



Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

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**Proposal for the establishment of an ESCWA centre
for advancing emissions reduction**

Summary

ESCWA proposes establishing a regional state-of-the-art centre for advancing emissions reduction. The centre will provide opportunities for regional collaboration to accelerate emissions reduction and facilitate implementation of the circular carbon economy. It will act as a platform for representing the voice of the Arab region, influence the global narrative, and develop a road map for lowering emissions. The centre will also provide a forum for collaboration between member States to address climate-related challenges through a collectively agreed strategy, and accelerate the deployment of mitigation measures and technologies and the untapped potential of negative emissions solutions. It will establish new networks and synergies with like-minded partners, and contribute to supplementing the efforts of similar international organizations.

The Commission is invited to consider the proposal for establishing the centre.

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Introduction

1. Article 2 of the Paris Agreement stipulates holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impact of climate change.
2. To achieve this, countries are aiming to reach peak global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions as soon as possible, and to achieve a balance between anthropogenic GHG emissions and removals using carbon sinks by mid-century.
3. Greenhouse gases refer to the collective group of gases that trap heat in the atmosphere. While carbon dioxide (CO₂) accounts for the overwhelming share, it is the potency of each gas (the amount of warming one ton of a gas would create relative to one ton of CO₂ over a 100-year timescale) that determines its share in GHG emissions, thus highlighting the significance of abating methane, nitrous oxide and fluorinated gases emitted across several sectors of the global economy.

I. Background

4. In 2020, emissions from energy use accounted for over 70 per cent of total GHG emissions. Although the energy sector constitutes the largest share, overall emissions span several sectors, warranting innovative, coordinated, and interlinked solutions. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that about 21-37 per cent of total GHG emissions are attributable to the food system¹ (land use, production, storage, transport, packaging, processing, retail, consumption and waste), through the release of methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxides (NO₂), both of which have much higher global warming potential than CO₂.
5. Many countries' current emission trajectories are incompatible with the commitments of the Paris Agreement, but there is increasing recognition of the need for immediate action to limit GHG emissions. Consequently, over 30 countries have announced net-zero emission targets, and more than 100 countries are considering adopting net-zero emission goals. However, these are ambitious targets that go beyond nationally determined contributions, and therefore require high-level political commitment, substantial capital inflow, and global collaboration over multiple decades.
6. Sustainable energy therefore emerges as a key component of collective efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the objectives of the Paris Agreement, and to ensure a more prosperous, equitable and sustainable future for peoples and the planet. It also enables synergies between the SDGs, while meeting the 1.5°C objective set forth in the Paris Agreement.
7. As populations continue to grow, so too will demand for water, energy and food: a closely interlinked "nexus" of sustainable development. Food therefore also lies at the heart of tackling climate change, reducing water stress, alleviating pollution and restoring lands, all of which have played a symbiotic role in calibrating temperatures and environments.
8. Mitigation action therefore results in numerous co-benefits, and contributes to the global development agenda by promoting poverty reduction, health, education and social protection, among others. Mitigation action should be accompanied by adaptation measures, including nature-based solutions, to minimize the adverse impact of climate change, reduce risks, and strengthen climate resilience. Consequently, Governments, businesses and other stakeholders must step up to drive emissions reduction through transformational partnerships.
9. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has implemented a series of regional and interregional projects aimed at building the capacity of Arab countries on climate change mitigation,

¹ IPCC, [Climate Change and Land: an IPCC special report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems](#), 2019.

through renewable energy investments; formulating energy efficiency investment projects; and promoting the water-energy-food security nexus within the context of climate change and the SDGs. Complementary activities have been implemented to support clean energy.

10. In the first meeting of the ESCWA Group of Experts on Fossil Fuels, held in Beirut on 5 December 2018, the Group recommended the creation of work programmes on curbing gas flaring and carbon capture and storage technologies. In 2020, ESCWA produced a report entitled “[Reducing gas flaring in Arab countries](#)”, highlighting the region’s high reliance on fossil fuels. Focusing on the supply side of the region’s energy vulnerability, the paper identified challenges and made recommendations on key aspects to reduce associated gas flaring opportunities to monetize captured gas.

11. At its thirteenth session, held virtually on 20 and 21 September 2021, the Energy Committee made a recommendation to the ESCWA secretariat to build the capacity of member States in formulating sustainable energy policies and addressing vulnerabilities, especially in diversifying the energy mix, improving efficiency of energy use, identifying new renewable energy uses, and developing technologies that apply the principles of the circular carbon economy and integrating them in nationally determined contributions.

