



Report

Thirteenth session of the Committee on Social Development Online, 22 and 23 September 2021

Summary

The Committee on Social Development of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held its thirteenth session online on 22 and 23 September 2021. The work of this session focused on the design and implementation of integrated social policies in the Arab region, based on two reports on practical means of implementing integrated social policies and a number of policy tools developed by ESCWA to support member States in this area.

The agenda also included items following up on the implementation of the recommendations of the Committee on Social Development since its twelfth session, technical cooperation activities and the activities of the Intersessional Group of Experts on Disability and the Expert Group on Social Protection Reform.

The present report sets out the recommendations issued by the Committee on Social Development following its sessions and summarizes the discussions under each agenda item.

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Introduction

1. The Committee on Social Development of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held its thirteenth session online, on 22 and 23 September 2021, pursuant to resolution 198 (XVII) of 31 May 1994, endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1994/27 of 26 July 1994, concerning the establishment of a committee on social development at ESCWA, and in accordance with the recommendations issued at the twelfth session of the Committee on Social Development, held in Beirut on 8 and 9 October 2019.
2. The Committee on Social Development aims to increase the participation of member States in setting priorities and formulating recommendations to promote social development in the Arab region and to follow up on their implementation. This report contains the recommendations reached by the Committee at its thirteenth session, including recommendations to ESCWA member States and the ESCWA executive secretariat, a presentation of the topics of discussion on the agenda and the highlights of points raised by participants.

I. Recommendations made by the Committee on Social Development at its twelfth session

3. At the conclusion of its thirteenth session, the Committee on Social Development adopted a set of recommendations, some addressed to member States others to the ESCWA secretariat.

A. Recommendations to ESCWA member States

4. The Committee on Social Development made the following recommendations to member States:
 - (a) Welcome the progress made in implementing the activities in ESCWA's programme plan on social development issues, the implementation of the Committee's recommendations at its twelfth session and the significant expansion in the scope of technical cooperation activities provided to member States at their request in various areas of social development, in particular the rapid and effective support from the ESCWA secretariat to address the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic;
 - (b) Take note of the activities of the Intersessional Group of Experts on Disability and the Expert Group on Social Protection Reform and invite the two groups to continue their work;
 - (c) Welcome the ESCWA secretariat's vision of transforming the knowledge generated in the field of social development into interactive tools that could benefit decision makers, in a timely manner and according to needs;
 - (d) Intensify efforts to integrate the issues and priorities of vulnerable groups into public policies, including older persons, migrants and persons with disabilities, in line with regional and international frameworks and the principle of "leave no one behind";
 - (e) Intensify efforts to collect data disaggregated by age, gender, income, disability status and other data that enable the development of evidence-based policies that respond to the priorities and needs of all population groups, particularly the vulnerable;
 - (f) Work to expand the umbrella of social protection in accordance with national priorities and available resources to include all population groups, particularly older persons, persons with disabilities, the unemployed and migrants, as well as those in need of rehabilitation and social integration;
 - (g) Increase effective government spending on the development of social protection systems, especially in light of the increasing frequency of health, economic and social crises;
 - (h) Regularly inform the ESCWA secretariat of the efforts of member States in the area of social development policies and programmes.

B. Recommendations to the ESCWA secretariat

5. The Committee on Social Development made the following recommendations to the ESCWA secretariat:

(a) Support member States in developing comprehensive social policies linking national social and economic visions, using the ESCWA framework for social policy integration;

(b) Prioritize providing technical support to member States through capacity-building and support in the development of national policies, strategies and programmes using the nexus approach to the following areas: inclusion of persons with disabilities, ensuring the rights of older persons and migrants, improving access to the labour market, developing social protection systems, mainstreaming the principles of social justice, combating poverty and promoting urban development;

(c) Strengthen the activities of the Intersessional Group of Experts on Disability and develop its work in line with regional priorities in integrating persons with disabilities, with particular attention to the intersection of issues faced by persons with disabilities with those faced by other vulnerable social groups such as older persons and women;

(d) Strengthen the activities of the Expert Group on Social Protection Reform, particularly with regard to leveraging successful experiences in countries in the region and the global South generally;

(e) Link activities aimed at developing social protection systems to economic recovery efforts from the COVID-19 pandemic in particular, and policies aimed at increasing employment and economic growth in general;

(f) Continue to support member States in measuring multidimensional poverty and developing policies to reduce it and address its different dimensions;

(g) Assist member States wishing to use the policy tools developed by ESCWA through national training workshops and technical support to adapt these tools to national conditions and needs, particularly for the least developed countries and countries affected by conflicts and emergencies;

(h) Support States in preparing for the future change in jobs and skills under the fourth industrial revolution using the ESCWA Job Monitor and develop it as needed and based on different national contexts;

(i) Continue to coordinate with the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, the Arab Centre for Social Policy Studies and Multidimensional Poverty, United Nations organizations and regional organizations on issues of common concern.

II. Topics for discussion

A. Follow-up issues

1. *Implementation of activities under the ESCWA programme of work and of recommendations made by the Committee on Social Development at its twelfth session*
(Agenda item 4)

6. On the basis of document E/ESCWA/C.2/2021/3, the representative of the ESCWA secretariat made a presentation on the progress made in implementing the activities of the ESCWA programme of work since the twelfth session and its recommendations. She addressed the change in how ESCWA operates and the restructuring of its departments, which had led to the inclusion of poverty, employment, job opportunities and the Center for Women in the Social Development Division in a new cluster for gender justice, population and inclusive development. The cluster had adopted a comprehensive and integrated approach to the linkages between issues of fighting poverty, reforming social protection systems, creating new jobs, promoting the rights of persons with disabilities, older persons, migrants, young people and women, promoting urban

development and achieving social justice. ESCWA was working on these issues in collaboration with a large number of partners, including United Nations organizations, regional organizations, notably the League of Arab States, as well as civil society organizations, research centres and universities.

