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Committee on Social Development
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**Implementation of activities under the ESCWA programme of work
and of recommendations made by the Committee
on Social Development at its twelfth session****Summary**

The Committee on Social Development of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held its twelfth session in Beirut on 8 and 9 October 2019. Participants discussed several topics, including reforming social protection programmes; policy implications of the inclusion of older persons; and adopting the nexus approach to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region.

Member States emphasized the need for a comprehensive approach to ensure full inclusion and leave no one behind. The Committee for Social Development made recommendations to member States and to the ESCWA secretariat.

The present document provides an overview of the activities undertaken by ESCWA under its subprogramme 2 on social development, since the twelfth session of the Committee Social Development. The Committee is invited to take note of these activities and express its views on the way forward.

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Introduction

1. The Committee on Social Development of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held its twelfth session in Beirut on 8 and 9 October 2019. It adopted a set of recommendations, some directed to member States and others to the ESCWA secretariat. The present document presents the activities carried out by ESCWA between October 2019 and September 2021 in support of member States' efforts, and in accordance with the recommendations to the ESCWA secretariat under its subprogramme 2.
2. Subprogramme 2 aims to achieve equitable and inclusive social development and reduce inequality, poverty and unemployment, in line with the principle of leaving no one behind. It covers the following topics: social justice; poverty reduction; social protection systems; inclusion of persons with disabilities; the rights of older persons; migrant rights; improving employment opportunities; and helping countries implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
3. Pursuant to the recommendations of the Commission for Social Development at its twelfth session to mainstream a nexus approach between social policies in national plans and programmes aimed at achieving national development, ESCWA identified gaps at the national and regional levels preventing the implementation of interconnected and interrelated social programmes. Accordingly, ESCWA has prepared a set of policy tools to assist decision makers in Arab countries in designing and implementing coherent and effective policies.
4. ESCWA has endeavoured to forge partnerships with United Nations agencies, regional organizations, civil society organizations and academic institutes to ensure concerted efforts at the regional level. Examples of such partnerships include strengthening work with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the International Labour Organization (ILO). It has also enhanced its work with active international, regional and academic institutions, such as the League of Arab States, New York University's Center on International Cooperation, George Washington University, and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative. ESCWA has also worked with international and regional civil society organizations to implement many of its activities.

I. Supporting Arab countries in tackling the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic

5. ESCWA has worked to support Arab countries in addressing the social and economic repercussions of COVID-19, by issuing a series of policy briefs and comprehensive papers at the regional and national levels, discussing the status of certain population groups, and holding various meetings to analyse the repercussions of the pandemic, prepare forecasts thereon, and provide practical recommendations to help countries address them.

A. Policy briefs

1. *Regional level*

6. At the regional level, ESCWA published the following policy briefs:

(a) COVID-19: Economic cost to the Arab region ([E/ESCWA/CL3.SEP/2020/Policy Brief.1](#)). This policy brief includes projections of the losses that Arab economies will incur as a result of the sharp decline in global growth, estimated at about \$42 billion in 2020. It also provides forecasts of expected losses in oil revenues, estimated at about \$1 billion between January and mid-March 2020. Moreover, it sets out policy recommendations to help countries absorb those losses;

(b) A solidarity tax to address the impact of COVID-19 on poverty in the Arab region ([E/ESCWA/2020/Policy brief.7](#)). This policy brief includes a discussion on wealth inequalities in the Arab

region, and shows that the wealth of the 37 richest billionaires in the region is equal to that of the poorest half of the adult population. It provides estimates of poverty levels in middle- and low-income countries, and offers practical solutions, including leveraging a 1.1 per cent solidarity tax on wealth to lift millions out of poverty in middle-income countries;

(c) Mitigating the impact of COVID-19: poverty and food insecurity in the Arab region ([E/ESCWA/CL3.SEP/2020/Policy Brief.2](#)). The policy brief provides estimates on the increase in the number of poor people in the Arab region due to the COVID-19 pandemic, on food shortages, and on increases in food prices owing to the extended pandemic. It covers the number of people at risk of the pandemic who need humanitarian aid, which could reach 55 million. It also includes proposals on emergency measures to reduce the severity of those effects, including providing social protection, supporting small and medium enterprises, ensuring food security, and meeting the basic needs of all;

