ESCWA tools to support countries in designing integrated social policies

Summary

In support of the design of integrated social policies linking the social and economic visions of Arab States, and in implementation of recommendation (f) of the Committee on Social Development of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), issued by its twelfth session to “adopt an inclusive approach to policymaking and to designing systems, programmes and interventions to ensure complementarity between them”, ESCWA has designed a set of policy tools for use in many areas. These include the measurement of multidimensional poverty, identification of new labour market needs resulting from the Fourth Industrial Revolution, analysis of policies from a social justice perspective and evaluation of institutions from a gender equality perspective.

The present document provides an overview of these tools. The Committee on Social Development is invited to take note of them and provide observations and recommendations on their development.
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Introduction

1. The global and Arab economy is stagnating due to the economic and social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which inflicted financial and human losses that the entire world will suffer for many years to come. According to estimates by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), Arab countries lost nearly $180 billion in gross domestic product (GDP) in 2020, the number of poor people increased by about 16 million in the region and unemployment worsened, limiting access to education, health and other basic human rights. Inequalities and discrimination already prevalent in the region have also worsened, for example, the wage gap between women and men has increased to 79 per cent.

2. The challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic are intertwined with those the Arab region was already suffering from, particularly with regard to the fragmentation of policies and lack of integration between them. Under the current difficult circumstances, the approach to development must be changed and comprehensive and relevant policies adopted to achieve the desired goals. This is highlighted in document E/ESCWA/C.2/2021/7, which is before the Committee under item 8 of its current session’s agenda. Practical policy tools must also be provided to enable policymakers to identify potential policy alternatives that fit the national reality and available financial and human capabilities.

3. In this sense, ESCWA has developed a set of policy tools to help Arab States make appropriate decisions quickly and at no financial cost. A selection of these tools is presented below. The presentation follows the sequence of document E/ESCWA/C.2/2/2021/7 that suggested the following steps to move towards integrated social policies: first, in-depth national socioeconomic analysis (by calculating poverty, conducting an in-depth analysis of the status quo and then moving on to estimates and projections); second, alignment of national efforts with international frameworks; third, undertaking legislative reforms after mobilizing political will and ensuring broad engagement of all stakeholders in policy formulation, implementation and evaluation; fourth, analysis of institutional status and capacity; and fifth: assessment of the fiscal space and fiscal implications of social policies to secure the necessary funding.

I. Analysis of the economic and social situation

A. Multidimensional Poverty Index Assist Tool (MAT)

4. Purpose of the tool: The tool aims to calculate national measures of multidimensional poverty and assess alternatives before policymakers in an advanced, transparent and participatory manner. The tool helps in the analysis of society and its different groups, such as the identification of the middle class or other classes, and can be adapted to identify poverty affecting a specific group of the population, such as women.

5. Problem/gap addressed by the tool: Most States limit poverty to unidimensional material poverty and calculate it based on this narrow concept, rather than adopting the concept of multidimensional poverty, which measures overlapping deprivations in health, education and/or standard of living. When only material deprivation is considered, it is difficult to determine the causes of poverty, identify the characteristics of the groups it affects and track how it changes over time. This hinders effective decision-making, complicates the efficient allocation of already limited national resources to ensure that they are delivered to those most in need and makes it difficult to adopt integrated policies that coherently address multiple aspects of poverty. The calculation of poverty was also time-consuming and required considerable resources and efforts.

6. Description of the tool: The MAT has been developed on an easy-to-use and flexible online platform to help decision makers design highly transparent national multidimensional poverty indices using multiple diagnostics and alternatives. The index is based on data from national censuses of persons living in poverty and measures the depth of their multidimensional deprivation. The MAT allows for analysis of the contribution of different dimensions of poverty to the degree of poverty, calculation of poverty by region, use of demographic variables such as sex, age or geographical area, tracking of poverty and its increase or decrease.
over time and comparisons between Arab States. The scenarios presented by the tool allow for very rapid and cost-free design and evaluation of national policies plus development of policy forecasts. At a later stage, the tool will allow for calculation of the impact of positive or negative shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, wars or economic growth on the level of multidimensional poverty.

