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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)



Report

Seventh meeting of the Executive Committee Online, 21 December 2020

Summary

The Executive Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held its seventh meeting online on 21 December 2020. The agenda was limited to the following three main items, because of the virtual nature of the meeting: implementation of recommendations made by the Commission at its sixth special session held in Amman on 21 and 22 December 2019; technical cooperation activities in 2020; and the proposed programme plan for 2022.

The present report summarizes the discussions under each agenda item, and sets out the recommendations adopted at the meeting.

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Introduction

1. At its twenty-eighth session, held in Tunis from 15 to 18 September 2014, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) adopted resolution 320 (XXVIII) on redesignating the Technical Committee as the “Executive Committee” and amending its terms of reference to empower it to facilitate direct communication between the secretariat and member States on regional development, economic and social issues, and to submit resolutions directly to the Economic and Social Council, if necessary.
2. The Executive Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held its seventh meeting online on 21 December 2020. The agenda was limited to the following three main items, because of the virtual nature of the meeting: implementation of recommendations made by the Commission at its sixth special session held in Amman on 21 and 22 December 2019; technical cooperation activities in 2020; and the proposed programme plan for 2022.
3. The present report summarizes the discussions under each agenda item and sets out the recommendations adopted at the meeting.

I. Recommendations made by the Executive Committee at its seventh meeting

4. At the closing session of its seventh meeting, the Executive Committee adopted the following recommendations on items set out in the meeting agenda.

A. Recommendations to ESCWA member States

5. The Executive Committee made the following recommendations to ESCWA member States:
 - (a) Welcome efforts by the ESCWA secretariat to implement the recommendations made by the Commission at its sixth special session, held in Amman on 21 and 22 December 2019, noting the activities it has undertaken to assess the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Arab countries, the recommendations it made to Arab countries on dealing with the pandemic’s repercussions, the tools it developed to support social protection in this context, and the flexibility it showed in its ability to adjust its activities in response to the global health crisis;
 - (b) Welcome the creation by ESCWA of a fund to support Palestine pursuant to a recommendation made by the Executive Committee at its sixth meeting, held in Marrakech, Morocco, on 15 and 16 June 2019, which aims to strengthen the capacity of the Palestinian people and their institutions to achieve sustainable development, and support the realization of their inalienable rights; and invite those able to finance the Fund to participate in this effort;
 - (c) Welcome the establishment of the Centre of Entrepreneurship, in collaboration with the International Chamber of Commerce, to provide technical support to Arab entrepreneurs and assistance in digitizing small and medium-sized businesses;
 - (d) Continue to benefit from the analyses, findings, recommendations and services provided by the Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies and the Regional Knowledge Hub under RICCAR in the field of climate change, and from the ESCWA secretariat’s efforts to support Arab countries in the field of financing climate action; and strengthen regional cooperation in these areas;
 - (e) Commend the technical cooperation activities provided by the ESCWA secretariat to member States, the tools, strategies and programmes it has developed, and the efforts it undertakes to strengthen communication and disseminate knowledge so as to maximize the benefits of its electronic platforms and

interactive tools for monitoring public policies, and its interactive publications, policy papers, data and recommendations;

(f) Stress the importance of adopting an integrated approach, avoiding duplication and ensuring efficiency in budget management, and the importance of not reducing the regular budget of ESCWA;

(g) Adopt the proposed ESCWA programme plan for 2022 and support the development of the secretariat's internal structure to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of its work, facilitate administrative procedures, and maximize the benefits of innovation and new technologies.

B. Recommendations to the ESCWA secretariat

6. The Executive Committee made the following recommendations to the ESCWA secretariat:

(a) Continue monitoring the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Arab countries, updating data on platforms established for that purpose, building the capacity of member States in dealing with the impact of the pandemic, and adopting a flexible approach to designing projects in line with social and economic developments in the region in 2021;

(b) Develop the [Arab SDG Gateway](#), including frameworks for financing development in Arab countries, and make them available to member States to maximise the benefits of ESCWA efforts in that critical area for sustainable development; and support member States in establishing and developing national platforms dedicated to following up on achievements towards the SDGs;

(c) Strengthen the production of knowledge, data and analyses on the impact of climate change on water resources, food security and livelihoods in Arab countries, and use that knowledge to propose appropriate recommendations, programmes and policies to adapt to and mitigate the impact of climate change at the regional and national levels; and continue working on the ESCWA Climate-SDGs debt swap initiative launched by ESCWA in December 2020;

(d) Intensify efforts to strengthen social protection systems in view of increasing unemployment and poverty and exposure of certain social groups, such as women, young people, persons with disabilities and older persons, to greater risks owing to the pandemic, especially through tools developed by ESCWA to combat poverty, monitor social expenditure, and evaluate policies according to their consideration of equality and social justice;

(e) Continue building relationships and networking with international institutions and organizations and the private sector to advance the small business sector to strengthen its resilience to shocks and crises, and to create decent job opportunities for Arab young people;

(f) Continue performing monitoring and analysis activities to raise awareness of Israeli policies and practices and their direct and long-term repercussions for the Palestinian people and the Syrian people in the occupied Golan, especially policies aimed at consolidating Israeli control over Palestinian land and keeping the Palestinian economy dependent on Israel;

(g) Continue mobilizing resources for the fund created by ESCWA to support Palestine and use them to achieve the SDGs, and formulate a development framework to support the Palestinian economy under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and end its dependence on the Israeli economy;

(h) Intensify efforts to support member States and develop their capacity to prepare participatory voluntary national reviews with stakeholders, and to follow up on the implementation of the SDGs;

(i) Intensify efforts to support member States and develop their institutional capacity to tackle risks and crises.

