

**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 gender justice, population and inclusive development since the fourteenth session of the Committee on Social Development, held in Beirut on 8 June 2023. It focuses on examples of activities that highlight the links 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 present document and express an opinion on ways to develop technical cooperation activities and maximize their utility at national level.

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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 gender justice, population and inclusive development since the fourteenth session of the Committee on Social Development, held in Beirut on 8 June 2023. 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 States from inside and outside the region, and to translate its work and findings from its research into capacity-building and skills enhancing programmes for representatives of different ministries.
3. To maximize the use of available resources and avoid the duplication of effort, ESCWA continues to work to expand its partnerships with specialized United Nations organizations such as the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), United Nations Resident Coordinators' Offices, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UN-Women, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). ESCWA also works with global institutions, such as the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) at the University of Oxford and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG); regional and national institutions, such as the League of Arab States, the Sawiris Foundation, SETI (Support, Education, Training for Inclusion), and Orange Jordan; and academic institutions, such as the American University of Cairo (AUC), Cairo University, and Alexandria University.
4. Since June 2023, ESCWA has received requests for assistance in the following areas: reducing inequalities, advancing social justice, reducing poverty, improving social protection systems, increasing labour market opportunities, advancing women's economic empowerment, developing the care economy, including persons with disabilities, upholding the rights of migrants and the elderly, developing youth skills, and advancing sustainable urban development. The present document provides an overview of main technical cooperation activities implemented in response to those requests.

I. Reducing inequalities

5. In the technical paper "[Inequality in Egypt: facets and challenges](#)", ESCWA supported policymakers in better understanding the dynamics driving economic inequality in Egypt, noting the increase in poverty rates, and provided practical policy recommendations to reduce inequalities.
6. To support the Government in its efforts to reduce inequality among young people and increase their access to opportunities, ESCWA built on its Josour Initiative, launched in Lebanon in 2022, to design a regional platform with two national chapters for Egypt and Jordan in collaboration with the Sawiris Foundation and Orange Jordan. The [Josour](#) regional platform bridges members from the private sector who have opportunities to offer with young people from around the region who are looking for opportunities. It supports young people in better understanding what skills are in demand and what skills are needed for certain jobs, and offers opportunities for them to expand their skills through free tailored courses. By May 2024, a total of 4,209 young people, 36 opportunity providers, and 98 opportunities had been registered on the platform.
7. The Egyptian chapter is being implemented in partnership with the Egyptian private sector and universities, including Cairo University, Alexandria University, Pharos University, Borg El Arab University, the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at the AUC, and the Federation of Egyptian Chambers of Commerce. Seminars have been held with young people at universities to introduce Josour and the opportunities it can offer,

and individual analytics for young people have been produced, enabling them to access tailored insights on how their particular skillsets compare with a variety of jobs they might be interested in.

8. To build the skills of young people, ESCWA, in partnership with Coursera, is working with the Ministry of Social Solidarity in Egypt, the Ministry of Social Development and the National Aid Fund in Jordan, the Ministry of Economic Inclusion, Small Business, Employment, and Skills in Morocco, the Ministry of Youth and Sports in Iraq, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Childhood and Family in Mauritania, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour in Yemen, and the Ministry of Social Development in Palestine, to provide free training opportunities to 40,000 young people across these seven countries. The selection of the Coursera courses is informed by the results of the [ESCWA Skills Monitor](#). The range of courses offered to young people is intended to enhance their soft and hard skills to match the requirements of the job markets.

9. The Coursera programme has been rolled out in Egypt and Jordan. By May 2024, a total of 10,000 young people from the two countries had enrolled in the programme and were receiving free access to training courses on Coursera.

10. In providing opportunities for young people in Egypt, ESCWA has also supported the Government in identifying practical policy solutions that can sustain youth employment generation through two policy briefs. The policy briefs “[Youth employment dynamics in Egypt: challenges and opportunities](#)” and “[A better future: SME potential to generate youth employment in Egypt](#)” examine current trends in youth employment and provide policy recommendations to ensure more inclusive job creation for young people.