(d) Regional emergency response to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 ([E/ESCWA/2020/INF.1](#)). The policy brief provides examples of the urgent responses adopted by countries to address the socioeconomic issues exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It highlights some positive examples, such as the stimulus packages offered to support citizens and to enhance companies' capacity to address the sharp decline in their activity as a result of the pandemic. It includes policy guidance for decision makers on financial measures and ways to enhance social solidarity to serve the interests of poor and vulnerable groups;

(e) Social protection responses to the COVID-19 crisis in the MENA/Arab States region. This policy brief was prepared in partnership with members of the Issue-based Coalition on Social Protection. It provides an overview of the main social protection measures adopted by Arab countries in response to the COVID-19 crisis, with the aim of disseminating best practices and facilitating the learning process between countries.

2. Most affected social groups

7. At the level of social groups most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, ESCWA issued the following policy briefs:

(a) Impact of COVID-19 on young people in the Arab region ([E/ESCWA/2020/POLICY BRIEF.9](#)). This policy brief includes an assessment of the economic, social and psychological impact of the pandemic on young people, and suggests solutions to help Governments protect them in this critical stage and beyond, especially from poverty, particularly those living in rural areas and persons with disabilities;

(b) Impact of COVID-19 on migrants and refugees in the Arab region: technical paper ([E/ESCWA/CL2.GPID/2020/TP.16](#)). This paper was prepared in partnership with UNHCR and ILO, and in collaboration with members of the Issue-based Coalition on Migration in the Arab Region. It analyses the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrants and refugees in the region, focusing on various areas, including health, income security, the economy and education. It also discusses the issues of return, voluntary repatriation and trafficking in persons in view of the pandemic, and the impact of the pandemic on specific groups, such as women, children and refugees. Moreover, it provides practical recommendations on short- and medium-term policies and actions that could be implemented to protect migrants and refugees;

(c) The impact of COVID-19 on migrants and refugees in the Arab region ([E/ESCWA/CL2.GPID/2020/Policy BRIEF.2](#)). The policy brief explains the recommendations set out in the technical paper mentioned in paragraph 7 (b). It focuses on several areas, including health, income security, the economy, education, voluntary repatriation and trafficking in persons in view of the pandemic, and highlights the impact of the pandemic on specific groups, such as women, children and refugees;

(d) The impact of COVID-19 on older persons in the Arab region ([E/ESCWA/CL2.GPID/2020/Policy BRIEF.12](#)). This policy brief was prepared in partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO) to analyse the effects of the pandemic on some 32 million older persons in the region. It addresses the heightened

risks the pandemic poses to older persons, especially women and persons with disabilities. It also tackles the challenges facing older persons, notably high illiteracy rates, a lack of technological awareness, and weak capacity to learn about pandemic-prevention measures and to contact others to seek help or mitigate feelings of isolation;

(e) The impact of COVID-19 on gender equality in the Arab region ([E/ESCWA/2020/Policy Brief.4](#)). This policy brief was prepared in partnership with UN-Women, UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO and the World Food Programme. It assesses the effects of the pandemic on domestic violence in the Arab region as a result of lockdowns and forced proximity, and increased tensions in households because of food insecurity and fears of exposure to the virus. It notes the pandemic contribution to women's diminishing ability to access health services, including reproductive health services, and their increasing role in home care, which has doubled their burden. It also provides estimates of the losses that women could incur, including the loss of 700,000 jobs held by women;

(f) [Violence against women and girls and COVID-19 in the Arab region](#). This policy brief was prepared in partnership with a number of United Nations organizations working in the Arab region. It includes a detailed assessment of violence against women in view of the pandemic, the increase in violence rates, and its effects on the services provided to survivors in Arab countries. It presents the successful experiences of some countries, and identifies gaps that must be filled to ensure that survivors have access to quality services during the pandemic;

(g) [Mapping of government measures to protect persons with disabilities from the emerging coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and of efforts to provide them with information and awareness-raising material in an accessible format \(Arabic only\)](#) ([E/ESCWA/CL2.GPID/2020/INF.5](#)). This mapping reviews the precautionary measures taken by Arab countries to ensure that their responses to the pandemic are inclusive of persons with disabilities. It presents a set of educational and awareness-raising material published on the Internet and social networks to help persons with disabilities in accessing and benefiting from those measures.

