UN  
VOLUNTEERS**

Despite the unprecedented challenges faced in 2020, as a service to the United Nations system, the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) Regional Office for Arab States deployed the largest number of volunteers in the Arab States region in organization's history. UNV continues to bring an integrated service to the United Nations, including through participation in the Issue-Based Coalitions for Adolescents and Youth Empowerment, Humanitarian and Development Nexus, Gender, Justice and Equality, among others.

In support of the IBC dedicated to Adolescents and Youth Empowerment, UNV will provide technical support to the establishment of the National Youth Volunteer Service Platform (NYVSP) and all its elements, including introducing international expertise and best practice. This is confirmed in the 2020 MoU signed between the Prime Minister Office, Higher Council for Youth and Sports and UNICEF-UNDP-UNFPA, with the inclusion of UN Volunteers. An action plan is being defined to establish the Palestine Volunteers Service Programme. It is expected to serve as a platform for diverse voluntary work initiatives throughout the State of Palestine. The National Volunteer Service will connect potential youth volunteers with opportunities to contribute meaningfully to their communities, while gaining valuable work experience and skills for future employment. In addition to Palestine, the UNV Regional Office has engaged UNICEF at the country (Iraq, Jordan) and regional level in joint initiatives in support to generation unlimited, and mainstream national volunteers networks.

In the Arab States region, 1,141 UN Volunteers were deployed in 31 countries (top 3: Sudan 214, Lebanon 157, Egypt 123) with 31 partners (top 3: UNDP 370, UNICEF

144, WHO 93). Of these UN Volunteers, 55 per cent were women and 60 per cent nationals. Remote support was also provided by 1,484 Online Volunteers, serving virtually worldwide with 44 UN partners and in support of seven civil society organizations and public institutions.

Moreover, the portfolio continues to diversify. There is an increase in the number of UN partners between 2019 and 2020, from 30 to 31, and a decreasing concentration of the top 5 partners to account for 66 per cent of total UN Volunteers mobilized in the region in 2020, compared to 68 per cent in 2019. There is also evidence of an increase in the number of national UN Volunteer assignments, while maintaining the same number of international UN Volunteers, female percentages and average age. Regarding volunteer satisfaction, over 84 per cent of our UN Volunteers responded reporting 4.3/5 satisfaction rate in 2020.

Evidence indicates that UN partners rely on UNV service provision. For example, thanks to UNV COVAX and COVID support, UNV deployed 75 volunteers on the forefront of UNDP COVID response in Arab States. With key recognized achievement in Yemen, with 65 Doctors and Nurses deployed as national UN Volunteers to support the UN Clinics in the country.

UNV remains committed to continue a strong collaboration with the UN system in Yemen and Iraq for the coming elections, and in Libya and Sudan for mission transition and stabilization, recognizing the near necessity of UN Volunteers for the UN system and UNDP to achieve impact at scale, efficiently, and cost-effectively. As demonstrated in the UNV COVID/COVAX regional response, Beirut blast

and Yemen, after a short period, the Regional Office has achieved historical highs in Arab States. With the youth bulge in AS region, more could be done to demonstrate the relationship between volunteerism and expanding economic opportunities.

On SDG contribution, UN Volunteers serving in the region reported contributions to all 17 SDGs, with the highest being SDG 16 (32.5 per cent), SDG 3 (22.4 per cent), SDG 17 (19 per cent) and SDG 5 (18.4 per cent).





Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



## ● COVID-19 response

### ○ Policy briefs

The decade marked for accelerated action and delivery towards sustainable development has been disrupted by a global health threat that has severely impacted the Arab region. The virus has severely affected the lives and livelihoods of people from all social and economic backgrounds. Although the focus has until now been on urgent action to save lives and protect and repair livelihoods, the crisis also served a stark reminder of the importance of an efficient and effective public sector as the first line of defence in addressing any risk, and of the need to continuously strengthen national capacities which are paramount to welfare and social and economic prosperity.

In the wake of the pandemic, ESCWA capitalised on its expertise and proactively embarked on analysing emerging trends, risks and opportunities, and identifying good practice in support of member States' and regional policy- and decision-making on COVID-19-related issues. Specifically, ESCWA prepared 12 thematic policy briefs on topics ranging from the impact of the pandemic on specific vulnerable groups (youth, elderly, gender equity) and/or on core socioeconomic factors (food security and poverty, fiscal and financial stability, natural resources, or trade) to future-focused proposals for recovery and building back better (<https://www.unescwa.org/publications/socioeconomic-impact-covid-19-policy-briefs>). The foresight and early actions taken by ESCWA were much appreciated by

its constituency, as demonstrated by the feedback obtained from member States. They also received extensive media coverage, which undoubtedly contributed to awareness-raising amongst various stakeholders in the region and beyond.