II. Topics of discussion

A. Implementation of recommendations made by the Commission at its sixth special session (Agenda item 3)

7. With reference to document [E/ESCWA/EC.7/2020/2](#), the representative of the secretariat reviewed progress in implementing the recommendations and resolutions issued by ESCWA at its sixth special session, held in Amman on 21 and 22 December 2019. He said that the Economic and Social Council had adopted resolution [2020/20](#) on the admission of Algeria and Somalia to membership in ESCWA, and resolution [2021/3](#) on the new strategic vision of ESCWA, pursuant to ESCWA resolutions [335 \(S-VI\)](#) and [336 \(S-VI\)](#) adopted at the Commission's sixth special session.

8. He reviewed the activities that the ESCWA secretariat had undertaken pursuant to recommendations issued at the sixth special session of ESCWA. Regarding financing for development, he said that ESCWA had prepared 15 policy papers to present recommendations on mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on countries' capacity to finance a sustainable recovery. The papers covered related economic sectors, such as trade, banking, capital markets and foreign direct investment, as well as social sectors and population groups that should be targeted for financing. ESCWA had also analysed national frameworks for financing development in a group of member States, and developed an [electronic platform](#) to provide national reports and recommendations in that regard. Regarding social protection, he said that ESCWA had held two meetings of the Expert Group on Social Protection Reform to consider measures taken by countries to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on the most vulnerable groups, and to review a tool under development aimed at calculating multidimensional poverty in Arab countries to support them in combating poverty and targeting groups most in need of support. He added that ESCWA had developed another tool in 2020 aimed at evaluating policies in terms of their response to the principles of social justice, based on the [Tunis Declaration on Social Justice in the Arab Region](#).

9. In the context of recommendations on ESCWA support to the State of Palestine, he indicated the note by the Secretary-General prepared by ESCWA in 2020, and every year, on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan. The note had been submitted to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, which had adopted two resolutions in that regard, as usual. He mentioned the fund that ESCWA had created to support Palestine, pursuant to a previous recommendation by the Executive Committee, and that the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development had contributed \$350,000 to finance some activities, including a study on ending the Palestinian economy's dependence on the Israeli economy. He noted that ESCWA had carried out several support activities for the State of Palestine in 2020, including activities for the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology, the General Personnel Council, and the Ministry of Women's Affairs in their fields of competence. Regarding the recommendation on climate action, he said that ESCWA had forged new partnerships and extended existing partnerships with regional and international bodies, such as the World Bank, the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the Global Centre on Adaptation. He added that ESCWA had benefited from those partnerships to address climate change issues and water and energy management in a manner that ensured resource sustainability, and to disseminate information, data and reports. He noted the capacity-building activities of the Arab Centre for Climate Change Policies managed by ESCWA, particularly training Arab negotiators to negotiate in the international arena on climate change issues, and transferring knowledge between the previous generation and the new generation of negotiators. The Centre also provided negotiators and policymakers with the necessary scientific data and models. He also presented the ESCWA Climate-SDGs Debt Swap Initiative, aimed at expanding the fiscal space to finance climate change adaptation and mitigation activities.

10. With regard to developing the internal electronic ESCWA portals, he highlighted the principles followed by the secretariat to move forward with the continual development process, such as facilitating access to

information and data, ensuring the credibility of sources, allowing users to interact with published material, using smart search engines, and presenting results and data in stories that effectively conveyed them to users. For example, until early September 2020, ESCWA had monitored downloads from its website of policy papers on the impact of COVID-19 on the Arab region, which had surpassed 13,250 downloads. Users had viewed the accompanying videos over 1,290,000 times. The policy papers were mentioned 1,280 times in the Arab and international media. He noted that ESCWA had worked to update its [Data Portal](#) and was in the process of updating its website. He added that the secretariat was updating the internal electronic system for following up on technical cooperation requests, and had introduced automatic notifications to notify country focal points and United Nations country teams that technical cooperation requests had been received, which enabled information sharing with those in charge of following up on ESCWA technical cooperation activities in member States, and avoiding duplication of work with the United Nations country team, thus enhancing coordination between all stakeholders.

11. He noted the Commission's recommendation on enhancing integration in financing ESCWA activities, recalling the global crisis that had reduced the resources available to the United Nations in general, and especially to the development and regional dimensions of its work. He said that the ESCWA secretariat had adopted a new project-based approach to activities, which assigned each project a specific deadline for implementation using available resources, while ensuring the best possible quality. The project approach had contributed to achieving efficiency in spending. He added that in 2020, the secretariat had also developed administrative and logistical services, which it provided internally and to other United Nations bodies operating in the region, thus mobilizing extrabudgetary resources in an innovative way and nearly doubling the activities regular budget. He said that ESCWA had recently been appointed as the regional centre for administrative and logistical support for the United Nations Resident Coordinator System in Arab countries, which attested to the quality and efficiency of its services.

12. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Morocco thanked the ESCWA secretariat for its efforts in implementing the recommendations of the Executive Committee and all other activities despite the pandemic, whose repercussions had affected all aspects of life worldwide, had exacerbated poverty and unemployment, and had exceeded the ability of any country to face it alone. He praised ESCWA work on monitoring the economic and social repercussions of the pandemic on Arab countries, and its insistence in its recommendations on strengthening regional cooperation to mitigate the pandemic's effects. He reviewed the preventive measures taken by Morocco to ensure the safety of both citizens and the economy, including allocating more than \$1.5 billion to a recovery plan. He said that Morocco had also established an air bridge to more than 20 African countries to transport medical aid, in an initiative to boost South-South cooperation. He expressed his hope that the Executive Committee would be a platform to explore collective solutions to the grave challenges facing countries. The representative of Somalia said that his country was pleased to join ESCWA and participate for the first time in its Executive Committee meeting, which was an opportunity to reaffirm the importance of international and regional cooperation to achieve the SDGs and address cross-border issues, such as climate change and the pandemic. He noted efforts by Somalia towards development and security in recent years, especially combating poverty and providing quality education, which joining ESCWA would enhance. The representative of Algeria also expressed his happiness to represent his country for the first time at the ESCWA Executive Committee meeting after its accession to ESCWA membership in July 2020, and renewed his country's commitment to constructively and effectively participate in ESCWA activities to enhance regional cooperation in various development fields.

13. The representative of Lebanon noted the unprecedented challenges facing her country, including local challenges and those related to the pandemic that had confounded the entire world. She said that the Lebanese Government had worked to address the effects of the pandemic by forming a multilateral committee that met periodically, and building partnerships with international organizations operating in Lebanon, especially ESCWA. She commended the studies prepared by ESCWA in 2020, which had contributed to the transfer of reliable information and the preparation of appropriate policies for recovery. She thanked Arab countries and ESCWA for their support after the Beirut port explosion on 4 August 2020, which had caused massive damage. The representative of the State of Palestine reviewed his country's efforts to implement the recommendations

to member States made by the Commission at its sixth special meeting, including communicating with permanent missions at the United Nations headquarters in New York to support ESCWA reform, and enhancing integration with other intergovernmental committees on ESCWA technical cooperation activities. He said that he had communicated with his country's representatives in other ESCWA intergovernmental committees to ensure consensus on cooperation needs and the optimal use of resources available to his country in that context. He enquired about progress in developing an ESCWA interactive platform for the SDGs that the Executive Committee had reviewed at its sixth meeting, held in Marrakesh, Morocco, in June 2019. He referred to a national platform set up by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics for that purpose, and called for intensified efforts to generate data for sustainable development indicators.

14. The representative of Jordan commended ESCWA efforts under the exceptional circumstances witnessed in 2020, including confronting the pandemic and following up and coordinating technical cooperation activities with the concerned parties in Jordan. He confirmed that the Ministry of Planning had communicated with other Jordanian ministries to ensure the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee to member States. He reviewed the measures taken by Jordan to tackle the pandemic, which occurred at a time when the country was suffering from a chronic refugee crisis, and requested that ESCWA give the issue of food security utmost importance in that context. The representative of Yemen commended the efforts of ESCWA and Arab countries in facing epidemics and other disasters in the spirit of regional cooperation, and noted the exceptional challenges that his country had faced since the outbreak of the war in 2015, especially poverty and deprivation, hoping that the outcomes of the Committee's meeting would reflect interest in Yemen and that the country would receive support from ESCWA through the implementation of the bilateral Technical Cooperation Framework. The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic reviewed his country's efforts to deal with the pandemic in terms of health services, which had been hindered by the unilateral measures imposed on the Syrian people by some countries. He called on the Committee to support his country in demanding the lifting of those measures. He suggested that United Nations organizations should prepare a joint integrated paper on the impact of the pandemic on Arab countries, and asked whether ESCWA had prepared an Arabic translation of the outputs of the Regional Initiative for the Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Water Resources and Socio-economic Vulnerability in the Arab Region (RICCAR), which would optimize their benefits. He also expressed his country's interest in joining the Regional Initiative to Promote Small-scale Renewable Energy Applications in Rural Areas of the Arab Region (REGEND), and the interest of the Planning and International Cooperation Commission, as represented by him, to learn more about the ESCWA mechanism to inform the United Nations country team of technical cooperation activities, so as to further activate it in the Syrian Arab Republic.