3. National level

8. At the national level, ESCWA published the following policy briefs:

(a) Poverty in Lebanon: solidarity is vital to address the impact of multiple overlapping shocks ([E/ESCWA/2020/Policy Brief.15](#)). The policy brief highlights the effects of the pandemic and economic instability, and suggests effective and sustainable strategies to mitigate them. ESCWA submitted the policy brief to the Prime Minister of Lebanon. This policy brief, in addition to a technical paper entitled "Wealth distribution and poverty impact of COVID-19 in Lebanon" ([E/ESCWA/CL3.SEP/2020/TP.8](#)), indicate that the number of poor people in Lebanon has risen to an estimated 55 per cent, and that the extreme poverty rate rose to 23.4 per cent in 2020. ESCWA proposed remedial measures at the policy level to enhance food and health security and social protection to bridge the poverty gap, including establishing a national community solidarity fund;

(b) Rapid gender analysis of the August Beirut port explosion: an intersectional examination. This policy brief was prepared in collaboration with the UN-Women Lebanon Country Office, the UNFPA Country Office in Lebanon, CARE International in Lebanon, and the Resource Center for Gender Equality (ABAAD). It assesses the effects of the explosion on the population in affected areas, from a gender equality perspective. The assessment was prepared based on an analysis of available documents on all aspects of the explosion's impact, and on an analysis of information obtained through a series of interviews with service providers and think tanks. The analysis provides various findings on several issues, including health, reproductive health, shelter, mental health, violence against women and food security. The policy brief also includes a number of recommendations;

(c) Lebanon's formal private sector: the bitter reality of 2020 ([E/ESCWA/CL2.GPID/20201/POLICY BRIEF.1](#)). The policy brief examines the impact of the Beirut Port explosion and the COVID-19 crisis on private sector sales and fulltime employees in key sectors. It was the fastest assessment prepared based on official data summarizing the performance and employability of the Lebanese private sector.

B. Meetings

9. ESCWA held the following meetings to present and discuss the results of policy briefs with Arab countries:

(a) A meeting held online on 22 April 2020, in partnership with ILO and members of the Intersessional Expert Group on Social Protection Reform (IGESP) of the ESCWA Committee on Social Development. Participants discussed the economic and social repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting response policies, as well as countries' efforts and national measures taken to address it. Participants reviewed the COVID-19 Stimulus Tracker prepared by ESCWA, which includes detailed information from some 194 countries on the financial and social protection measures they have taken to address the effects of the pandemic;

(b) A special online meeting of the Committee on Women was held on 23 April 2020, in partnership with UNFPA, UN-Women and UNDP, to present the results of the policy brief and the economic and social consequences of the pandemic's effects, with a focus on women as the most affected group. Countries made presentations on the measures they had taken to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on women, so as to facilitate the learning process and identify successful experiences;

(c) The Arab Regional Parliamentary Forum, convened by ESCWA on the theme "The impact of COVID-19 on SDG implementation and the role of parliaments", was held online on 26 November 2020. The meeting discussed the role of Arab parliaments in responding to crises from the perspective of 2030 Agenda. It provided a platform for parliamentarians to share experiences and lessons learned in the context of the pandemic;

(d) In partnership with ILO and UNHCR, and in collaboration with members of the United Nations Network on Migration in the Arab region, ESCWA held an online meeting on 17 December 2020 on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrants and refugees in the Arab region. Participants discussed the pandemic's impacts, including on the health of refugees and migrants, and their access to services and income security. The meeting concluded with policy recommendations;

(e) On the sidelines of the fifty-fourth session of the United Nations Commission on Population and Development, and in partnership with the League of Arab States and UNFPA, ESCWA held an online seminar on 21 April 2021 on population, food security and sustainable development in the Arab region. The seminar, which was attended by representatives of relevant ministries and population councils in Arab countries, focused on the repercussions of the COVID-19 crisis on food security in view of the demographic shifts taking place in the region.

II. Progress on social justice

10. ESCWA published a study entitled "Examining multidimensional inequality in the Arab region through a capabilities lens: Presenting a pilot study in Lebanon with a focus on SDG 10" ([E/ESCWA/SDD/2019/TP.7](#)). The study examines the implementation of SDG 10 (on reducing inequality within and between countries) and proposes an innovative research method to identify multidimensional inequalities that remain to be addressed in the targets of this Goal.

