



Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

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Technical cooperation activities

Summary

The present document provides an overview of technical cooperation activities undertaken by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) under subprogramme 2 on social development since the thirteenth session of the Committee on Social Development, held virtually on 22 and 23 September 2021. The present document focuses on activities that highlight the interlinkages between the three functions of ESCWA as a research institution that produces studies aimed at supporting reforms at the public policy level, a regional forum for consensus-building between member States on challenges they face and ways to overcome them, and a house of expertise that provides technical guidance to policymakers.

The Committee on Social Development is invited to review the implemented technical cooperation activities, and to discuss ways to develop them and maximize benefits at the national level.

Contents

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
Introduction	1–4	3
<i>Chapter</i>		
I. Social justice	5–14	3
II. Poverty reduction	15–21	5
III. Social protection systems	22–34	6
IV. Labour markets	35–46	8
V. Women’s economic empowerment and the care economy	47–51	9
VI. Inclusion of persons with disabilities	52–69	10
VII. Migrant rights	70–73	13
VIII. Rights of older persons	74–80	13
IX. Sustainable urban development	81–94	14

Introduction

1. The present document provides an overview of technical cooperation activities undertaken by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) under subprogramme 2 on social development since the thirteenth session of the Committee on Social Development, held virtually on 22 and 23 September 2021. These activities have been implemented by the ESCWA secretariat in response to requests from member States for support in various areas of social development.
2. The technical cooperation services provided by ESCWA fall into the following three categories: advisory services to support countries on issues related to public policies, capacity-building workshops, and field projects. ESCWA has intensified its efforts to transfer expertise to Arab countries from inside and outside the region, and to translate its standard work and research findings into capacity-building and skills-enhancing programmes for representatives of various ministries.
3. To maximize the utilization of available resources and efforts, ESCWA continues to expand its partnerships with specialized United Nations organizations, such as the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC), the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat), and the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF). It also works with global organizations such as the World Bank, regional organizations such as the League of Arab States, and academic institutions such as Cairo University and the Lebanese American University.
4. Since September 2021, ESCWA has supported the following areas of social development: social justice, poverty reduction, social protection systems, labour market opportunities, women's economic empowerment and the care economy, inclusion of persons with disabilities, rights of migrants and older persons, youth skills development, and urban development. The present document provides an overview of these activities.

I. Social justice

5. ESCWA is committed to promoting social justice in the Arab region to ensure equal access to economic, political and social rights and opportunities.
6. At the regional level, in June 2022, ESCWA, in collaboration with UNOSSC, launched the joint initiative "[Addressing social justice under conflict and fragility](#)", which examines how to address social justice issues under complex political and socioeconomic conditions. Under the initiative, ESCWA and UNOSSC organized a [round table discussion](#) in Beirut on 29 July 2022, which engaged experts and development practitioners from Iraq, Libya, Yemen, United Nations agencies and academia to consider elements that may promote or hinder social justice in conflict and fragility contexts, and to explore potential solutions grounded in conceptual frameworks, evidence and concrete country experiences.
7. At the national level, ESCWA adopted a phased approach to support member States promote social justice through a pragmatic and institutionalized process. For each country, the process is adjusted and contextualized, but follows an agreed structured approach that introduces the ESCWA social justice conceptual framework to relevant ministries, provides training on ESCWA social justice tools and guides (such as the Social Justice Policy Gap Assessment Tool (PGAT)), supports the establishment of a national team or task force to lead the social justice institutionalization process, and provides technical support in developing either a national social justice strategy or a pilot social justice programme within a selected ministry. Training of trainers is also provided to ensure that national trainers have the expertise to continually build capacity within the various national institutions on practical modalities for applying the social justice conceptual framework.

8. In Egypt, ESCWA, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Solidarity, organized a workshop on the theme “[Measuring social and economic inequalities for developing equality oriented policies](#)” on 12 and 13 October 2021. The workshop focused on training government officials on the concept of inequality and its measurement, so as to mainstream social justice in policymaking and implementation. At the workshop, an expert from Argentina shared case studies, lessons learned and best practices from mainstreaming social justice in Latin America. Following the workshop, the Ministry established a task force of multi-disciplinary experts and advisors to lead a long-term technical cooperation programme on inclusive social development with ESCWA. The task force members have been instrumental in supporting national inclusive social development efforts, with particular attention to social protection.

9. In Iraq, ESCWA, organized two workshops, in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, in Baghdad in March 2022. The first workshop on “[Integrating social justice principles in the COVID-19 response strategy and recovery plan: Iraq](#)” was held from 14 to 16 March 2022, and provided technical support to government officials to assess the national COVID-19 response strategy from a social justice perspective. The second workshop on “[Integrating social justice principles in the national employment policy: Iraq](#)” was held from 17 to 19 March 2022, and examined the national employment strategy through a social justice lens. Following these workshops, the Directorate of Human Development of the Ministry of Planning developed a vision on the institutionalization of social justice to empower vulnerable groups and young people in Iraq. ESCWA is currently working with concerned officials to translate the vision into a pragmatic pilot programme on social justice.

10. In Libya, ESCWA, in collaboration with the Planning Institute and the National Sustainable Development Committee of the Ministry of Planning, organized a workshop on “[Integrating social justice principles into public policies: Libya](#)” held in Tunis from 31 January to 3 February 2022. The workshop introduced government officials to the ESCWA social justice conceptual framework, assessed the degree of social justice in the national social policy, established a process for developing a national social justice strategy, and formed a national task force that was instrumental in institutionalizing the mainstreaming of social justice in Libya. ESCWA organized a follow-up workshop on “[Design and implementation of equality-oriented policies in Libya](#)” in Tunis from 13 to 16 August 2022 to support the Libyan national task force in identifying social justice priorities, so to develop and implement a national social justice strategy.