7. **Advantages of the tool:** The tool allows policymakers to:

   (a) Build scenarios and alternatives for calculating national multidimensional poverty extremely quickly and efficiently;
   (b) Save time, money and effort;
   (c) Complete the information provided by monetary poverty to paint a full picture of poverty;
   (d) Track the evolution of multidimensional poverty over time;
   (e) Design evidence-based policy interventions to reduce poverty;
   (f) Coordinate various social policies aiming to eradicate poverty;
   (g) Allocate national resources more efficiently.

8. **Presentation to States or training on the tool:** The tool was presented to the Expert Group on Social Protection Reform (EGSPR) of the ESCWA Committee on Social Development on 2 November 2020 online. The tool was welcomed by EGSPR and received positive reactions from representatives of member States.

9. **States using the tool:** The tool is currently being applied in Iraq and Egypt in cooperation with their ministries of planning.

B. **In-depth analysis of the status quo – COVID-19 Stimulus Tracker:**

   **Global Observatory on Social Protection Policy Responses**
   (http://tracker.unescwa.org/)

10. **Purpose of the tool:** To provide States and all stakeholders with detailed information on responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and the social protection measures taken to mitigate its effects.

11. **Problem/gap addressed by the tool:** There are many different sources of information on social protection measures and financial stimulus implemented by countries worldwide in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and these sources do not provide a full picture using a common understanding of the measures in question.

12. **Description of the tool:** The Observatory is an interactive platform presenting the social protection measures adopted by 194 States, including Arab States, to address the COVID-19 pandemic and respond to its health, economic and social impacts. The Observatory provides information by type of social protection measure and by region, in a coordinated manner to facilitate comparisons. The Observatory also provides maps and information on social protection measures for each country or region, as well as coordinated global policy measures on social protection. Because of the abundance of information the Observatory contains, it is a reliable source for Governments and practitioners to learn from peers and track pandemic response and reporting policies.

13. **Advantages of the tool:** The Observatory is characterized by the abundance of information and the tabulation of information by type and source of social protection services. The Observatory helps users extract information about a particular country or region in several forms and make comparisons.

14. **Presentation to States or training on the tool:** The Observatory was presented to Arab States during two regional events and one global event:
(a) A meeting of the Expert Group on Social Protection Reform was held on 22 April 2020 online, to discuss “Policy response to the social and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic: social protection”;

(b) A special meeting of the ESCWA Committee on Women on “Policy responses to the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic: gender equality” was held on 23 April 2020 online;

(c) An online launch event on the sidelines of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) held on 13 July 2021.

15. States that have implemented or are implementing the tool: All Arab and non-Arab States benefit from the Observatory.

C. Tools to support estimates and projections: ESCWA Job Monitor

16. Purpose of the tool: The main purpose of the tool is to support States in preparing for the next change in jobs and skills under the Fourth Industrial Revolution, considering the number of jobs required to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and taking national characteristics into account. The ESCWA Job Monitor, a tool for calculating labour demand using big data, will enable policymakers in member States to investigate the demand for new skills and therefore take the necessary measures to provide them through education and training programmes and to reform labour market systems as needed.

17. Problem/gap addressed by the tool: The Fourth Industrial Revolution will inevitably eliminate many current types of work, but if properly leveraged it will also provide new types of work. One of the challenges related to preparing for these changes is the difficulty of predicting future jobs due to a lack of timely information monitoring changes in labour market needs; the mismatch between human capital and labour market demand; and the inadequacy of current labour market policies and regulations given the rapid changes of the new industrial revolution.