11. The study examines the main inequalities affecting three groups in Lebanon: persons with disabilities, educated young people, and vulnerable women. The study provides a clear visual representation of the gaps that need to be narrowed between the population's current and desired reality.

12. In March 2021, ESCWA held an online dialogue in the theme “Review of Goal 10: Inclusive recovery and reducing inequality in the Arab region”, as part of the activities of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development. The session highlighted the main manifestations of inequality during the COVID-19 pandemic, and their implications for policy development in the Arab region. Policy options were presented to reduce inequality and accelerate progress in achieving SDG 10.

13. The dialogue dealt with the region’s experience in reducing inequalities and redistributing resources equitably in the social, economic and policy spheres; and in working to ensure sustainable access to social services in the post-pandemic recovery and in future crises.

14. ESCWA issued Social Development Report 3 entitled *Leaving No One Behind: Inclusion of Marginalized Groups in Some Arab Countries* ([E/ESCWA/SDD/2019/4](#)), which is based on the principle of leaving no one behind. The report includes three case studies from Egypt, Lebanon and Tunisia on marginalized regions and groups that suffer from exclusion. It also sheds light on the structural causes that reinforce exclusion, and discusses its root causes. The report provides recommendations on policies to address the exclusion of marginalized social groups; and calls for the adoption of a holistic approach to formulating social policies, and for the reform of institutions that practise discrimination and exclusion against some segments of society, while identifying targeted measures to address the fundamental obstacles that prevent the advancement of disadvantaged, marginalized or excluded social groups.

15. ESCWA prepared the Social Development Report 4 entitled *Social Inequality in the Arab Region Post-COVID-19: The Path to Structural Transformation*, which will be published in 2021. The report sets out measures and policies adopted to address the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, focusing on the two dimensions of inequality and social justice in those policies. It assesses the sustainability of those policies and their capacity to respond to the needs of communities in the region, compared with cases from other regions worldwide. In addition to presenting innovative interventions, the report reviews good practices in responding to the pandemic and provides recommendations thereon for the Arab region.

16. On 7 June 2021, ESCWA held an expert group meeting to discuss the first draft of Social Development Report 4. The meeting brought together experts from the Arab region who reviewed the preliminary findings of the report and its main messages, and agreed on its conclusions and recommendations.

17. ESCWA prepared a policy brief for the Social Development Report 4 entitled “Required structural transformations in the Arab region”, which will be issued in 2021. The policy brief reviews the required reforms of social protection policies contained in the report. The policy brief also provides recommendations for applying the conclusions contained in the report.

18. ESCWA developed the Social Justice Policy Gap Assessment Tool (PGAT) to assist countries in analysing their national policies and their compatibility with social justice principles. The tool consists of a conceptual introduction, a set of paragraphs on evaluation, and a questionnaire comprising 22 questions on the following four main themes: the knowledge and skills required to design, implement, finance or evaluate social and economic policies; consensus among stakeholders on policy options; legislative and regulatory frameworks; and institutional structures and internal mechanisms.

19. The tool aims to enable government institutions to self-evaluate their capacity to integrate principles of social justice into policy development processes in a participatory manner; provides them with a tool and a visual scoreboard to assess the extent to which social justice principles have been mainstreamed in national policies, and allows them to use this classification as a criterion for building capacity to design plans and policies; and enables them to devise local solutions and reforms to address obstacles and overcome challenges that prevent the mainstreaming of social justice in policymaking processes.

20. The tool was tested at a national workshop, held in Tunisia on 24 and 25 September 2020, where participants provided valuable feedback on the tool’s content, structure and proposed working methodology.

They also expressed their opinion on its flexibility and adaptability to national contexts, and suggested a set of recommendations. Based on these discussions, the tool was modified and suggested changes were introduced.

21. The first draft of the tool was presented at a regional expert group meeting on 11 November 2020 to discuss its content, structure, the methodology adopted for its development; and the effectiveness of its questions in identifying gaps in the integration of the principles, concepts and pillars of social justice in policies. A group of eminent regional experts and academics, specializing in issues of social inclusion, equality, participation and human rights, and in developing and implementing social policies and programmes, participated in the meeting. The meeting resulted in a set of recommendations that were taken into account when preparing the final version of the tool.