11. In Mauritania, ESCWA is supporting the Government in building a national programme on social justice, assessing new policies and strategies through a social justice lens, and identifying priority areas for social development. In collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Family and Children and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Productive Sectors, ESCWA organized three workshops on social justice. The first workshop on “[Integrating social justice principles in the national strategy for recovery from COVID-19: Mauritania](#)”, held in Nouadhibou, Mauritania, from 20 to 22 January 2022, assessed the degree to which social justice had been mainstreamed in the national COVID-19 strategy, and was followed by consultative meetings to discuss the development of a national programme for social justice that focused on national priority areas. The second [workshop](#), held in Nouadhibou from 23 to 25 June 2022, assessed the new social protection policy from a social justice perspective. Following the second workshop, federal government officials were trained in Nouadhibou from 26 to 28 June 2022 on mainstreaming social justice when implementing projects. The workshops are part of a longer-term engagement with the Mauritanian Government, under the leadership of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Productive Sectors, to develop a national plan on social justice. The workshops equipped the Government and local officials with the knowledge, tools and skills to enable their participation in developing a national programme on social justice.

12. In Somalia, in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, ESCWA introduced ministries to the concept of social justice and to ESCWA tools on social justice, and trained participating officials on assessing the national gender strategy from a social justice perspective using the PGAT. ESCWA organized a workshop on “[Promoting social justice policies in Somalia](#)”, held in Beirut from 13 to 16 December 2021. Drawing on the above, and recognizing the importance of applying social justice in the State building process, ESCWA organized a workshop on “[Integrating social justice principles into national policies](#)”

and legislations: Somalia” in Mogadishu from 24 to 27 October 2022. The workshop focused on strengthening the capacity of parliamentarians in integrating the principles of social justice and equality into national policies and legislation, providing technical assistance on identifying social justice gaps in public policies and programmes, and assessing their alignment with the principles of social justice. It was followed by consultative meetings to discuss a roadmap for developing a national strategy on social justice, in accordance with national priorities.

13. In the Sudan, ESCWA, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development, organized a national capacity-building workshop on [PGAT in the Sudan](#), held in Khartoum on 5 and 6 October 2021. The workshop introduced PGAT and assessed the Sudanese policy on the economic empowerment of women from a social justice perspective, enabling participants to develop an action plan to close the identified social justice gaps and strengthen the policy.

14. ESCWA, in partnership with the Yemeni Ministry of Legal Affairs and Human Rights, organized a workshop on [“Mainstreaming social justice principles in public policies in Yemen”](#) in Cairo from 1 to 3 March 2022. The workshop introduced participants to the concept of social justice, how to apply it under conflict, and assessed the Ministry’s action plan for strengthening the institutional performance of the Human Rights Directorate from a social justice perspective, using PGAT. The workshop was the first phase of a longer-term project to support Yemeni officials in developing a national social justice plan that complements State-building and peacebuilding efforts.

II. Poverty reduction

15. ESCWA has continued to make significant progress in highlighting the importance of measuring multidimensional poverty, and in assisting member States with developing their national multidimensional poverty indices (MPIs). To highlight the importance of measuring multidimensional poverty and linking it to poverty reduction and social protection strategies, ESCWA, in partnership with the League of Arab States, DESA and the Arab Center for Social Policies and the Eradication of Poverty, held a workshop for Arab ministries of social affairs and planning on [“Measuring multidimensional poverty”](#) in Amman from 9 to 11 December 2021. This was followed by a second workshop on [“Multidimensional poverty indices for poverty reduction strategies”](#), held in Beirut from 28 to 30 November 2022, to highlight how multidimensional poverty indices can be used to align national social protection systems to achieve effective poverty reduction.

16. The [Multidimensional Poverty Index Assist Tool \(MAT\)](#) was developed by ESCWA to assist member States in designing their national MPIs and identifying optimal poverty reduction approaches. MAT empowers countries to use their data to assess the extent and prevalence of deprivations in education, health, living standards, employment, safety and other social dimensions, using transparent methods and ensuring accountability. The tool also supports countries in tracking progress in multidimensional poverty alleviation, and in estimating the impact of shocks on multidimensional poverty.

17. Upon developing a national MPI, it is critical to design appropriate policies and strategies to effectively reduce poverty, within limited resources. Consequently, ESCWA developed the [“Optimization model for poverty reduction strategies”](#) to help policymakers identify policy solutions with the greatest impact on poverty reduction.

18. ESCWA supported the Iraqi Government in developing a national MPI, which was launched and released in March 2023 (forthcoming). Iraqi public officials were trained to use MPI in policymaking at a workshop on the theme [“Validation and capacity-building on multidimensional poverty: Iraq”](#), held in Amman from 5 to 9 September 2022.

19. ESCWA supported the Somali Government in developing a new MPI with updated data, which is scheduled to be launched in 2023. Public officials were trained to use MPI in policymaking at a workshop on [“Multidimensional poverty and poverty reduction policies in Somalia”](#), held in Nairobi from 27 to 31 August 2022.

20. ESCWA continues to support the Egyptian Government in designing a national MPI, and identifying the best resource allocation to maximise poverty reduction. ESCWA held a series of consultative meetings with the Ministry of Social Solidarity to prepare a national MPI, and published a report entitled “Optimized use of public spending to reduce multidimensional poverty in Egypt” (forthcoming), which highlights the impact that Internet provision can have on efficiently reducing poverty in Egypt.

