

Arab Regional Parliamentary Forum on the 2030 Agenda The Role of Parliament in Building Back Better for All

Online, 13-14 December 2021

Programme of Work

Day 1: Monday, 13 December 2021

Beirut Time	Session
9:45 - 10:00	Online registration and accessing the platform.
10:00 - 10:15	<p>Opening remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Mounir Tabet, Deputy Executive Secretary, ESCWA (3 min) ▪ Mr. Martin Chungong, Secretary General, IPU (3 min, by video message) ▪ Mr. Khaled Abdel Shafi, Regional Hub Director, Regional Bureau of Arab States, UNDP (3 min)
10:15 – 10:45	<p>Session I – Setting the scene</p> <p>This session will set the scene for the forum by providing participants with an overview of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the progress towards achieving the SDGs. It will also present some initial observations on Arab parliaments' response to the COVID-19 crisis and situate the response in the context of achieving the SDGs and ensuring that no one is left behind.</p> <p>Presentations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on development and progress towards achieving the SDGs in the Arab region (7 min) <i>Ms. Hania Sabbidin Dimassi, ESCWA</i> - Arab parliaments response to the COVID-19 pandemic: Initial trends and findings (7 min) <i>Ms. Sara Salman, Population Affairs Officer, ESCWA</i> <p>Q&A (15 min)</p> <p>Moderator: Ms. Maisaa Youssef, Officer-in-Charge, Cluster on 2030 Agenda and SDG Coordination, ESCWA</p>
10:45 – 11:50	<p>Session II – Responding to the COVID-19 crisis: Parliaments' representative and lawmaking roles</p> <p>In times of crisis the legislative powers of the executive are formally or informally boosted to ensure quick responses and immediate implementation of necessary measures, which is why crises are dubbed as the "Executive hour". Yet, Parliaments continue to play an important lawmaking role during crisis either through scrutinizing the draft laws submitted by the executive or submitting member bills that represent their constituents' concerns.</p>

Beirut Time	Session
	<p>This session discusses the extent to which Arab parliaments were able to contribute to an inclusive and sustainable response to the COVID-19 pandemic through their representative and lawmaking functions. Parliamentarians will share their experiences in ensuring that the policies adopted represented their constituencies concerns and priorities, especially the most vulnerable amongst them. They will also discuss their role in ensuring a more inclusive policy making process and contributing to raising awareness at the level of constituencies. The session will offer an opportunity for collective reflection on how the parliaments response to the COVID-19 crisis contributes to the progress towards achieving the SDGs.</p> <p>Open Discussion: Exchange of parliamentary practices and experiences.</p> <p><i>Guiding questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What laws have parliaments submitted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic? How did these laws address the SDGs, and did they target the most vulnerable? • Were parliaments able to scrutinize the draft laws submitted by the executive? What were the challenges? • Were parliaments able to ensure that the national responses to COVID-19 supported a green recovery? • How did parliamentarians work to ensure citizen participation despite the mobility restriction measures? • Have MPs been successful in reflecting their constituents’ priorities in the policies adopted? • To what extent, have parliamentarians been able to meet and/or consult citizens, including the underrepresented, marginalized or vulnerable segments of the society (e.g. poor people, minorities, women, young people) to ensure their needs are duly taken into account? <p>Moderator: Mr. Azmi Shuaibi, Anti-Corruption Advisor, Aman, Palestine</p>
11:50 – 12:00	Break
12:00 – 13:00	<p>Session III- Responding to the COVID-19 crisis: Parliaments’ budgeting and oversight roles</p> <p>Parliaments’ oversight role during crisis is critical to ensure that response policies adopted by the executive target those in need and that programs are implemented efficiently and do not leave anyone behind. Equally important is parliament’s role in monitoring funding allocation and spending in response to crisis despite tight timelines to pass budgets and the increased potential for extra-budgetary funds and spending.</p> <p>This session will focus on Arab parliaments experience in overseeing the executive during the COVID-19 pandemic and their role in scrutinizing the budgets. The discussion will serve to identify some of the promising practices from the region and the factors for success, as well as the challenges faced, and lessons learnt to strengthen the role of parliament in implementing SDGs despite possible crisis.</p>