18. Description of the tool: The ESCWA Job Monitor uses big data to monitor changes in the labour market and predict the skills required to deal with the dynamic nature of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

19. Advantages of the tool: The tool allows policymakers to:

(a) Learn about the current status of labour market demand;
(b) Complete institutional and workforce surveys;
(c) Predict new skills that will be thriving in coming years;
(d) Monitoring whether Arab labour markets provide access to jobs for persons with disabilities and support gender equality and the Sustainable Development Goals;
(e) Assess the impact of technology on the labour market, such as new opportunities created and types of jobs eliminated, and monitor the skills required;
(f) Assist the private sector in retraining staff to keep pace with the future needs of the labour market;
(g) Guide universities in efficiently building their programs to suit the requirements of the new labour market.

20. Presentation to States or training on the tool: So far, the tool has been presented to Lebanon.

21. Countries using the tool: Consultations are currently underway with certain countries to implement the tool.

II. Support for aligning national efforts with international standards: Index Simulator for Policymakers in the Arab Region (ISPAR)

(https://ispar.unescwa.org/about.aspx)

22. Purpose of the tool: To analyse the potential impact of specific policies on national ranking in selected international indices.
23. **Problem/gap addressed by the tool:** Most Arab countries perform poorly in many widely used international indices. They often work hard to improve, but their efforts do not necessarily lead to a higher ranking than other Arab States, foreign States or countries with similar economies. This makes it difficult to measure, monitor and evaluate the performance of related policies.

24. **Description of the tool:** ISPAR is based on an easy-to-use electronic platform and provides data on the performance of 140 countries in the following international indicators:

   (a) Global Gender Gap Index  
   (b) Ease of Doing Business Index  
   (c) Global Competitiveness Index  
   (d) Global Cybersecurity Index (developed by the International Telecom Union)  
   (e) ICT Development Index (produced by the International Telecom Union)  
   (f) Network Readiness Index  
   (g) Global Innovation Index  
   (h) E-Government Development Index (developed by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs)  
   (i) Digital Accessibility Rights Evaluation  
   (j) E-Participation Index  
   (k) B2C E-Commerce Index  
   (l) AI Readiness Index.

25. The tool is currently being developed to also cover the following indices:

   (a) Index of Economic Freedom  
   (b) Global Findex Database  
   (c) Rule of Law Index  
   (d) Legatum Prosperity Index  
   (e) Women, Peace and Security Index.

26. **Advantages of the tool:** ISPAR enables decision makers to:

   (a) Access important international indices with the greatest impact on development outcomes and compare between 140 countries, whether between one country and another or between one country and a group of countries;  
   (b) Learn about the experiences of other States and the policies that have helped to increase their ranking;  
   (c) Link national policies to results and identify the best policies with the greatest ability and impact to achieve national goals;  
   (d) Identify the expected impact of planned policies and policies under consideration on the country’s ranking in international indices;  
   (e) Strengthen decision-making capacity on the strategic policies needed and how to best allocate the budget to improve the country’s performance and increase its ranking in international indicators.

27. **Presentation to States or training on the tool:** ISPAR was presented to Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, and was welcomed by them.
III. Support for legislative reform and justice-based policymaking

A. Gender Justice and the Law tool
(http://genderjustice.unescwa.org)

28. **Purpose of the tool:** The tool presents national laws in Arab States and analyses their compatibility with international human rights standards, the general recommendations of the United Nations Commission for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and international standards on International Labour Organization conventions, with the aim of identifying gaps and encouraging States to amend legislation to follow international obligations and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5.

29. **Problem/gap addressed by the tool:** In Arab countries, a narrow concept of justice continues to be used that is concerned only with gender equality and the elimination of gender discrimination and does not take into account the need to establish effective accountability mechanisms and reduce the legislative gap that contributes to gender inequality.

30. **Description of the tool:** The interactive tool comes in the form of a detailed table and map describing legal frameworks in the region, the general recommendations of the United Nations Commission on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions and visually categorizing laws concerning gender equality with respect to how well they meet international standards. The regional table and map use a simple four-colour system to compare laws and public policies in each country and their compatibility with gender equality principles according to five main themes:

   (a) General legal framework, including ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
   (b) Laws combating violence against women
   (c) Laws governing personal status and marriage
   (d) Laws governing employment and economic participation
   (e) Laws governing reproductive rights.