21. In the State of Palestine, ESCWA supported the formulation of the National Poverty Reduction Strategy for the State of Palestine (forthcoming). ESCWA organized an expert group meeting on the “[National multidimensional poverty reduction strategy for Palestine](#)”, held in Amman on 25 and 26 September 2021, to initiate work on the strategy and build the capacity of staff members at the Ministry of Social Development to implement it. The meeting discussed linkages with existing national strategies and policies, including the education, health and social protection strategies and the 2021–2023 National Development Plan, which will be reflected in the final national multidimensional poverty reduction strategy.

III. Social protection systems

22. ESCWA has continued promoting social protection reform to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of social protection systems and programmes within limited resources, and thereby promote universal coverage and long-term sustainability.

23. In this context, ESCWA, in partnership with the International Policy Center for Inclusive Growth, developed a template that can be rolled out across the region to provide policymakers with a detailed and comprehensive baseline for their social protection systems, a standardized basis for cross-country comparisons, and recommendations for necessary reforms in line with international best practices. The template is presented in a report entitled “[Comprehensive national social protection systems and reforms: country profiles](#)”.

24. Upon identifying the status of national social protection systems using the country profiles, ESCWA supported efforts to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of social assistance programmes so as to accurately target social assistance beneficiaries, ensure that social assistance was combined with human capital development, and help lift social assistance beneficiaries into productive employment. To complement these efforts, ESCWA supported the expansion of social insurance so that the wider population can benefit from social insurance schemes that are typically limited to the formally employed.

25. ESCWA developed a Social Protection Programme Rapid Assessment Framework (SPP-RAF) to help public agencies in charge of social assistance programmes improve the targeting of their programmes. By ensuring that the intended population groups are targeted with social assistance, and that nobody is left behind, social protection systems can become more efficient and inclusive. A report entitled “[Social Protection Programme Rapid Assessment Framework: quantitative analysis for evidence-based social assistance policymaking](#)” introduces SPP-RAF, and is supported by a training manual entitled “[Introduction to quantitative analysis for evidence-based social protection policymaking](#)”.

26. It is also important to support current beneficiaries’ graduation out of social assistance and into productive and decent employment. To that end, ESCWA has combined support to social protection programmes with labour market opportunities.

27. Universal social insurance, such as health and unemployment insurance, is key to preventing vulnerable households, including those that have graduated out of social assistance, from falling into poverty. ESCWA published a technical paper entitled “[Subsidized health insurance for the hard-to-reach: towards universal health coverage in the Arab Region – a first look](#)”, which was supported by a policy brief entitled “[Subsidized health insurance for the hard-to-reach: towards universal health coverage in the Arab region – a first look](#)” to assess how health insurance could be expanded in the Arab region beyond formal sector employees. To explore including informal and irregular workers in social (health) insurance arrangements, ESCWA organized a peer exchange to highlight relevant best global practices.

28. ESCWA has finalized its work on social protection during the COVID-19 pandemic, and is using the results to develop adaptive and shock-responsive social protection systems across the region. A policy brief entitled “[COVID-19 policy responses in the Arab region: limited fiscal space and lack of effective social protection systems](#)”, and the technical paper entitled “[The role of social protection information systems in the expansion of cash transfer programmes during COVID-19 pandemic: experiences from selected Arab countries](#)” both review Arab Governments’ responses to the pandemic to provide lessons for future crises. In particular, it is vital to integrate social protection with disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation.

29. In July 2022, ESCWA concluded a project on “[Strengthening social protection for pandemic response](#)”, in collaboration with DESA, UNCTAD and the other United Nations regional commissions. The project supported regional exchanges of best practices and experiences in national social protection responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

30. If well-designed and implemented, conditional cash transfer programmes can build human capital among beneficiaries and their dependents, and thereby reduce intergenerational poverty. In Egypt, ESCWA has supported the Ministry of Social Solidarity in monitoring beneficiary compliance with conditionalities and enforcing conditionalities. ESCWA organized a peer-exchange on “[Effective implementation of conditional cash transfer](#)” in Beirut on 1 and 2 August 2022, which brought together government experts in social protection from the Arab region, Chile and Türkiye. The peer exchange was followed by a policy brief entitled “[Conditional cash transfers in Egypt: opportunities and challenges of introducing conditionalities](#)” (forthcoming), which contains recommendations that have been applied by the Ministry to guide its decision to gradually introduce conditionalities.

31. In Jordan, ESCWA has worked extensively with the National Aid Fund to develop a social protection country profile and a rapid assessment framework, so to provide graduation opportunities and strengthen the Fund’s 2022–2026 Strategic Plan to better target poverty reduction. ESCWA kickstarted the process of developing a country profile by holding a workshop on “[Landscape and prospects of social protection in Jordan](#)” in Amman on 29 September 2022 to initiate data collection and drafting. A first draft of the country profile for Jordan has been prepared, providing an extensive analysis of social protection in the country and policy recommendations to increase the efficiency of the social protection system to ensure that it leaves no one behind. To support policymakers understand the SPP-RAF and use it to deliver evidence-based policies, ESCWA organized a national training workshop on “[Evaluation of social assistance programmes in Jordan](#)” in Amman from 27 to 31 March 2022. ESCWA also promoted the graduation approach by supporting the National Aid Fund to match social assistance beneficiaries with available formal employment opportunities in the national employment platform, and to provide relevant up-skilling opportunities as demanded by the labour market.