12. As part of its technical cooperation services, ESCWA has developed a strategic framework for enabling the just energy transition of member States, identifying key pillars towards sustainable energy systems using circular principles and the circular carbon economy framework as a guiding approach to shaping sustainable energy pathways.

II. Need for the proposed centre

13. The Arab region is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, which threaten the livelihoods of millions by limiting the availability of arable land and drinking water as a result of higher temperatures and more frequent natural disasters. This is not only due to the Arab region’s high degree of intraregional heterogeneity in socioeconomic development and associated large differences in access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy, but also to the rapid increase in energy demand over recent decades, combined with institutional, regulatory, infrastructural and sociopolitical structures that lag in many cases behind the region’s needs.

14. The Arab region has increased its efforts to achieve climate neutrality in recent years. Under the Sustainable Development Scenario of the International Energy Agency, the region is expected to witness over 100-fold growth in renewable power generation between now and 2050 – more than any other region. At the twenty-sixth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, standout initiatives included the Global Methane Pledge to reduce emissions by 30 per cent from 2020 levels by 2030 and key statements on public support for a clean energy transition, all of which included several ESCWA member States. As at November 2022, 17 Arab States have submitted second or updated nationally determined contributions (NDCs). The overwhelming majority specify levels of GHG emissions reduction by a target year, including enhanced mitigation targets from an increased share of renewables in the energy mix, a reduction in energy consumption, and reaching specified levels of improvement in energy efficiency.

15. The proposed ESCWA centre for advancing emissions reduction aims to broker solutions supporting emissions reduction, and to catalyse action in line with the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, by providing a holistic view of major emitting sectors and adopting a systematic approach towards emissions reduction.

16. In serving the Arab region, the centre will engage in high-level policy activities, technical assistance and communication. It will also act as the region’s voice at global forums, and propose solutions to advance emissions reduction.

17. The centre will work in close collaboration with all United Nations System entities in the region, and with various global and regional partners. The following section outlines the background, purpose, key elements, vision, mission, and scope of work of the centre.

III. Vision, mission and purpose

A. Vision

18. The centre's vision is to create prosperity by catalysing regional efforts towards achieving a climate-neutral world. The centre envisages that adoption of net-zero GHG emission targets, and the framing of climate action plans that can play a crucial role towards a climate neutral world.

B. Mission

19. The centre's mission is to advance a global narrative on emissions reduction by advocating regional efforts, brokering innovative solutions, and facilitating a science-policy approach.

C. Purpose

20. The centre will provide opportunities for regional collaboration to accelerate emissions reduction and facilitate implementation of the circular carbon economy, and will act as a platform to represent the Arab region's voice so as to influence the global narrative and develop a road map for reducing emissions.

21. The centre will also provide a forum for collaboration between its members to address climate-related challenges through a collectively agreed strategy, and accelerate the deployment of mitigation measures and technologies and the untapped potential of negative emission solutions. It will establish new networks and synergies with like-minded partners, and contribute to supplementing the efforts of similar international organizations.

22. The work of the centre will be guided by the following:

(a) No two national emission reduction pathways are identical, and development strategies should be guided by global and national commitments;

(b) Collective action must be taken to achieve emissions neutrality and to ensure the "future we want" for future generations, in support of net-zero goals articulated by many countries for the coming decades;

(c) Path dependency is important, and countries must design and implement their plans in a strategic and integrated manner to enhance synergies and address trade-offs with other sectors;

(d) The conceptual framework of the circular carbon economy was endorsed by the Saudi G20 presidency as "an essential means to a low-carbon future through coordinated G20 efforts towards supporting carbon management technology innovations". The four components known as "reduce, reuse, recycle and remove", and their accompanying enablers, could be adopted as a suitable framework for addressing climate goals.

23. The centre will be dedicated to helping Arab countries better prepare and respond to climate change challenges facing the region. Targeted beneficiaries will include ministries of planning, foreign affairs, energy, agriculture, water, environment and social and economic affairs. Intergovernmental councils and interagency committees focused on the preparation and implementation of NDCs and the achievement of the SDGs will directly benefit from the services and knowledge products generated by the centre. Specialized institutions and research centres able to inform policymaking will also be targeted beneficiaries of capacity development and knowledge generation exercises, with special attention given to involving women and young graduates in the centre's training programmes to support institutional strengthening and sustainability at the national level.

IV. Way forward

24. Saudi Arabia has shown interest in supporting and hosting the centre.
