



Report

Fifteenth session of the Committee on Social Development Cairo, 3 June 2024

Summary

The Committee on Social Development of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held its fifteenth session in Cairo on 3 June 2024. The session focused on the issue of inequality in times of crisis in the Arab region, based on three documents addressing inequality reduction in times of crisis, growth and inequality challenges and responses, and the middle class in the Arab region.

The agenda included items related to following up on the implementation of recommendations made by the Committee on Social Development since its fourteenth session, as well as technical cooperation activities and activities of the Intersessional Group of Experts on Disability and the Expert Group on Social Protection Reform.

The present report sets out the recommendations made by the Committee at the end of the session, and the main topics discussed by participants.

Contents

| | <i>Paragraphs</i> | <i>Page</i> |
|--|-------------------|-------------|
| Introduction | 1–2 | 3 |
| <i>Chapter</i> | | |
| I. Recommendations made by the Committee on Social Development at its fifteenth session | 3–5 | 3 |
| A. Recommendations to ESCWA member States | 4 | 3 |
| B. Recommendations to the ESCWA secretariat | 5 | 4 |
| II. Topics for discussion | 6–51 | 4 |
| A. Follow-up issues | 6–49 | 4 |
| B. Date and venue of the sixteenth session of the Committee on Social Development | 50 | 10 |
| C. Other matters | 51 | 10 |
| III. Adoption of the recommendations made by the Committee at its fifteenth session | 52 | 11 |
| IV. Organization of work | 53–59 | 11 |
| A. Date and venue | 53 | 11 |
| B. Opening | 54–55 | 11 |
| C. Participants | 56 | 11 |
| D. Election of officers | 57 | 11 |
| E. Agenda and organization of work | 58 | 11 |
| F. Documents | 59 | 11 |
| Annexes | | |
| I. List of participants | | 12 |
| II. List of documents | | 15 |

Introduction

1. The Committee on Social Development of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held its fifteenth session in Cairo on 3 June 2024, pursuant to resolution 198 (XVII) of 31 May 1994, endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution [1994/27](#) of 26 July 1994 concerning the establishment of a committee on social development at ESCWA, and in accordance with the recommendations issued at the fourteenth session of the Committee on Social Development, held in Beirut on 8 June 2023.
2. The Committee on Social Development aims to increase the participation of member States in setting priorities and formulating recommendations to promote social development in the Arab region, and to follow up on their implementation. The present report sets out the recommendations made by the Committee at its fifteenth session, including recommendations to ESCWA member States and to the ESCWA secretariat, the main topics for discussion, and the most prominent points raised by participants.

I. Recommendations made by the Committee on Social Development at its fifteenth session

3. At the close of its fifteenth session, the Committee on Social Development adopted a set of recommendations, some addressed to member States and others to the ESCWA secretariat.

A. Recommendations to ESCWA member States

4. The Committee on Social Development made the following recommendations to member States:
 - (a) Welcome progress in implementing the activities set out in the ESCWA programme plan on social development issues, and in carrying out the technical cooperation activities presented to member States;
 - (b) Take note of the activities of the Intersessional Group of Experts on Disability and the Expert Group on Social Protection Reform; and request the Intersessional Group of Experts on Disability to focus on raising awareness of ways to achieve inclusive community-based development, and the Expert Group on Social Protection Reform to expand social protection coverage to include informal and irregular workers;
 - (c) Reaffirm the commitment to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Goals, especially Goal 10 on reducing inequality within and between countries; and acknowledge the efforts of Arab countries to address inequality, noting that disparities have persisted, and a decline in efforts may occur owing to the impact of multiple and interrelated crises;
 - (d) Emphasize the importance of integrating inequality reduction into national development strategies, policies and programmes, so as to ensure that economic growth benefits all segments of society, especially vulnerable groups;
 - (e) Develop and implement comprehensive strategies to mitigate the impact of multiple crises on equality, prioritize vulnerable groups in recovery and resilience efforts, establish early warning systems to mitigate crisis risks, and adopt flexible policies to respond to shocks through effective and efficient social protection systems;
 - (f) Welcome the Multidimensional Inequality Framework, noting the importance of its adaptation at the national level, as a tool to assist policymakers in analysing the impact of multiple and interrelated crisis risks on national efforts to reduce inequality; and formulate policies that mitigate their impact on the most vulnerable groups;

(g) Rethink existing growth strategies to address rising poverty rates by focusing on increasing decent work opportunities, adopting policies that promote equal opportunities in the labour market, increasing investment in quality health and education, and implementing structural economy reforms;

(h) Work to achieve complementarity between economic and social reform policies, taking into account their effects on the most vulnerable groups and on middle-class sectors that lack social protection.