32. In Mauritania, ESCWA, in partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Family and Children, held a workshop on “[Strengthening the social protection system in Mauritania](#)” in Nouakchott from 26 June to 1 July 2022 to prepare a country profile and train government officials in social protection planning and implementation. ESCWA also supported the Ministry in developing a dashboard that compiles the country’s social protection activities in one place. The dashboard enables the Ministry to minimize inclusion and exclusion errors, thereby ensuring that the targeted population is being reached; and provides a profile of all social protection beneficiaries, which will pave the way for future interventions, including graduation schemes.

33. In Somalia, ESCWA has supported the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to strengthen social protection systems, and to transition social protection from humanitarian aid provision to a government-managed programme, initially by conducting a social protection capacity needs assessment. The assessment focused on the human and organizational capacities already available within the Ministry and the additional capacities required for successful social protection management. The results were endorsed by the Ministry at a workshop held in Addis Ababa on 14 and 15 March 2023. The results will inform the formulation of a capacity development plan for the Ministry to effectively implement the national social protection policy.

34. In the Sudan, ESCWA supported the Ministry of Social Development to improve its monitoring and management of social assistance programmes by supporting the integration of a social protection information system that shares beneficiary data between programmes and institutions. ESCWA also conducted a study on vulnerable groups in the Sudan, and included their information in the integrated social protection information system so that they may qualify for social assistance programmes. In addition, and in response to the growing threat caused by climate disasters in the country, ESCWA is currently working with Ministry to develop an adaptive and shock-responsive social protection system through greater stakeholder coordination.

IV. Labour markets

35. ESCWA has supported many Arab countries to better understand their labour markets, to match job seekers with employment opportunities, and to train their labour forces in skills demanded by the labour market. The [ESCWA Skills Monitor](#) assists Arab countries in supporting their labour markets.

36. In Egypt, ESCWA met with representatives of the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development on 23 and 24 February 2022 to discuss employment creation, reskilling, upskilling and skills matching techniques, based on the ESCWA Skills Monitor. ESCWA is now working with the Ministry to build an advanced labour market information system to better track national labour market dynamics and support evidence-based policymaking.

37. In Iraq, ESCWA is working with the Ministry of Planning and the National Statistical Office to develop a labour market information system for the public sector, which accounts for a considerable proportion of employment. ESCWA held a workshop for technical officials on 28 February and 1 March 2023 to highlight the importance of labour market surveillance and assess available labour market information. A labour market information system is currently being developed.

38. In Jordan, ESCWA organized a workshop on 19 and 20 October 2022 to support the Ministry of Digital Economy in surveying digital skills, and establishing a system to match the skills demanded with those available in the labour force and thereby reduce unemployment and promote accession to the Fourth Industrial Revolution. ESCWA also held a workshop for the Higher Council for Persons with Disability from 5 to 7 February 2023 to enhance the integration of persons with disabilities in the labour market by identifying employment opportunities and the skillsets of persons with disabilities, and strengthening available career guidance.

39. In Kuwait, ESCWA assisted the Youth Public Authority (YPA) in integrating its *Tawtheef* platform (a digital job matching platform) with the ESCWA Skills Monitor to better match skills demanded by the labour market with jobseekers' skills. ESCWA met with YPA in Kuwait City from 27 to 30 August 2022 to support the integration process. ESCWA and YPA are also working towards expanding their labour market analytics to profile available skills in the labour market.

40. In Lebanon, ESCWA is supporting the Ministry of Labour in improving the ability of its digital employment platform to better link jobseekers with available jobs. ESCWA is also supporting the Ministry to better understand the demanded skills from employers in Lebanon, and how demand had changed as a result of the pandemic and the ongoing economic crisis.

41. In Libya, ESCWA provided the Libyan Center for Strategic and Future Studies with access to the ESCWA Skills Monitor to monitor labour demand in the country. ESCWA will further support this initiative by providing analysis of the skills demanded by employers in Libya.

42. In Qatar, ESCWA is supporting the Ministry of Labour and the Qatar Foundation to redesign the country's digital employment matching programme, and explore the possibility of upskilling unemployed Qataris. From January 2023, ESCWA has started to build a model that identifies the optimal number of national employees per firm, in a bid to advance beyond the current quota system.

43. Youth unemployment is an emerging and critical challenge in the Arab region, which ESCWA seeks to alleviate through youth empowerment and skills development.

44. In the Sudan, ESCWA has focused on promoting youth empowerment, particularly through participatory governance and participation in public affairs. ESCWA, in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Development, held a national workshop on “[Building partnership capacity in democratic governance in the Sudan](#)” in Khartoum on 28 and 29 June 2022, which supported the development of a youth agenda for socioeconomic dialogue in the Sudan. ESCWA, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Youth and Sports, held a second workshop on “[Empowering youth and enhancing their participation in public affairs in the Sudan](#)” in Khartoum on 19 and 20 September 2022 to equip Sudanese young people with the skills to actively participate in public policy formulation. ESCWA is currently supporting the Government to establish a youth network that will participate in the upcoming national dialogue.

45. In Qatar, ESCWA has focused on skills development and entrepreneurial support for young people, and on engaging them in social work. To support entrepreneurial youth activities, ESCWA organized a series of workshops in Doha, in collaboration with the Nama Center, on “[Identifying the problem and solution](#)” from 3 to 5 October and from 6 to 9 October 2021, and on “[Business modelling, project growth and disseminating the solution](#)” from 20 to 24 October 2021. The workshops were supported by training of trainer sessions to further promote youth entrepreneurship in Qatar. The “[First training of trainers in Qatar on the first stage of the social entrepreneurship journey: identifying the problem and solution](#)” was held in Doha from 11 to 14 October 2021, and was followed by the “[Second training of trainers in Qatar on the first stage of the social entrepreneurship journey: identifying the problem and solution](#)” from 2 to 8 November 2021. To further support youth entrepreneurship, ESCWA and the Nama Center organized a national consultation on 13 September 2022 to develop a “[Roadmap for establishing a social incubator in Qatar](#)”.