31. **Advantages of the tool:**

   (a) The tool is based on information that has been reviewed and verified by national women’s machineries in Arab countries;
   (b) The tool provides a map identifying legislation that needs more attention, harmonization and amendment to provide the necessary guarantees for effective gender equality at the economic, social, political and cultural levels;
   (c) The tool allows users to learn about the experiences of Arab States in adopting and amending laws promoting gender equality;
   (d) The tool contains the texts of the national laws of all Arab States for the laws under consideration.

32. **Presentation to States or training on the tool:** A regional meeting was held in Beirut in December 2018 to present national reports, followed by a regional meeting in Amman in November 2019 to present the tool in its entirety, including the table and interactive map. In November 2020, the tool was presented to all Arab States at a workshop targeting members of the ESCWA Intergovernmental Subcommittee on Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals. Three meetings were also held on the sidelines of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women at its 63rd, 64th and 65th sessions with the high-level participation of representatives of Arab States.
33. **States that have implemented or are implementing the tool:** 18 Arab States participated in the national reporting: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen.

34. **Purpose of the tool:** PGAT analyses the extent to which social justice principles are integrated into public policies and development programmes developed and implemented by public institutions by identifying gaps and shortcomings in how well they respond to social justice principles.

35. **Problem/gap addressed by the tool:** Public policies in Arab States suffer from fundamental and compounded obstacles standing in the way of achieving social justice, particularly in countries with limited capacity and those suffering from or affected by conflicts. These obstacles include: increased inequality and social marginalization, lack of equal economic and social opportunities, weak capacities and lack of resources available to combat poverty, failure to adopt a rights-based approach to development, lack of a clear, integrated and long-term national vision and more. Government efforts to achieve social justice are often scattered among different entities and institutions without policy coherence or effective coordination between them. The impact of these obstacles is exacerbated by a lack of statistics and data, limited fiscal space and the lack of the environment needed to carry out the required reforms, which increase inequality despite the efforts exerted.

36. **Description of the tool:** PGAT consists of a conceptual introduction, several sections on the assessment and how to use it and a questionnaire of 22 questions along the following pillars:

   (a) Knowledge and skills required to design, implement, finance or assess social and economic policies;
   (b) Consensus among concerned parties regarding political options;
   (c) Legal and regulatory frameworks;
   (d) Institutional structures and internal mechanisms.

37. **PGAT is used by States for self-assessment of their ability to integrate social justice principles into policymaking and is available on a special electronic platform that allows States to track changes to the assessment and reach conclusions electronically.**

38. **Advantages of the tool:** PGAT helps decision makers:

   (a) Increase the awareness of decision makers in ministries and public institutions of the need to integrate social justice principles into public policies;
   (b) Monitor the status of social justice indicators, with each indicator allocated a set of requirements/standards and basic rules (human resources, material resources, legislative framework, laws, etc.);
   (c) Continuous/regular follow-up of progress through a self-assessment process and periodic reporting on what has been achieved and the challenges that remain;
   (d) Practical identification of gaps in the following areas: (i) knowledge and skills required to design, implement, finance or assess social and economic policies; (ii) agreement between stakeholders on political options; (iii) legislative and regulatory frameworks; and (iv) institutional structures and internal mechanisms;
   (e) Enabling government institutions to come up with local solutions and reforms to address barriers and overcome challenges to mainstreaming social justice in policymaking processes.

39. **Presentation to States or training on the tool:**

   (a) The tool was presented to the Ministry of Social Affairs in Tunisia with the aim of implementing it.
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(b) The tool was presented to Arab States at a high-level regional meeting held virtually in December 2020. Experts from Arab States and decision makers were trained on the tool at a regional workshop in April 2021 and discussed how it could be used and applied autonomously, independently and depending on the specifics and priorities of each country and how to use the tool’s electronic platform.