II. Advancing social justice

11. In Libya, ESCWA is supporting the Ministry of Planning in developing a national social justice strategy focused on economic inclusion, decentralization, climate and food justice, social protection, access to health and access to education. The process of developing and drafting the strategy relied on broad-based consultations with various stakeholders from civil society, academia, the private sector and selected government entities to ensure that the strategy responds to the targeted social justice policy mix for Libya. A final strategy drafting meeting, entitled “[National strategy for social justice in Libya](#)”, was held in Tunis, Tunisia, on 24 and 25 January 2024, with a team of national experts from Libya in attendance, to fine-tune parts of the strategy draft and agree on a final version. The strategy includes a road map for national action plans to incorporate and mainstream social justice principles into the sectors mentioned above.

12. In Iraq, ESCWA is supporting the High-level Interministerial Committee for Social Justice in developing a national social justice strategy, and exemplifying how it could be implemented through a pilot programme that institutionalises social justice in the health sector. To achieve this, ESCWA, in cooperation with the High-level Interministerial Committee for Social Justice, held a workshop on “[Institutionalizing the principles of social justice in Iraq](#)” in Baghdad on 16 and 17 July 2023. During the workshop, members of the committee and representatives from the Ministry of Planning and the Ministry of Health discussed the national vision for the institutionalization of social justice, and how to convert that vision into a pilot programme in the health sector. The workshop benefited from South-South cooperation by introducing the case of Mexico in promoting social justice in the health sector through decentralization.

13. In Somalia, ESCWA is supporting the Parliament of Somalia in developing a national social justice strategy that promotes a just and peaceful society. A parliamentary task force has been established to lead the development of the strategy.

III. Reducing poverty

14. In collaboration with DESA and the League of Arab States, ESCWA organised a workshop to equip member States with skills on how to measure both monetary and multidimensional poverty and formulate policy solutions to reduce it. The workshop “[Optimizing poverty reductions in Arab countries](#)” was held in

Amman on 28 and 29 November 2023, offering a forum for peer exchanges from across the world to highlight solutions that can reduce poverty in all its forms.

15. In Iraq, ESCWA supported the Central Statistical Organization and the Ministry of Planning in advancing the multidimensional poverty agenda. A national multidimensional poverty index (MPI) for Iraq was launched in Baghdad, Iraq, on 15 August 2023; this was followed by a workshop held in Baghdad on 29 and 30 January 2024 entitled “Optimizing poverty reduction pathways in Iraq”. The workshop gave training to government officials on how to use the new MPI to identify effective poverty reduction strategies.

16. In Jordan, ESCWA partnered with the Department of Statistics and OPHI at the University of Oxford, the Ministry of Planning and the National Aid Foundation to develop a national MPI. A series of planning and technical meetings were held, beginning with a workshop held from 2 to 5 October 2023 to identify key stakeholders to accompany the process of developing the national MPI. This was followed by a technical workshop held from 6 to 9 November 2023 aimed at reaching national consensus on the MPI indicators. A methodology workshop to train officials on the multidimensional poverty assist tool used by ESCWA to build the national MPI and produce initial results was held from 23 to 25 January 2024. Finally, during a [stakeholder validation workshop](#) held on 7 March 2024, all indicators and cut-offs were discussed with stakeholders from various ministries.

17. In Mauritania, ESCWA partnered with the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development (MEDD) and the National Agency for Statistics, Demographic and Economic Analysis (ANSADE) to identify effective poverty reduction strategies. Over the course of one year, consultations, computations, and validations of optimizing MPI reduction pathways were conducted with MEDD and ANSADE. The results will be published in a technical report entitled “Optimizing poverty reduction pathways in Mauritania: using the MPI-M” and a policy brief entitled “Note d’orientation sur l’optimisation des politiques et investissements pour la réduction de la pauvreté en Mauritanie”. A workshop entitled “[Optimizing poverty reduction pathways in Mauritania](#)” was held on 11 March 2024 in Nouakchott, Mauritania, in partnership with ANSADE, MEDD, the United Nations Resident Coordinator’s Office, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNICEF to discuss the findings and ways to capitalize on the poverty reduction optimization exercise. This has paved the way for strengthening the evidence base of poverty reduction policies, tailoring them to specific challenges in Mauritania, and allocating an appropriate level of resources to effectively reduce poverty in all its forms.