46. Within the framework of promoting a culture of civic responsibility in Qatar, particularly among young people, ESCWA partnered with the Nama Center to encourage young people to embrace social development work and initiatives. ESCWA and the Nama Centre organized a workshop on “[Youth in social work](#)” aimed at building the capacity of young people who were already engaged in social institutions, held in Doha from 27 February to 2 March 2022. The workshop was followed by another on “[Capacity-building of youth in social development work in Qatar: training of trainers](#)”, held in Doha from 20 to 23 March 2022, aimed at training young people to further disseminate knowledge gained from social development work.

V. Women’s economic empowerment and the care economy

47. An ESCWA technical paper entitled “[Leaving women and girls further behind or a potential opportunity for strengthening gender equality? Lessons from the COVID-19 crisis in the Arab region](#)”, published in July 2022, highlighted that women and girls are frequently not integrated in the institutional mechanisms used by Governments in times of crises. As such, women and girls are at risk of falling further behind during a crisis. The technical paper provides recommendations for better integrating women and girls’ rights in future emergency responses.

48. ESCWA has also continued to promote women’s economic empowerment in the region, especially by focusing on how the burden of unpaid care work, disproportionately borne by women, limits female labour force participation. In response, ESCWA is supporting Arab countries in advancing the care economy and strengthening female labour force participation, and in turn increasing economic growth. ESCWA efforts in that regard include a guide entitled “[Women economic empowerment in the Arab region: guidelines to advance care policies](#)” and a series of national situational assessments on the care economy, which have been used to provide policy advice.

49. A document entitled “[Empowering women in the Arab region: advancing the care economy – Case study: childcare in Lebanon](#)”, prepared by ESCWA in collaboration with ILO, the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Social Affairs, provides a detailed understanding of the characteristics of the

childcare economy in Lebanon, its major stakeholders, the changes that occurred over the last decade and during the pandemic, the needs and expectations of families, and the broader policy environment framing the public and private provision of care. The case study was followed by a “[Multi-stakeholder dialogue on childcare economy in Lebanon](#)”, held in Beirut on 22 and 23 June 2022, organized by ESCWA, the National Commission for Lebanese Women, the World Bank, UN-Women and the Arab Institute for Women at the Lebanese American University. The dialogue centred on developing a national strategic vision on women's economic empowerment and the childcare economy. One recognized solution to enhance women's economic empowerment is to promote flexible work arrangements. To that end, ESCWA conducted a legal study entitled “[Women's economic participation in Lebanon: a mapping analysis of laws and regulations](#)” to identify the necessary legal changes to implement flexible work arrangements in Lebanon. The results of the legal study were used to propose a law that allows for flexible work arrangements in the country, which was submitted to the Lebanese Parliament in February 2023.

50. A document entitled “[Case study: childcare in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia](#)” was prepared by ESCWA, in collaboration with the Family Affairs Council, and published in August 2022. The case study assesses how the relatively new child hospitality sector in Saudi Arabia has supported women's economic empowerment, and provides policy recommendations to further advance childcare and women's economic empowerment.

51. ESCWA is currently conducting further case studies in Oman and the Sudan on how care provided to persons with disabilities and older persons affects women's economic empowerment.

VI. Inclusion of persons with disabilities

52. ESCWA continues to support member States in implementing and reporting on the Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and to provide policy advice that promotes the comprehensive inclusion of persons with disabilities, including in the community, at school and at work.

53. To promote the rights of persons with disabilities, it is vital to first accurately classify disability. ESCWA has partnered with the League of Arab States to develop an approach for disability assessment, determination and classification that allows policymakers to focus on removing obstacles that perpetuate disability. Two workshops on “[A roadmap for the classification and assessment of disability](#)” were held in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, on 5 and 6 December 2021, and in Doha on 27 and 28 June 2022, to set out the new Arab classification of disability. After successfully implementing the roadmap, the new classification and assessment for persons with disabilities was adopted and approved by the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs in their regional meeting on “[The rights of people with disabilities and multidimensional poverty: further implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Beyond](#)”, held in Doha on 25 and 26 January 2023.

54. ESCWA also partnered with the League of Arab States to improve the resilience of persons with disabilities during crises, as they are normally at higher risk of being left behind. ESCWA and the League have developed a roadmap to help member States develop national policies and programmes to support and include persons with disabilities in emergency response plans (forthcoming). The roadmap was presented by ESCWA and the League, in collaboration with the Egyptian Ministry of Social Solidarity, at a workshop on “[Responding to the needs of persons with disabilities during crises](#)”, held in Cairo on 15 and 16 March 2022, and again at a side event held in New York on 15 June 2022 on the theme “[Disability in pandemics and crises: technology adaptation and economic empowerment](#)” at the fifteenth session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The roadmap was approved by the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs at their regional meeting in January 2023, and will pave the way for reforms to disaster management plans to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

55. To support reporting on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities across the Arab region, ESCWA, in collaboration with the League of Arab States and the Regional Office of the OHCHR, organized a [regional training](#) in Riyadh on 23 and 24 May 2022. The training supported Arab countries to

adopt a simplified reporting mechanism and a set of national indicators to monitor progress towards implementing the Convention.

