



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



**Regional Workshop  
Launch of the regional report  
“Social Expenditure Monitor for Arab States: Toward Making Budgets More  
Equitable, Efficient and Effective to Achieve the SDGs”**

**Mezzanine Floor, UN House, Beirut  
24 November 2022**

**INFORMATION NOTE**

**I. BACKGROUND**

Public social expenditure underpins the well-being and economic potential of individuals and entire societies. As repeatedly demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, it protects poor and vulnerable populations, and stabilizes small businesses and economies. It fuels progress on education, poverty and inequality that is directly linked to realizing the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Over the last 60 years, the Arab States have used social welfare provisions to make strides towards improving human well-being. Starting from relatively weak social indicators on the eve of their independence, most leapfrogged forward on access to education and health. In the last two decades, the region has closed some gaps between the rich and poor and reduced gender disparities in health and education.

At the same time, shortfalls in public social expenditure remain, sustaining poverty and constraining more dynamic, inclusive economic growth. The Arab States not only spend less on social expenditure than the global average but also tend to spend less efficiently. This wastes billions of dollars in some cases, adding up to a significant share of gross domestic product (GDP). In the wake of the devastating COVID-19 pandemic, and against weakening social contracts, global food and energy crises, and unsure growth prospects, adequate, efficient and equitable public social spending is more important than ever. Recovery and resilience to future shocks will largely depend on it.

ESCWA, in partnership with Jordan and Tunisia, developed the Social Expenditure Monitor (SEM) concept and dashboard to inform current budget choices and “smart spending” for the SDGs. UNDP and UNICEF have joined the initiative given that social policy and related fiscal aspects are placed at the hearth of their daily work in the region.

This report titled “**Social Expenditure Monitor (SEM) for Arab States: Toward Making Public Budgets More Equitable, Efficient and Effective to Achieve the SDGs,**” jointly produced by ESCWA, UNDP, and UNICEF, offers a pioneering assessment of social policy spending in the Arab region, with detailed analysis on trends and issues, as well as recommendations on how it can help accelerate towards the SDGs. The recommendations help optimize links between expenditure choices and macroeconomic objectives, support the need for better statistics and strengthen advocacy for

much-needed fiscal policy reforms as well as efforts to address systemic Public Financial Management challenges. The report will also provide useful inputs to the forthcoming 2022 Arab Sustainable Development Report.

## **II. OBJECTIVES**

The main objective of the launch event is to disseminate key findings and recommendations of the report toward better understanding the landscape of social expenditure in Arab States and assess the challenges and opportunities for optimizing links between expenditure choices and macroeconomic objectives. Addressing the challenges of enhancing social expenditure by taking into account equity, adequacy and efficiency and addressing systemic Public Financial Management challenges are some of the key concerns that the report deals with. In this launch event that envisages participation from government, academia, civil society and international development community, the main objectives of the event are the following:

- Disseminate the key findings of the report with regard to landscape of social expenditures in the Arab States
- Highlight the challenges of adequacy, equity and efficiency of social expenditure and overall public finance management
- Discuss the policy recommendations toward addressing the challenges in enhancing social spending and fostering the SDGs and the inclusive and sustainable recovery from the pandemic and other ongoing as well as future shocks

## **III. PARTICIPANTS**

The launch event will foster dialogue among participants represented through various entities of government including finance, social and planning and economy across the region, academia, members of the United Nations System, regional organizations and international experts engaged in social and fiscal policy reforms in Arab States toward progressing on the SDGs will also attend.

- **Government:** The report analyses social expenditures of eight Arab States in more detail (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Sudan and Tunisia). The focus is on these countries to have representation from ministries of finance, social affairs and planning and/or economy. The participation from other Arab States is requested from ministry of finance.
- **International Agencies:** IMF, World Bank, UN Agencies
- **Civil Society with regional focus:** Academia, Carnegie Middle East Centre, Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND)

## **IV. ORGANISING PARTNERS**

The launch event is organized in partnership between United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN ESCWA), UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States (RBAS), and UNICEF Middle East and North Africa Regional Office (UNICEF MENARO).

## V. DATE AND VENUE

The one-day regional workshop will be hosted by ESCWA at the United Nations House in Beirut, Lebanon on Thursday, 24 November 2022 in the Mezzanine Hall conference room. The opening session will commence at 9:30 am and the meeting will conclude by 5:00 pm on the same day. Lunch and coffee breaks will be offered at the meeting venue.

## VI. FORMAT OF THE MEETING

The meeting will be organized in an onsite format, with online access provided to those who register to participate online. All registered participants will receive the online link to the meeting one week before the event.

For participants attending the meeting onsite, pedestrian access to the United Nations House is provided through the Gibran Khalil Gibran Garden entrance in front of the building. Participants are kindly asked to bring photographic identification with them and to allow sufficient time to pass through security to collect their meeting badge.

## VII. LANGUAGE

The meeting will be conducted in the English language. Simultaneous translation will be provided between the Arabic and English languages for onsite and online participants.

## VIII. REGISTRATION

**Registration for participation is requested by 21 October 2022** via indico portal through the following link <https://indico.un.org/event/1002997/>. The participants need to upload a scanned copy of the national passport, a passport size photograph, and the letter of nomination or invitation confirmation.

Tickets will be issued following registration to the Indico portal and **no later than three weeks prior to the meeting date**. Ticket changes will be the subsequent responsibility of the participant.

Sponsorship includes roundtrip air travel to Beirut, a daily subsistence allowance to cover hotel, meals and incidental expenses for up to two nights, and a terminal allowance to facilitate ground transportation to and from the airport. Roundtrip tickets are issued in economy class on the least expensive direct route, in accordance with United Nations Financial Rules and Regulations.

For online participation, the date of registration can be one week prior to the event.

## IX. ACCOMMODATION AND TRANSPORTATION

Participants are requested to arrange their own hotel reservations by directly contacting a hotel of their choice in Beirut. The organizers can provide registered participants a list of hotels that offer preferential room rates upon request. All participants are welcome to either do their bookings directly with the hotel or through ESCWA upon sending a request via email to the meeting organizers (Ms. Siham El Sabeh, [elsabeh@un.org](mailto:elsabeh@un.org)). All hotel expenses are to be settled by participating guests directly with the hotel. Participants are to arrange their own local ground transport between the airport, hotel and the United Nations House. It is recommended to arrange airport pick-up from the airport through their selected hotel.

## **X. ENTRY VISAS**

Participants are requested to secure their own visas for travel to Lebanon, as may be necessary. The list of countries whose nationals can secure a visa upon arrival to Lebanon is available at: <https://www.general-security.gov.lb/en/posts/38>. ESCWA can coordinate with the Government of Lebanon to assist in obtaining entry visas for participants who are unable to secure visas in their home countries. Those in need of such assistance should complete their registration for the meeting and send a colour, scanned copy of their national passport to ESCWA no later than **21 October 2022**. Sponsored participants shall submit a visa fees receipt to be able to redeem visa expenses/cost.

## **XI. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Further information and background materials to inform the meeting are available at: <https://www.unescwa.org/events/social-expenditure-monitor-arab-states-launch-regional-report>

## **XII. CORRESPONDENCE**

For any inquiries, kindly contact the following meeting focal points:

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