### ○ International technical cooperation

ESCWA participated in international technical cooperation efforts to monitor and mitigate the effects of the pandemic, such as the United Nations Observatory on Border Crossings Status due to COVID-19 aimed at preventing the spread of the virus. ESCWA worked on including Arab countries in the observatory. ESCWA also participated in the launch of three new projects funded by the United Nations Development Account, which were designed to address the effects of the pandemic. ESCWA worked on the projects to obtain more resources for technical support to Arab countries. These new projects are: the Global initiative towards post-Covid-19 resurgence of the MSME sector, which ESCWA is leading with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD); a project entitled "Transport and trade connectivity in the age of pandemics: United Nations solutions for smooth and collaborative transport and trade without friction", which was launched by UNCTAD and the five United Nations regional commissions to formulate and implement measures for the continued flow of transport and trade across borders while preventing the spread of pandemics by implementing digital solutions; and a project entitled "Strengthening social protection to address the pandemic" aimed at strengthening social

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

○ *Protecting women and girls during the COVID-19 pandemic*

In early 2020, governments around the globe imposed lockdowns to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. While necessary to prevent loss of life, they brought with them a troubling consequence: an increase in violence against women and girls, including online violence. In many cases, survivors were stranded in the proximity of perpetrators. As a result, the survivors' ability to access essential support services decreased significantly; either because they were not available (e.g.: were reprioritized to focus on COVID-19 interventions) or not easily accessible. Women and girls in the Arab region were no exception.

In response to the initial reports of increased violence against women and girls and a projected increase in gender-based inequalities in the labour market, care work responsibilities, education and access to timely services and information, ESCWA issued a multi-agency policy brief on "The Impact of COVID-19 on Gender Equality in the Arab Region." The brief aimed to raise awareness amongst member States of the potential gendered impact of the lockdowns and, in particular, the gender equality concerns that needed to be taken into consideration while addressing the pandemic. It was accompanied by an open letter to Governments of all Arab States, advocating for implementation of alternative solutions to assist female survivors of domestic violence across the region. The subsequent policy brief "Violence against Women and Girls and COVID-19 in the Arab

Region" outlined qualitative and quantitative data on instances of such violence, the availability of support systems, and good and emerging practices for preventing and combating it. The efforts were complemented by a special meeting of the ESCWA Committee on Women which discussed the impact of COVID-19 on gender equality at the regional and national levels. In addition, building on the regional approach and in partnership with UN Women, ESCWA provided policy guidance at the national level (e.g.: for Iraq and Yemen) on mitigating the impact of the pandemic on women's economic and political participation and access to social protection services.

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

In the same context, ESCWA is working with Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Saudi Arabia to study the responsiveness of available services to care work (caring for children, older persons and people with disabilities) in the light of the pandemic, so as to

guide countries' response to the negative effects of the pandemic and related measures on women in general, and working women in particular.

● *Integrated management of natural resources for sustainable development*

○ *Energy efficiency in the building sector*

In 2019 and 2020, ESCWA produced baseline mappings of energy use in the building sector in Jordan and Tunisia, results of which were validated through national dialogues with relevant stakeholders; and assessed the related policy and institution-building needs in both countries. The evidence gathered in the process allowed ESCWA to better target its technical assistance in support of the governments' efforts to design and implement energy-efficiency policies and programmes for the sector. As part of the assistance, ESCWA undertook assessments of energy performance certification standards for energy-intensive household appliances and equipment in both countries. Consequently, it supported relevant institutions in Tunisia with the set-up of a digitalised process aimed at reinforcing the certification programme. The launch of a similar scheme has also been discussed with institutions in Jordan. Furthermore, ESCWA worked with relevant institutions in both countries on identifying energy-efficiency measures which could be replicated at large scale and on developing implementation schemes, including incentives and financing instruments for end-users, to retrofit building envelopes and adopt more energy-efficient equipment and appliances.