56. At the regional level, ESCWA, in collaboration with the Maltese Ministry for Inclusion, Social Wellbeing and Voluntary Organizations and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities launched the [European Union-Arab Cooperation Forum on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) on 24 January 2022. The Forum fosters policy exchange, technical cooperation, capacity-building and research to further uphold the rights of persons with disabilities.

57. ESCWA and its partners established the Arab-European Union Research Network on Disability as the first activity under the Forum. As part of this Network, a call for papers on “the right to independent living within the community” was issued. Of the submissions, eight papers, contributing towards generating knowledge on the issues facing persons with disability, were selected from across the Arab region and Europe and presented at a conference on the theme “[Transition towards independent living within the community for persons with disabilities](#)”, held in Beirut on 14 and 15 February 2022. In addition to presenting the papers, the conference explored policies and programmes that support countries in ensuring the right of independent living for persons with disabilities. The conference was supported by four subregional consultations on “[Independent living in the Arab region: consultations with persons with disabilities](#)”, held virtually from 12 to 19 December 2022, at which persons with disabilities and their representative organizations were invited to identify key challenges to achieving deinstitutionalization, independent living, and inclusion within the community.

58. ESCWA, in partnership with the CBR Global Network and CBR regional networks, held five virtual dialogues on the theme “[Towards a sustainable and inclusive community development for all](#)” on 3, 10, 17 and 24 November and 1 December 2021 to identify the best practices in CBID and CBR, especially in the COVID-19 context. The dialogues contributed towards a road map on including persons with disabilities during emergencies, developed by ESCWA and the League of Arab States. ESCWA has also published a policy brief entitled “Community-based Inclusive Development: national policy and community programmes” (forthcoming), which provides policy recommendations to promote CBID.

59. Inclusive education and employment are critical to empower persons with disabilities. ESCWA partnered with UNESCO to promote the empowerment of persons with disabilities in education and employment across the Arab region.

60. Starting with inclusive education, and the importance of early childhood education, ESCWA developed an “Early intervention minimum package for children with disabilities (0–5 years old)” (forthcoming) and supportive tool to help parents and caregivers in offering targeted developmental support to young children with disabilities. The package is currently being piloted in three community development centres in Lebanon, in partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs, and will be made available to the region in 2024.

61. To improve teachers’ capacity to deliver inclusive education, ESCWA, in partnership with the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education and King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center, developed a “[Training package on inclusive education and disability](#)”. The package supports the development of comprehensive policies and practices that ensure inclusive education, particularly focusing on disadvantaged children at risk of dropping out of school. The package was formally launched at a regional workshop on “[The implementation of inclusive and comprehensive education in the Arab region](#)”, held in Beirut from 28 to 30 November 2022, and supported by the Sultan bin AbdulAziz Al Saud Foundation.

62. ESCWA is also supporting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market. It has created a pool of trainers on inclusive employment across the Arab region, and promoted the development and implementation of inclusive policies in Jordan, Lebanon, the Sudan, and the Syrian Arab Republic.

63. ESCWA held workshops on “[Inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workplace: training of trainers](#)” for Middle Eastern Arab countries in Amman from 15 to 20 May 2022, for Arab least developed countries in

Khartoum from 16 to 21 July 2022, for North African Arab countries in Tunis from 5 and 10 November 2022, and for Gulf Cooperation Council countries in Muscat from 19 to 24 November 2022. A total of 50 trainers from across the region provided specialized training on disability inclusion to employers in the public and private sectors, including on effective strategies for engaging adult learners, diversity and inclusion, inclusive language and terminology, legislative frameworks and international conventions, requirements for inclusion management, engineering approaches and accommodation, inclusive recruitment mechanisms, and integrating inclusion standards in workplace policies.

64. In Egypt, ESCWA held a national conference on “[Community-based Inclusive Development in Egypt](#)” in Cairo on 26 December 2021, followed by two regional workshops in Upper Egypt and the Delta area. The workshops increased demand for CBID initiatives, and resulted in the reallocation of public resources from the Ministry of Social Solidarity to local authorities to promote CBID.

65. In Jordan, ESCWA conducted a survey to identify the perceptions of public and private sector employers in hiring persons with disabilities. Results of the survey were published in a policy brief entitled “[Persons with disabilities: labour market perceptions survey – Jordan](#)” to highlight employers’ perceptions of employing persons with disabilities. The results will be used to develop inclusive employment policies.

66. In Lebanon, ESCWA, in partnership with UNFPA, supported the Ministry of Social Affairs in developing its first National Disability Strategy (2022–2030) and a three-year National Plan of Action on Disability (2022–2024). Focusing on inclusive education, ESCWA, in partnership with the Ministry of Education and UNESCO, organized a workshop on “[Inclusive and comprehensive education in Lebanon](#)”, held in Beirut on 6 and 7 October 2022, to pilot the training package on inclusive education and disability and to initiate a national policy on inclusive education. To promote inclusive employment, ESCWA conducted a second survey to identify employers’ perceptions, the results of which are published in a policy brief entitled “[Persons with disabilities: Labour market perceptions survey – Lebanon](#)”. The results will be used to develop inclusive employment policies.