18. In Somalia, ESCWA supported the Somalia National Bureau of Statistics in developing the country’s first MPI. The results were issued in a technical report entitled “National multidimensional poverty index for Somalia” and a policy brief entitled “Multidimensional poverty in Somalia: strategic policy optimization for poverty reduction” (unpublished).

19. To effectively fight poverty and improve welfare, social and economic policies must be evidence-based, using the most recently available figures. However, the current national MPI of the State of Palestine uses data from 2017, and a new survey has not been conducted since. In 2023, ESCWA supported the Government in updating their national MPI estimates to ensure that their poverty reduction policies remained evidence based. The technical paper “[Nowcasting the national multidimensional poverty index for the State of Palestine \(2017–2022\)](#)”, published in October 2023, contains details of the update, which informed the formulation of the national poverty reduction strategy of the State of Palestine.

IV. Improving social protection systems

20. ESCWA has continued to support member States in evaluating the design, delivery mechanisms, organizational set-up, and financing of their social protection systems, and in identifying avenues for improvement based on international best practices.

21. In Egypt, the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS) is continuously working to improve the country’s social protection system, aiming to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the system as a whole and of

its key programmes. In view of these aspirations, ESCWA supported the MoSS and other national stakeholders on various levels.

22. First, ESCWA facilitated a detailed, diagnostic stocktaking of the social protection system and its key programmes to identify reform needs and reform options, using the ESCWA template to establish a comprehensive country profile of national social protection systems and reforms (forthcoming). This document, which was facilitated by ESCWA, has been implemented by the Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI) in cooperation with the MoSS and other key national social protection stakeholders.

23. Second, ESCWA contributed to the development and installation in the MoSS of machine-learning driven applications that will empower the ministry to undertake automated profiling of social assistance beneficiaries based on common vulnerabilities, with a view to enabling effective case management, and will enable the MoSS – based on household expenditure data – to identify the most efficient and effective budget allocation options for poverty reduction through social assistance. These applications were introduced to the ministry during a workshop held together with the MoSS from 24 to 26 September 2023.

24. In Jordan, ESCWA, in cooperation with the To-Excel think tank, supported the Ministry of Social Development in developing a comprehensive country profile of national social protection systems and reforms (forthcoming). This document provides policymakers with an assessment of the overall social protection framework and identifies areas for improvement. This was complemented by support to develop a reform action plan which will inform the upcoming new national strategy for social protection. The action plan was developed during a workshop on “[Social protection reform options in Jordan](#)”, which was jointly organised by ESCWA and the Ministry of Social Development from 22 to 25 June 2023 in Amman, Jordan. This was complemented by an analysis of the gender sensitivity of the current transition from the monthly cash transfer programme for vulnerable population groups to the poverty-targeted unified cash transfer programme in Jordan.

25. In Palestine, ESCWA supported the Ministry of Social Development in analysing the Palestine national cash transfer programme with a view to strengthening provision and efficiency. To this end, ESCWA organized a series of meetings with national stakeholders between 19–21 June 2023 in Ramallah, Palestine, to collect and analyse data from the programme. Results were identified and presented to the Ministry. They included the identification of challenges targeting effectiveness in certain regions and with regard to certain demographics.

26. ESCWA worked with the Ministry of Social Affairs in Tunisia, in cooperation with Development Pathways, to assess the status of the country’s social protection programmes in order to identify areas to strengthen delivery, efficiency, and inclusion. A comprehensive country profile of national social protection systems and reforms (forthcoming) – which has been developed jointly with the Ministry of Social Development’s Centre for Research and Studies and Development Pathways – provides policymakers with an analytical assessment of the overall social protection framework and identifies areas for improvement. It also provides a baseline for engagement by ESCWA with the Government of Tunisia.

