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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

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Sustainable transport project**Summary**

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Europe and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, is implementing a project dealing with the interdependence of sustainable transport with the Sustainable Development Goals. The project aims to establish a mechanism to assess the sustainability of internal transport in the target countries. The project was carried out in the Arab region, in Jordan, Lebanon and the State of Palestine, while other regions included Paraguay, Georgia, Serbia and Kazakhstan. The project's officials have issued a national report for each country with scores in international indicators on sustainable transport, which have been developed as part of the project's activities and applied to all participating Countries.

The Committee on Transport and Logistics is invited to review the present document and comment thereon.

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Introduction

1. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) is involved in the implementation of a project on “sustainable transport connectivity and implementation of transport-related Sustainable Development Goals in selected landlocked and transit/bridging countries”, in collaboration with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.
2. The project is primarily aimed at strengthening the capacity of five countries (Georgia, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Paraguay and Serbia) to design and implement an evidence-based transport policy framework capable of promoting sustainable transport connectivity at the national, regional and international levels, and to support the implementation of the transport-related Sustainable Development Goals.
3. In the context of this project, connectivity means interconnection in terms of transport, trade, customs and logistics. The connectivity of internal transport networks allows for transport networks to be closely linked to each other, and the connectivity of transport networks is a national priority of interest to both the public and private sectors. Jordan pays clear attention to connectivity through two initiatives, the Nafith Initiative and the National Single Window, both aimed at improving the exchange of information between the various transport entities in order to facilitate work and improve the quality of communication.
4. As part of the project, a set of sustainable internal transport connectivity indicators has been developed, based on a set of international standards to be applied to selected countries to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of their transport systems and the level of compliance of national and legal departments with the frameworks of United Nations conventions on transport facilitation and border crossing.
5. Through the project, a series of events is being held to build capacity to use indicators in each beneficiary country and to make proposals to improve legislation, regulations and infrastructure in order to improve the efficiency and sustainability of internal transport connectivity, to present and apply them in national, regional and international contexts and to use them as a basis for the development of new, innovative and evidence-based internal transport policies. The project involves transport, trade and customs policymakers and the National Border Administration, regional integration mechanisms, infrastructure managers, operators and carriers, professional private sector federations, academia and relevant civil society organizations.

I. Overview of progress as of September 2021

A. Fact-finding mission

6. The project activities began with a fact-finding mission on 6 October 2019 to review the internal status of transport and logistics in the participating countries. Activities included a review of information and statistics on the transport system and gathering opinions and approaches from the relevant national authorities and stakeholders.
7. The mission also aimed at conducting intensive consultations with national stakeholders, collecting relevant data and information (on hardware, software, policies and systems) and identifying communication gaps and challenges.

B. National Connectivity Report: Jordan 2020

8. Jordan prepared the National Connectivity Report with the aim of measuring transport connectivity through a set of indicators designed by project officials at the international level. The data collection process involved a large number of entities from the private and public sectors. An electronic questionnaire was designed using indicators of the three dimensions of sustainability: economic, social and environmental. Jordan’s national road transport connectivity index was 39.8 per cent.

9. Jordan's strategic location sharing borders with Iraq, the occupied Palestinian territory, Saudi Arabia and the Syrian Arab Republic has been a burden during the recent Iraqi and Syrian crises. However, it is expected that it will be able to benefit from the reconstruction of the two countries and the resumption of transit flows between the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Levant. In light of the recent turmoil, Jordan is expected to remain an important supplier of road transport services for trade with its various neighbouring countries and to play a prominent role in connecting countries when the region stabilizes.

10. The country's main road transport corridor is the link between Aqaba and Amman (M47/M45), linking the port to Amman and other population centres, northern industrial areas and the main border crossings with the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq. The corridor also connects the port to potash factories on the Dead Sea and phosphate mines. Other important shipping corridors link Amman and production areas in the north to the land border crossing with Saudi Arabia in Omari; as well as phosphate mines at the port; and the cities of Amman and Irbid.