Beirut Time	Session
	<p>Open Discussion: Exchange of parliamentary practices and experiences</p> <p><i>Guiding Questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were parliaments able to monitor the executive’s performance in response to the COVID-19 pandemic? Was the implementation of the SDG’s taken into consideration when overseeing the executive? • What were some factors that supported this role? What challenges were faced? • Were parliaments able to scrutinize and amend the budgets to ensure funding and resources were invested effectively to also support sustainable and inclusive development? What were some of the challenges? • How can parliaments strengthen their oversight and budgeting roles to effectively contribute to SDGs implementation despite possible crises? <p>Presentation</p> <p>- Budgeting for the SDGs: Making the most of public resources (5 min) <i>Ms. Aleksandra Blagojevic, Programme Manager for International Development, IPU</i></p> <p>Moderator: Mr. Adel Alsarawi, Former MP, Kuwait National Assembly</p>

Day 2: Tuesday, 14 December 2021

Beirut Time	Session
9:45 - 10:00	Accessing the platform.
10:00 – 11:30	<p>Session IV- Building forward better to ensure that no one is left behind: the role of Arab parliaments in protecting older persons</p> <p>Older persons are one of the most vulnerable population groups that have been negatively impacted by the pandemic. In addition to the increased health and mortality risks posed by COVID-19, older persons suffered from increased levels of isolation that negatively impacted their mental and physical health, limited their ability to receive or access care needs due to mobility restrictions, and heightened their income instability. Given that older persons’ priorities and issues cut across the different SDGs, including issues related to poverty, health, education, nutrition, labor, equality, urban development, and data among others, getting back on track to achieve the SDGs and ensuring that no one is left behind, requires that building back efforts are sensitive and responsive to older persons concerns.</p> <p>Building on regional attempts to strengthen the legislative framework in this area, this session will zoom in on parliament’s role in ensuring that the needs and specificities of older persons are duly considered, including in times of crises. To this end, participants will share their parliaments’ efforts to address the needs of older persons in their different functions. This session also offers the opportunity for presenting the regional draft law for older persons that could guide countries efforts to further protect older persons rights particularly in times of crisis.</p>

Presentations

- The guiding draft law for older persons.
League of Arab States
- Country presentations (2-3 to be identified) on their efforts.

Open Discussion: Exchange of parliamentary practices and experiences.

Guiding questions:

- Have older persons priorities clearly been identified by your country?
- How have parliaments ensured that older persons are not left behind, especially during the COVID-19 crisis?
- Have parliamentarians received information or discussed the multiple factors (e.g. gender, origin, disability, etc.) that could make older persons even more vulnerable?
- What kind of approaches could be implemented to ensure that the voices of older persons are heard and taken into account in the key parliamentary functions?

Moderator: Ms. Sara Salman, ESCWA

11:30 – 11:40

Break

11:40 – 12:40

Session V – Parliaments’ institutional responses to COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic had a disruptive impact on all institutions including parliaments given the lock down measures and social distancing requirements enforced in most countries, which posed additional hurdles for achieving transformative change to more equitable, inclusive, and just societies. Shortly after its outbreak, institutions recognized that the traditional ways of working and communicating were no longer viable, and the need to find new ways of doing business became urgent. In response, parliaments have adopted a series of innovative measures to enable its members and staff to carry on with their functions as efficiently as possible.

This session will provide a platform for Arab parliaments’ Secretary Generals, senior parliamentary staff, and parliamentarians to present the administrative measures adopted during the pandemic, such as reforms to rules of procedure, teleworking, electronic voting, etc. Participants will also discuss the challenges faced and reflect on the lessons learnt on parliamentary work during crisis.

Presentations

- Lessons from the Pandemic
Mr. Andy Williamson, Senior Researcher, Centre for Innovation in Parliament, IPU (5 minutes)
- Importance of institutionalizing the use of evidence in parliamentary work (TBC)
Mr. Fadi Al Jardali, Professor of Health Policy and Systems, American University of Beirut



	<p><i>Guiding questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What measures have parliaments adopted to ensure their operation during the pandemic? • Did parliaments adopt institutional mechanisms to respond to the pandemic (ex. form committees, adopt parliamentary strategies, etc.)? • How did the parliament communicate with its staff, members, and other institutions? • Which new measures proved to increase the efficiency of the parliamentary work and could be systematically incorporated in the medium and long term to improve Arab parliaments' performance? <p>Open Discussion: Exchange of parliamentary practices and experiences (55 min).</p> <p>Moderator: Mr. Mohamed Agati, Researcher & Director, Arab Forum for Alternatives</p>
12:40 – 13: 00	<p>Wrap-up: The way forward and closing remarks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key messages that emanated from the workshop. • Recommendations for future activities of the Parliamentary Forum.