

Progress in accelerating global actions for a world without poverty and implementation of the System-wide Plan of Action for the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2018-2027): ESCWA, June 2019

Poverty is among the key challenges facing the Arab region on its path towards sustainable development. Multidimensional poverty rate in the Arab region is estimated by ESCWA to be around 40%. Political instability, conflict, economic, social and environmental challenges continue to throw burdens on a large segment of its population and exacerbate the severity and complexity of poverty and vulnerability. ESCWA has been closely monitoring poverty in the Arab region and supporting regional and national partners to step up their efforts to eradicate poverty in all its dimensions and has implemented a number of activities that address poverty in all its dimensions.

Work that supports Member Countries in eradicating poverty

Following the successful launch of the first *Arab Multidimensional Poverty Report* in September 2017, which was prepared in partnership with the League of Arab States, the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) and UNICEF, ESCWA organized three capacity building workshops on multidimensional poverty measurement to track progress and adopt policy tools to eradicate multidimensional poverty at national and regional levels. These workshops, conducted in partnership with the League of Arab States and OPHI, serve as a regional inter-governmental platform to raise awareness on poverty eradication efforts required by exposing policy makers to the conceptual and practical approaches for adopting and adapting national Multidimensional Poverty Indexes (MPIs), sharing best practices of mainstreaming multidimensional poverty within policy frameworks and advising countries on developing an action plan to address gaps in evidence and the steps to develop measurement and policy tools. ESCWA has also developed in-depth multidimensional poverty country profiles for ten Member States which provide subnational profile of the poor and identify key policy proposals to reduce poverty.

ESCWA developed a tailored Arab MPI as part of its flagship Arab Multidimensional Poverty Report (2017) and a background paper requested by the League of Arab States to inform the Arab Poverty Reduction Strategy with updated analysis of poverty in the region. These outputs supported the integration of the Arab Poverty Reduction Strategy with global frameworks such as the SDGs and the Third UN Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, contributing to the SWAP and the global Multidimensional Poverty Peer Network. ESCWA also supported the League in formulating the *Arab Strategic Framework for the Eradication of Multidimensional Poverty 2020-2030*, which was adopted at the fourth Arab Economic and Social Development Summit, held in Beirut on 20 January 2019.

ESCWA hosts a database on inequality and poverty for 13 countries across 2 points in time (one close to 2000 and one close to present). The database provides the foundation for our work on multidimensional poverty and inequality

ESCWA has also conducted, jointly with DESA and ECLAC, an expert group meeting on “*Revisiting Socio-economic policies to address poverty in all its dimensions in Middle Income Countries (MICs)*” (Beirut, May 2018). The meeting aimed to facilitate the exchange of best practices and lessons learned between MICs in Latin America and the Arab Region focusing on revisiting socio-economic policies to address poverty in all its dimensions. It examined national experiences in developing poverty reduction policies oriented toward achieving the SDGs, with a focus on the examination of macro-fiscal economic policies, and social policy including social protection.

Work on multidimensional inequalities

ESCWA has pioneered the concept of multi-dimensional inequality in the Arab region and has been promoting it through normative, capacity building and technical advisory work.

ESCWA’s normative work has advanced a new framework to gauge and respond to multi-dimensional inequalities by linking inequality of outcome, opportunity and autonomy. In its upcoming Social Development Report (SDR), ESCWA is focusing on the issue of excluded groups and marginalized communities in a selected number of Arab countries. The objective of the ongoing research is to understand – and eventually curb – the structural, legal and political barriers to inclusion and identify policy entry points and actions to take by Member States, civil society and the international community to ensure more inclusive approaches to policymaking. ESCWA had already published

a bird's eye view of the political economy of inequality in the Arab Region, arguing that multi-dimensional inequality, particularly the political economy part, is as important as the economic, money-metric one.

Between 2013 and 2019, ESCWA designed capacity-building activities and a number of toolkits to support Member States in developing policies and tools to strengthen the equality and equity dimensions of social justice in their national development strategies, and to support policy-makers, civil society organizations and citizens develop long-term partnerships by equipping them with relevant knowledge and instruments to respond to pressing development challenges.