7. The representative of the ESCWA secretariat then reviewed the activities carried out since the previous session in each of the areas of work of the Gender Justice, Population and Inclusive Development cluster, which focused on four key themes reflecting the methodology of work at ESCWA: generating knowledge through the issuance of studies and research papers; facilitating consensus by organizing meetings at all levels; translating knowledge into technical support programmes; and developing user-friendly and practical policy tools to help States implement all of the above. The response to the COVID-19 pandemic represented a large portion of the cluster's work, with 15 policy briefs prepared on the impact of the pandemic regionally and nationally and on the most vulnerable, the most important of which was the calculation of economic losses resulting from the pandemic, estimated at about \$42 billion in 2020, and the multidimensional poverty rate in Lebanon, which reached 82 per cent at the beginning of August 2021.

8. The representative of the ESCWA secretariat also highlighted some of the core activities in each area of work, such as the design of a social justice Policy Gap Assessment Tool (PGAT) to assess how compatible public policies are with the principles of social justice; the launch of the Arab Digital Inclusion Platform (ADIP) aimed at facilitating access to information and services for persons with disabilities; research on improved targeting methods for social protection programmes, ensuring that beneficiaries graduate after improving their situation and linking social protection interventions with the poverty reduction goal; the design of a job monitor to help decision makers prepare for the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the accompanying changes in the labour market; the development of a tool to quickly and easily build national Multidimensional Poverty Indices, to develop a new methodology for calculating monetary poverty using national standards that fit the realities of Arab States; following up with Arab States in adopting the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and preparing for the first regional review of the Compact; and the development of a policy tool to integrate older persons' issues into policymaking.

9. In the discussion, the representative of Jordan announced that the Council of Arab Foreign Ministers had approved the bylaws of the Arab Centre for Social Policy Studies and Multidimensional Poverty, which would be based in Jordan. The Centre welcomed cooperation with ESCWA, Arab States and organizations working in this area and would serve as an umbrella for joint Arab action on topics related to multidimensional poverty. The representative of the State of Palestine noted the rapid response by ESCWA to the COVID-19 pandemic and the adaptation of its programme of work to address the repercussions of the pandemic in the Arab region, in line with emerging priorities. He stressed the importance of Arab States helping each other during emergencies. He hoped that the issues would be addressed in the coming period in a more in-depth way to review priorities and consider planning, implementation, follow-up and challenges. He stressed the importance of transparency in discussing and learning from challenges and failures.

10. The representative of the Sudan thanked ESCWA for its support in 2020 and 2021 through several important workshops. A poverty reduction strategy was under way, as the democratic transition and economic reform launched in the Sudan had impacted living conditions, and the COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated poverty in the country. The Sudanese Government had adopted an expanded social support strategy aimed at providing direct cash and in-kind support to 1 million families, especially after the full lockdown. The Government was specifically targeting workers in marginal occupations and the informal economic sector to protect them from falling into poverty, with priority for persons with disabilities. A national social protection strategy was being developed in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and research centres.

11. The representative of Yemen said that the political and armed conflicts taking place in the country had greatly affected all aspects of life and made Yemen one of the countries most in need of anti-poverty measures and social protection systems. The Government was making determined efforts in cooperation with international organizations to empower national institutions, support and reactivate the social safety net,

provide institutional support for social protection programmes and expand emergency intervention projects to prevent poverty from spreading further. It was hoped to receive the support of ESCWA and donor States and to benefit from the experiences of Arab States in this area.

12. The representative of the League of Arab States noted the active partnership with ESCWA on many topics, particularly on issues of multidimensional poverty, persons with disabilities and social protection. He congratulated Jordan on the adoption by the Council of Arab Foreign Ministers of the bylaws of the Centre for Social Policy Studies and Multidimensional Poverty in the Arab States. The Centre, based in Jordan, was the technical arm of the Council of Arab Foreign Ministers and played an important role as part of joint Arab action. Coordination was beginning with ESCWA and all partners on a number of topics, particularly the development of a national plan for multidimensional poverty in the State of Palestine.

2. Technical cooperation activities (Agenda item 5)

13. On the basis of document E/ESCWA/C.2/2021/4, the representative of the ESCWA secretariat made a presentation on technical cooperation activities implemented since the twelfth session. These activities were in response to requests from member States and represented an application of the results of studies and research papers prepared by ESCWA. Technical cooperation activities are divided into three categories: advisory services on policy issues, capacity-building workshops and field projects. Technical support in priority social areas was aimed at strengthening the capacity of member States to develop inclusive and integrated social policies by assisting in the review and design of existing policies and laws and the necessary amendments to them, using the technical tools and guidelines developed by ESCWA. ESCWA had cooperated in that context with specialized United Nations organizations, the League of Arab States, academic institutions and civil society organizations.