40. **States that have implemented or are implementing the tool:** Tunisia has implemented the tool in its “public policy and programmes for young people who are marginalized, experiencing difficulties or socially maladapted”. This was done jointly with the Ministry of Social Affairs through the formation of a small working group representing the central departments of the Ministry, which collected data and reviewed relevant documents and reports. Two national workshops were held, one with the working group in September 2020 and representatives of 10 relevant ministries to apply the tool to the selected policy, and another in November 2020 to present the final version of the PGAT. As a result, an action plan was developed to fill the gaps identified, and a mechanism was put in place to introduce the PGAT in all public policies overseen by the various ministries and to adopt the tool at the national level after ratification. A recommendation was made to the Prime Minister to issue a law to include social justice principles in all major policies, reforms and government documents. At the regional level, work is underway to use the tool in all Arab countries and apply it to national policies on wages and worker protection.

## IV. Analysis of the status of institutions and capacity-building

### A. Institutional capacity assessment tool

41. **Purpose of the tool:** The tool aims to support institutions in addressing challenges of weakness and fragility.

42. **Problem/gap addressed by the tool:** In cases of conflict and fragility, institutional capacities are extremely weak and their resources practically non-existent, and in such circumstances it is difficult to assess the capacities of institutions based on ready methodologies and a single standard approach of what must be done regardless of circumstances. We developed this methodology to bridge this conceptual gap, with stakeholders within institutions self-assessing their capabilities based on the priorities and situational tasks they have to undertake, given a considerable scarcity of resources. Based on the results of the assessment, the limited resources and energy available are invested in increasing the capacity of institutions to meet pressing situational priorities. Institutions are enabled to carry out their core functions amid conflict and fragility, helping them to reverse the negative trend, gradually restore people’s confidence in them and cumulatively rebuild capacity and resources.

43. **Description of the tool:** The tool examines a single capacity or multiple capacities within a particular institution, provides an in-depth study of data and information collected around the concerned institution, measures one or more specific capacities in multiple government institutions, measures the capacities of multiple government institutions dealing with a particular problem or shared issue and measures the capacities of different institutions (government, private, international) that are similar in nature or in their area of competence to address a shared issue. The tool’s methodology is based on three phases: preparation and assessment; review and analysis of results; and identification of support programmes based on priorities. The tool can be used in different environments with flexibility, openness and ability for self-assessment.

44. **Advantages of the tool:** The tool allows policymakers to:

   (a) Perform an objective assessment by empowering relevant institutions to self-assess their capacities, identify strengths and weaknesses in these capacities and required resources and needs and set an appropriate frequency for assessment and review, in accordance with the proposed methodology and in a manner that officials consider appropriate for a given institution;

   (b) Operationalize institutions, i.e. empower relevant institutions, based on results collected and analysed under the methodology and through results-based support and training programmes, to improve their
performance in line with priorities, specificities, available resources and the resulting capacity from the aforementioned programmes;

(c) Engage in experimental development, empowering relevant institutions to benefit from building the capacity of other institutions in the same or a different environment.

45. **Presentation to States or training on the tool:** The tool has been presented to Iraq, the State of Palestine and Yemen:

(a) Three training workshops were held for Iraq, for a team of experts from the Ministry of Planning and representatives of local administrations in Hamdaniya district in Nineveh Governorate in 2018-2019;

(b) Three training workshops were held for Yemen, for a team from the Ministry of Planning and various ministries in 2018-2019;

(c) Two training workshops were held for the State of Palestine, for the General Department of Career Planning and Formation Schedule team in the General Staff Office and four ministries in 2019-2020.

46. **States that have implemented or are implementing the tool:**

(a) Iraq: to assess the capacity of local institutions to return displaced persons to areas liberated from terrorists;

(b) Yemen: to develop strategic planning capacities in conditions of fragility for concerned persons in various ministries and decentralized institutions;

(c) State of Palestine: to develop the capacities of the General Department of Career Planning and Formation Schedule team in the General Staff Office.