27. To support the development of national capacities to drive recovery efforts in Yemen, ESCWA, the Yemeni Social Welfare Fund and UNICEF conducted a five-day training course to support the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour in designing and implementing social protection systems and programmes. The training, titled “[TRANSFORM](#)”, was held in Aden, Yemen, from 13 to 17 August 2023. ESCWA also supported the Social Welfare Fund in improving the country’s cash transfer programme by better managing beneficiary data. The training course, entitled “[Review of data on social welfare beneficiaries and development of data collection tools and protocols](#)” was held in Aden, Yemen, from 6 to 10 August 2023, and concluded with policy recommendations to improve beneficiary targeting and data collection.

V. Increasing labour market opportunities

28. The ESCWA Skills Monitor supports individuals and policymakers in identifying needed skills in the Arab region. It can therefore identify opportunities where a new skill set could improve labour market outcomes, which would ultimately improve employment opportunities and economies. However, for policymakers, an effective and accurate labour market information system (LMIS) is an essential first step towards understanding the exact dynamics of the labour market and to identify priority areas and beneficiaries for new skill sets and training. ESCWA thus supports member States in improving their LMISs as a first step to supporting Arab labour markets. This is fundamental to achieving a better understanding of labour market dynamics and developing practical policy solutions that achieve inclusive and decent employment.

29. In Egypt, ESCWA is supporting the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development in developing a national LMIS. The LMIS will allow the Government to monitor key employment indicators, provide labour market intelligence, and facilitate policy simulations. The LMIS will enable the Government of Egypt to reduce the time lag in data gathering, monitoring and analysis from a periodic format to close to real-time. The LMIS, even in its pre-operational stage, has provided the Ministry with a marked improvement in its ability to use big data in labour market policy design.

30. In Qatar, ESCWA is supporting the Ministry of Labour in developing a LMIS that includes a matching platform, a platform to increase national employment, and a labour market policy simulation platform to monitor policy variables. An introductory meeting was held with the Ministry of Labour in Doha, Qatar, from 28 to 30 January 2024 to discuss a road map for the new LMIS platform. As a result of the support provided by ESCWA, Qatar has experienced improved job matching accuracy, and now applies an intuitive approach using artificial intelligence to enhance national employment.

31. In Bahrain, ESCWA is supporting the Ministry of Labour in analysing the Bahrain labour market's needs by identifying relevant indicators, and necessary variables, as well as by enhancing the capabilities of the Ministry's team in using indicators within its skills-monitoring platform. Furthermore, through the ESCWA Skills Monitor platform, ESCWA is supporting the Ministry by tracking key performance and productivity indicators for the labour market that align with the Ministry's needs, and through the effective use of classification and clustering techniques. Additionally, ESCWA will provide real time data to the Ministry and to Skills Bahrain, and raise awareness of the benefits of the Skills Monitor platform, with an emphasis on sectors of interest in line with national planning.

32. ESCWA worked with the Iraq Ministry of Planning and the country's national statistical office to enhance the efficiency of public sector employment and the efficiency of resource allocation. This was done by carrying out a public sector skills-monitoring questionnaire in various ministries to assess the skills of public sector employees. A follow-up workshop was held from 28 February to 1 March 2023 for representatives of the Ministry of Planning and the national statistical office to improve knowledge of methods for monitoring public sector employment.

33. In Jordan, following a preliminary meeting held in Amman, Jordan on 19 and 20 October 2023, ESCWA proposed enhanced matching options between unemployed candidates and potential jobs. Furthermore, ESCWA conducted an exercise matching candidates with information technology (IT) roles on the country's Sajjil national employment platform. The aim of this exercise was to understand the gap between the skills being demanded by employers for IT roles and those being offered by applicants. The work performed by ESCWA allowed the Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship to better understand what support IT experts need to enter employment. By identifying skills gaps and improving alignment between job seekers and market demand in the IT sector, ESCWA has provided policymakers with real-time gap analysis to tailor labour market support mechanisms, thereby strengthening the IT sector further.