22. The tool was launched in its final form in the presence of representatives of Arab countries at a high-level meeting on 22 December 2020. The meeting aimed to mainstream the use of the tool in Arab countries; maximize its use through technical support provided by ESCWA in analysing its results; and develop appropriate solutions to fill gaps and correct processes for formulating national policies and programmes.

23. At the closing of the meeting, participants determined the minimum wage and worker protection policy to be evaluated at the national level in Arab countries, and agreed to issue an analytical report on the results. The meeting was attended by experts and government consultants responsible for the formulation and implementation of public policies directly related to social justice at the national and local levels, representing ministries of social affairs and ministries of labour in ESCWA member States.

24. Pursuant to the recommendations of the high-level meeting, ESCWA began applying the tool to assess the compatibility of public policies with principles of social justice and with minimum wage and worker protection policies, so as to produce a regional analytical study on the subject. On 14 and 15 April 2021, ESCWA held a workshop to review the tool for assessing the compatibility of policies and programmes with the principles of social justice, and to launch the regional report on assessing wage policies and worker protection. The workshop aimed to build the capacity of a group of experts and policymakers in Arab countries on how to use and apply the tool's methodology independently, according to the specificities and priorities of each country. The workshop concluded by launching the regional report on wage policies and worker protection, and agreeing on future steps.

25. Based on decisions agreed at the workshop, countries participating in the report formed national working teams comprising employees of the government entity being evaluated and experts on wage policies and worker protection to participate in the evaluation process. A series of national meetings and discussions were held, and a questionnaire was conducted to assess the compatibility of those policies with the principles of social justice.

26. This participatory process has resulted in national reports that have fed into the draft regional report on assessing national policies on wages and workers protection, which will be published in 2021. The report highlights regional trends in wage policies, identifies key gaps, proposes scenarios to address them, and sets out an action plan to be applied with Arab countries. An expert group meeting was held to review the draft regional report and its preliminary findings, and the key findings of the evaluation of national policies on wages and worker protection, and to provide technical advice on the recommendations contained therein.

27. ESCWA followed a parallel path to assist some Arab countries in using the tool and applying it at the national level to other selected policies. For example, Tunisia was provided with technical support to implement the tool to assess its public policy and programmes targeting marginalized, socially challenged and ill-adapted young people, in partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs and representatives of 10 related ministries.

28. An electronic platform for the tool has been developed to provide a practical means of collecting the required information in an interactive and systematic manner, which allows those involved in the evaluation

to develop an indicator/barometer for social justice that measures the extent to which the policies under evaluation take into account the principles of social justice at all stages of their preparation and implementation.

III. Progress in the field of persons with disabilities

29. ESCWA issued a technical paper entitled “Disability assessment and determination in the Arab region: an overview”. It includes a regional mapping of legal frameworks related to disability assessment and determination, and additional analytical elements. The paper discusses the normative shift in understanding disability from the perspective of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It reviews the main objectives of disability assessment and determination, and the tools available to activate the normative shift in disability assessment, including the WHO International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health.

30. The technical paper covers the main trends, similarities and differences in the Arab region with regard to disability assessment and determination laws, which were compiled from laws, legislation, instructions and administrative policies that regulate disability assessments and determination processes in 18 member States. The paper included case studies from several Arab countries, namely Egypt, Morocco, Oman and Tunisia. The paper concludes with a set of recommendations to ensure a transition to a disability assessment system in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

31. A workshop was held regarding a working paper on disability assessment and determination in Lebanon, on 27 February 2020, in collaboration with the Center for Lebanese Studies at the Lebanese American University and the International Committee of the Red Cross. The workshop was attended by representatives of disability organizations in Lebanon, and representatives of the academic community.

32. ESCWA launched a joint support campaign with UNDP to provide immediate, medium and long-term support in mitigating the negative effects of the multiple crises in Lebanon, notably the economic and housing crises, the COVID-19 pandemic and the Beirut Port explosion, on persons with disabilities who are among the most affected by these crises. The campaign began with a walking tour by Mr. Michael Haddad, UNDP Regional Goodwill Ambassador for Climate Action, starting from ESCWA headquarters, passing through the affected areas in central Beirut, and ending at Karantina Primary Health Care Center, one of the primary health-care centres severely affected by the explosion. Representatives from the development community, international organizations, civil society, the Lebanese Order of Engineers and Architects, the private sector, diplomats and many volunteers participated in the tour.