B. **Analysis of the status of institutions from a gender equality perspective and helping them achieve gender equality**

47. **Purpose of the tool:** The tool seeks to support institutions in tracking their progress in achieving equality internally in their work and in identifying the necessary measures to make progress.

48. **Problem/gap addressed by the tool:** Most national institutions operate without a practical methodology to measure the organization’s commitment and adoption of the concept and principles of gender equality.

49. **Description of the tool:** The tool includes 15 performance indicators centred around six areas:

(a) Accountability:
   - Institutional policies and plans
   - Gender-responsive performance management.

(b) Results-based management:
   - Strategic planning
   - Monitoring and reporting.

(c) Oversight:
   - Assessment
   - Gender-responsive institutional auditing
   - Programme review.
(d) Human and financial resources:
- Financial resource tracking
- Financial resource allocation
- Institutional structure and gender parity
- Organizational culture.

(e) Capacities:
- Capacity assessment
- Capacity development.

(f) Coherence, knowledge and information management:
- Knowledge generation and communication
- Coherence.

50. The tool is available through an electronic platform that can be used while keeping each organization’s information confidential.

51. **Advantages of the tool**: The tool allows policymakers to:

   (a) Standardize the concept of gender equality;
   (b) Track progress and identify gaps at the level of the institution’s work in achieving gender equality;
   (c) Use a common and graded sliding scale to monitor the progress that the organization aspires to.

52. Presentation to States or training on the tool: The tool has been presented to countries several times:

   (a) ESCWA Women’s Committee at its seventh session in Muscat in January 2016;
   (b) ESCWA Women’s Committee at its eighth session in Beirut in October 2017;
   (c) ESCWA Women’s Committee at its ninth session in Beirut in November 2019.

53. **Countries that have implemented or are implementing the tool**: Jordan, Mauritania and Qatar have begun to use the tool.

V. Assessment of fiscal space and the financial implications of social policies

**Social Expenditure Monitor (SEM): An Integrated Framework for Supporting Macofiscal Policies and the SDGS**

(https://www.unescwa.org/sub-site/social-expenditure-monitor-arab-states)

54. **Purpose of the tool**: SEM helps Arab States assess their social policy expenditures and provides them with the information needed to reallocate resources to the sectors most in need of development.

55. **Problem/gap addressed by the tool**: SEM is designed to monitor public social expenditures and provide Governments with the information needed to balance public spending priorities, with the aim of reforming social protection systems, addressing poverty and inequalities, improving youth skills and promoting economic diversification, productivity and growth. ESCWA Member States currently do not have a comprehensive mechanism for monitoring public social spending and linking it to macroeconomic policies to ensure cohesion. Budget allocations are often made to support multiple and overlapping programmes, and policies lack consistency and effectiveness to meet social development priorities and achieve Sustainable Development Goals. Given the pressures on public budgets in Arab countries, this mode of managing expenditures is not sustainable.
56. **Description of the tool:** SEM provides the following basic services and functions: (a) analysis of different social spending scenarios and macroeconomic policy options; (b) identification of optimal expenditures for a performance-based budget; (c) provision of indicators and data on programmes and social expenditures; and (d) provision of a support tool that allows Governments to focus on their needs, with a view to achieving greater international cooperation and funding for sustainable development. SEM also helps with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by laying the foundations for social justice, promoting human capital and growth and improving the collection of public fiscal statistics.

57. **Advantages of the tool:** SEM enables the rationalization of expenditures in order to provide high-quality public services, the use of social investments aimed at promoting inclusive development and social stability and the promotion of economic growth and revenues over time.

58. **States that have implemented or are implementing the tool:** Jordan and Tunisia are currently implementing a pilot project to establish a social expenditure observatory, and ESCWA is currently in discussions with several Member States to implement the social expenditure monitoring project within their national contexts.

**VI. Conclusion**

59. The Committee on Social Development is invited to take note of the set of tools developed by ESCWA to support decision makers in Arab countries in developing integrated and evidence-based policies, to show interest in the possibility of applying any of the tools in the national context and to make a formal request for technical cooperation in this area.