B. Recommendations to the ESCWA secretariat

5. The Committee on Social Development made the following recommendations to the ESCWA secretariat:

(a) Study the various forms of social and economic inequality, and provide technical support to member States that wish to develop national policies addressing inequality;

(b) Provide technical support to member States in developing methodologies to calculate material and multidimensional poverty through the development of policy tools that improve strategy and policy development;

(c) Support the efforts of member States and the Expert Group on Social Protection Reform to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of social protection systems;

(d) Support the efforts of member States and the Intersessional Group of Experts on Disability to integrate disability issues into development plans and achieve inclusive community-based development;

(e) Continue to convene the Arab Forum for Equality as a multilateral platform to exchange experiences, learn about best practices, and promote South-South learning to reduce inequality, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in accordance with available resources;

(f) Continue to coordinate with regional organizations, such as the League of Arab States, and with United Nations organizations on issues of common interest.

II. Topics for discussion

A. Follow-up issues

1. *Implementation of activities under the ESCWA programme plan and of recommendations made by the Committee on Social Development at its fourteenth session*
(Agenda item 4)

6. On the basis of document [E/ESCWA/C.2/2024/3](#), the representative of the ESCWA secretariat made a presentation on progress in implementing the activities of the ESCWA programme plan since the fourteenth session and the recommendations made by the Committee at that session. She said that the sessions of the Committee on Social Development were now being held annually instead of biennially, and that this was the first time that an annual meeting was being held. She explained the work of ESCWA, which included providing knowledge by preparing studies, analysing global trends and their impact on the Arab region, conducting research, developing computational methodologies, and proposing advanced methods to present a unified vision. A key example was the multidimensional poverty approach, which had resulted in a regional agreement on a common approach. She added that ESCWA activities also included the development of policy tools to facilitate clear and effective knowledge transfer to decision makers.

7. She gave a full account of the work of ESCWA, addressing the different topics it handled, the social groups it targeted, and the various partners it worked with, including United Nations bodies, research

institutions and universities. She also explained the various types of ESCWA publications and products, and discussed the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning in ESCWA policy tools to enhance measurement, efficiency and accuracy. She highlighted new publications in the areas of social management, both at the thematic level and at the level of vulnerable groups.

2. Technical cooperation activities (Agenda item 5)

8. On the basis of document [E/ESCWA/C.2/2024/4](#), the representative of the ESCWA secretariat presented the technical cooperation activities undertaken by ESCWA in the field of social development. She explained that the technical cooperation programme was mostly based on requests received from member States, and stressed the importance of receiving those requests through official channels to enable proper allocation of human and financial resources. In the same context, she noted the importance of flexibility and quick responses to requests. She indicated some of the challenges that ESCWA faced in that regard, namely States' slow response after sending requests, which affected the ability of ESCWA to respond. She noted the ability of technical support programmes to translate the knowledge produced by ESCWA into technical programmes to develop practical policies that took into account the specificities of each country, and commended the role of those programmes in promoting knowledge exchange and South-South cooperation, thus creating networking opportunities among Arab countries and with countries from other regions such as Latin American countries.

9. She said that there was an increasing number of requests for technical support in the field of social development, representing more than one third of technical support requests submitted to ESCWA. She noted that ESCWA provided technical support both at the thematic level, such as in relation to poverty reduction, equality, social protection, employment, social justice and urban development, and at the target-group level, including women, young persons, persons with disabilities, older persons and migrants. She presented ESCWA activities in those areas during the past year, including technical consultations, capacity-building and project implementation.

10. ESCWA focused on strengthening technical cooperation with member States with the aim of shifting from material poverty to multidimensional poverty by developing methodologies, assisting States in calculating multidimensional poverty, and preparing strategies to reduce it. ESCWA allocated the effort, time and financial and human resources to reducing inequalities, improving decent work and increasing the efficiency of social protection as an effective policy to reduce multidimensional poverty.