Furthermore, ESCWA periodically organizes dialogues with representatives of civil society organizations and other stakeholders from selected Arab countries to discuss critical issues within ESCWA's broad social justice agenda, including measures to combat poverty, reduce inequality and promote civic participation. The outcomes of such discussions feed into policy-oriented documents, such as a recent issue of ESCWA's Social Development Report on inequality in the Arab region.¹

ESCWA, in partnership with ERF, organized an Expert Group Meeting on Rethinking Inequality in the Arab Region (Beirut, February 2019). The meeting provided a venue to discuss several background papers on inequality of outcomes and inequality of opportunity in health and education sectors, in addition to inequality of outcomes in gender and drivers of inequality. Also, and in partnership with ERF, ESCWA is finalizing a report on *Rethinking Inequality in the Arab Region* (Forthcoming in 2019). The report puts forward a comprehensive survey and analysis of inequality in Arab countries by examining disparities in health, education, and living standards spatially, by gender and by household socio-economic characteristics. The report covers the political economy as well and the drivers of inequality with the aim of charting out remedial policy actions. The results of the report will feed into the future work of ESCWA to leverage Arab countries' efforts toward achieving the SDGs and targets, particularly those related to poverty reduction, reducing inequality, generating decent employment, and achieving inclusive productive growth.

Work that contributes to facilitating the development of integrated economic, social and environmental policies

Under the "Regional Initiative for the Assessment of the Impact of Climate Change on Water Resources and Socio-Economic Vulnerability in the Arab Region (RICCAR)", work undertaken to date focused on identifying the expected impact of climate change on freshwater resources in the Region and associated vulnerability hotspots through the application of an integrated assessment that involved linking a regional climate model to a set of hydrological models for scenario development at the regional level. This resulted in the generation of five climate change projections that are each linked to two to three regional hydrological models to secure a good picture of the expected impacts of climate change on freshwater resources in the Arab region during the coming years. The initiative has provided a common platform for examining and addressing climate change impacts on freshwater resources and related sectors in the Arab region by providing a basis for dialogue, understanding, priority setting and policy formulation on climate change adaptation at the regional level.

Work that contributes to the inclusion and empowerment of those left behind

Under the Regional Initiative to Promote Small-Scale Renewable Energy Applications in the Rural Areas of the Arab Region (REGEND), work is geared towards supporting national efforts on implementing small-scale renewable energy technologies in rural areas in selected Arab countries so as to enhance the resilience of disadvantaged rural population, with special emphasis placed on the empowerment of women. The project is seeking to achieve this objective by showcasing and documenting business models that offer incentives to rural communities and providing financing instruments for adopting appropriate small-scale renewable energy technologies through the implementation of pilot projects on income generating activities.

Expanding social protection systems to underpin inclusive poverty-reducing development

ESCWA supports and stimulates inclusive social protection reforms in Arab countries through targeted research and policy advice, technical support and capacity building, as well as through enhanced regional cooperation

¹ ESCWA, Social Development Report 2: Inequality, Autonomy and Change in the Arab Region, document E/ESCWA/SDD/2017/6.

and experience exchange. In 2018-19, ECSWA has carried out extensive research on social protection reforms in the Arab region (report forthcoming in 2019). The report will discuss social insurance, social assistance and health care reforms and their impacts, informational and institutional infrastructure and complex political economic aspects impacting the outcome of reforms. The report will showcase the best regional practices of extending the coverage of both contributory and non-contributory social protection programmes, as well as improving the quality of social protection.

In collaboration with ILO, World Bank and OECD, ESCWA held a workshop on Social Protection Reform in the Arab Region, in February 2019. The event facilitated exchange of experience and capacity development of participating Member States in expanding their social protection systems and encouraged a “system’s perspective” that enables Governments to better integrate different parts of social insurance, assistance and health care, thus leaving no one without social protection coverage.

In May 2019, ESCWA will hold an expert group meeting (in partnership with ILO) to facilitate regional experience exchange on the recent and ongoing social protection reforms in Arab countries, discuss the policy challenges of extending social protection systems and inform ESCWA’s forthcoming report on Social Protection Reform in the Arab Region.