15. The representative of Qatar reviewed her country's efforts to limit the pandemic by adopting a national action plan for a timely, proportionate and effective response. She also noted the support provided to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on the most vulnerable social groups, such as older persons, persons with disabilities, women and orphans, and on economic activities. The representative of Kuwait thanked ESCWA for its research efforts in measuring the impact of the pandemic on Arab countries, and expressed his hope that the ESCWA secretariat would conduct a study on the transport sector, especially air transport, tourism and the medical sector. He also expressed his wish that background papers would reflect the recommendations proposed by the secretariat, so that member States could be fully informed of all aspects of those recommendations before their approval.

16. In response, the Chair of the Committee, the representative of Tunisia, welcomed Algeria and Somalia to the membership of ESCWA and to the meetings of the Executive Committee, and praised the efforts of all Arab countries in tackling the pandemic, and the exceptional efforts of ESCWA in that field. He expressed the Committee's solidarity with Lebanon following the tragic explosion that rocked the country, with Yemen, and with the countries hosting refugees and those in conflict, and called for strengthening cooperation to face all regional challenges. He took note of countries' proposals, recommending their inclusion in the final report of the meeting.

B. Technical cooperation activities in 2020 (Agenda item 4)

17. The representative of the secretariat reviewed progress in implementing technical cooperation activities in 2020, based on document E/ESCWA/EC.7/2020/3 and a documentary summarizing the most prominent achievements, highlighting the flexibility adopted by ESCWA to deal with changing priorities and new needs resulting from the pandemic. Instead of conducting workshops in and advisory missions to member States, ESCWA resorted to building capacity online through intensive meetings to provide advice, and to producing sectoral policy papers to meet new requests for support on mitigating the effects of the pandemic (at least 10 requests were received in the areas of economic modelling and protection measures for specific population groups, such as women and persons with disabilities, and on assessing the pandemic's impact on the transport sector, poverty, etc.). By the end of 2020, ESCWA had provided around 80 advisory services and had held more than 70 training workshops, most of them online.

18. The documentary also shed light on key technical cooperation activities not related exclusively to the pandemic, such as support in building the capacity of public institutions in the State of Palestine, launching the first version of the Arab Regional Job Competencies Framework for Senior Public Servants; evaluating social policies in terms of their compatibility with the principles of social justice in Tunisia; supporting the development of policies and programmes to protect women from violence in Saudi Arabia and the Sudan; using technology to integrate persons with disabilities in the Syrian Arab Republic; and supporting Lebanon after the 4 August 2020 explosion by conducting a study on the master plan of the Beirut port to update it, launching an initiative to support affected persons with disabilities and rebuild Beirut in a way that ensures their access to public and private facilities, and supporting the Ministry of Labour in creating employment opportunities for young people and developing their skills by launching an initiative with Coursera, a global online learning platform. The documentary also touched on technical cooperation activities in the areas of digital government and digital transformation in Jordan, Iraq and the Sudan, technology transfer and innovation in the Sudan and Kuwait, and new technologies in Jordan, Lebanon, the State of Palestine and Qatar.

19. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of the State of Palestine thanked the ESCWA secretariat for its efforts to ensure the continuity of technical cooperation despite the difficult circumstances. He enquired about the reasons behind the limited services provided in the areas of implementing the 2030 Agenda and governance, despite the urgent need for cooperation on these issues in Arab countries. He also asked about the share of statistical activities from the activities provided under 'statistics and the information and technology community', indicating the possibility that technology had dominated the advisory services provided in 2020. He called for rethinking how to build capacity to implement the 2030 Agenda, and requested that the guides produced within the framework of technical cooperation activities be published and made available to users on the ESCWA technical cooperation webpage, not just on the publications webpage. Moreover, he asked about the extent of interaction and complementarity between regional advisors and ESCWA clusters when working on a topic.

20. The representative of Yemen reaffirmed his country's commitment to the bilateral Technical Cooperation Framework with ESCWA, which included various aspects of technical and advisory support and capacity-building in more than 14 areas of ESCWA work, and called for intensified implementation efforts given that the pandemic had impeded progress in 2020. He referred to the ESCWA project entitled "Yemen: A participatory vision for recovery and building institutional capacity for inclusive sustainable development", which aims to establish a comprehensive economic and social framework for reconstruction and development in Yemen, expressing his appreciation for efforts to prepare the concept paper. He called for the implementation to proceed, starting with the development of an implementation plan, and highlighting the newly formed Yemeni Government's support for the project. The representative of the Sudan thanked ESCWA for its efforts and stressed the importance of establishing national platforms to monitor sustainable development data and indicators, requesting the support of the ESCWA secretariat to develop her country's platform. She also noted the effects of the pandemic on society and the economy in the Sudan. The representative of Iraq referred to the Technical Cooperation Framework with ESCWA, and praised the serious

work it was undertaking to implement it, noting that the Iraqi Government might request additional support to develop an integrated framework to respond to the acute health and economic crisis affecting the country.