11. ESCWA was keen to support vulnerable groups, implementing programmes to integrate persons with disabilities into the labour market, designing electronic platforms for national women's machineries to support gender equality, and supporting several countries in developing national strategies for migration, older persons and persons with disabilities.

12. The representative of the secretariat explained that ESCWA was able to adopt an integrated approach to technical support, given the multiplicity and harmony of its existing competencies, which allowed it to respond to the specific needs of each country.

13. The discussion was moderated by Mr. Hector Hajjar, Minister of Social Affairs of Lebanon, in his capacity as chair of the current session, and participants commended ESCWA for its technical support. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Oman stressed the need to publish ESCWA reports in Arabic first or in Arabic and English simultaneously, so that countries could comment thereon and correct some of the statements and terminology contained therein.

14. The representative of Tunisia asked about the role of ESCWA in responding to the catastrophic situation resulting from the war, genocide and starvation in Gaza and the wars in the Sudan and Yemen, and stressed the need to identify the party responsible for those inhumane acts.

15. The representative of the Sudan called for continuing technical cooperation efforts that had begun before the war in the Sudan in the areas of social protection, multidimensional poverty and older persons. He welcomed the annual meetings of the Committee on Social Development, which helped to discuss the rapid changes faced by countries.

16. The representative of Morocco recommended marketing ESCWA publications in regional and international forums instead of only publishing them on the website, and advised ESCWA to carry out follow-up activities after publishing studies and reports.

17. The representative of Libya requested technical support in the areas of poverty and social protection, and hoped that reports would be sent to countries through official channels.

18. The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic requested that the Ministry of Social Affairs serve as a focal point to facilitate communication with ESCWA, and expressed his wish for technical support in preparing the national social register and evaluating the social protection system.

19. The representative of Somalia said that ESCWA needed to support countries facing occupation and conflict, and stressed the importance of providing social support at that critical stage.

20. In the same context, the representative of the State of Palestine emphasized the importance of ESCWA efforts in documenting and analysing the reality on the ground through studies used by countries so as to develop intervention plans and future scenarios, and requested support from all assisting parties to stop the genocide against Palestinians in all the occupied Palestinian territory.

21. In response, the representative of the secretariat thanked State representatives for their comments. She said that ESCWA relied mainly on data received from countries to conduct its studies, and would sometimes resort to expert meetings to discuss the results. National studies, however, were often prepared by ESCWA in collaboration with countries. She stressed that ESCWA work was not limited to preparing studies, but also to transforming them into knowledge bases that guided regional dialogues held by ESCWA and led to the formulation of national policies.

22. Regarding the war on Gaza, the representative of the secretariat highlighted the socioeconomic role of ESCWA, and referred to the policy brief and studies issued in that regard. She noted current ESCWA efforts to support the Palestinian State in developing a national recovery plan and a plan to upskill young people in Palestine. She referred to the ESCWA Governance and Conflict Prevention Cluster, which specialized in conflict issues.

23. The representative of the secretariat described ESCWA efforts in that area as cumulative, explaining that they had begun before the latest war on Gaza, and referred to the attention given to the war in the last ESCWA ministerial session held in December 2023. He said that about 25 per cent of the technical support budget was allocated to support Arab least developed countries. He noted that technical cooperation provided to the Sudan had continued over the past years despite the circumstances, adding that ESCWA was prepared to receive new requests.

24. He said that ESCWA focal points were identified by Governments to avoid duplication of communication channels. Therefore, countries wishing to change their focal point should discuss the matter with the Government.

