

ECOSOC Coordination Segment

Leveraging regional perspectives for an inclusive and resilient recovery guided by the 2030 Agenda

4 February from 10 am to 10:30 am NYT (5 pm to 5:30 pm Beirut Time)

Statement of Ms. Rola Dashti, USG, Executive Secretary of UNESCWA

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for this opportunity to engage with member states and share some of the work we are doing together to tackle inequality, limited fiscal space, and inefficiency in spending, in the recovery from COVID-19.

- The Arab region has one of the highest inequality rates globally. And we project that wealth inequality increased during the pandemic in our region. By the end of 2020, the wealthiest 1% held almost 45% of aggregate wealth and the wealthiest 10% controlled 81.0%. Ours is a region where almost 27% of people were poor based on national poverty lines. And we have the highest concentration of refugees and displaced people.
- Our Global Stimulus Tracker estimates that the Arab region requires an additional \$462 billion for a fast and more inclusive recovery.
- In light of these challenges, let me highlight 3 examples of support to member states.
- One, COVID-19 has pushed gross public debt in the Arab region to a historic high of \$1.4 trillion. We have launched a climate/SDG **Debt Swap/Donor Nexus Initiative**, an innovative financing mechanism that offers win-win results for debtor and creditor countries to deliver on the SDGs and the Paris Agreement commitments, and advance North-South and triangular cooperation.
This initiative makes debt holders and donors partners in realizing the aspirations of Arab countries to meet national development goals.
- Two, only 35% of people in the region are covered by one social protection benefit. We are bringing together ministers and their technical teams to reform social protection schemes and reduce inequality.

In this context I want to highlight the Ministerial Declaration, which was adopted during last November's Arab Ministerial Forum on **The Future of Social Protection in the Arab Region: Building a vision for a post-COVID-19 reality**, during which ministers in the region agreed on key principles of social protection coverage, financing, shock-responsiveness and governance.

- Third, optimizing fiscal spending and enhancing its efficiency and effectiveness is key to addressing limited fiscal space. ESCWA has developed a Smart spending approach through its Social Expenditure Monitor to support members states in optimizing social spending.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Next month we will all come together in the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development 2022 not only to highlight challenges but also to raise the ceiling on what the UN and the region can achieve. It is a mutli-stakeholder forum and we know that it will take the efforts and creativity of multiple stakeholders to pull us through to an inclusive and resilient recovery.
- In conclusion, we affirm our commitment to work with and support Arab member states in their efforts not only to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, but also to restore hope to the people of the region.

Thank you.