14. The technical cooperation activities included a large number of workshops and advisory services at the national and regional levels on the concept of social justice and the assessment of policy gaps; policies based on equality and partnership in democratic governance; estimation of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; development of national multidimensional poverty indices; adaptation of skills to labour market requirements; development of national social protection strategies and evaluation of social protection programmes; determination and assessment of disability; integration of people with disabilities into the labour market and education and crisis response plans; comprehensive strategic planning of disability issues; digital accessibility for persons with disabilities and early intervention for children with disabilities; development of national strategies for older persons; integration of older persons' issues into policies; strengthening of the role of Arab parliaments in protecting the rights of older persons; empowerment of young people and building their capacities; building urban economic resilience; implementation of the New Urban Agenda ; and cooperation with the League of Arab States in preparing the unified Arab Law on the Rights of Older Persons. In the previous two years, the number of requests for technical support had increased to 118, most of which had been met by ESCWA, despite limited human and financial resources, while some were still under implementation and follow-up.

15. In the discussion, the representative of Saudi Arabia noted that work was under way to integrate persons with disabilities in the labour market as a national strategic objective. More than 100,000 people with disabilities had benefited as of the first quarter of 2021. The Government of Saudi Arabia was working to develop the educational system for persons with disabilities, including in public and private universities and colleges attended by about 4,000 students with disabilities. It was also working on a national strategy for persons with disabilities which would be completed in the coming months.

16. The representative of the Sudan thanked ESCWA for efforts to integrate persons with disabilities and for its continued cooperation with the Sudan and requested support in preparing a social protection strategy for persons with disabilities and establishing an implementation mechanism for it, support in training persons with disabilities in modern techniques and production methods and training workshops to prepare activist

experts in the field of persons with disabilities. The representative of Oman praised the success of the comprehensive behavioural language assessment of persons with disabilities implemented in the framework of technical cooperation with ESCWA and stated that there would be another programme in the coming months to enhance the skills and efficiency of administrative staff of rehabilitation centres for persons with disabilities. The representative of Tunisia said that the Tunisian Government had adopted a human rights approach to ensure a minimum for a decent life by passing Basic Law 10 of 2019 creating the Social Safety Programme, which used a multidimensional definition of poverty. A bill had also been prepared on the national social protection floor, which guaranteed universal health coverage and a minimum income for children, the unemployed, persons with disabilities and older persons. The representative of Tunisia asked ESCWA to continue to provide technical support in promoting social justice and equality with a view to mainstreaming the use of the Policy Gap Assessment Tool and forming teams of trainers in various ministries and at the national and regional levels.

17. The representative of Jordan spoke about the new national strategy for deinstitutionalization of persons with disabilities in the country, a pioneering service in the region. The strategy was in response to a 2017 law guaranteeing the right of persons with disabilities to live with their families and access comprehensive care services, as well as the right to inclusive education. The Government of Jordan was ready to share the expertise acquired in preparing the strategy with interested Arab States.

18. The representative of Algeria touched on his country's experience in social protection and social solidarity, with its many programmes aimed at vulnerable groups. These programmes included health coverage for vulnerable groups, fighting unemployment and social coverage. There were important collective development projects aimed at engaging beneficiaries in the implementation stages in exchange for cash transfers. It was also important to share experiences within the Arab region to develop a pioneering Arab experience in adopting a common social development policy. Measures taken by the Government of Algeria to support and protect persons with disabilities included Law 02/09 of 2002 on the protection of persons with disabilities which sought to standardize the general framework for protection systems, with the aim of mobilizing society to defend persons with disability and prevent any exclusion due to disability. The National Strategy for the Protection of Persons with Disabilities also contained four main themes: prevention and early care, specialized education for children with disabilities, professional integration and social programmes. Persons with disabilities and their families benefited from financial and in-kind assistance as well as medical, psychological and social services. A model high school for children with hearing disabilities had been approved, aimed at providing continuous specialized training, finding ways to take care of people with hearing disabilities and promoting applied research in this area.

19. The representative of Yemen requested technical support from ESCWA in developing a national social protection strategy, reforming social protection systems and social safety nets, conducting programmes to support national institutions and with regard to poverty and food security, emergency interventions, needs assessments and the design of appropriate programmes and interventions. The representative of Egypt shared her country's experience in the Takaful and Karama cash transfer programme, which covered 3.8 million families and placed women at the top of its priorities, with 75 per cent of cash transfers paid to women for the benefit of the entire family in order to eliminate the feminization of poverty and promote women's participation in decision-making at home. Takaful and Karama also provided cash transfers to 1.1 million persons with disabilities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic and social repercussions were quickly addressed through existing programmes and the database that included social and economic indicators for some 30 million citizens. The multidimensional poverty index and information technology and networking programs had also been used to improve the targeting of beneficiaries, thus reducing the administrative costs of cash transfers. At the same time, work in the field of disability relied on early intervention and detection and the promotion of awareness in rural areas, as well as the provision of rehabilitation, care and economic empowerment to integrate persons with disabilities into society.

20. The representative of Qatar reported on the development of the online platform "Kawader", which sought to provide employment to all groups of society, including persons with disabilities. Employment was

based on a medical report determining a person's abilities and the positions suitable for him or her. The employment of persons with disabilities was pursuant to the law, which allocated 2 per cent of jobs to persons with disabilities in all State institutions. The project provided a great opportunity for persons with disabilities to find jobs in government and non-governmental institutions, with about 95 per cent of applicants in 2019 having been hired. A project on promoting digital access for persons with disabilities was also being implemented to train persons with intellectual disabilities and multiple disabilities in the jobs they could fill.

21. In response, the representative of the ESCWA secretariat explained that requests for technical assistance should be submitted to ESCWA through official channels.

3. *Activities of the Intersessional Group of Experts on Disability* (Agenda item 6)

22. On the basis of document E/ESCWA/C.2/2021/5, the representative of the ESCWA secretariat made a presentation on the activities of the Intersessional Group of Experts on Disability since the twelfth session of the Committee. The Group had been established in 2016 on the recommendation of the tenth session of the Committee on Social Development with the aim of providing a platform for sharing experiences and knowledge and strengthening coordination among Arab States and with ESCWA with regard to the implementation and monitoring of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The team comprised national focal points from 18 Arab States and it looked forward to Algeria and Somalia joining it.