3. Activities of the Intersessional Group of Experts on Disability (Agenda item 6)

25. On the basis of document [E/ESCWA/C.2/2024/5](#), the representative of the secretariat made a presentation on the activities of the Intersessional Group of Experts on Disability. She said that the

Intersessional Group had emanated from the Committee on Social Development, and aimed to exchange experiences and good practices among member States in the field of disability. The Intersessional Group, established in 2015, brought together senior government officials concerned with disability, and met annually to discuss the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. She presented the outcome of the eighth meeting of the Intersessional Group, held on 15 November 2023, which had tackled the protection of persons with disabilities in times of war. At the meeting, a policy brief on the correlation between disability and multidimensional poverty was discussed, as well as progress made in achieving digital accessibility for persons with disabilities and the launch of the Arab Digital Inclusion Platform developed by ESCWA. She noted that the Intersessional Group had participated in the final meeting of the ESCWA regional project on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market in the Arab region. At the meeting, participants discussed the policy of inclusive employment in the Arab region, and shared the analysis results of units intended to measure the barriers preventing persons with disabilities from entering the labour market.

26. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Libya asked about the mechanism of establishing the Intersessional Group of Experts on Disability and nominating representatives of member States. The representative of the secretariat explained that ESCWA used expert groups as a mechanism to exchange experiences and good practices among member States. She added that group members were elected by member States, and mentioned the name of the Libyan expert in the Intersessional Group of Experts on Disability.

27. The representative of Kuwait praised the studies prepared by ESCWA on the integration of persons with disabilities in the labour market. She addressed the issue of persons with severe intellectual disabilities, noting that their integration into education and work could face greater challenges, and that they might need rehabilitation instead of education. The representative of the secretariat explained the importance of inclusive education, and the need to link it to the integration of persons with disabilities into work and society. He said that there were many solutions for that challenge, and that ESCWA was ready to provide technical support should Kuwait wish to submit a request for cooperation in that field.

28. The representative of Lebanon commended ESCWA efforts in supporting his country formulate national strategies, and asked about the possibility of coordination between countries at similar stages of developing their national strategies. The representative of the secretariat explained that that type of coordination was carried out by ESCWA, and was already taking place between several countries.

29. The representative of Egypt noted the crises in the region and the obstacles they imposed on equality, stressing the importance of developing a road map that allowed member States to deal with crises. She also acknowledged the gap in the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market, despite a clear focus on them since 2018.

30. Participants also discussed the topics of the next Committee session, and agreed on priority topics for member States, namely strengthening the role of national coordination councils and mechanisms, raising awareness on the importance of integrating persons with disabilities into the labour market, strengthening the role of organizations in developing the skills of persons with disabilities, and coordinating with representatives of chambers of commerce in the Arab region.

4. Activities of the Expert Group on Social Protection Reform (Agenda item 7)

31. On the basis of document [E/ESCWA/C.2/2024/6](#), the Committee considered the item on the activities of the Expert Group on Social Protection Reform. The representative of the secretariat made a presentation on the main activities undertaken by the Expert Group in Arab countries during the period between the fourteenth and fifteenth sessions of the Committee. She introduced the Group and its role in providing a platform for cooperation, coordination and exchange of experiences, knowledge and good practices in the field of social protection, and in integrating relevant topics into national policies, strategies and programmes.

32. The Expert Group held its eighth meeting in Beirut on 9 June 2023, in which it addressed the issue of social insurance, coverage of the so-called "missing middle", and the tools that ESCWA had developed and put at the disposal of member States to raise the efficiency and effectiveness of social assistance programmes. The Expert Group held its ninth meeting in Muscat on 21 and 22 February 2024, in partnership with the Omani Ministry of Social Development. The meeting focused on the issue of graduating the poor from social assistance programmes, empowering them economically through asset transfer programmes, and linking them to the labour market. The meeting also considered the economic impact of social protection programmes, especially cash assistance, and presented a proposal to develop an electronic platform for social protection for the Arab region.

33. State representatives commented on the Expert Group's working mechanism, and requested that the secretariat continue to support the efforts of member States and the Expert Group to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of those systems.

34. The representative of Libya stressed the need to communicate with the focal point of the Expert Group in Arab countries through the relevant ministry, with a view to preserving institutional memory, especially in the light of the circumstances prevailing in some countries requiring changes in the functions and tasks of senior government officials. In response, the representative of the secretariat said that ESCWA would continue to send copies of its correspondences with focal points to the relevant ministries to ensure they were informed.

35. The representative of Oman indicated the need for close follow-up with relevant ministries to verify latest data and information owing to delays in announcing them on official websites. The representative of the ESCWA secretariat took note of the observation and confirmed that she had prepared detailed lists to be sent to countries to obtain the most up-to-date information to be included in ESCWA reports, in particular the ESCWA Annual Digest of Social Protection Reforms in the Arab region.