67. For Somalia, ESCWA held a workshop on CBID in Nairobi from 24 to 26 August 2022 to introduce participants to CBID, determine how to achieve CBID in Somalia, and identify priority interventions to improve the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

68. In the Syrian Arab Republic, ESCWA, in partnership with UNDP, supported the development of a roadmap to implement CBID in rehabilitation centres and disability inclusion in national planning and programming. ESCWA and UNDP held five workshops on CBID, targeting policymakers and managers of rehabilitation centres in various governorates. The national workshops were held in Damascus from 6 to 9 February 2022, from 21 to 23 March 2022, from 10 to 12 May 2022, from 19 to 21 July 2022, and from 7 to 9 November 2022. ESCWA also held a consultation on “Legislation related to equal opportunities of persons with disabilities in the labour market in the Syrian Arab Republic” in Damascus on 11 and 12 October 2022. This was informed by a gap analysis prepared by ESCWA on legislation. The workshop benefited from ESCWA analysis of national legislation, and participants’ examples of missing or misdirected legislation. This information is currently being compiled in a national report that will also provide recommendations to promote inclusive employment policies.

69. In the Sudan, ESCWA supported the Ministry of Social Development in formulating its National Strategy on Persons with Disabilities, and reviewing the National Social Protection Strategy to ensure that it was inclusive and responded to the needs of persons with disabilities. ESCWA and the Ministry organized a workshop on “[A strategic plan for people with disabilities in the Sudan](#)” in Khartoum on 29 and 30 March 2022 to discuss the development of a national strategy for persons with disabilities, and how to ensure that persons with disabilities were included in the National Social Protection Strategy. ESCWA also organized a workshop on “National policies related to including the persons with disabilities in the Sudanese labour market” in Khartoum on 22 and 23 March 2022. The workshop benefited from ESCWA analysis of national legislation, and participants’ examples of missing or misdirected legislation. This information is currently

being compiled in a national report that will also provide recommendations to promote inclusive employment policies.

VII. Migrant rights

70. Over the past two years, ESCWA has stepped up efforts to work with member States on migrant rights.

71. In Somalia, at the request of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, ESCWA is providing technical assistance to the Federal Government of Somalia to develop the country's first national migration strategy. Work began by undertaking a situational analysis of migration to inform the strategy.

72. In the Sudan, ESCWA is working with the National Population Council, in collaboration with IOM and UNFPA, to prepare a national migration strategy, building upon the results of the 2018 situational analysis on migration and on interviews with focus groups and stakeholders. The draft strategy will be validated through a national consultation in 2023.

73. In Jordan, ESCWA is working with the Higher Population Council to prepare a situational analysis of migration to and from Jordan, including the various drivers of migration (economic, conflict, climate change, among others). The study (forthcoming) will help identify the priorities and entry points, including institutional and legal frameworks and stakeholders, to develop a national migration strategy for Jordan.

VIII. Rights of older persons

74. ESCWA continues to assist member States in meeting the needs of older persons and safeguarding their rights. In this context, ESCWA has been assisting Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Sudan in developing national policies to support older persons.

75. In Jordan, ESCWA is supporting the Government's efforts to mainstream older persons' priorities. It organized a workshop for government representatives on "[Centering the needs of older persons in policymaking in Jordan](#)", held in Amman on 27 and 28 October 2021. Subsequently, ESCWA partnered with the National Council for Family Affairs to evaluate the strategy for older persons that ended in 2022, and to draft a new strategy in a participatory manner.

76. In Iraq, ESCWA is supporting the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in drafting a national policy for older persons. The participatory drafting process entailed multiple consultations with relevant governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, including a national consultation on the "[Draft national policy for older persons in Iraq](#)" held in Baghdad on 29 and 30 November 2022.

77. In the Sudan, ESCWA is supporting the Ministry of Social Development in formulating a "National strategy for older persons" (forthcoming). The participatory drafting process entailed multiple consultations with relevant governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, including a national consultation to endorse "[The national strategy for older persons in the Sudan](#)" held in Khartoum on 7 and 8 June 2022.

78. In the Syrian Arab Republic, ESCWA supported the Commission for Family and Population Affairs in developing a "National strategy for older persons" (forthcoming), which has been endorsed by the Government. This was based on a participatory and consultative process, including a national workshop on the "[Draft national strategy for older persons in the Syrian Arab Republic](#)" held in Damascus on 11 and 12 May 2022.

79. In Somalia, ESCWA is supporting the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in drafting a national strategy for older persons. As a first step, ESCWA organized a capacity-building workshop on "[Mainstreaming ageing in policymaking: Somalia](#)", held in Nairobi on 23 and 24 August 2022.

80. In Lebanon, following the launch of the National Strategy for Older Persons in Lebanon 2020–2030, ESCWA, in partnership with UNFPA, is supporting the Ministry of Social Affairs in developing an action plan to operationalize the strategy.

IX. Sustainable urban development

81. During the pandemic, urban areas proved to be areas of vulnerability, unemployment and poverty, largely more so than rural areas. In response, ESCWA, in collaboration with the other United Nations regional commissions, UNCDF and UN-Habitat, implemented a joint global project on “[Building urban economic resilience during and after COVID-19](#)”. The project aims to enable a better understanding of the key factors and drivers of urban resilience in the face of COVID-19, so as to develop practical solutions as part of a framework that outlines prerequisites for enhancing the resilience of cities.

82. ESCWA is leading the project in the Arab region, conducting regional analysis on urban resilience and individual analysis in Alexandria, Egypt; Beirut; and Kuwait.