23. The representative of the ESCWA secretariat highlighted the activities undertaken by the Group, from the preparation and discussion of publications and technical studies to periodic meetings on the following key areas: disability assessment and determination as a means of integrating persons with disabilities, adopting a human rights approach and multidimensional assessments as an alternative to a medical approach; responding to COVID-19 and its impact on persons with disabilities and surveying support measures taken in that context; participating in the Arab Digital Inclusion Platform and discussing the guidelines ESCWA had prepared of national digital access policies and technical principles. Finally, she reviewed the future activities of the Group, which would focus on promoting digital access and the accessibility of the urban environment, as well as working on the establishment of an Arab academic network in collaboration with European universities and the Valletta Forum in Malta to achieve some kind of integration and partnership between Arab and European universities in disability research.

24. In the discussion, the representative of Saudi Arabia praised the activities of the Group and stressed the importance of collecting statistics and data on persons with disabilities in setting priorities and identifying needs. ESCWA should become part of an Arab academy that would share statistics and experiences with data collection and analysis. The questions of the Washington Group on Disability Statistics should be put into general use to keep pace with international experiences. A guide had been prepared on the accessibility of the urban environment in Saudi Arabia which could be built on in the future activities of the Group. The representative of Morocco noted that the issue of promoting the rights of persons with disabilities required a multidimensional human rights approach that took into account planning, legislation, statistics, funding, coordination and governance between sectors. The Government of Morocco had adopted such a methodology to develop a policy and programme of action and pass a law to protect the rights of persons with disabilities, conduct periodic statistical research and establish a mechanism to finance services for persons with disabilities. ESCWA was to be thanked for technical support in the area of disabilities and requested additional support in the areas of social protection, particularly in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on persons with disabilities, disability assessment, digital accessibility and professional integration.

25. The representative of the State of Palestine recommended that the issue of disability not be treated as a single entity, but rather consideration should be paid to the characteristics and needs of different groups within the category of persons with disabilities, such as women with disabilities and older persons with disabilities, and the intersection of disability with other factors, which could contribute to the design of more effective interventions and programmes. The representative of Qatar noted that some States still lacked a database or

had a database that needed to be updated in line with international practices in the area. She requested technical support from ESCWA to develop a database system for Arab States in line with international standards.

26. In response, the representative of the ESCWA secretariat stressed that the interconnection between persons with disabilities and other topics was a priority for ESCWA, and projects were already under way to integrate persons with disabilities into the labour market and education, in addition to activities in the Sudan to integrate persons with disabilities into national social protection policy and integrate older persons and persons with disabilities into national strategies. The scarcity of data on disability in the Arab region had prompted ESCWA to collect and publish official data from Arab States in two reports in 2016 and 2018, which were available on the ESCWA website, and an updated version of the data would be released in 2022. This context showed the challenge of obtaining and verifying data, and its relevance to the issue of disability classification and assessment.

4. *Activities of the Expert Group on Social Protection Reform* (Agenda item 7)

27. On the basis of document E/ESCWA/C.2/2021/6, the representative of the ESCWA secretariat made a presentation on the activities undertaken by the Expert Group on Social Protection Reform since its inception in 2019. The essence of the Group's work was to share experiences, share knowledge and promote coordination and consultation among Arab States and with ESCWA in the field of social protection policies. He highlighted the major meetings of the Group and their outcomes, and ESCWA had cooperated in their implementation with international organizations, including the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

28. At those meetings, ESCWA had put forward the COVID-19 Global Stimulus Tracker to track financial interventions and social protection policies taken by States in response to COVID-19; the ESCWA Multidimensional Poverty Index Assist Tool had been discussed at the meetings; and the first pilot test of the rapid assessment framework for social protection programmes had been conducted. The Group's meetings also focused on research into the protection of social health and social registers, the importance of subsidized health insurance in expanding health coverage for informal workers, providing targeted social assistance and adapting social protection programmes and management information systems to emerging needs.

29. According to the representative of the ESCWA secretariat, the Group's future activities included organizing a ministerial forum on improving coverage rates and enhancing emergency response in collaboration with the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors, researching subsidized health insurance to include workers in the informal sector, considering the integration and coordination of social protection and social insurance programmes, continuing to provide a platform for peer learning on the use of the rapid assessment framework to analyse social registers data, as well as working to prepare comprehensive national profiles on reforming social protection systems in Arab countries to allow for the building of an information base and knowledge about existing programmes and proposed reforms.

30. In the discussion, the representative of Algeria stressed the need to link the principle of social protection with the principle of social development, as social development could not be achieved without effective social protection. Work to foster incipient economic and social development had begun in Algeria after years of applying the principle of social protection to rehabilitate groups in need of government support. In order to reduce social vulnerability in rural areas, women staying at home had been targeted and given loans and training to enable them to contribute to a social and economic advancement in these areas.

31. The representative of the State of Palestine noted the importance of learning from the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic, which had showed the importance of investing in social protection. However, social protection programmes should also be linked to economic recovery plans in future activities and synergies between them should be promoted. In economic recovery, the most vulnerable economic sectors, informal sector workers, small businesses and women-run businesses must also be protected. One of the activities of

the Expert Group on Social Protection Reform should be devoted to discussing food security and improving food systems, as these topics were closely related to social protection but farmers in developing countries were excluded from social protection systems.