The above-mentioned work contributed to finalizing the development of two large-scale energy-efficiency schemes in Tunisia (roof insulation and old refrigerators replacement) and initiating the process for the development of two similar schemes in Jordan (roof insulation and dissemination of solar water heaters). However, this was short

of meeting the target of at least two member countries developing a scheme to offer end-users access to incentives, financing instruments and implementation assistance for thermal retrofitting of the building envelope and/or adoption of more energy-efficient equipment/appliances, as reflected in the proposed programme budget for 2020 since large-scale implementation schemes for Jordan remain under development due to COVID-19-related delays.

○ *Addressing food insecurity in the Arab region under the challenge of COVID-19 pandemic*

ESCWA prepared two policy briefs on the impact of COVID-19 on food security and water resources. These briefs shed light on how the pandemic would influence food security in Arab countries during the upcoming decade, taking into account the usual sources of vulnerability (climate change, food trade, conflicts, etc.) and analysing ways for member States to mitigate these threads, alleviate negative impacts of COVID-19 and build a more food secure future, with recommendations on actions to be taken by national, regional and global actors. ESCWA also changed the scope of a planned publication on climate change and biofuels challenges for food security in vulnerable Arab countries, to focus instead on "Ensuring food security in the Arab region under the challenge of COVID-19". This knowledge product allowed ESCWA to update simulation parameters and prepare alternative scenarios, and therefore better support member States in their responses to the new food security crisis. To make pertinent information available at national level, ESCWA revised the results of 22 food security country profiles, using the regionally adopted Arab Food Security Monitoring Framework. It added a section on national impacts of COVID-19 on food security, as well as references to national initiatives undertaken to improve the situation.

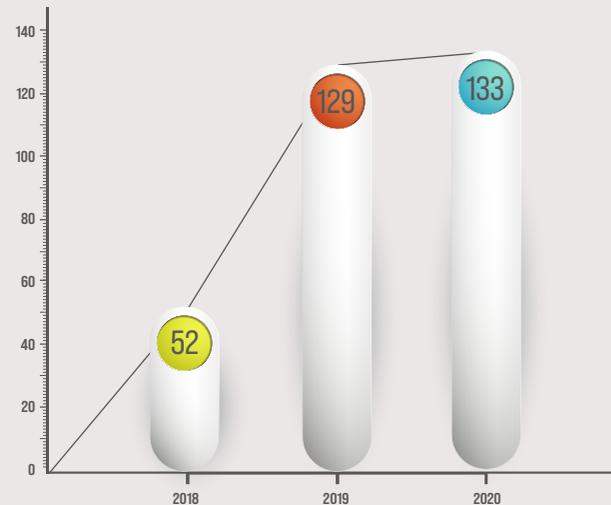
● *Social development*

- *Towards policies and actions that protect the rights of migrants and improve their lives*

In 2019 and 2020, ESCWA focused its efforts on helping member States operationalize the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM). It did so by supporting evidence-based policymaking through the design of knowledge products and tools, including an online database aimed at facilitating access to migration-related policies in the region, and the 2019 “Situation Report on International Migration”, which presented data on migration patterns and trends in Arab countries, with an analysis of the GCM policy implications for the region. ESCWA also helped building regional dialogue platforms to enhance collaboration in the area of migration. It led the regional review of the GCM and brought member States together to discuss progress made, as well as challenges faced and possible solutions. Furthermore, ESCWA organized a series of regional workshops to build the capacity of policy makers to operationalize the GCM and follow up/review its implementation at national level. Support was provided to the Government of the Sudan to develop a first draft of the national migration strategy aligned with the GCM. In addition, ESCWA strengthened regional partnerships by launching together with IOM, ILO and the LAS an Issue Based Coalition (IBC) on International Migration in Arab countries, with the participation of 18 other United Nations agencies, funds, and programmes.

The above-mentioned work contributed to 129 new migration policies, programmes and actions in 2019 and 133 new policies, programmes and actions in 2020, some of which were aligned with the GCM, which exceeded the planned target of 60 new migration policies, programmes and actions in 2019 and 70 new migration policies, programmes

**Number of Migration Policies in Arab Countries Since the Adoption of the GCM**



and actions in 2020, as reflected in the proposed programme budget for 2020.