34. Also in Jordan, ESCWA supported the Higher Council for Persons with Disabilities in developing a database that identifies gaps in the labour market and the skill sets of persons with disabilities, which has

enabled the Council to improve the career guidance it provides. ESCWA has supported the Council in developing a matching platform, including an algorithm that can highlight jobs that support inclusive employment. As a result of the work of ESCWA, the Council is able to ensure that persons with disabilities have more access to job opportunities.

35. ESCWA provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Labour in Lebanon to improve its employment platform. ESCWA supported the Ministry in introducing amendments to the employment platform in order to comply with international classifications of occupations, education, and sectors. ESCWA is currently testing the accuracy of the platform. By optimizing the national platform, ESCWA has contributed to making the job search process more efficient and accessible, thus supporting Lebanon in its efforts to tackle its employment challenges.

36. As part of its cooperation with other international organizations, in 2024, ESCWA started supporting the ISESCO foresight centre in analysing existing data and insights from Arab job markets and the findings of a Gallup survey regarding the expectations of young people.

37. ESCWA is currently providing support to the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth in Oman to develop six national studies focusing on the country's economic priorities. The studies will identify skills needed across the Oman labour market. During a visit carried out by ESCWA in December 2023, ESCWA staff provided comments on all six studies to enhance the research outcomes, and explained how data from the ESCWA Skills Monitor platform could support the six research topics. Data from the Skills Monitor platform can inform researchers how to align targeted sectors in the studies with market needs, and ultimately design actionable policies that strengthen the workforce of Oman.

38. ESCWA provided special support to projects aimed at enhancing the economic participation of women by creating a working environment free of sexual harassment and reforming the care work structure in order to reduce the burden of unpaid care work that is disproportionately borne by women and limits their participation in the labour market.

39. In December 2023, in partnership with UNFPA, ESCWA supported the National Council for Lebanese Women in creating an online self-paced information module on standard operating procedures for implementing a 2020 law on sexual harassment, including measures providing remedies to support victims of sexual harassment in the workplace.

40. In Oman, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development, ESCWA carried out a study on providing care for people with disabilities. The study (forthcoming) concludes that the burden of providing such care frequently falls on women. This restricts economic participation by women, and sometimes limits the care that persons with disabilities receive. However, the study also examines how legislative and service reform can reverse this trend. The study highlights how women can be empowered at the same time as caring for people with disabilities. Practical policy recommendations were shared during a meeting entitled “[National dialogue on women's economic empowerment and care for persons with disabilities in Oman](#)”, which was organized virtually in partnership with the Ministry of Social Development on 19 December 2023.

VI. Including persons with disabilities

41. To ensure that persons with disabilities are not left behind, ESCWA has continued to support member States in assessing, determining, and classifying disabilities using a human-rights-based approach.

42. In Egypt, ESCWA supported the Ministry of Social Affairs in reforming its disability assessment system. A workshop entitled “Mechanisms to reform the disability assessment and determination” was held in Cairo, Egypt from 19 to 23 June 2023. The aim of the workshop was to support the Ministry in linking the new disability assessment to the “Disability Card”, with the aim of guaranteeing the provision of services to persons with disabilities based on a human-rights-based approach.

43. In Lebanon, ESCWA, in partnership with UNFPA, supported the Ministry of Social Affairs in developing a situational analysis entitled “[Persons with disabilities in Lebanon: a situational analysis to develop a national strategy](#)”. The aim of the analysis, which reflected current legislative and institutional frameworks, the system for disability assessment and identification, and the pressing challenges and available opportunities, was to guide the country’s overall national disability strategy. Informed by the findings of the situation analysis, ESCWA, in partnership with UNFPA, supported the Ministry in developing a comprehensive national disability strategy (forthcoming). The strategy promotes an inclusive society grounded in justice, equality, and non-discrimination that prioritises inclusion across economic, health, social, educational, and political sectors. It is intended to incorporate a culture of disability inclusion into policymaking by 2030, integrating it into various projects and programmes and ensuring accessibility in services and public spaces. The strategy was validated at a national workshop in Beirut, Lebanon on 12 and 13 December 2023, and will be officially launched by the Prime Minister at the Parliament in Beirut.