32. The representative of the Sudan reported on a social protection working group operating in consultation with the private sector, civil society organizations and political parties in the country, noting that there were numerous social protection programmes in the Sudan and they cut across all ministries and covered various groups of society. The planned strategy was expected to integrate these programmes and standardize relevant concepts and terminology. She requested support from ESCWA in the implementation of the social protection strategy, specifically in the development of the operational plan and assessment and follow-up plan, the incorporation of social justice principles into plans and policies and the application of Policy Gap Assessment Tool. The representative of Bahrain said that care and attention should be paid to patients with chronic and terminal diseases and persons in recovery from drugs and they should be included in social protection programmes.

33. In response, the representatives of the ESCWA secretariat confirmed that they would resend official letters to Algeria and Somalia to nominate focal points from the two States to ensure their representation in the Expert Group on Social Protection Reform. It was important for social protection to be linked to economic recovery plans, and ESCWA was working to strengthen this linkage through activities in the areas of multidimensional poverty and employment. They stressed that the results of the Job Monitor would be used to link the skills required in the labour market with those available to beneficiaries of social protection programmes, enabling them to enter the labour market and graduate from social protection programmes. The Expert Group on Social Protection had also launched the Multidimensional Poverty Index Assist Tool (MAT) at the national level and would look at linking the results to social protection policies.

34. On the subject of food security, the representative of the ESCWA secretariat referred to a regional session with ministries of agriculture and ministries of social affairs on social protection and social justice, as well as an event on the sidelines of the United Nations Commission on Population and Development on the relationship between social protection systems, food systems and population. ESCWA had contributed to the preparation of a paper on social protection and food systems in cooperation with the other United Nations regional commissions, and the paper would be shared with the Expert Group on Social Protection Reform.

B. Integrated social policies

1. Towards integrated social policies in the Arab region (Agenda item 8)

35. On the basis of document E/ESCWA/C.2/2021/7, the representative of the ESCWA secretariat made a presentation on the methodology for developing integrated social policies in the Arab region. Despite efforts to improve social development plans, with the crises affecting many Arab countries and most recently the COVID-19 pandemic, policies remained fragmented either at the individual policy level, between policies or in the means of implementation, which reduced the efficacy of those policies in achieving their objectives. Hence there was a need to help States move from disintegration to integration when designing and implementing policies.

36. The representative of the ESCWA secretariat reviewed how integrated policies could be put into effect through a six-stage approach: in-depth national social and economic analysis; aligning national efforts with international frameworks; ensuring political will and stakeholder engagement; conducting the necessary legal and constitutional reforms; creating the appropriate institutional infrastructure; and assessing the fiscal feasibility and implications of social policies. Such measures were needed to integrate social policies, and the subsequent presentation would provide a set of policy tools that would enable policymakers to make evidence-based decisions and view policies in an integrated manner.

37. In the discussion, the representative of the State of Palestine saw the issue of integrated social policies as simultaneously the problem and the solution, noting that policies in the Arab States had always suffered from fragmentation. The assessment of the economic viability of social policies was important, but the social impact and cost of economic policies that were frequently not inclusive must also be assessed. The most important issue for Arab States was to promote harmony and synergy between various sectoral policies. The failure of States was mostly due to the failure of institutions, so the focus must be on institutional arrangements, governance, integrity, transparency, accountability and the fight against corruption.

38. The representative of Algeria noted that the tools used to shape social policies in the Arab region varied from country to country, and most of them had been inspired by different international norms and standards. Therefore, work should proceed to develop a new Arab vision, based on agreement among all concerned to reach a unified Arab standard and develop Arab social development policies that took into account the issues and challenges shared by States and the Arab situation as a whole.

39. The representative of Yemen stressed that the linkage of social policies to legislation was very important, especially in countries experiencing armed conflicts, where it was difficult to reform the legal systems. ESCWA should dedicate space in its studies to States suffering from crises and armed conflicts and offer solutions and proposals regarding achieving social justice and the design of effective social protection programmes. The representative of Jordan called for clarification of the definition of integrated social policies, asking whether it meant integrated social protection policies and whether the definition was limited to social issues *per se* or if it extended to any issue with a social impact generally. The concept of response to crises and shocks needed to be included in the integrated social policy approach, either by allocating a separate stage to it or by addressing it as a cross-stage issue.

40. The representative of Qatar reported on the establishment of the National Commission on Women, Children, the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities in the country, which consisted of all relevant ministries and representatives of civil society institutions. A dialogue had begun within the Commission on changing existing social policies and considering problems in a different way in light of the authorities granted to the Commission to study Qatari legislation and social policies. The Commission leveraged civil society institutions and individuals from different groups to propose solutions and make decisions.

41. In response, the representatives of the ESCWA secretariat stressed that the design of integrated social policies had become a need rather than a luxury. However, the excessive emphasis on integration had sometimes become a problem, and so policy synergies were required to avoid negative effects. The practical framework that had been presented could be applied in an environment of instability but the orientation at times of excessive violence was generally towards relief work. Nevertheless, that did not preclude preparations for integrated social policies in the recovery and reconstruction phase. ESCWA had conducted numerous studies on countries in conflict, but the challenge of providing data, information and laws to those States remained. On the difference between social policies and social protection policies, social policies were the umbrella under which all policies, including social protection policies, fell.

