

From risk to resilience
Accelerating actions to achieve a more sustainable and equitable future
through regional cooperation
Annual Dialogue of Regional Commissions with the Second Committee
Tuesday 25 October 2022 (10 AM - 1 PM EST)

USG Rola Dashti, Executive Secretary - ESCWA
Talking points

Excellencies, President and members of the Second Committee,
Distinguished delegates,

At the outset, I would like to thank you for your invitation to this annual dialogue, which reflects your continued appreciation for the role that regional commissions play in furthering the 2030 Agenda.

Also, I would like to brief you on the Arab region.

In broad terms, the Arab region faces multiple development challenges:

- Less than optimal socio-economic structural reality;
- Conflicts that have rolled back some of the progress made on the 2030 Agenda;
- A charge of refugees, larger than any other region;
- Repercussions of crises besetting the rest of the world - climate, food, fuel and finance.

More specifically:

- **On economy: As a result of the Russia-Ukraine war**, Arab oil-importing economies are likely to lose \$28 billion in 2022. Middle-income countries are facing an increase in external debt service of about \$1 billion in 2022 due to hike in interest rate. The situation is likely to be worst as a result of global inflation and the food security situation is a cause for real concern particularly in war torn countries such as Yemen and Somalia.



- **On conflict:** In our region, at least seven countries are experiencing conflict. An estimated 28 million people are considered either refugees or IDPs, while close to 65 million are in need of humanitarian assistance. The Russia-Ukraine war is jeopardizing delivery of aid by humanitarian organizations, putting millions of refugees and displaced persons at risk of hunger.
- **On food security: The food security situation** is a cause for concern particularly in war-torn countries such as Yemen and Somalia.
- **On climate:** The Arab region is extremely vulnerable to the ravages of climate change, even though it contributes less than 5 per cent to global greenhouse gas emissions. Droughts, heat waves, forest fires, sand and dust storms, sea level rise and flash floods have wreaked havoc in urban, rural and coastal communities alike.

Distinguished delegates,

Throughout 2022, ESCWA has helped member States in addressing the crises by undertaking 94 advisory services (missions, technical support, consultancy work) and 74 capacity-building initiatives for 1790 policymakers and practitioners, helping them advance their 2030 agendas while fostering regional integration through:

- interactive, policy modelling and simulation tools and platforms;
- building institutional capacities;
- providing strategic policy recommendations emanating from evidence-based analysis of the region's sustainable socio-economic development challenges.

These services were delivered in areas such as strengthening national development planning capacities, processes, and budgets to:

- enhance national and regional responses to external shocks and pandemics;

- integrate transboundary risks and disaster response measures;
- include social protection frameworks for the elderly and migrants, and support in formulating poverty reduction strategies;
- enhance production and dissemination of SDG data and statistics;
- enhance access to climate financing through debt swap for climate initiatives;
- more effectively manage transboundary groundwater resources and energy transition strategies.

Between 2021 and 2022, ESCWA released 18 policy briefs, evidence-based analyses of major development challenges in the region and offered member States policy recommendations on multiple issues including food security, social protection, sustainable fiscal management and inequality.

As we move forward into 2023, we will expand our support to member States, deepen our knowledge base, continue enhancing our policy simulation tools and provide the proper environment to help the Secretary General implement the elements of the Common Agenda that have received green lights from member States.

More specifically, we will take the lead on the two proposals that the SG mandated us (Tackling tax evasion – proposal 6) and helping the SG prepare an annual meeting with the regional organizations – proposal 60). Of course, we will support in other areas where we have built up expertise such as social protection, food security, green and digital jobs, gender equality, youth engagement and climate warming.

As we do so, we will deepen our close working arrangements with the UN system through at least three main avenues:

- Strategic leadership and guidance to the UN system at the regional level, through our role as Co-vice chair of the Arab States RCP (AS-RCP);

- Servicing and supporting the smooth operation of the RCP through our role as part of the joint secretariat;
- Substantive contribution through the IBCs.

This is in addition to our lead role in organizing the Annual Arab Forum for Sustainable Development with full participation of all UN agencies operating at the regional level.

In 2022 we continued to ramp up our direct support to RC offices and UNCTs, and we commit to continuing to do so in 2023.

In addition to what has been mentioned above and in conclusion, we are strengthening our partnerships with key UN agencies (UNCTAD, UNEP, ILO, UN-Habitat, DESA and others) while consistently enhancing our cooperation, coordination and joint work with other regional commissions.

I thank you for your attentive listening.