44. In Palestine, ESCWA supported the Ministries of National Economy, Social Affairs, Education and Women’s Affairs in mainstreaming disability inclusion into policies and programmes. This involved reviewing draft strategies and supporting disability mainstreaming within them. Practical suggestions and mechanisms for greater inclusivity were shared with the ministries to support them in making their services more accessible. The recommendations were discussed during a virtual meeting, resulting in more inclusive national strategies that contribute towards a more inclusive and diverse society, while actively addressing the stigmatization and isolation faced by persons with disabilities.

45. ESCWA continues to support member States in adopting the community-based inclusive development (CBID) approach in national policies as an alternative to the segregated model of service delivery currently prevalent in Arab countries. ESCWA partnered with SETI, the Women’s Council and Christoffel Blindenmission (CBM), to organize a 10th pan-Arab training event on CBID, which was held in Amman, Jordan from 5 to 11 August 2023. The training event influenced the efforts made by Egypt to incorporate the CBID approach into its upcoming national disability strategy. The National Council for Persons with Disabilities in Egypt included the CBID approach as a main strategic approach in the outline of the national disability strategy, which has been submitted to the Office of the Prime Minister.

46. To ensure that persons with disabilities benefit equally from opportunities, especially in employment, ESCWA developed a training guide titled “[Understanding and translating Article 27 of the CRPD into national employment policy on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the Arab region](#)” to support policymakers in the Arab region in formulating disability-inclusive policies.

47. Cultural, organizational, and physical barriers in the work environment exacerbate the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the labour market. To support member States in overcoming cultural, organizational and physical barriers in the work environment, ESCWA developed a training guide, entitled “[Inclusion of disability in the workplace](#)”, to promote employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in the private sector. The guide gives examples of how to address stereotypes and prejudices, and provides advice on how to develop diversity management skills and make reasonable accommodations in the workplace.

48. Recognizing that women with disabilities face a double barrier in gaining access to the labour market, ESCWA, in partnership with the Ford Foundation, is carrying out a project in Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia to support people with disabilities and women in gaining access to economic opportunities. ESCWA is assessing the current degree of economic inclusion across the region, carrying out detailed analysis in the four countries to develop practical policy recommendations to achieve inclusive development.

49. ESCWA, in partnership with the ILO, is also implementing a regional project entitled “[Inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market in the Arab region](#)”. For this project, ESCWA has produced [19 national reports](#) that identify gaps and inconsistencies in legislation related to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market. The assessment has already borne fruit: it has led to an amendment being made to the Jordanian constitution.

50. The project has also contributed to developing and maintaining the knowledge repository of documents and training materials. The knowledge repository now includes an inventory of qualified experts and trainers who can provide specialized training to employers in both the private and public sectors. The package has already been launched in Jordan, Oman, Tunisia and the Sudan.

51. To support persons with disabilities in gaining access to decent employment opportunities in Morocco in particular, ESCWA conducted a labour market perceptions survey to understand the perceptions of employers regarding the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market, with a particular emphasis on employers' attitudes and the accessibility of work environments. The results and practical policy recommendations were published in the ESCWA policy brief "[Persons with disabilities: labour market perceptions survey – Morocco](#)".

52. The [Arab-EU Research Network on Disability](#) was established by ESCWA in 2022, in cooperation with the Ministry of Inclusion and Social Wellbeing of Malta, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Ford Foundation. ESCWA has continued to strengthen the network, which acts as an inter-regional platform for knowledge exchange, capacity-building, bringing together academics, researchers and institutions from both Europe and the Arab region for the shared objective of pursuing research as a driver for change to ensure the greater social inclusion of persons with disabilities. ESCWA organized an online workshop on disability research and academic writing on 23 May 2023, targeting a group of young researchers from the Arab region who participated in the conference on [Transition towards independent living within the community for persons with disabilities](#) in February 2023. The aim of the workshop was to refine the skills of young researchers in the Arab region who wish to produce and publish further studies on the subject, in light of their central role in supporting the rights of persons with disabilities.