21. In response, the ESCWA Executive Secretary emphasized the integration, coordination and interaction between regional advisors and ESCWA clusters. She said that advisors did not work in isolation and that technical cooperation was not limited to them, but rather included all ESCWA employees according to their expertise. On the topic of sustainable development, she stressed that ESCWA supported countries in monitoring progress and implementing the 2030 Agenda based on their requests, and that it also initiated support activities through its regular programme plan. For example, ESCWA had recently held a workshop for Arab parliamentarians on their role in achieving the 2030 Agenda and building their capacity to contribute to its implementation. She presented the [Arab SDG Gateway](#) that ESCWA was developing based on recommendation made by the Executive Committee at its sixth meeting, highlighting its various components, including the [Arab SDG Monitor](#) dedicated to key data; the ‘[Leave No One Behind](#)’ dashboards that provided data on women and girls, persons with disabilities, older persons, and young people in all Arab countries; the [ESCWA Data Portal](#) that included data on sustainable development indicators drawn from national data and supplemented when necessary with United Nations and other economic, social and environmental data; and the above-mentioned [Finance for Development](#) platform; and the [SDG Knowledge and Learning Platform](#) that comprised all the knowledge tools and reports on the 2030 Agenda in the region and in Arab countries.

22. She gave examples of data from some countries under the SDGs and their targets, stressing ESCWA work on similar national platforms, in partnership with statistical offices in a number of countries, including Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia and the Sudan. She noted a memorandum of understanding recently concluded by ESCWA with the Arab Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (ARABOSAI) to build the capacity of audit office employees in Arab countries to integrate the SDGs in auditing standards. She also noted the support provided by ESCWA to the State of Palestine to link the national platform for SDG data with the platform of the United Nations Statistics Division and with various national data-producing agencies, using the SDMX system. In response to the comment by the representative of Yemen, she affirmed that ESCWA was seeking to finance its project on the vision for recovery and reconstruction in order to implement it.

C. Proposed programme plan for 2022 (Agenda items 5)

23. With reference to document [E/ESCWA/EC.7/2020/4](#), the representative of the secretariat presented the proposed programme plan for 2022, stressing that it would maintain the same structure that was approved by the Commission at its sixth special session, which divided the programme plan into six subprogrammes that ESCWA clusters would implement in an integrated manner that ensured complementarity and effectiveness and avoided duplication of efforts and activities. He said that the objective of the programme plan for 2022 was to support member States in mitigating the social and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, while protecting development gains and accelerating progress towards the SDGs. He reviewed the objectives of the six subprogrammes and key expected accomplishments and activities within their framework, stressing the extent of the climate challenge in the Arab region, which subprogramme 1 on climate change and natural resource sustainability would address through the advancement of climate action and the development of integrated and sustainable policies in the area of water, energy and food security. One of the expected accomplishments of the subprogramme was to improve the management of transboundary groundwater.

24. The representative of the secretariat said that subprogramme 2 on gender justice, population and inclusive development aimed to support member States in developing integrated social policies that addressed inequalities and ensured the empowerment of vulnerable groups, using various means including the ESCWA tool for calculating the Multidimensional Poverty Index and ESCWA Job Monitor. One of the expected accomplishments of the subprogramme was to strengthen the development of coherent policies on older persons in the Arab region. Regarding subprogramme 3 on shared economic prosperity, he said that it aimed to improve smart government spending through integrated monitoring of social expenditures; measuring the

impact of policies on economic growth in various sectors to rationalize them; facilitating trade by launching a specialized Arab portal and a set of tools for measuring export-related risks; and developing integrated national frameworks for financing development. He highlighted the ESCWA Climate-SDGs debt swap initiative that the secretariat would implement under subprogrammes 1 and 3, aimed at reducing the debt burden and expanding the fiscal space for climate action in Arab countries.

25. The representative of the secretariat referred to multiple objectives under subprogramme 4 on statistics, the information society and technology, including promoting the use of various sources in official statistics, supporting the digitization of data services and e-commerce, using technology in censuses and surveys, and collecting data from administrative records and other registers; supporting member States in developing national SDG platforms; developing the ESCWA Data Portal and its services and the tool for simulating international indicators to improve the performance of member States; and dealing with regional challenges related to innovation and localization of technology. He said that ESCWA sought to have at least half of Arab countries' national data available on the international SDG portal. ESCWA, under subprogramme 5 on the 2030 Agenda and SDG coordination, also aims to build the capacity of member States to prepare voluntary national reviews, align their national plans with the 2030 Agenda, and expand partnerships between stakeholders to implement the 2030 Agenda. Under subprogramme 6 on governance and conflict prevention, he affirmed that ESCWA would continue monitoring the repercussions of conflict and occupation, improve the efficiency of crisis response policies, adopt an approach linking human security and human development, build national capacity towards good governance and resilience in tackling crises, improve the efficiency, inclusiveness and accountability of institutions, support reforms to enhance the competitiveness of Arab economies, and strengthen the capacity for cross-border planning to address risks.

26. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of the State of Palestine said that the programme plan as presented appeared ambitious, and hoped that ESCWA would be able to implement it. He stressed the importance of focusing on the period following the presentation of voluntary national reviews on progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda. He said that over the last five years, countries had acquired skills for preparing reports, but countries should also consider what would happen after submitting the reports, and what means were available for progressing towards implementation and bridging gaps. On the subject of data, he noted that the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics had begun replacing international indicators for which data were not available, which constituted half of the indicators thus impeding evaluation, with national indicators. However, numerous indicators were not available and fell under the custodianship of United Nations organizations and which they calculated, because they would include comparisons between countries, for example. To prepare such indicators, countries would need ESCWA support in coordination with other relevant organizations. He asked why the issue of competitiveness was addressed under the subprogramme on governance rather than the subprogramme on economic prosperity, and about the existence of a section in the programme plan related to the COVID-19 pandemic that was not covered by the presentation. He also asked about the programme plan for 2021 that the Committee had adopted in 2019 before the pandemic, how it would be implemented and what changes would be made to it owing to the pandemic, given that 2021 would be the year of recovery.