5. Reducing inequality in times of crisis (Agenda item 8)

36. On the basis of document [E/ESCWA/C.2/2024/7](#), the Committee on Social Development considered the item on reducing inequality in times of crisis. The representative of the ESCWA secretariat presented two new analytical frameworks developed by ESCWA in the areas of inequality and multiple crises, and explained that ESCWA focused on the nexus between the two, especially given the increasing crises in the region, including earthquakes in Morocco and the Syrian Arab Republic, conflict in the Sudan, floods in Libya, and the war on Gaza, all of which had affected a significant number of people. The region was also facing several risks such as drought, water scarcity, ongoing conflicts, hyperinflation, the collapse of national currencies, and institutional instability. Despite growing needs, financial assistance had declined and United Nations agencies had received only a third of the requested resources, forcing them to reduce assistance. It was therefore important to consider the correlation between inequality and multiple and interrelated crises.

37. The representative of the ESCWA secretariat presented the first framework, which categorized crisis risks into four categories: climate crisis; conflicts, war and occupation; economic crisis; and institutional crisis. Twelve indicators were used to measure the risk of crises as high, moderate or low. She expressed concern about the growing risk of multiple and interrelated crises in the region. The second framework provided an innovative assessment based on data on nine different inequalities: economic inequality, gender inequality, youth inequality, and inequalities in access to health, education, social protection, food, finance and technology. She noted that youth inequality, economic inequality and inequalities in access to food were increasing in the region. She also mentioned that multidimensional inequality was particularly high and increasing in low-income, least developed and conflict-affected countries.

38. She highlighted the positive correlation between the risk of multiple crises and multidimensional inequality, stating that the increased risk of multiple crises might represent a future threat to equality, and noting the disparity in risks between different groups of countries. She concluded with policy recommendations

aimed at reducing inequality within countries, as well as recommendations tailored to countries in specific situations, recommendations to increase national financing to protect equality during crises, and recommendations to reduce inequality within countries.

39. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Morocco emphasized that caution should be exercised when using certain terms, such as "institutional crises", to avoid interference in the Government's internal affairs. He also asked about the threshold criteria for assessing interrelated crises. The representative of Libya expressed concerns about the accuracy of his country's climate change data.

40. The representative of Tunisia said that it was important to identify groups that might be vulnerable to inequality. He highlighted challenges in reaching some vulnerable groups, necessitating the establishment of a registry to target their locations and accurately determine their income. The representative of Egypt raised several points, including the need for clear methodologies to measure interrelated crises, the implementation of progressive tax policies to enhance the efficiency of public administration, and the important role of civil society during crises. He said that those aspects highlighted critical areas that required attention to comprehensively manage crises and develop fair policies.

41. In response, the representative of the secretariat explained that ESCWA sought to make its publications as comprehensive as possible, despite the limited number of pages and words. She stressed that ESCWA did not interfere in the internal affairs of Governments, and that the aim of the report was to raise awareness of the way crises interacted with each other to generate worse outcomes that affected all segments of society. She added that the case study of Morocco was a positive example of the ability to overcome inequality. She also explained that the data used in the case study of Libya were derived from a national study conducted by ESCWA in collaboration with the Libyan Government, which had approved its findings. She explained that the specific indicators used in the report were mostly based on international standards.

6. Growth and inequality challenges and responses in the Arab region (Agenda item 9)

42. On the basis of document [E/ESCWA/C.2/2024/8](#), the representative of the ESCWA secretariat made a presentation on the complexities of income and poverty, explaining that material poverty stemmed from two key factors: the distribution of income within society, and the growth of income over time. He noted that national income growth in the Arab region had been below the world's average (1.5 per cent versus 1.7 per cent) between 1995 and 2023. Moreover, household surveys in the Arab region showed little growth in per capita income.

43. He added that household income was stagnating despite national economic growth, which contradicted global trends. As a result of the slowdown in household income, the number of poor people in the Arab region increased to 143 million in 2023. He said that the number was expected to rise by 2030, meaning that the region would not achieve SDG 1 on poverty eradication. Referring to regional disparities in poverty, he explained the reasons for high poverty rates in the Arab region. He said that low-income and conflict-affected countries had recorded the highest increases in poverty and extreme poverty, while middle-income countries recorded a decline in poverty rates until 2010, but a rebound in extreme poverty rates since 2019.