33. The campaign also included the launch of a “Call for action in support of persons with disabilities”, which aims to support persons with disabilities and reduce their vulnerability to increased and successive risks. The call sets out the priorities of persons with disabilities, and reflects the commitment of all parties involved to ensure that their needs are met and that their rights are taken into account during the rebuilding of Beirut. The call was adopted by a numerous representatives of the diplomatic corps and embassies in Beirut, United Nations bodies, and civil society organizations.

34. In early 2020, ESCWA launched the Arab Digital Inclusion Platform (ADIP), aimed at enhancing digital accessibility and ease of access to information and electronic services for persons with disabilities in the Arab region. The project also strives to support Arab policymakers in developing and improving their policies and national guidelines to enhance electronic accessibility, so as to bridge the digital divide and enable all people to access and use information and communication technologies (ICTs).

35. Under ADIP, ESCWA prepared two templates to support countries in formulating national digital access strategies: the ESCWA template on e-accessibility national policy for the Arab region; and the ESCWA template on technical guidelines for e-accessibility. ESCWA organized an online consultative meeting to review and discuss the two templates with representatives of Arab countries, held on 10 and 11 November 2020.

36. The meeting resulted in proposals to enrich the templates submitted by ESCWA. Based on these templates, ESCWA will organize a series of national and regional workshops to build the capacity of Arab countries in developing national policies and programmes for digital accessibility. ESCWA is also establishing an electronic platform in Arabic and English, which is easy to use and includes basic information, data and documents on disability. It aims to be the main database for information and resources related to disability policies in the Arab world, and to contribute to filling gaps in this field. The initial version of the platform has been completed and will be finalized in 2021.

37. ESCWA, in partnership with the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States, held a panel discussion on 2 December 2020 to observe the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. The discussion covered the inclusion of persons with disabilities to build towards an inclusive, accessible and sustainable world for them after the COVID-19 pandemic. Pandemic response policies and their coverage of the rights and needs of persons with disabilities in the areas of health, education and development were also discussed. The panel discussion was an opportunity for United Nations organizations and partners to identify areas for enhancing collaboration and coordination in the process of building back better after the pandemic, and to exchange best practices, policies and programmes that contribute to this goal.

38. To mark the occasion, ESCWA launched an online awareness campaign in December 2020, in partnership with the Lebanese Ministry of Labor, ILO, the Lebanese American University and several disability organizations, including the Helm Foundation (Egypt), ProAbled (Lebanon), and Arcenciel (Lebanon). The campaign focused on integrating persons with disabilities in the labour market and workplace, on promoting the right of persons with disabilities to work, and on giving them equal opportunities on a par with other social groups. A series of messages were launched on this issue through awareness-raising audio-visual materials on social media platforms.

39. ESCWA, the UNDP Office in Cairo, WHO and the American University in Cairo organized a panel discussion in Cairo on 20 December 2020 to mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, on the theme “Research and innovation in assistive technologies”. The panel discussion shed light on key innovations in assistive devices that rely on advanced technology, which support persons with disabilities to become self-reliant and live independently.

40. Participants recommended that Governments adopt national policies that emphasize the rights of persons with disabilities to access to such devices and to benefit from advanced technology in this field, without burdening the beneficiaries financially; and mobilize various funding sources to cover the expenses of scientific research, innovation and local manufacturing.

IV. Progress in the field of social protection

41. ESCWA prepared a technical paper entitled “Targeted social protection in Arab countries” to be issued in 2021. The paper provides an overview of targeted social protection programmes in selected Arab countries, including Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, the State of Palestine, the Sudan and Tunisia. It discusses recent reforms to those programmes, with a focus on identifying poor and vulnerable population groups, and information systems and databases to manage the programmes. It also addresses ways to adjust targeted social protection programmes to respond to recent social and economic crises triggered by the pandemic.