83. At the regional level, ESCWA drafted a report entitled “[Policy advocacy on building urban economic resilience during and after COVID-19 in the Arab region](#)”, which provides regional policy recommendations on how to ensure urban resilience across labour markets, economic governance, the business environment, financial arrangements and infrastructure. A complementary report entitled “[Smart sustainable cities and smart digital solutions for urban resilience in the Arab region: lessons from the pandemic](#)”, a webinar on the theme “[Building urban economic resilience: digital solutions](#)” held on 21 April 2022, and an e-learning course entitled “[Introduction to urban economic resilience diagnostics and action planning in the context of COVID-19](#)” explored the possibility of smart sustainable cities in the Arab region, and smart digital solutions that could help increase both resilience and inclusion.

84. At the local level, ESCWA undertook urban resilience diagnostics and recovery plans.

85. ESCWA published a technical paper entitled “[Performance diagnosis of urban economic recovery and resilience: the case of Alexandria](#)”, which found Alexandria, Egypt, to have been relatively resilient during the pandemic. Nonetheless, recommendations to strengthen the city’s resilience, including greater support for entrepreneurs and maintaining a diverse economy, were set out in a technical paper entitled “[Building urban economic resilience plan for the city of Alexandria](#)” and a policy brief entitled “[Building urban economic resilience in the city of Alexandria within the framework of recovery planning during and after COVID-19](#)”. A workshop on the theme “[Validation of Alexandria city diagnostics and local stakeholders visioning](#)” was held online on 10 May 2021.

86. An ESCWA technical paper entitled “[Performance diagnosis of urban economic recovery and resilience: the case of Beirut](#)” found that Beirut was less resilient during the pandemic and in general. Consequently, an ESCWA technical paper entitled “[Building urban economic resilience plan for the city of Beirut](#)” and a policy brief entitled “[Building urban economic resilience in the city of Beirut within the framework of recovery planning during and after COVID-19](#)” were critical in providing policy recommendations on increasing the economic and social resilience of Beirut.

87. However, ESCWA work on urban resilience in Lebanon stretches beyond Beirut. Urban resilience in Lebanon was discussed at the [First National Urban Forum of Lebanon](#), organized by ESCWA and UN-Habitat and held in Beirut on 23 and 24 March 2022. A 2021 report, prepared by ESCWA and UN-Habitat, entitled “[State of the Lebanese cities: governing sustainable cities beyond municipal boundaries](#)” considered urban resilience in 10 Lebanese cities.

88. A report entitled “[Performance diagnosis of urban economic recovery and resilience: the case of Kuwait City](#)” found that the resilience of Kuwait, particularly its labour markets, could be improved, and a resilience plan was outlined in a technical paper entitled “[Building urban economic resilience plan for the city of Kuwait](#)”

and a policy brief entitled “[Building urban economic resilience in the city of Kuwait within the framework of recovery planning during and after COVID-19](#)”.

89. The New Urban Agenda is a concise, action-oriented, forward-looking and universal framework of actions to promote decent housing and sustainable urban development. ESCWA, in collaboration with the other United Nations regional commissions and UN-Habitat, continued to support the implementation and monitoring of the New Urban Agenda and SDG 11, including by implementing the regional component of the global [Inter-regional Cooperation on the Implementation of the New Urban Agenda](#) programme, which encourages policy consistency across national urban policies.

90. This global project is being implemented in nine cities worldwide, including two Arab cities, namely Amman and Agadir, Morocco. Under the project, ESCWA led the first voluntary local reviews (VLRs) in the Arab region to monitor the SDGs at the local level. ESCWA conducted the first VLR in the Arab region in Amman, in collaboration with UN-Habitat and the United Cities and Local Governments Middle East and West Asia Section (UCLG-MEWA), and in partnership with the Greater Amman Municipality. A virtual meeting on the “[Voluntary local review in Amman](#)” was held on 10 January 2022 to inform stakeholders of the processes to launch VLR. A report entitled “[Voluntary local review: the city of Amman, Jordan](#)” was published in July 2022 and launched at a [workshop](#) held in Amman on 5 and 6 October 2022. The launch stressed the need to strengthen policy coherence at the national and local levels.

91. The exemplary success of Amman’s VLR has resulted in it being presented at numerous high-level events, including the “[Round table on voluntary national reviews: subnational follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and tackling inequality](#)” (Beirut, 16 March 2022) held as part of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development; the “[High-level meeting on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda](#)” (New York, 28 April 2022); the [World Urban Agenda](#) (Katowice, Poland, 26 to 30 June 2022); “[Acting at local level](#)” (New York, 6 July 2022) held on the sidelines of the 2022 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development; and “[Multilevel governance for SDG localization](#)” (New York, 31 January 2023) held at the 2023 Partnership Forum of the Economic and Social Council.

92. ESCWA, in partnership with UN-Habitat and UCLG-MEWA, led the Arab region’s second VLR in Agadir, Morocco. A virtual meeting on the “[New Urban Agenda implementation project in Agadir](#)” was held on the 8 December 2021 to inform stakeholders of the processes to launch VLR, and an event entitled “[Smart cities and localizing Sustainable Development Goals](#)” was held in Agadir on 29 September 2022 to advance VLR and support the localization of the SDGs, multilevel governance, and the formulation, monitoring and implementation of local policies, programmes and projects.

93. To further promote localization and strengthen the capacity of local governments, ESCWA, in partnership with UN-Habitat, adapted [The New Urban Agenda Illustrated](#) to Arabic and developed the “[New Urban Agenda crash course part 1: core dimensions](#)” and the “[New Urban Agenda crash course part 2: means of implementation](#)”.

94. ESCWA organized a regional meeting of the Arab Land Initiative (Beirut, 13–14 July 2022), which addressed key regional land governance challenges by empowering Arab land governance champions through increased coordination, collaboration, capacity, knowledge and information sharing.