44. He noted that high-income countries had recorded a reduction in poverty rates, with no extreme poverty recorded. His presentation summarized the main challenges in the Arab region, such as the limited effectiveness of social protection policies in combating poverty, and the absence of macroeconomic policies required to promote economic growth and prevent middle-income groups from falling into poverty. A number of solutions were put forward to address these challenges, including improving social protection, addressing the challenge of shrinking fiscal space, implementing policies to promote inclusive growth, establishing macroeconomic policies to create decent jobs and effectively address the roots of poverty, and implementing structural reforms to encourage a shift to greater value-added sectors, which generated decent jobs and promoted economic growth.

45. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Tunisia noted that the assessment in Tunisia was based on the social security database which included about 4 million Tunisian citizens.

7. The squeezing of the middle class in the Arab region
(Agenda item 10)

46. On the basis of document [E/ESCWA/C.2/2024/9](#), the representative of the secretariat made a presentation on the pressures faced by the middle class in the Arab region as a result of converging and interrelated crises, stressing its role in promoting social cohesion and political stability. He said that since the COVID-19 pandemic, Arab Governments had recognized the vulnerability of the middle class in the face of multiple crises, and highlighted the difference between that stage and previous stages when poor marginalized groups were the most affected by crises. He said that this was due to several factors, including the rapid depreciation of local currencies, increased indirect taxes, unbalanced reforms of public subsidies, and continued downsizing of the public sector, which had led to a decline in formal employment in the private sector. Together, these factors had two cumulative effects on the lower-middle class in the Arab region: cost-of-living inflation, and erosion of formal sector incomes. He explained the terminological difference between two classes within the middle class: the owning class, and the working class. He presented the available statistics on the Arab region, stating that the working class was the most vulnerable, given that it represented about 50 per cent of the middle class but was neither covered by social assistance and benefits like the poor, nor was it protected like the owning class.

47. In the context of proposing solutions based on lessons learned from around the world, he made some recommendations to policymakers responsible for social and economic reforms, including promoting economic growth and creating decent jobs with social insurance; supporting policies such as the "unilateral tax" aimed at formalizing informal companies, self-employed individuals and small and micro businesses; using available fiscal space by reforming public subsidies to support contributions in social insurance and unilateral tax schemes for those with limited ability to contribute; gradually shifting from consumption-based regressive taxes such as value-added taxes (VAT) to more equitable direct income-based taxes; stimulating women's participation in the workforce to enhance their economic inclusion and ensure their access to social insurance against life-cycle risks; and integrating economic and social policy reforms by taking into account the repercussions of crises on the most vulnerable and the middle class.

48. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Mauritania asked how the criteria used to define the middle class were selected. The representative of Tunisia addressed the wealth owned by specific families that benefited from existing legislation, and asked why existing legislation in Arab countries had not been highlighted in the study on the middle class.

49. In response, the representative of the secretariat said that the middle class was identified based on criteria related to employment rather than income, as stated in the previous presentation by the social affairs representative (owning class and working class). She explained that the study on the middle class did not include existing legislation or wealth in Arab countries, as it focused on the problems related to the middle class that were raised in the presentation.

B. Date and venue of the sixteenth session of the Committee on Social Development
(Agenda item 11)

50. The Committee decided to hold its sixteenth session in Beirut in June 2025, provided that no other member State submitted a request to host the session.

C. Other matters
(Agenda item 12)

51. No matters were discussed under this item.

III. Adoption of the recommendations made by the Committee at its fifteenth session (Agenda item 13)

52. At its final meeting, the Committee adopted the recommendations made at its fifteenth session, as set out in paragraphs 4 and 5 of the present report.

IV. Organization of work

A. Date and venue

53. The fifteenth session of the Committee on Social Development was held in Cairo on 3 June 2023. One meeting was held, in which participants discussed the agenda items as adopted.