42. ESCWA issued a study entitled “Social protection in the Syrian Arab Republic” ([E/ESCWA/SDD/2019/TP.12](#)), which defines the national features of the social protection system in the Syrian Arab Republic, including social insurance, social assistance and social health care. It identifies policy gaps and structural challenges in the country’s social protection system, and the challenges arising from the effects of the conflict since 2011. The study concludes with a set of recommendations focused on developing a sustainable and inclusive social protection system for all citizens in the Syrian Arab Republic.

43. ESCWA published a study entitled “Social protection in rural Egypt” (E/ESCWA/C12/2020/TP.1), which provides an overview of the rural landscape in Egypt, discusses the challenges facing the provision of social protection in rural Egypt, and suggests policy recommendations for improvement.

V. Progress in the labour market

44. ESCWA, in partnership with ILO, developed a tool for calculating labour demand in Arab countries called the Job Monitor, to help decision makers better prepare for the Fourth Industrial Revolution by taking into account the number of jobs required between now and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. The main objective of the Job Monitor is to support countries in preparing for the upcoming change in jobs and skills owing to ongoing technological developments, while taking into account national specificities by forecasting new skills, so as to discover burgeoning skills in the coming years.

45. This tool allows Arab countries to quickly monitor demand for new employment skills, and thus modify available skills. ESCWA uses the Job Monitor to mine big data to develop a more dynamic and flexible monitoring platform for required skills.

46. The initial version of the Job Monitor was reviewed at a meeting of regional and international experts on 21 December 2020. Participants discussed the proposed methodological framework for building the tool and received comments on the accomplished tasks. A roadmap for improving the final framework was also proposed. The meeting comprised experts on labour market policies and the future of work, data science, machine learning and artificial intelligence, and several big data experts and web developers from many Arab countries.

47. ESCWA used the Jobs Monitor’s initial findings to produce a regional report entitled “What manpower do we need in the Arab region: the future of jobs is here”, which will be published soon. The report examines the status of skills in Arab countries, and analyses the link between skills and jobs required in the region, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and the new era of economic development. It answers several vital questions, and examines whether production techniques adopted in companies match the skills available in the labour market. It also presents trends in current and new skills and jobs in the Arab region, and the readiness of the labour market for future jobs.

48. The draft report was discussed at an expert group meeting held on 10 August 2020, and attended by regional and international experts to discuss the national results of the Job Monitor, and begin building a national platform for developing modern policies and keeping pace with the global labour market.

49. ESCWA prepared a technical paper in December 2019 on the labour market in the State of Palestine, which includes an analysis of demographic trends, youth unemployment, the labour market in general, and individual productivity under occupation. It also provides policy proposals to achieve specific targets of SDG 8.

50. ESCWA prepared a technical paper entitled “Employment profile and challenges of the private sector in Iraq” ([E/ESCWA/EDID/2019/WP.17](#)), which includes research on how to achieve more inclusive employment and a more diversified economy, using corporate data in Iraq to highlight the role of private sector development in creating job opportunities.

51. ESCWA, in partnership with ILO, prepared a regional report entitled “Towards a productive and inclusive path: job creation in the Arab region”, which will be issued shortly. The report examines ways to develop the private sector development and create jobs, and the role of innovation in the private sector and its impact on labour demand in a group of eight Arab countries. The report is complemented by a policy brief on the subject.

VI. Poverty

52. ESCWA, in partnership with the League of Arab States and United Nations entities operating in the Arab region, organized a plenary session to review SDG 1 on the theme “Poverty eradication and recovery from the COVID-19 crisis in the Arab region”, held on 29 March 2021 on the sidelines of the 2021 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development. The session focused on eliminating poverty in general, and recovering from the COVID-19 crisis in the Arab region in particular.

53. The session highlighted the main interventions needed to reduce poverty and mitigate the effects of the pandemic in the region, so as to meet the needs of groups most vulnerable to neglect and to mitigate the impact of future shocks. Interventions focused on the importance of reviewing social protection systems to increase their effectiveness and inclusiveness in the long term. Policies and experiences from Egypt and Morocco in expanding and strengthening social protection measures, and diversifying and sustaining the financing structure of social protection systems, were also presented.

54. ESCWA, the League of Arab States, the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, UNICEF, UNDP and UNFPA held a meeting of regional and global experts on multidimensional poverty in Arab countries, in Amman on 18 and 19 December 2019. ESCWA and partner organizations agreed to design a monitoring and evaluation framework for the implementation of the Arab strategic framework, which is expected to be completed in 2021.

