Arab Sustainable Development Report 2024 (ASDR 2024)

Expert Group Meeting (EGM)

Virtual, 7-9 November 2023

Background

ESCWA is mandated to produce a Regional Report—The Arab Sustainable Development Report—at regular intervals in support of follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda at the regional level. Specifically, ESCWA's Executive Committee Resolution 322 (December 2015) requested the Commission to implement a set of activities including: "monitoring progress made in the Arab region towards achievement of the SDGs; and the preparation of regional follow-up reports using official data."

Working under the umbrella of the Regional Collaboration Platform (RCP) and previously the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM), ESCWA is committed to lead a participatory process for the development of the ASDR, engaging all interested regional UN entities.

The ASDR 2024 in Context

Four ASDRs are to be produced within the timeframe of the 2030 Agenda: 2020, 2024, 2028, and possibly 2030 or 2031. The ASDR in those years would be published in the first quarter of the year.

While ESCWA published an ASDR in 2015, it was a thematic one and did not review all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The first ASDR to be produced after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs and as an interagency product is the ASDR 2020.

ASDR 2024 is therefore effectively the second in the series and will maintain the role and identity of the ASDR 2020. It will:

- serve as a reference document on where the Arab region stands on the 17 SDGs
- offer quantitative and qualitative analysis of each SDG and maintain a focus on interlinkages
- update regional averages where such data exists on the official indicators for each SDG
- cover 22 Arab states and provide comparative sub-regional as well as inter-regional analysis
- present information in a format that is concise and user-friendly.

The focus of ASDR 2024 (the report)

ASDR 2024 will provide a comprehensive overview of the main policy directions in Arab countries to achieve the SDGs. Taking off from ASDR 2020 and its analysis of the main barriers to achieving the SDGs in the Arab region, the report will consider policies. It will address the extent to which policy directions overcome main barriers to achievement and are in line with recommendations to dismantle them. In reviewing the **existing broad policy landscape** for each SDG, the report advances the knowledge of policy directions and trends in the region and helps to identify policy gaps.

Policy directions are not an exhaustive mapping of every single policy at the national level. Main policy areas will be identified where policies aim to achieve overarching or critical targets within a goal. Policy areas are then mapped and analyzed, and directions thereof identified.

Main policy directions will be presented along emerging trends in progress on SDG targets and indicators. Data on all indicators per SDG, where available, will be presented in regional averages, noting progress or regression from that presented in 2020.

In addition, an annex will present national averages. While it will not be possible to offer a robust analysis of the impact of each policy direction within the scope of the 2024 report, the presentation of main policy directions along with progress or regression on targets and indicators (at both regional and national levels) allows for indicative readings of the transformative potential of policy directions. The report will also identify areas where policies remain absent or less defined, and where policy gaps are detrimental to achieving SDGs.

Data in ASDR 2024

Obtained mainly from the Arab SDG Monitor, data will be reported on regional averages for the 22 Arab states as available. Change or lack of it will be noted as a trend per indicator. In addition, each SDG chapter will include a brief section highlighting developments in data availability in the region.

ASDR 2024 in the context of the COVID-19 crisis

The report will be produced as Arab countries continue to grapple with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, its related crises and impacts, and emerging challenges. Affirming the UN discourse on the centrality of the 2030 Agenda for resilient recovery, the report will flag trends in response measures within each SDG that are also significant in the medium and long term.

In addition, while noting the challenges of assessing the financing of the SDGs, the report will include a reflection on visible financing trends for each SDG, in an attempt to link policy discussions to financing in reflecting on SDG progress, even if information is often limited. This is more pressing given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and current global crises.