B. Opening

54. Ms. Mehrinaz Elawady, Leader of the Gender Justice, Population and Inclusive Development Cluster, made a statement on behalf of the ESCWA secretariat. She welcomed participants and explained the connection between the Committee's meeting and the Third Arab Forum for Equality, adding that they would provide a space for dialogue at two levels, with the Committee on Social Development comprising member States, and the Third Arab Forum for Equality comprising stakeholders from inside and outside the Arab region. She added that in 2024, the Committee on Social Development would discuss the issue of inequality in times of crisis, given its importance in a region facing several forms of social and economic inequality, affecting its efforts to achieve the SDGs.

55. Ms. Mariam Saud Al-Azmi, representative of Kuwait and chairperson of the fourteenth session, made an opening statement in which she said that reducing inequality had become an issue of great importance and a high priority in the national agenda of Arab countries. She affirmed support to the next chairship of the Committee in performing its work to the fullest, and highlighted the role of ESCWA as a regional forum supporting joint Arab action, especially in view of the great development challenges facing the region, and its role in promoting social development. She then handed over the presidency to Lebanon to conduct the work of the Committee.

C. Participants

56. A total of 18 ESCWA member States participated in the session. The list of participants is set out in annex I to the present report.

D. Election of officers

57. Article 18 of the Rules of Procedure of ESCWA provides that member States shall assume the presidency of the subsidiary bodies of the Committee on a rotating basis, in Arabic alphabetical order, as established by the United Nations. In accordance with that rule, the representative of Lebanon chaired the fifteenth session of the Committee on Social Development. Participants elected the representatives of Kuwait and Libya as vice-chairs, and the representative of Egypt as rapporteur.

E. Agenda and organization of work

58. The Committee on Social Development adopted the agenda for its fifteenth session, as set out in document [E/ESCWA/C.2/2024/L.1](#), and approved the organization of work of the session as set out in document [E/ESCWA/C.1/2024/L.2](#).

F. Documents

59. Annex II to the present report sets out the list of documents submitted to the Committee on Social Development at its fifteenth session.

Annex I

List of participants

ESCWA member States

Bahrain

Ms. Eman Khalifa Al-Choumali
Senior Specialist in Childhood Development
Programmes
Ministry of Social Development

Mr. Faisal Abdullah Al-Huwaihi
Head of International Relations Department
Ministry of Social Development

Egypt

Mr. Raafat Shafeek
Advisor to the Minister of Social Solidarity for
Social Safety Net Support Programmes

Ms. Manal Hanafi
Head of the Central Administration for Persons
with Disabilities
Ministry of Social Solidarity

Ms. Mervat Sabreen
Assistant Minister of Social Solidarity

Mr. Hossam Amer El-Zomor
Financial Advisor
Ministry of Social Solidarity

Iraq

Mr. Abdulrahman Owaid Hanfish
Vice President of the Social Protection Authority
Director General of Social Protection for Men
Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

Mr. Mohammed Khalaf Abd Ali
Office of the Minister
Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

Jordan

Mr. Yousef Kloub
First Secretary
Embassy of Jordan in Egypt

Kuwait

Ms. Mariam Saud Al-Azmi
Acting Secretary General of the Supreme Council
for Family Affairs

Ms. Nadia Hussein Al-Koot
Director of the Department of Foreign Relations
Ministry of Social Development

Ms. Zainab Gayer Al-Enezi
Supervisor of the Performance Follow-up
Department
Public Authority for Disability Affairs

Mr. Khalid Alharbi
Deputy Director General of the Administrative and
Financial Affairs Sector
Public Authority for Disability Affairs

Ms. Sara Al-Dossery
Director of the Family Care Department
Ministry of Social Affairs

Lebanon

Mr. Hector Hajjar
Minister of Social Affairs

Mr. Adel Al Shabab
Chief of Staff
Ministry of Social Affairs

Libya

Ms. Amira Mohamed Abdel Moneim
Ministry of Social Affairs

Mr. Hafiz Abdul Qadir Khalifa
Director of the International Cooperation
Department
Ministry of Social Affairs

Mauritania

Mr. Ahmadou Adahi Khteirah
Secretary General
Ministry of Social Affairs, Childhood and Family

Ms. Umm Kulthum Hamdino
Technical Advisor in Charge of Gender
Ministry of Social Affairs, Childhood and Family