11. Based on the results of this study, recommendations for improving the performance of the road transport sector in Jordan can be grouped into aspects of transportation, procedures and institutions, infrastructure, environment and sustainable energy. The most important recommendations include strengthening the financial resources of public transport bodies, particularly in capacity-building, simplifying the institutional arrangements at the port of Aqaba to address challenges such as delays faced by stakeholders and investors in the region due to inadequate management structure and slow decision-making processes and continued efforts to attract bilateral donor investment in the region to finance some of the costs of transport projects.

12. With regard to procedures and institutions, the report recommends the application of stricter standards for monitoring driver working conditions (driving and rest periods), controlling the technical conditions of vehicles (weight and dimensions on the road), establishing an observatory for road transport and the logistics sector, enhancing transport-related data and improving data sources and applying IT systems and solutions to the transport chain.

13. The report recommends ensuring continued access to funding from regional and international sources, as well as private sector participation, making decisions related to the implementation of the national railway project, securing funding and implementation of the rehabilitation of the Hijaz Railway and establishing the new Aqaba-Maan link.

14. With regard to environment and sustainable energy, the report recommends reviewing national legislation on perishable foodstuffs to ensure that they are comprehensive and cover the requirements for transport conditions, testing, classification of special equipment, approval and compliance certification, ensuring that they comply with international standards and regulations and implementing fleet renewal programmes through a variety of policy tools such as repurchase programmes.

15. Additional recommendations include strengthening the participation and increased powers of the Ministry of Transport, as the Ministry is not currently represented in the main activities of the port of Aqaba (mainly loading and unloading activities); updating this study after the eradication of the COVID-19 pandemic to assess connectivity without the temporary effects of the pandemic, or conducting a more comprehensive study should the impact of the pandemic last for a longer period, and conducting an ongoing study that takes into account the different weights of the different indicators depending on the importance of the indicator and its impact on the evaluation process.

C. Policy dialogue in Jordan (31 March – 1 April 2021)

16. ESCWA organized a virtual meeting from 31 March to 1 April 2021 to hold a national dialogue on the national connectivity report in Jordan. The meeting brought together about 50 participants who are stakeholders in transport and logistics. Participants gave a detailed account of the report and its conclusions and recommendations.

D. Needs assessment workshop in Jordan (13 October 2021)

17. ESCWA organized a training workshop in Jordan on Wednesday, 13 October 2021 to discuss the capacity-building needs of stakeholders according to their interventions. Based on the discussions, a final list of the most pressing needs will be drawn up. The discussions will also include ways to strengthen ties between Jordan and neighbouring countries, Jordan's status with regard to the implementation of international conventions, the need to coordinate customs procedures, the need for an integrated cargo strategy, the public and private sectors' view of the challenges facing cross-border and transit transport, ways to activate rail transport and other challenges.

II. Extension of coverage to include the State of Palestine and Lebanon

18. In 2021, there were financial possibilities to add two States from the Arab region to the project: Lebanon and the State of Palestine.

A. The status of transport in the State of Palestine

19. Officials in the State of Palestine prepared the National Connectivity Report in order to analyse and assess the compatibility of transport in the country with sustainable transport indicators. To this end, the assessment process contained the three dimensions of sustainability (economic, social and environmental), focusing only on roads (as appropriate, as there are currently only road routes in Palestine). Institutional and legal structures were assessed as well as regulatory and administrative systems for border crossings, customs and transit procedures. The quality of the administrative framework (including shipping and transport document systems) was also assessed. Officials analysed the quality and effectiveness of transport and logistics infrastructure; they also determined the robustness of road traffic management and road traffic infrastructure system. The quality of the regulatory framework surrounding the transport of hazardous goods and perishable foodstuffs was also estimated. The report also included an assessment of the efforts aimed at reducing greenhouse gases, the age and maintenance of the vehicle fleet and the emissions and noise generated by it.

