

SPECIAL SESSION 6

Rethinking Inequality in Arab Countries

Wednesday 10 April 2019, 11:15-13:00, Main Hall, UN House, Beirut

Background

Inequality is conventionally measured in terms of final outcomes, namely the distribution of income, expenditure or wealth resulting from the growth process. This concept of inequality is easy to grasp but it does not account for the multidimensionality of inequality. Many believe that societies seeking social and economic justice should promote equality of opportunity by compensating the inequality that arises from "circumstances" beyond individual control, such as place of birth, family wealth and educational level of the parents, while letting individuals bear the consequences of actions or "effort" for which they can be held responsible.

Session objectives

The session will address the following objectives:

- Inform the regional audience about some of the key messages drawn from the joint ESCWA-Economic Research Forum forthcoming report on "rethinking multidimensional inequality in Arab States;
- Consult with member states and other stakeholders for the preparation of the forthcoming Human Development Report 2019 by the United Nations Development Programme on inequality in human development;
- Discuss policy options to reduce inequality and promote buy-in among stakeholders.

Themes of discussion

The session will address the following questions:

- Do we have a consistent narrative on social (health and education) and economic inequalities in the Arab region?
- How does this narrative relate to the global narrative?
- What are the challenges facing the region and the globe according to those two narratives? What are the possible ramifications of a continuing trend of growing inequalities in wealth and income?
- What are the possible remedial policy options in the short and medium terms? Would it be feasible to introduce changes to fiscal policies (such as for example a wealth tax designed specifically to reduce inequalities)?
- What are the political economy ramifications, including those related to the nexus between conflict and inequality?

Chair

- **H.E. Ms. Hala El Saeed**, Minister of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform, Egypt

Panelists

- **Mr. Paul Makdisi**, Professor of Economics, University of Ottawa, Canada
- **Mr. Khalid Abu-Ismail**, Section Chief, Economic Development and Integration Division, ESCWA
- **Mr. Oussama Safa**, Section Chief, Social Development Division, ESCWA
- **Mr. Thangavel Palanivel**, Deputy Director, United Nations Development Programme/Human Development Report Office
- **Mr. Milorad Kovacevic**, Chief of Statistics, United Nations Development Programme/Human Development Report Office

Discussants

- **Mr. Ibrahim Elbadawi**, Managing Director, Economic Research Forum
- **Ms. Sherine Shawky**, Social Research Center at the American University in Cairo
- **Ms. Najla Ali Murad**, Director General, Iraq Poverty Reduction Strategy

Discussion

- Questions and answers

This special session will be live-streamed.