Morocco

Mr. Rashid Al-Qadida
Director of Social Development
Ministry of Solidarity, Social Development and Family

Mr. Khalid Sharifi Alawi
Head of International Cooperation Division
Ministry of Solidarity, Social Development and Family

Oman

Ms. Laila bint Ahmed bin Awad Al-Najjar
Minister of Social Development

Mr. Mohammed ben Ali ben Mohammed al-Saadi
Advisor to the Minister for Social Welfare
Ministry of Social Development

Mr. Hamoud bin Mohammed bin Nasser Al-Manthari
Head of the Office of the Minister of Social Development

Ms. Maymuna bint Salem bin Saeed Al-Manthriya
Director General of Social Development in Al-Batinah South Governorate
Ministry of Social Development

Mr. Moaz bin Saeed bin Abdulaziz Al-Rawas
Director of the Department of Social Development in Seeb
Ministry of Social Development

Mr. Mohammed bin Saud bin Abdulrahim Al Balushi
Media Specialist
Department of Communication and Media
Ministry of Social Development

Ms. Wadha bint Saeed bin Harith Al-Muqbiliya
In Charge of Following up on the Oman Vision 2040
Social Protection Fund

State of Palestine

Ms. Manal Tawfiq Abu Ramadan
Director General
General Planning Department
Ministry of Social Development

Qatar

Ms. Huda Nasser Al-Kuwari
Senior Legal Expert
Ministry of Social Development and Family

Ms. Mariam Mohammed Al-Mohammed
International Cooperation Department
Ministry of Social Development and Family

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Soltan bin Jorais Al-Jorais
Acting Deputy Minister
Deputy Minister for Social Security
Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development

Ms. Manal bint Saleh Al-Aboudi
Director of the Department of Social Protection in Social Security
Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development

Somalia

Mr. Yusuf Mohamed Aden
State Minister
Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

Mr. Mohamed Abdulrahman Hashi
Social Development Advisor
Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

Mr. Abdul Hakim Mukhtar Alharzi
Senior Advisor
Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

Sudan

Mr. Ahmed Adam Bakhit Dakhri
Minister of Social Development

Ms. Najla Al-Tayeb Mansour
Director of the Ministerial Executive Office
Ministry of Social Development

Mr. Jamal al Nile Abdullah Mansour
Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social
Development
Ministry of Social Development

Syrian Arab Republic

Mr. Yasser Abdul Ahmad
Assistant Minister of Social Affairs and Labour
Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour

Mr. Diaa Tabikh
Director of the Office of the Minister of Social
Affairs and Labour

Tunisia

Mr. Ibrahim Bin Idris
Head of the General Committee for Social
Promotion
Ministry of Social Affairs

Ms. Turkia Al-Shaibi
Advisor to the Minister of Social Affairs
Ministry of Social Affairs

Yemen

Ms. Mawaheb Adel Ali Al-Ahdal
First Secretary
Permanent Mission of the Republic of Yemen to
the League of Arab States

Mr. Mohammed Abdullah Nasser Bashaib
First Secretary
Permanent Mission of the Republic of Yemen to
the League of Arab States

Annex II

List of documents

| Title | Item | Symbol |
|--|------|------------------------|
| Provisional agenda and annotations | 3 | E/ESCWA/C.2/2024/L.1 |
| Organization of work | 3 | E/ESCWA/C.2/2024/L.2 |
| Implementation of activities under the ESCWA programme plan and of recommendations made by the Committee on Social Development at its fourteenth session | 4 | E/ESCWA/C.2/2024/3 |
| Technical cooperation activities | 5 | E/ESCWA/C.2/2024/4 |
| Activities of the Intersessional Group of Experts on Disability | 6 | E/ESCWA/C.2/2024/5 |
| Activities of the Expert Group on Social Protection Reform | 7 | E/ESCWA/C.2/2024/6 |
| Reducing inequality in times of crisis | 8 | E/ESCWA/C.2/2024/7 |
| Growth and inequality challenges and responses in the Arab region | 9 | E/ESCWA/C.2/2024/8 |
| The squeezing of the middle class in the Arab region | 10 | E/ESCWA/C.2/2024/9 |
| List of documents | | E/ESCWA/C.2/2024/INF.1 |