2. *ESCWA tools to support States in designing integrated social policies* (Agenda item 9)

42. The Committee on Social Development considered this item on the basis of E/ESCWA/C.2/2/2021/8 and a video prepared by the ESCWA secretariat to present some of the tools designed by ESCWA to support States in designing integrated social policies. The representative of the ESCWA secretariat noted that the greatest challenge facing the Arab region was the fragmentation of policymaking and implementation. While several States had achieved successes in a number of human development indicators, this quantitative success had not translated into economic success because of the lack of coherence between economic and social policies. ESCWA was working to create appropriate indicators that could reflect the economic and social realities and the scale of the challenge in the Arab region. ESCWA had developed a set of tools to support States in designing integrated social policies. ESCWA sought to link the outputs of these tools together, with

the aim of providing decision makers with the data required to assess the efficacy of social and economic policies.

43. The video was then shown and brief statements by representatives of the ESCWA secretariat on each of the tools were shown as follows:

(a) The Multidimensional Poverty Index Assist Tool (MAT), which helped with the analysis of the status of different groups of society such as the middle class, or populations that were more vulnerable to poverty, such as women, older persons and people in remote areas. The MAT used national survey data to set poverty thresholds, identify populations living in poverty and measure their deprivations;

(b) The COVID-19 Global Stimulus Tracker was an interactive platform covering social protection measures and economic policies adopted by 194 States, including Arab States, in response to the pandemic. The Tracker provided information in a coordinated manner to facilitate comparisons, as well as information on beneficiary groups and the total value of stimulus relative to GDP;

(c) The ESCWA Job Monitor, which aimed to support Arab States in adapting to the change in jobs and skills under the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and to support the implementation of the labour market-related 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. The Monitor used innovative methods, including big data, to calculate the demand for labour and provided information on new skills and measures necessary to adapt education and training programmes to labour market requirements;

(d) The Index Simulator for Policymakers in the Arab Region (ISPAR), which aimed to analyse the impact of specific policies on the performance of Arab States in the most important international indicators and allow States to compare their performance with other countries in the region and beyond. ISPAR covered a number of indicators, including the Global Gender Gap Index, the E-Participation Index, the E-Government Development Index, the Digital Accessibility Rights Evaluation Index, etc.;

(e) The Gender Justice and the Law tool, which analysed the compatibility of laws in Arab countries with international human rights conventions and the general recommendations of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as well as international standards under ILO conventions. The tool aimed to identify gaps in legislation and encourage States to amend their national laws in accordance with international obligations;

(f) The Social Justice Policy Gap Assessment Tool (PGAT), which allowed for an assessment of the extent to which the principles of social justice were integrated into national development policies and programmes and the identification of gaps with the goal of then addressing them. The PGAT provided a survey with questions to assess knowledge and skills; compatibility among the parties concerned; legislative and regulatory frameworks; and institutional structures and internal mechanisms;

(g) The institutional capacity assessment tool, which aimed to identify strengths and weaknesses in institutional capacities, develop capacity-building programmes, increase performance and efficacy and facilitate experience sharing among institutions. Organizations could determine the capacity or capacities they wished to evaluate according to their priorities;

(h) The gender equality analysis tool, which provided institutions with a framework for assessing their gender sensitivity, identifying gaps and supporting them in achieving gender equality internally by measuring 15 performance indicators for various areas such as staff performance management, strategic planning, monitoring, evaluation and institutional auditing and tracking and allocating financial resources;

(i) The Social Expenditure Monitor (SEM), which helped Arab States monitor their social expenditures on different population groups and provided them with information to reallocate resources to the sectors most in need. It also supported analysis of different social spending scenarios and helped with the preparation of a performance-based budget, laying the foundations for social justice and promoting sustainable development;

(j) The tool for integrating older persons into policymaking was in response to the absence of policies for older persons and the failure to include them in various policies. The tool provided information on

international standards for older persons' issues, in addition to seven sections on priorities for older persons and, through a series of questions, contributed to the development of a policy structure for older persons and the review of existing policies from the perspective of older persons;

(k) A diagnostic and planning tool to build urban economic resilience, which aimed to help city authorities understand the strengths and weaknesses of their institutional and operational arrangements from the perspective of economic recovery and resilience building, and to assess the structure and economic performance of cities. The tool also aimed to assist with designing and implementing recovery plans and strategies to address specific gaps, accelerate recovery and improve long-term resilience.

44. Commenting on the presentation, the representative of Qatar hoped that the toolkit would be used in all countries in the future. The representative of the League of Arab States noted the close cooperation with ESCWA in using these tools, particularly in the field of multidimensional poverty and the implementation of the Arab strategy for older persons. The representative of the ESCWA secretariat explained that the tools that had been presented were part of a total of approximately 40 electronic tools and portals being worked on at ESCWA. ESCWA was ready to provide training on the application of such tools at the national level at the request of member States. It was important to provide ESCWA with data and information that would feed these tools to increase their use nationally and regionally.

**C. Date and venue of the fourteenth session of the Committee
on Social Development
(Agenda item 10)**

45. The Committee decided to hold its fourteenth session at the ESCWA headquarters in Beirut in September 2023, provided that no other member State submits a request to host the session.

**D. Other matters
(Agenda item 11)**

46. No issues were raised under this item.

**III. Adoption of the recommendations made by the Committee
on Social Development at its thirteenth session
(Agenda item 12)**

47. At its final meeting, held on 23 September 2021, the Committee adopted the recommendations made at its thirteenth session, as stated in paragraphs 4 and 5.

IV. Organization of work

A. Date and venue

48. The thirteenth session of the Committee on Social Development was held online on 22 and 23 September 2021. Its work was divided into four sessions during which participants discussed the agenda items as adopted.