27. The representative of Yemen thanked ESCWA for its comprehensive plan that responded to the priorities of member States, stressing the importance of identifying, within the framework of subprogramme 6 on governance and conflict prevention, the economic cost of conflicts in the Arab region as a means of avoiding their outbreak. ESCWA had calculated the cost of conflict in Libya and the Syrian Arab Republic, using a methodology that was better than that used by other development institutions. He expressed his hope that ESCWA would also apply it to Yemen. Regarding capacity-building, he expressed his hope that ESCWA would continue its economic modelling exercises, especially to support countries in assessing the impact of COVID-19 and tackling it. He also requested support from ESCWA in preparing the voluntary national review of Yemen, expressing his hope that the activity would be included in the ESCWA programme of work.

28. In response, the ESCWA Executive Secretary said that the post-voluntary review phase was an important stage, and that ESCWA had issued the Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020, which analysed

obstacles to implementation under each SDG and proposed ways to overcome them. She added that ESCWA was working with countries, according to their requests, to propose a policy matrix that would effect a change in the development course and meet national priorities. ESCWA was already working with Egypt in that regard. As for competitiveness, she indicated that ESCWA dealt with it from the perspective of improving the economic environment and establishing competition and consumer protection frameworks and policies. For that reason, it had been placed under subprogramme 6 on governance, which from the ESCWA perspective involved strengthening public institutions, establishing e-governance frameworks, and improving economic governance.

29. On the subject of amending programme plans in response to priorities brought about by the pandemic, the Executive Secretary indicated that the Committee had also adopted the 2020 plan before the pandemic, not only the 2021 plan, but the flexibility that the Executive Committee had allowed when approving the ESCWA reform plan had enabled the secretariat to change its programme of work in response to new priorities in the region and its countries, so as to monitor and measure the repercussions of the global health crisis on societies and economies, and to make recommendations on response policies. It was impossible to proceed with the implementation of the 2020 plan as if nothing had happened, and the same was true for the 2021 plan. She added that although the secretariat hoped the health impact of the pandemic would gradually diminish in 2021, countries would still be dealing with the social and economic fallout until after 2021. The impact on small enterprises, transport, tourism, jobs, poverty and other sectors was profound and would not disappear in a year. Consequently, the 2022 programme plan addressed the issue of recovery, and the presentation noted it as a primary goal for the programme as a whole.

30. The Executive Secretary highlighted the complementarity and interdependence between the parts of the proposed programme plan for 2022, since climate change was complemented by work on financing for development, which in turn was complemented by work on debt relief to expand the fiscal space, which was also complemented by work on foreign direct investment, etc. Those issues were therefore interrelated and the ways of dealing with them overlapped through integrated projects implemented by harmonized working groups. She called on representatives of member States to review the [policy briefs](#) and the [COVID-19 Stimulus Tracker](#) established to monitor response policies in 170 countries, to benefit from information and experiences, make comparisons, and start the recovery process. She highlighted the ESCWA approach to develop practical tools and make them available to decision makers to support them not only with reports and analyses, but also in a practical and rapid manner.

31. Regarding the lack of data, the Executive Secretary said that ESCWA had concluded agreements with all United Nations bodies that were custodians of sustainable development indicators, so as to make them available to all on the ESCWA Data Portal. She confirmed that she would ask the ESCWA statistics team to contact the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics to provide it with missing data from the United Nations data available at ESCWA. On the issue of calculating the cost of conflicts, she indicated that ESCWA had applied an innovative methodology in the case of Libya, with the cost of the conflict estimated at over \$576 billion as at the current year. If the conflict continued until 2025, Libya would bear an additional cost of \$64 billion. In the Syrian Arab Republic, ESCWA had estimated the cost of the conflict at about \$440 billion. She said that ESCWA today was looking at what peace might bring in terms of benefits, and not only at the cost of the conflict, especially for neighbouring countries. ESCWA was on the verge of completing a study on that topic for Libya and neighbouring countries, such as Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia and even European countries, in the hope that the data would encourage those countries to secure peace in Libya. She added that ESCWA hoped to apply the approach to the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.

32. Regarding capacity-building, she referred to the Arabic e-learning platform that was under development. It would contain training courses in many areas, including strategic planning, the SDGs, and leadership and management requirements. ESCWA was also in the process of establishing partnerships with prestigious universities to enrich the platform's content and provide professional certificates.