20. The overall result of the assessment Indicators of National Connectivity Report of the State of Palestine was 40.9 per cent, which is generally low, but as expected for the country and close to the National Connectivity Report of neighbouring Jordan (39.8 per cent for road routes only). Some of these indicators (such as indicators for security, safety, infrastructure and transportation of hazardous and perishable materials) are relatively high, and others (such as energy and environment indicators) are quite low. Border crossings and the use of multimodal transport were at the lowest levels.

21. Based on the findings and analysis of the assessment, the report contained recommendations to improve the performance of the road transport sector. These recommendations concern different entities (in the public and private sectors) directly (or indirectly) related to road transport operations. However, the Ministry of Transport and Communications is expected to lead the implementation of these operations, while taking into consideration the specificity of the Palestinian reality in terms of not controlling most external roads and crossings, which Israel controlled. At the same time, however, the report noted that Palestinian institutions should play their part in developing this sector and promoting the Palestinian economy. The recommendations addressed regulatory and institutional frameworks, procedures, infrastructure and the environment.

B. Capacity-building workshop in the State of Palestine

22. On 25 October 2021, ESCWA organized a stakeholders workshop in the State of Palestine to discuss the report and identify the needs resulting from the analysis. Participants in the workshop discussed the results of the evaluation and made observations thereon, in preparation for their inclusion in the final report.

C. The status of transport in Lebanon

23. Officials prepared the National Connectivity Report in Lebanon to assess factors of economic, social and environmental sustainability of road transport. They assessed both the institutional and legal structures, as well as the regulatory and administrative structures related to border crossings, customs and transit procedures; they also discussed the regulatory framework for the transport of hazardous goods and perishable foodstuffs. They assessed the effectiveness of the administrative framework (including shipping and transport documentation systems) surrounding road transport modes. They analysed the efficiency and effectiveness of transport infrastructure, logistics, road traffic management and infrastructure management system. The report concluded by assessing efforts aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions, determining the age of vehicles and maintenance for vehicles as well as pollution and noise. Lebanon's national connectivity index was 55.8 per cent.

24. Based on these result, recommendations were made, including the establishment of an effective and productive transport system in terms of competition, quality and efficiency, as well as in terms of cost and sustainability. The aim is to modernize and improve road transport conditions by addressing current challenges and implementing the necessary changes in the regulatory body.

25. In detail, the report called for the development of an effective mechanism that maintains Lebanon's national security and the safety of citizens but contributes to raising the performance of the transport sector by facilitating procedures and reducing waiting, verification and inspection times. The report also noted the need to raise the current regulatory level of the transport sector to be more advanced, with clearance and inspections carried out through a joint database between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic and audit tools approved by both parties, in addition to the application of modern technologies and tracking methods. The report focused on the need to issue decrees and operational procedures relating to current laws, as well as to tighten control over their implementation, budgeting and human resources in order to keep pace with good implementation. Appropriate laws must be developed to control the quality and age of vehicles and conditions for their circulation.

26. The report stressed the importance of building the capacity of officials, technicians and administrators in all regulatory and security agencies in accordance with the requirements for the implementation of the future plan.

III. Electronic platform for transport sustainability indicators (under construction)

27. Within the framework of the project, an electronic platform is being created to assess the performance of countries in light of the indicators designed within the project and applied to participating countries. This platform will provide a self-assessment mechanism for transport sustainability by introducing assessments for each of the indicators in light of national data, in order to obtain an integrated assessment. It will be possible to include a large number of States in the platform, accompanied by a mentoring programme on how to work with indicators, self-input scores, generate reports and conduct assessments. The platform will be available in several languages, including Arabic.

IV. Conclusion

28. The importance of the project lies in the development of indicators on the sustainability of internal transport connectivity, the first of their kind. This provides an important assessment tool for identifying shortcomings in the sustainability and connectivity of the transport sector and thereby developing potential solutions. Although the project covers a limited number of States in the three regions, ESCWA calls on its member States to use the indicators developed through the electronic platform accompanying the project for self-assessment. ESCWA will provide the platform to the competent authorities as soon as it is ready and will provide the necessary technical support for national staff to conduct evaluations.