- *Multidimensional Poverty Index*

In 2020, ESCWA formulated training packages to build the capacity of staff members in public institutions, and developed analytical tools to support member States monitor gaps in social policies and assess relevant development reforms. ESCWA developed a simulation tool for the Multidimensional Poverty Index that enables decision makers to quickly and accurately form a perception of poverty and deprivation in a country, and of the successes and failures in advancing the development process over time. The tool analyses data according to gender, the education level of the head of the household’s, wealth, income level, or geographical areas within a country. Discussions are currently underway for its application in a number of Arab countries. ESCWA also worked with Arab countries to

strengthen social protection policies, especially in view of the pandemic, and developed a COVID-19 tracker of protection policies and stimulus measures announced by 170 countries, which helped transfer knowledge and experiences to member States regarding crisis response.

○ *Leaving no one behind*

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

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

In this context, ESCWA supported the efforts of some countries upon their request. For example, it provided advisory services to Libya on facing the

repercussions of the pandemic on persons with disabilities. It also made unprecedented efforts to form and coordinate a national working group that included representatives of WHO, UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, Humanity and Inclusion, the Libyan ministries of social affairs, health and education and the National Centre for Disease Control in Libya. The group developed a comprehensive action plan for all health, social and education themes, in a consultative manner. ESCWA, in collaboration with the Ministry of Communications and Technology in the Syrian Arab Republic, held a workshop on the use of technology for persons with disabilities on 29 January 2020, at which it presented best practices in digital access policies and assistive technologies.

ESCWA collaborated with UNDP to support Lebanon in mitigating the effects of the economic crisis, the pandemic, and the Beirut port explosion on persons with disabilities through an initiative that meets their immediate needs to maintain their health and wellbeing, and to ensure that areas affected by the explosion are rebuilt in a manner that provides improved accessibility for persons with disabilities to public institutions, streets and private facilities.

○ *National women's machineries: agents for change*

From 2018 to 2020, ESCWA has engaged with Syrian women refugees in Jordan and Lebanon to better understand their immediate needs, document what would facilitate their lives as refugees in their host communities and identify their aspirations upon return to their home country. The in-depth knowledge generated was used to advocate with National Women Machineries (NWMs) and other stakeholders for enhancing service provision to women refugees and supporting the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans (NAP) in Jordan and Lebanon. ESCWA also extensively supported Yemen in finalizing and disseminating its first NAP, which was endorsed in December 2019. It

helped the Sudan developing its own NAP through a series of national and subnational meetings that ensured broad ownership of the process and led to the endorsement of a first NAP by the Government in March 2020. And it provided support to the State of Palestine to revise its existing NAP and develop a new one to address identified gaps such as the limited representation of women in the security sector and the need for further integration of the Women, Peace and Security agenda into security sector operations. Furthermore, ESCWA helped building the capacity of Kuwait's National Women Machinery and began supporting the development of its NAP upon a technical assistance request.

● *Economic development and integration*

○ *TFinancing the Sustainable Development Goals through fiscal consolidation and domestic resource mobilization*

In 2020, ESCWA continued to support member States in identifying avenues to finance sustainable development, including through fiscal consolidation and domestic resource mobilization. To this end, ESCWA published a "Fiscal Policy Review of Arab States" that provides a baseline for the tax and expenditure reforms needed to mobilize domestic public resources. It supported member States in selecting thematic Financing for Development (FfD) options to address regional challenges and bridge the financing gap, in line with the conclusions of the report prepared on "Financing for Development: Global developments and regional challenges as reflected in the Arab FfD Scorecard". ESCWA also continued to provide 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 and increasing the understanding of the linkages among fiscal policy choices. It organized a

capacity building workshop to support Jordan in addressing tax base erosion and adopting optimal tax policies, and it used modelling techniques to assess the economic and social implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting two member States in defining and implementing mitigations measures.

The above-mentioned work contributed to the adoption by Tunisia of a subsidy reform proposal in its financial law, with the subsequent implementation of an automatic monthly adjustment mechanism for energy prices that allows the government to eliminate the gap between domestic and international oil prices and not to exceed the envelope foreseen for energy subsidies. This exceeded the planned target of the approval of one subsidy reform proposal by the parliament of one member State, as reflected in the proposed programme budget for 2020.

○ *Revisiting the master plan for enhanced performance and competitiveness of the Port of Beirut*

The development of the Port of Beirut stretched over several decades and followed various master plans. The last one, which dates from 2018, took into consideration inherited buildings and warehouses and analysed constraints hindering the full performance of the port and its optimal connectivity to land transport networks. The explosions of 4 August 2020 resulted in significant damage to the port premises. While there was an urgent need to make the port operational again, the situation opened the door for discussions on future layouts of the port, measuring potential for enhanced performance and competitiveness and for adopting the most advanced port technologies.