33. The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic commented on the issue of ESCWA studies regarding his country, stressing that the Syrian Government welcomed collaboration with ESCWA and its research work carried out in coordination with ESCWA and from within Syrian territory. He added that the Syrian Arab Republic relied greatly on collaboration with ESCWA in studies and reports in and technical cooperation, and that the coordination mechanism between the two parties was well known for its success. The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic asked about the Centre of Entrepreneurship established by ESCWA in collaboration with the International Chamber of Commerce, which ESCWA had presented to the Committee in a draft recommendation. She enquired about the Centre's work process for the implementation of activities in various countries.

34. The Executive Secretary emphasized that ESCWA valued its collaboration and coordination with the Syrian Government and the Planning and International Cooperation Commission. She thanked the representative for the question about the Centre that would allow her to present that important initiative. She said that the sector of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and young people were among the most affected by the economic crisis caused by the pandemic. ESCWA, in collaboration with the International Chamber of Commerce that had already established a centre to support young entrepreneurs and pioneers in the Latin American region, had launched an initiative to establish a similar centre for the Arab region. The Centre of Entrepreneurship was established within ESCWA, and held activities such as workshops, at which entrepreneurs from the region presented the obstacles to progressing in their work, so as to develop a work programme for the Centre. The programme would include technical support activities, linking entrepreneurs' projects to larger economic activities, and building the capacity needed for project success. ESCWA and the International Chamber of Commerce were also working on networking with major international companies to enable local enterprises to move to electronic marketing, which would open up global markets for them. The ESCWA Technology Centre, based in Jordan, was leading ESCWA work on the initiative, in collaboration with the International Chamber of Commerce, and would go through official channels to implement government-related activities in member States.

D. Date and venue of the eighth meeting of the Executive Committee

(Agenda item 6)

35. Participants agreed that the eighth meeting of the Executive Committee would be held at the United Nations House in Beirut in December 2021.

E. Other matters

(Agenda item 7)

36. No issues were raised under this item.

III. Adoption of recommendations made by the Executive Committee at its seventh meeting

(Agenda item 8)

37. At the close of its seventh meeting, the Executive Committee adopted the recommendations submitted to it in an amended form, for inclusion in the present report on its seventh meeting.

IV. Organization of work

A. Date and venue

38. The Executive Committee held its seventh meeting online on 21 December 2020. Pursuant to its terms of reference, which stipulate that the Chair of the ESCWA session shall be designated to chair the Executive Committee, the representative of Tunisia, in his capacity as Chair of the thirtieth session of ESCWA, was appointed Chair of the Committee.

B. Opening

39. The Executive Committee opened its seventh meeting online at 10 a.m. on Monday, 21 December 2020. The representative of Tunisia, which chaired the seventh meeting of the Executive Committee, Wadih bin al-Sheikh, Acting Director of the Sustainable Development Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Immigration and Tunisians Abroad, made a statement in which he welcomed participants and thanked the ESCWA secretariat for organizing the meeting. He also welcomed the accession of Algeria and Somalia to ESCWA. He noted the economic, social and environmental challenges facing the Arab region, which had been exacerbated by the pandemic, adding that Tunisia had submitted a request to the Security Council to hold a session devoted to the pandemic's impact on peace and security worldwide, and to take the necessary measures to activate international solidarity to contain the pandemic and limit its repercussions. Consequently, the Security Council had adopted resolution [2532 \(2000\)](#) calling for a general and immediate cessation of hostilities globally and for the acceleration of action to address the pandemic.

40. Rola Dashti, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCWA, made a statement in which she thanked Tunisia for chairing the meeting, and welcomed the accession of Algeria and Somalia to ESCWA. She noted the huge losses caused by the pandemic in the region, which ESCWA estimated at \$150 billion, and the efforts undertaken by the ESCWA secretariat in 2020 to support member States implement response and recovery measures. She confirmed the implementation of ESCWA reforms that the Committee had approved at its sixth meeting, so that ESCWA would be a modern, vibrant and advanced institution that made a difference in the region, responded to the needs of its countries, and changed the lives of its peoples - an institution that led development efforts, and realized its vision based on innovation, empowerment, openness, transparency, flexibility and initiative.

C. Participants

41. The seventh meeting of the Executive Committee was attended by representatives of ESCWA member States. The list of participants is set out in annex I to the present report.

D. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters

42. The Executive Committee adopted the agenda set out in document [E/ESCWA/EC.7/2020/L.1](#).

Annex I

List of participants

Algeria

Mr. Antar Hassani
Deputy Director of Economic, Financial and
Commercial Affairs
General Directorate of Multilateral Relations
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mr. Faisal Alaq
Office Director at the General Directorate of
Multilateral Relations
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Bahrain

Ms. Fatima Abdullah Aldhaen
Director of the Organizations Department
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mr. Moosa Abdulla Al-Noami
Consultant
Organizations Department
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Egypt

Mr. Omar Aboueich
Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for
International and Regional Multilateral
Economic Relations
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ms. Mona Issam
Director of the Sustainable Development Unit
Ministry of Planning

Mr. Sherif Dawoud
Deputy Director of the Sustainable Development
Unit
Ministry of Planning

Ms. Aya Nawwar
Assistant Director of the Sustainable Development
Unit
Ministry of Planning