VII. Upholding the rights of migrants

53. The Arab region is witnessing unprecedented human mobility. If managed well, migration can be an accelerator for development. ESCWA is committed to supporting member States in developing policies that ensure safe, orderly, and regular migration, limiting the potential negative impacts and maximizing the gains for development.

54. To this end, ESCWA is supporting the Government of Somalia in developing its migration strategy. The "[Situation report on migration in Somalia](#)" has been developed; based on the evidence obtained, a draft migration strategy (forthcoming) has been drawn up. The strategy was validated in a [national workshop](#) with the participation of representatives of different ministries organized on 7 March 2024 in Mogadishu, Somalia.

VIII. Upholding the rights of older persons

55. ESCWA is leading efforts to prepare an inclusive policy environment for older persons in the Arab region, through addressing the knowledge gap, fostering regional collaboration, facilitating dialogue, and building the capacity of member States to develop population- and ageing-related policies.

56. In Egypt, ESCWA is supporting the Ministry of Social Solidarity in developing a national strategy for older persons. This support started with capacity- and awareness-building across government ministries and agencies on the rights of older persons and how to systematically incorporate the inclusion of older persons into public policies. ESCWA held a workshop, "[Mainstreaming ageing in policymaking in Egypt](#)", in Cairo, Egypt on 13 and 14 June 2023, with the participation of representatives of seven ministries in addition to a number of NGOs, academic institutions, and experts.

57. In Iraq, ESCWA supported the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in developing a national policy for older persons for the 2024–2028 period. The policy was validated in a [national workshop](#) held in November 2022, and is currently pending adoption by the country's Council of Ministers.

58. In Jordan, ESCWA supported the National Council for Family Affairs in developing a new strategy for older persons. This has required an [assessment](#) of the country's previous such strategy to identify areas of success and areas of improvement in the inclusion of older persons. This assessment was used to support the drafting of the new strategy, which covers the period from 2023 to 2027. The new strategy is in the final stages of completion; on 27 and 28 February 2024, ESCWA, in cooperation with the National Council for Family Affairs, organized [a national workshop](#) in Amman, Jordan to validate the strategy.

59. In Somalia, ESCWA is supporting the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour in developing a national strategy for older persons. The strategy will complement an upcoming law on the inclusion of older persons. The strategy and the law are in the final stages of completion after they were validated in a [national workshop](#) organized by ESCWA in Mogadishu, Somalia on 5 and 6 March 2024, with the participation of representatives of governmental and non-governmental organizations.

60. In the Syrian Arab Republic, ESCWA supported the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs and Population to develop the "[National Strategy for the Protection and Welfare of Older Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic \(2023–2030\)](#)". A participatory approach was adopted to develop the strategy, engaging various government and non-governmental stakeholders concerned with older persons issues. The "[Launch of the national strategy for the protection and welfare of older persons in the Syrian Arab Republic 2023–2030](#)" was held on 14 December 2023 in Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic, with concerned government ministries and agencies, the private sector and United Nations agencies.

61. In Tunisia, ESCWA supported the Ministry of Family, Women, Childhood and Seniors in assessing the state of long-term care institutions for older persons to ensure that people who need support receive the best possible care. In cooperation with the Ministry, ESCWA drew up a study entitled "The situation of public and private older persons care institutions" (forthcoming), which provides specific policy recommendations aimed at improving the quality of services offered to older persons in care in Tunisia.

IX. Advancing sustainable urban development

62. ESCWA advocates for the localization of development by encouraging the implementation of local solutions to achieve sustainable development, working in partnership with various stakeholders such as UN-Habitat, United Nations regional commissions, the Global Cities Hub, and United Cities and Local Governments - Middle East and West Asia Section (UCLG-MEWA).