ESCWA, at the request of the Port of Beirut Management and Operating Committee, organized a series of consultations and three workshops to discuss such questions and produce a

study revisiting the 2018 Master Plan. During the workshops, the study approach and data and information sources were discussed, the initial survey findings were presented, and a final draft report was disseminated and open for comments from relevant stakeholders. The study took into account ground alterations after the blast and offered a comprehensive vision of land interaction between the port and its hinterland, with an analysis of comparative advantages of all Lebanese ports and recommendations on integrated port development strategic needs, as well as on actions for enhancing port performances. ESCWA built the general concept of the study and proposed guidelines for the adjustment and update of the 2018 master plan. It included elements related to the location of the port's facilities, the accessibility from outside and the traffic circulation within the port, opportunities for multimodal connectivity with the hinterland, and the use of emerging and future technologies for port operations and handling.

○ *Social Expenditure Monitor*

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

In 2020, data collection for the Monitor was completed, the necessary international standards,

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

● *Technology for development and regional integration*

○ *Digital development in the Arab region: leaving no one behind*

Providing inclusive and equitable access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), internet and e-services, and building a robust information society and digital economy are essential tools for empowerment of people and sustainable development in the Arab region. In 2020, ESCWA convened the fifth "Arab Internet Governance Forum" and published the flagship "Arab Digital Development Report 2019," both geared towards "Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness." The latter identified policy gaps and opportunities for harnessing ICTs in support of sustainable development. In this context, ESCWA convened ten national research workshops to help governments assess their "National Digital Development Reviews (NDDRs)" of 2019 and related methodologies. The targeted support of ESCWA, including its efforts to promote national ownership, led to elaboration of thematic strategies/policies on ICT-related issues by four member States. Two regional expert group meetings were also convened to develop

and endorse the ESCWA “Digital Development Framework and Process Manual,” aimed at facilitating the next round of NDDRs in 2021 and beyond, and their regional compilations. ESCWA also produced the “Arab Digital Agenda: Preliminary Framework for the Arab ICT Strategy” and the “ESCWA Vision on Work Modalities to Develop the Arab ICT Strategy.” Both have been endorsed by the working group of the Arab Telecom and Information Council of Ministers (ATICM), paving way for the inception of a unified regional ICT strategy – i.e.: the Arab Digital Agenda. To date, three regional events were convened, in collaboration with the League of Arab States (LAS), to advance its development.

To address the emerging requests due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ESCWA offered support to member States in tailoring the digital components of their responses. Subprogramme’s support included: convening, together with the LAS, the first “Arab forum on ICTs fighting COVID-19: Arab initiatives and success stories,” and producing, together with UNCTAD, a global report on “Post Pandemic COVID-19 Economic Recovery: Enabling Developing Countries to Better Harness e-Commerce and Digital Trade,” and other initiatives in the field of digital technologies, which helped building capacity and identifying good ICT practice, policies and solutions for mitigating the adverse effects of the pandemic on health, economies and societies.

The above-mentioned work contributed to the adoption by four member States of national strategies/policies on various ICT-related issues and adoption by 22 countries of the vision and preliminary framework which will underpin the unified regional ICT strategy (the Arab Digital Agenda), which met the planned target of at least three member States deploying their national digital strategy for accelerating the achievement of the SDGs, as reflected in the proposed

programme budget for 2020.

- *Peer learning and improved decision-making for fiscal stimulus and social protection policy responses in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic*

The COVID-19 pandemic forced most countries, including Arab States, to announce within a short span of time fiscal stimulus packages and social protection measures in order to mitigate negative impacts. Enhanced access to information on overall policy responses adopted, tools and delivery mechanisms was needed to help countries better understand which policies were more effective, and support them in the adoption of measures that could best counter the impact of the pandemic, including by protecting the most vulnerable groups, with a recognition that countries with developed social protection systems were in a better position to deliver effective responses.

In this context, ESCWA 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. It informed the social protection policy responses dialogue with representatives from Arab States’ Ministries of Social Affairs in a virtual meeting held in April 2020. In addition, ESCWA used information generated by the tracker to produce and disseminate a series of policy briefs aimed at further informing webinar discussions on topics related to the economic and social impact of the pandemic. This included a policy brief on “Limited fiscal space puts the Arab region at risk of recovering better from COVID-19 pandemic”, and contributions to a policy brief”

released by the Secretary-General on “Impact of COVID-19 on the Arab region: an opportunity to build back better”. Furthermore, a harmonized set of social protection measures agreed upon by the five United Nations Regional Commissions were produced through the use of the tracker, which helped advance the analysis of social protection policies and their effectiveness in a comparative context of regions and countries.