Iraq

Mr. Maher Hammad Johan
Deputy Minister of Planning for Technical Affairs
Ministry of Planning

Ms. Maha al-Rawi
Director
Department of Human Development
Ministry of Planning

Ms. Khawla al-beer
Ministry of Planning

Jordan

Mr. Malek al-Breazat
Director of the Arab Relations Department
Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation

Ms. Ghusoun Yousef
Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation

Kuwait

Ms. Eman Ibrahim al-Haddad
Head of International Organizations Division
International Economic Cooperation Department
Ministry of Finance

Ms. Muneera Alkhulaifi
Foreign Relation Specialist
International Economic Cooperation Department
Ministry of Finance

Ms. Loloa Albader
Administrative Coordinator of Transactions
Ministry of Finance

Lebanon

Ms. Caroline Ziadeh
Director of International Organizations,
Conferences and Cultural Relations
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants

Mauritania

Mr. Sidi Mohamed Zenvour
Coordinator of the strategy for exponential growth
and shared prosperity
Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Promotion
of Productive Sectors

Mr. Mohamed Teghre
Director of Strategy and Policy
Department of Development Policies
and Strategies
Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Promotion
of Productive Sectors

Morocco

Mr. M'hammed Grine
Ambassador of Morocco to Lebanon

Mr. Abdullah Benmellouk
Director of Multilateral Cooperation and
International Economic Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation
and Moroccan Expatriates

Mr. Muhammad Aman al-Tiyal
Head of the Financial Institutions Department
Directorate of Multilateral Cooperation and
International Economic Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation
and Moroccan Expatriates

Mr. Hicham Oussihamou

Head of the Economic and Financial Issues
Department
Directorate of Multilateral Cooperation and
International Economic Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation
and Moroccan Expatriates

Mr. Abdul Samad Lamrani
Director of Social Development

Mr. Mohamed Ait Azizi
Director for the Advancement of the Rights of
Persons with Disabilities

Oman

Mr. Emad Al Ajmi
Director of the Department of Arab
and International Organizations
Ministry of Economy

Mr. Ali bin Saeed Al Jabri
Economic Agreements Specialist
Department of Arab and International
Organizations
Ministry of Economy

State of Palestine

Mr. Mahmoud Ataya
Reform and Policy Priorities Unit
Office of the Prime Minister

Qatar

Mr. Shaheen bin Ali al-Kaabi
Assistant Director
Department of International Cooperation
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ms. Mariam Abdul Rahman al-Jaber
Third Secretary
Department of International Cooperation
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ms. Najat Daham Abdulla
Director of the Family Affairs Department

Ms. Hadeel Ali al-Ajil
Director of the Family Development Department

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Abdulrahman bin Mansour al-Zamil
Senior Expert on Sustainable Development
Ministry of Economy and Planning

Mr. Majid al-Asfour
Project Specialist
Ministry of Economy and Planning

Somalia

Mr. Mohammad Mohammad Ali Noor Haji
Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International
Cooperation

Somalia (continued)

Mr. Mustafa Adam Daqal
Director of the Arab Affairs Department
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International
Cooperation

Mr. Hasan Muhammad Ali
Deputy Director of the Department of Arab Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International
Cooperation

Mr. Abdullah Abdullah Ali
Participant

Sudan

Mr. Mohamed Youssef Ahmed
General Administration of International Relations
Ministry of Commerce

Mr. Issam Saadallah Mirsal
General Administration of International Relations
Ministry of Commerce

Ms. Salma Abdel Rahman Abdel Hafeez
General Administration of International Relations
Ministry of Commerce

Syrian Arab Republic

Ms. Thuraya Edelbi
Assistant to the President of the Commission for
International Cooperation
Planning and International Cooperation
Commission

Mr. Nader al-Sheikh Ali
Director of Cooperation with International
Organizations
Planning and International Cooperation
Commission

Tunisia

Mr. Wadiah Bemcheikh
Acting Director of Sustainable Development
Directorate-General for Multilateral Cooperation
and Cross-cutting Issues
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Immigration and
Tunisians Abroad

United Arab Emirates

Ms. Etidal Al Ameri
Economic Researcher
Department of Trade Negotiations and
International Organizations
Ministry of Economy

Ms. Mahaba Al Teneiji
Legal Researcher
Department of Trade Negotiations and
International Organizations
Ministry of Economy

Yemen

Mr. Mohammed Ahmad al-Hawri
Deputy Minister of Planning
Economic Studies and Forecasts Sector
Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation

Ms. Wazeerah Mohammed al-Sharmani
Deputy Director of the Project Sector
Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation

Mr. Mansour Zaid Haidara
Assistant Undersecretary
Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation

Annex II

List of documents

Title	Item	Symbol
Provisional agenda and annotations	۲	E/ESCWA/EC.7/2020/L.1
Implementation of recommendations made by the Commission at its sixth special session	3	E/ESCWA/EC.7/2020/2
Technical cooperation activities in 2020	4	E/ESCWA/EC.7/2020/3
Proposed programme plan for 2022	5	E/ESCWA/EC.7/2020/4
List of documents		E/ESCWA/EC.7/2020/INF.1