

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Expert Group Meeting on Deepening Regional Economic Integration
through the Liberalization of Trade in Services
2-3 June 2016
Tunis, Tunisia

INFORMATION NOTE

I. BACKGROUND

The Arab region is currently facing the imperatives of economic reform and adaptation at a time when the global economic landscape is changing rapidly with shifting wealth and strengthened connectivity/increased interconnectedness through trade, investment and capital movement. Fostering regional economic integration is a strategic response to these factors, and a foundation on which Arab countries can build their reform and development plans.

Within this context, ESCWA published its first report on Assessing Arab Economic Integration in 2015 that provides a roadmap for launching an Arab Customs Union through setting out the goals and justification for regional economic integration. The report sheds the light on the efforts and challenges facing the region through introducing a new and comprehensive quantitative system of indices that was developed to analyze the economic integration experience in the Arab region, capturing the involvement of all actors at the national, sub regional and regional levels. This system of indexes provides a relatively reliable diagnostic tool to help assess progress towards economic integration in the region by monitoring and evaluating the implemented reforms and their impacts on selected economic and social indicators. Building on this first edition, and in continuing its efforts, ESCWA plans to shed the light in its second edition of the report on trade in services as there is a strong evidence of the direct and indirect positive effects of trade in services on economic growth through its positive linkages with sectoral competitiveness, export promotion, and jobs creations. In this context, promoting trade in services is believed to be among the main ingredients for better connectivity to GVCs. Moreover, this publication come at the time where most trade negotiations involving the Arab countries, either among themselves (PAFTA) or with the rest of the world (EU and USA) are increasingly focusing on trade in services.

International experience suggests that better quality of services, lower costs of backbone services (such as telecommunications, transport, financial and business services) and availability of important production inputs (such as energy services) play a critical role in reducing the cost of exporting and strengthening as well as strengthens the linkages with global production networks. To this end, regulatory reforms are instrumental in improving the efficiency of economic operators. Trade in services is a fundamental component of all economic integration policies and initiatives; hence its exclusion would reduce its expected benefits in terms of expansion of intra-regional trade and development of productive capacities.

The literature on trade and trade policy in services in the Arab region is very scarce. This is mostly due to limited knowledge with respect to the definition and measurement of barriers to trade in services. Moreover, many countries in the region still lack the appropriate statistics in relation to trade in services, and unfortunately, there are no significant attempts to improve the quality of those statistics so far.

II. OBJECTIVE

The meeting aims to provide guidance in the preparation of the second edition of the Assessing Arab Economic Integration Report planned to be published in 2017. In this context, the Expert Group Meeting will explore the methodologies for identifying regulatory instruments affecting trade in services, estimating restrictiveness indices related to trade in services, formulating policy reforms to promote trade in services, and ex post and ex ante assessing their economic impacts. The overall objective is to assist member countries to formulate comprehensive integration policies for higher economic transformation through a better connectivity to global value chains.

III. SCOPE

The Expert Group Meeting will focus on discussing technical issues related to trade in services in the Arab region with specific emphasis on the following:

- Review of the concept note of the second edition of ESCWA recurrent publication on “Assessing Arab Economic Integration Report”;
- Techniques to assess liberalization of trade in services;
- Review of other organizations’ activities on trade in services;
- Bridging the gap between research and policy making;

IV. PARTICIPANTS

The meeting will bring together regional and international experts specialized in international economics in general and in trade in services in particular as well as representatives from regional and international organizations and academic centres.

All participants are kindly requested to confirm their participation by completing the registration form and sending it back to Ms. Hana’a Saad at saad@un.org by 18 April 2016.

V. ORGANIZATION OF THE WORKSHOP

The meeting will be held from 2 to 3 June 2016 in Tunis, Tunisia. The meeting will be conducted in English with interpretation services (English-French) made available.

VI. LOGISTICAL INFORMATION

Participants are required to secure their own visa for entry to Tunisia. Participants should check with the Embassy of Tunisia in their country of residence to see if a visa is necessary and to secure their visa prior to departure if needed. Related information is also available on the World Travel Guide via the following link: <http://www.worldtravelguide.net/tunisia/passport-visa>.

Air travel reservations and ticketing for sponsored participants will be arranged by ESCWA. Roundtrip tickets will be issued in economy class on the most economic route in accordance with United Nations travel rules and regulations. Participants attending the meeting at their own cost are responsible for making their own travel arrangements.

Participants should arrange for their own accommodation in Tunisia. Sponsored participants will receive a daily subsistence allowance (DSA), as per the United Nations travel rules and regulations, for up to three nights to cover the cost of their hotel, meals and incidental expenses during the course of the meeting. A fixed terminal expenses allowance (US\$ 152) will also be provided to cover airport transfers.

Participants are kindly requested to bring with them on the **first day** of the meeting their **passport, copy of airline ticket and original boarding pass**. Review of these documents is necessary to allow for the issuance of DSA on the second day of the meeting.

VIII. CORRESPONDENCE

All correspondences related to the meeting should be addressed to:

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