

**Expert Group Meeting for**  
***The Middle Class in Arab Countries Report***

UN House, Beirut 9-10 May, 2023

**Information Note**

## Introduction

It is widely believed that a large and secure middle class is advantageous to countries for various reasons: lowering inequalities and polarization, improving savings and accumulation of human capital, and breeding entrepreneurs for better productivity, innovation and employment opportunities. Entrepreneurs especially in the new high technology economy typically come from the middle class. Finally, middle class values of tolerance, hard work, and ambitions to get ahead are considered important for political stability and functioning democracies.

In his note on “Our Common Agenda” report by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), UN Secretary-General António Guterres addresses the subject matter by declaring that ***“The future of the middle class depends on building an inclusive and sustainable economy that provides decent work and economic opportunities for all, regardless of gender, race, or social status.”***<sup>1</sup> A sizable number of the middle class lacks formal employment status, legal protection, access to finance, or pension coverage, making them vulnerable to economic shocks. Not only the working poor, but members of the middle class including artists, small entrepreneurs and contractual white collar professionals, typically work in unregulated, informal sectors. At the same time, the new technology and the drive for automation have replaced jobs traditionally held by skilled professionals. New social, labor, economic and tax policies directed at formalization of the labor market are needed in order to increase legal and social protection coverage for the needy poor as well as members of the middle class.

Although policy concerns about the fate and fortune of the middle class abound, there is little agreement on who counts as middle class. Typically, middle class boundaries are measured in terms of distance from median income and/or poverty threshold or in terms of their similar position in the labor market (e.g., occupation). However, the decline in the size of the middle class may indicate income ‘polarization’ and not necessarily shrinking or ‘missing’ class. Alternatively, the middle class is considered a social class, with class boundaries delineated according to one’s position in the labor market.

ESCWA has previously published its *“Arab Middle Class Measurement and Role in Driving Change”* report in 2014. In continuation of its previous activities, ESCWA is preparing a new report on the middle class using a social definition of class. The report provides a conceptual framework for measuring the middle class while pinpointing its key features, growth challenges, and needed policy interventions to consolidate its role as a growth engine for development and social stability in Arab region. This report aims to identify a number of mechanisms that governments can pursue to maintain stability and protect the middle class from shock, vulnerability and economic hardship particularly after dealing with the ramifications of COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukrainian war. Preliminary findings from the study will be presented and discussed in the expert group meeting.

To this end, ESCWA Gender Justice, Population and Inclusive Development Cluster is organizing an EGM on the *Middle Class in Arab Countries* report, to be held at ESCWA premises, UN-House in Beirut – Lebanon during the period 9-10 May 2023.

---

<sup>1</sup> World Moving Backwards on Sustainable Development Goals, Secretary General of the United Nations, <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sgsm21196.doc.htm>.

## **A. Objectives**

The meeting aims to achieve the following goals:

- To discuss the methodological framework adopted to measure the middle class
- To highlight gaps in available Labor Force Survey (LFS) and Household income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) micro data that hamper middle class measurement
- To present and discuss the preliminary findings on the middle class using data from six Arab countries. The following themes will be discussed:
  1. Conceptual framework for measuring the middle class
  2. The size, characteristics, and dynamics of the Arab middle class
  3. Middle class poverty and vulnerability
  4. Middle class informality
  5. Social protection status of the middle class
  6. Impact of fiscal policy on the middle class
  7. Skills of the middle class
  8. Impact of conflict and social movements on the middle class
- To critically evaluate through open discussions current and future policies aimed at nurturing the middle class in Arab countries and impeding its further erosion.

## **B. Participants**

Relevant international and regional experts, public policy researchers, academic and non-academic specialists with diverse backgrounds in social class formation, inequality, social protection, political economy, and developmental economics.

## **C. Documents**

- Copy of the draft report on the middle class in Arab countries
- EGM agenda

## **D. Language**

The languages of the workshop will be English and Arabic. Simultaneous interpretation will be provided during the meeting.

## **E. Venue and time of the workshop**

The meeting will be held during the period 9-10 May 2023 at ESCWA premises (UN-House) in Beirut – Lebanon.

## **F. Administrative arrangements**

Participants are kindly requested to make their own arrangements to get the visa from the Lebanese embassy in their home country (if needed).

Upon their arrival to Beirut airport, they will need to hire a taxi to reach the hotel.

ESCWA will make the necessary administrative and logistical arrangements to cover their travel and participation as per UN rules and regulations.

A list of hotels will be sent to the participants for ease of reference; participants can make their own arrangements for hotel accommodation or can be assisted by the organizers.

Participants are requested to send a scanned copy of their passport and to fill the attached registration forms.

For more information regarding the logistical arrangements, kindly contact: Mrs. Zeina Sinno at the following e-mail: [sinnoz@un.org](mailto:sinnoz@un.org)

## **G. For further information, kindly contact:**

Mr. Marwan Khawaja  
Chief, Demographic & Social Statistics Section  
Statistics Division  
UN-ESCWA  
T. +961 1 978 365  
F. +961 1 981 510  
E-mail: [khawaja@un.org](mailto:khawaja@un.org)

Ms. Zeina Sinno  
Statistics Assistant  
Statistics Division  
UN-ESCWA  
Tel : + 961 1 978 358  
Fax: + 961 1 981 510  
E-mail: [sinnoz@un.org](mailto:sinnoz@un.org)

Ms. Wafaa El Baba  
Research Assistant  
Statistics Division  
UN-ESCWA  
Tel: +961 1 978 726  
Fax: +961 1 981 510  
E-mail: [wafaa.elbaba@un.org](mailto:wafaa.elbaba@un.org)