B. Opening

49. The thirteenth session of the Committee on Social Development was opened by Mr. Daoud al-Dik, representative of the State of Palestine, which chaired the twelfth session of the Committee. He noted ESCWA's role in helping Arab States develop social policies and supporting their social priorities. Despite the difficult circumstances that the Arab region had been going through since the previous session, reports presented at the session indicated the implementation of many activities and recommendations in various areas, such as addressing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, social justice, the rights of persons with disabilities and older persons, social protection, the labour market, poverty eradication and migration.

50. He stressed that, in light of the continuing pandemic and the economic and social damage it had caused, States needed to draw lessons from the session, first and foremost the importance of working towards social justice and bridging inequalities, developing social protection policies and programmes and addressing multidimensional poverty, unemployment and community and family violence. It was also important to increase investment in Government services, raise the efficiency of the public sector and pay attention to vulnerable groups. The most important lessons learned from the pandemic were the need to invest in data, improve targeting methodologies and transform monotonous and bureaucratic social protection systems and programmes into efficient systems and programmes that could respond to shocks and emergencies. In conclusion, he congratulated Qatar on chairing the current session and wished the countries of the region prosperity, stability and greater hope and action.

51. Ms. Mehrinaz Elawady, the Gender Justice, Population and Inclusive Development Cluster Leader, made a statement on behalf of the ESCWA secretariat. She addressed the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic and social challenges that had led to the rearrangement of development priorities in the countries of the region. ESCWA recognized the need to adopt new development models, requiring the adoption of a new methodology of action, namely the restructuring of the Social Development Division. It had become an integrated cluster concerned with issues of social justice and gender equality, poverty reduction, social protection systems, the rights of persons with disabilities, older persons and migrants, young people, improved employment opportunities and urban development.

52. She noted that as part of the adoption of a comprehensive and integrated methodology of action, the Committee aimed at providing practical tools to help decision makers fill policy gaps. The Committee was therefore considering two technical papers on the overall social development situation in the Arab region and the policy tools developed by ESCWA to help design integrated social policies capable of addressing existing challenges. Finally, she thanked the State of Palestine for its good management as chair of the twelfth session and welcomed working with Qatar as chair of the current session.

C. Participants

53. Eighteen ESCWA Member States participated in the session, as well as a number of representatives of international and regional bodies, civil society organizations and the private sector. The list of participants is set out in annex I to the present report.

D. Election of officers

54. Article 18 of the Rules of Procedure of ESCWA provides that member States shall assume the presidency of the subsidiary bodies of the Commission on a rotating basis, in Arabic alphabetical order, as established by the United Nations. In accordance with this rule, the representative of Qatar chaired the thirteenth session of the Committee on Social Development. Participants elected the representatives of the State of Palestine and Kuwait as vice-chairs, and the representative of Lebanon as rapporteur.

E. Agenda and organization of work

55. At its first meeting, the Committee on Social Development adopted the agenda for its thirteenth session set out in document E/ESCWA/C.2/2021/L.1. The Committee also adopted the organization of work set out in document E/ESCWA/C.2/2021/L.2.

F. Documentation

56. Annex II to the present report contains the list of documents submitted at the thirteenth session of the Committee on Social Development.

Annex I

List of participants

A. ESCWA member States

Algeria

Mr. Mourad ben Amzale
Director-General for the Protection and Promotion
of Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Jamal Rahim
Director General of the Social Development Agency

Ms. Faiza Yaker
Sub-Director for Cooperation
Ministry of National Solidarity, Family
and Women's Affairs

Bahrain

Ms. Najwa Abdullatif Janahi
Acting Assistant Undersecretary for Social Care
and Rehabilitation
Ministry of Labour and Social Development

Ms. Aesha Mohammed AlZayed
Family & Childhood Development Director
Ministry of Labour and Social Development

Ms. Huda AlHumood
Social Welfare Director
Ministry of Labour and Social Development

Ms. Jalila AlSayed
Acting Rehabilitation Director
Ministry of Labour and Social Development

Ms. Munira al-Fadhala
International Affairs Specialist
Ministry of Labour and Social Development

Egypt

Ms. Amina Yahya Nouredine Tarraf
Associate to the Minister of Social Solidarity for
Social Policies
Ministry of Social Solidarity

Mr. Raafat Shafeek
Ministry of Social Solidarity

Iraq

Ms. Huda Sajjad Mahmoud
President of the Social Protection Authority
Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

Mr. Raed Jabbar Bahedh
Director General of the Department of Employment
and Vocational Training
Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

Jordan

Mr. Ahmad Hamad Abuhaidar
Director of the Policy and Strategies Department
Ministry of Social Development

Mr. Bashar Odeh Al-Dala'in
Head of the Department of Persons with Disabilities
Affairs
Ministry of Social Development

Mr. Faisal Khalaf Salman Arshid
Adviser to the Director-General for Social Protection
Programmes
National Aid Fund

Kuwait

Ms. Hanaa' al-Hajery
Assistant Undersecretary for Social Development
Ministry of Social Affairs and Community
Development
Secretary General, Supreme Council for Family
Affairs

Ms. Nadia Hussein Hamza Al-Koot
Director, Directorate of International Relations
Ministry of Social Affairs and Community
Development

Ms. Sara al-Dossery
Director, Family Welfare Department
Ministry of Social Affairs and Community
Development

Kuwait (continued)

Ms. Talia Abdullah al-Shatti
Head of the International Affairs Department
Ministry of Social Affairs and Community
Development

Lebanon

Mr. Abdullah Ahmed
Director General
Ministry of Social Affairs

Mauritania

Mr. Al-Salk Al-Jereb
Director of Studies, Cooperation and Follow-up
Ministry of Social Work, Childhood and Family