Methodology

As in ASDR 2020, the report combines quantitative and qualitative analysis. Expert opinion is that of the **UN interagency taskforce**, building on their collective knowledge of the SDGs in Arab countries as well as the global framework itself. The work is validated and complemented by a **Reviewers Group** drawing on the expertise of regional experts working on sustainable development priorities in the Arab region.

| 1 | Identify policy areas per SDG | For each SDG, two to three main policy areas are identified for focus. These include, for example, "trade policy", "tax policy", "labor market policy", etc. While noting that the achievement of each SDG is organically linked to interventions to achieve multiple other SDGs and at different levels of government and stakeholder action, it is possible to identify comparable and common areas of focus in public policy for each SDG. This is reflected in the way governments continue to design and implement policies.
The choice of policy areas will be determined by:
    a. Reference to policy recommendations of ASDR 2020
    b. Expert opinion—UN interagency task force |
| 2 | Map policies per policy area | Map relevant policies within each policy area for each Arab country, if available. This mapping builds on existing efforts to review the policy landscape in the region by different UN entities and is supplemented through additional research to ensure the maximum level of comprehensiveness possible. The "policy landscape" covers legislation where relevant, national strategies and sectoral strategies, depending on the specificity of each SDG. |

3	Analyse policy directions at regional and sub-regional levels	Policy directions identify a concentration of policies that aim to achieve similar results and/or target similar sectoral interventions. These are grouped as they appear as common for the region as a whole and per sub-region, as necessary. For example, there may not be policy trends specific to Middle Income Countries of the region when it comes to managing water scarcity; policy trends on combating violence against women may be unform across the region.
4	Identify data trends	The report identifies data trends—where there is progression, regression, or no change. As in the ASDR 2020, an annex will also include country level data. The data analysed here is that of the official SDG statistical framework. Data considered is that provided by the Arab SDG Monitor using UNSTATS.
5	Identify main messages related to promising policies or policy gaps	Building on the policy mapping and its review by experts, and read against the data trends, the analysis of policy directions flags policy gaps—where we are not seeing policies in the region to address a major policy area. Alternatively, it flags promising policies or those that could be scaled up or bolstered to allow for progress.

The ASDR 2024 Outline

1. **Executive Summary** – overall assessment of SDG progress in the Arab region with key messages.

2. **Umbrella chapter on Policymaking for the SDGs in the Arab region**: a contextualization chapter that considers macro trends and issues of systemic and policy concern in the context of advancing towards achieving the SDGs, which are of particular importance for Arab countries. This includes the following:

   A) The necessity of a wholesome approach to policymaking behind the SDGs; coherence, continuation, and long-term approach

   B) The domestic enabling environment

   C) The external environment and international commitments

   D) Financing the SDGs and related processes: the possibilities and the pitfalls in public and private financing

   E) Issues to consider in the engagement and contribution of non-State stakeholders: the role of the UN agencies, civil society, and the private sector

3. SDG chapters, 1-17

Each SDG chapter includes the following sections:

- **Brief qualitative assessment** of where the region stands on each SDG

- **Regional level data**: What the data says on official indicators

- **The policy landscape at regional level** for selected SDG policy areas: What are the major policy trends in the region to achieve the SDG under consideration?

- **The policy landscape at sub-regional level**, including four groups of countries: Which policies and policy patterns are specific to a given group of countries? Are there differences between subgroups of Arab countries? Are the policy trends different in the various groups of countries? Are there any "outlier" countries where policies are particularly promising or advanced?

- **Policies to leave no one behind**: This section aims at mainstreaming gender and human rights considerations, including relevant examples of national policies. Are gender and LNOB considerations addressed by policies to achieve the SDG in the region? Are there any new groups that have emerged as at risk since the publication of ASDR 2020 (for example due to the COVID-19 crisis)?

- **The financing landscape:** This section addresses the financing challenges and opportunities for achieving each SDG in the Arab countries. Is there any analysis available of financing the SDG (or policy areas) in the region? Any assessments on financing challenges? Any suggestions for innovative financing mechanisms?

- **The regional dimension**: This section highlights existing or forthcoming opportunities (or recommendations) for regional integration and cooperation that can accelerate SDG achievement within the region. It spotlights the regional dimensions of analysed policy themes, including opportunities for Arab countries to pursue or deepen cooperation that might productively advance progress on the SDGs.

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