● *Statistics for evidence-based policymaking*

- *Introducing modern technologies and a geospatial dimension to enhance the availability of census data for the 2030 Agenda*

From 2018 to 2020, ESCWA has supported the modernization of National Statistical Offices (NSOs) in the Arab region by enhancing the use of new technologies for population and housing census, including by publishing and disseminating knowledge products on electronic devices use and data quality assessment in electronic census. ESCWA also created an online knowledge base that gathers guidelines, studies and information on relevant events both in Arabic and English. Furthermore, ESCWA worked closely with NSOs on data collection planning and strategic decisions taking in view of adopting new technologies in censuses. It organized training events in Iraq, Libya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan and the United Arab Emirates on new technologies and geospatial information use in data collection (tablet and self-enumeration by internet and records linkages, electronic editing, data dissemination and utilization), as well as a series of five regional capacity-building workshops to facilitate the exchange of experiences amongst NSOs in Arab countries. In 2020, ESCWA delivered technical advice on how to implement census via social media platforms, as a few countries decided to postpone their census data collection beyond 2020 due to the

COVID-19 pandemic.

The above-mentioned work contributed to five additional countries in 2019 (Algeria, Iraq, Libya, the Sudan and Yemen) and six in 2020 (Bahrain, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia) that prepared to use new technologies for data collection, which met the planned target of 16 Arab States ready to conduct population and housing census using electronic means of data collection (the five initial countries in 2018 were Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon (census of the refugee camps), the State of Palestine and the United Arab Emirates), as reflected in the proposed programme budget for 2020.

● *Conflict mitigation and development*

- *Strengthened institutions for the prevention of and recovery from conflict*

From 2018 to 2020, ESCWA developed a self-assessment methodology and tool to strengthen the public sector and identify key institutional gaps in countries affected by crisis, conflict or occupation. It produced a series of tailor-made national capacity-building modules for Iraq, Palestine and Yemen. A total of 86 civil servants took part in training sessions and effectively advanced their capacities to enhance institutional effectiveness for conflict recovery and prevention, and better development outcomes. The gaps assessment methodology was formally adopted by the Ministry of Planning in Iraq, while training-of-trainers courses were delivered to 40 civil servants in Yemen. The Palestinian General Personnel Council also adopted the methodology to support its workforce planning strategies. ESCWA presented the gaps assessment methodology to 18 representatives of ESCWA member States during an Executive Committee meeting in July 2019, and this resulted in a request to adapt the assessment tool and allow its use

in countries that are not affected by conflict or occupation. Furthermore, ESCWA provided to Iraq, the State of Palestine and Yemen policy recommendations based on institutional gap assessment reports produced between 2019 and 2020.

- *Strengthened governance and public institutions to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic*
  - The pandemic has highlighted the pivotal role of State institutions in addressing crises. In this context, ESCWA examined the interplay between the various repercussions of the pandemic and the institutional response to them, especially that of public institutions, and developed technical support in the field of institutional reform by focusing on the two interlinked fundamental dimensions:

The first dimension is knowledge-based. ESCWA held a series of remote seminars with 16 member States, represented by participants from public institutions (such as ministries and parliaments), the private sector, civil society organizations, and regional and international organizations (including the League of Arab States, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Islamic Development Bank, WHO, the International Organization for Migration, UNESCO, and the Regional Hub Office for Arab States of the United Nations Development Programme

(UNDP)), so as to understand structural and institutional challenges and identify gaps and weaknesses in the public governance system's response to challenges raised by the pandemic, strengthen response capacity and explore innovative solutions to build back better. These seminars demonstrated the need to strengthen and develop the role of public institutions, on the one hand, and to enhance cooperation between them and with private sector institutions and civil society, on the other, to tackle crises;

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

ESCWA also facilitated contacts between experts and Arab government representatives from different countries to further support the exchange of knowledge and experiences on integrating the Sustainable Development Goals in national development plans, with a focus on how to enhance coordination for effective service delivery in the context of COVID-19.

## Endnotes

1. The Arab region refers to 22 countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.
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