Morocco

Mr. Khalid al-Hammoumi
Acting Director, Social Development
Ministry of Solidarity, Social Development, Equality
and Family

Mr. Ahmad al-Cheikhi
Head of the Prevention, Access and Assistance
Department
Ministry of Solidarity, Social Development, Equality
and Family

Ms. Layla al-Bosdogui
Ministry of Solidarity, Social Development, Equality
and Family

Oman

Mr. Mohammed ben Ali ben Mohammed al-Saadi
Director General for Social Welfare
Ministry of Social Development

Mr. Hamoud bin Mirdad bin Hamoud al-Shubaybi
Director General
Directorate General for Persons with Disabilities
Ministry of Social Development

Ms. Jamila bint Salem bin Mabkhout Jadad
Assistant Director-General for Family Development
Ministry of Social Development

State of Palestine

Mr. Daoud al-Deek
Undersecretary
Ministry of Social Development

Qatar

Ms. Najat Daham Abdullah
Director of the Family Affairs Department
Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour
and Social Affairs

Ms. Hadeel Ali al-Ajeal
Director of the Family Development Department
Family Affairs Department
Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour
and Social Affairs

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Hashem bin Mohammed al-Haidari
Executive Director, Authority for Persons
with Disabilities
Ministry of Human Resources and Social
Development

Ms. Manal al-Makoshi
Director of International Cooperation
Authority for Persons with Disabilities

Ms. Reem al-Darwish
Ministry of Human Resources and Social
Development

Ms. Nouf bint Ibrahim al-Melaihan
Ministry of Human Resources and Social
Development

Mr. Faisal bin Abdullah al-Tulayhan
Ministry of Human Resources and Social
Development

Somalia

Mr. Abdullahi Mohamed Ali
Director General
Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

Ms. Suad Abdullah Moallem
Director of Legal Relations and Employment
Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

Somalia (continued)

Mr. Abdalla Adam Abdi
Financial Administration Consultant
Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

The Sudan

Mr. Mohammed Hussein
Undersecretary
Ministry of Social Development

Ms. Rihab Mustafa
Secretary-General of the National Council
for Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Ezzedine al-Safi
Commissioner of the Commission for Social Safety
and Poverty Reduction

Ms. Safa al-Amin Ahmed
Director-General
Department of Social Welfare and Rural
Development

Ms. Aisha al-Imam
Policy Director
Ministry of Social Development

Ms. Tayseer Al-Nour Ahmed Mustafa
Assistant Director, International Cooperation
and Partnerships

Tunisia

Mr. Sami Belghith
Director of the Directorate-General for Social
Promotion
Ministry of Social Affairs

United Arab Emirates

Mr. Nassir Ismail
Assistant Under-Secretary of Social Welfare Affairs
Ministry of Community Development

Ms. Alia Al-Joker
Family Development Department
Ministry of Community Development

Ms. Moza Al-Raqbani
Senior Projects Director
Ministry of Community Development

Yemen

Ms. Najla Ahmed Omar al-Sayyad
Executive Director
Social Welfare Fund

B. International Organizations

UN Women – Regional Office for Arab States

Ms. Simon Ellis Oluoch-Olunya
Regional Policy Adviser
Women's political participation programme

Ms. Esther Mulamba
Disability Integration Assistance Programme
Analyst
Women's political participation programme

International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth – United Nations Development Programme

Ms. Charlotte Biló
Researcher on Social Protection Issues in the Arab
Region

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Ms. Roueida El Hage
Regional Representative
Middle East and North Africa Regional Office
Beirut, Lebanon

Mr. Ulrik Halsteen
Deputy Regional Representative
Middle East and North Africa Regional Office
Beirut, Lebanon

United Nations Population Fund

Mr. Luay Shabaneh
Regional Director
Arab States Regional Office

Mr. Samir Anouti
Regional Youth Advisor
UN-Habitat

Mr. Abdellatif Bouazza

Ms. Nagwa Lachine

United Nations Development Programme

Ms. Thouraya Bahri

Mr. Fekadu Terefe

Ms. Susanne Dam-Hansen
Expert in Regional Strategic Planning

C. Arab and regional organizations

League of Arab States

Mr. Tarek Nabulsi
Minister Plenipotentiary
Director, Development and Social Policies
Department
Head of Coordination and Follow-up Unit, Cabinet
of Assistant Secretary General for Social Affairs

Arab Forum for the Rights of Persons
with Disabilities

Ms. Silvana Lakkis
Forum President

Arab Organization of Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Riad Assoum

Muhanna Foundation

Mr. Ibrahim Muhanna
Chairman of the Board of Trustees

Annex II

List of documents

Title	Item	Symbol
Information for participants		E/ESCWA/C.2/2021/INF.1
Provisional agenda and annotations	3	E/ESCWA/C.2/2021/L.1
Organization of work	3	E/ESCWA/C.2/2021/L.2
Implementation of activities under the ESCWA programme of work and of recommendations made by the Committee on Social Development at its twelfth session	4	E/ESCWA/C.2/2021/3
Technical cooperation activities	5	E/ESCWA/C.2/2021/4
Activities of the Intersessional Group of Experts on Disability	6	E/ESCWA/C.2/2021/5
Activities of the Expert Group on Social Protection Reform	7	E/ESCWA/C.2/2021/6
Towards integrated social policies in the Arab region	8	E/ESCWA/C.2/2021/7
ESCWA tools to support countries in designing integrated social policies	9	E/ESCWA/C.2/2021/8
List of documents		E/ESCWA/C.2/2021/INF.2