63. In cooperation with the other United Nations regional commissions and UN-Habitat, ESCWA implemented the regional component of a global project entitled "Inter-regional cooperation to implement the new urban agenda". This project, which was implemented in nine cities around the world, including Amman, Jordan and Agadir, Morocco in the Arab region, is intended to increase policy consistency among member States and strengthen institutions in implementing and monitoring SDG 11 and the new urban agenda. Recognizing the value of voluntary local reviews in promoting transparency and accountability, ESCWA supported Amman in carrying out its review, the first city in the Arab region to do so. This success was showcased globally at a [high-level political forum](#) in July 2023, where Jordan presented its second voluntary national review, which was aligned to the newly developed voluntary local review and underscored the importance of national-local policy coherence and development dialogue.

64. In Morocco, ESCWA, in partnership with UN-Habitat and UCLG-MEWA, has led the first voluntary local review in North Africa in Agadir, Morocco. A launch event was held in Agadir on 25 October 2023. The production of the review was highlighted as an example of good practice at an event on "[Regional action for supporting SDG localization and urban resilience](#)" held on 8 June 2023 in Nairobi, Kenya, during the second UN-Habitat assembly.

65. Building on these efforts, ESCWA, in partnership with UN-Habitat and UCLG-MEWA, has developed practical guidelines for member States in the Arab region on developing voluntary local reviews (forthcoming). This concluded a global project on interregional cooperation to implement the new urban agenda.

66. To build on this momentum, ESCWA, in partnership with UN-Habitat, ECA, ESCAP, DESA, and UCLG, launched a new project entitled “Fostering COVID-19 recovery and SDG implementation through local action in Asia-Pacific, Arab and African countries”. The aim of the project is to support numerous cities in conducting voluntary local reviews and to develop the capacities of city mayors and officials in the Arab region to effectively address regional challenges and lead sustainable urban development. In the Arab region, ESCWA and UN-Habitat are supporting Ennour, Tunisia, Irbid, Jordan, and Ramallah, State of Palestine. An inception meeting, entitled “[Localizing sustainable development goals and COVID-19 recovery](#)”, was held in Beirut, Lebanon, on 15 March 2023. A virtual training session, entitled “[Urban monitoring framework and voluntary local reviews in the Arab region](#)” was held on 12 September 2023 to improve the capacity of local authorities to participate in the voluntary local review process. On 7 February 2024, in partnership with the Greater Irbid municipality, ESCWA and UN-Habitat launched the [voluntary local review of Irbid](#). On 18 April 2024, in partnership with Ennour municipality, ESCWA and UN-Habitat launched the voluntary local review of Ennour.

67. To facilitate South-South and triangular collaboration among mayors, ESCWA facilitated the participation of Arab mayors to share their experiences at global level during an [interregional segment](#) at the third Forum of Mayors, held in Geneva on 2 and 3 October 2023. This session was organized by all regional commissions, including ESCWA, in partnership with UN-Habitat and the Global Cities Hub, and included the experiences of mayors from Amman, Jordan, and Damietta, Egypt. Building on the presence of Arab mayors in Geneva, ESCWA, in partnership with UN-Habitat and the other United Nations regional commissions, together with the Global Cities Hub, presented opportunities to increase sustainable investments in cities during a panel discussion entitled “[How to increase financing for the SDGs at the local level through United Nations action?](#)” on 3 October 2023, as part of the Building Bridges Forum.

68. Acknowledging that quality of life lies at the core of sustainable urban development, ESCWA, in partnership with UN-Habitat and the Quality of Life programme of Saudi Arabia, is implementing a global quality of life initiative. As part of this initiative, ESCWA and its partners organized a panel discussion at the UN-Habitat Assembly in Nairobi on 8 June 2023. On 30 January 2024, a virtual side-event entitled “[Unveiling the Quality of Life Initiative](#)” was organized during the ECOSOC Partnership Forum underscoring the people-centred perspective, emphasizing the transformative impact of human-centric approaches on sustainable development, inclusion, and peace in cities.