55. ESCWA, in collaboration with the League of Arab States and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, prepared a revised Arab Multidimensional Poverty Index. The index includes improvements made to the previous measure used in the first Arab Multidimensional Poverty Report, issued in 2017, as documented by ESCWA in the following technical papers:

(a) A study entitled “Proposal for a Revised Multidimensional Poverty Index for Arab Countries” ([E/ESCWA/CL2.GPID/2020/TP.11](#)), which highlights the methodology and conceptual advantages of the index. The results were presented to member States of the League of Arab States;

(b) A study entitled “Testing the robustness of the revised Multidimensional Poverty Index for Arab countries” ([E/ESCWA/CL3.SEP/2020/TP.23](#)) identifies various tools for examining and testing the assumptions made when designing the Arab Multidimensional Poverty Index. The tool indicates that the evidence should be robust so that countries’ rankings change when any of the adopted assumptions are changed. In December 2020, the Council of Arab Social Affairs Ministers approved the revised Arab Multidimensional Poverty Index as an official methodology for monitoring and tracking multidimensional poverty. After its adoption, ESCWA prepared national studies for Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Mauritania, the State of Palestine, Tunisia and Somalia using the revised Arab Multidimensional Poverty Index.

56. ESCWA prepared guidelines entitled “The revised Arab guide to multidimensional poverty in the design and evaluation of social protection strategies”, which will be published in 2021. The study includes a summary on how to use multidimensional poverty indicators in designing and evaluating social protection strategies for developing countries, and provides recommendations on the causes, scope and ways to adopt these indicators in the Arab region.

57. To implement these methodologies for measuring multidimensional poverty in a practical way at the national level, using indicators that reflect the reality of each country and assist in calculating a multidimensional national poverty index, ESCWA designed a tool for building a multidimensional poverty index, so as to help decision makers calculate and monitor multidimensional poverty and monetary poverty at the national level, and for evaluating alternatives in an advanced, transparent and participatory manner with Arab countries. The tool is designed to analyse society and its various groups, including the middle class. The tool can be adapted to identify poverty in a specific social group, such as women. A set of user guides and training modules have been developed around the tool to demonstrate how it can be used.

58. ESCWA prepared a paper entitled “Proposed framework for the revised national multidimensional poverty index: Lebanon case study”, to be published in 2021. The paper proposes a six-dimensional framework based on a recent assessment survey to evaluate the effects of three emerging crises (the economic crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Beirut Port explosion) on poverty. The results of the simulation model show a significant increase in the poverty rates. Accordingly, the paper presents policy recommendations on ways to address poverty in Lebanon and reduce its incidence.

59. ESCWA, in partnership with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, prepared a study entitled “Simulation of various techniques for analysing the revised multidimensional poverty index: Morocco case study”, to be published in 2021. The study covers three simulation techniques: a one-dimensional Monte Carlo shock, a multi-dimensional randomized Monte Carlo shock, and a probability model method with covariates accounting for social and demographic shocks. The preliminary results show that the randomized Monte Carlo shocks provide an effective and accurate means of simulation, and provide added value not only for understanding the revised evidence on the multidimensional poverty index, but also on its response to potential changes and shocks.

60. To monitor monetary poverty in the region and identify coping mechanisms for the COVID-19 crisis, ESCWA issued the following studies:

(a) A study entitled “Wealth Inequality and Closing the Poverty Gap in Arab Countries: The Case for a Solidarity Wealth Tax” ([E/ESCWA/CL2.GPID/2020/TP.9](#)), which sheds light on how wealth is distributed in the Arab region and its countries, and estimates the scope of poverty in the region before and after the pandemic. The study also includes an assessment of the feasibility of reducing poverty by imposing a solidarity wealth tax;

(b) A study entitled “Impact of COVID-19 on Money Metric Poverty in Arab Countries” ([E/ESCWA/CL2.GPID/2020/TP.10](#)), which estimates the effects of the pandemic on income poverty and the cost of poverty eradication in 14 Arab countries not members of the Gulf Cooperation Council;

(c) A technical paper on reviewing the measurement of monetary poverty from the perspective of international comparisons based on the report “Rethinking Inequality in Arab Countries” ([E/ESCWA/EDID/2019/2](#)), related to a new approach that links poverty lines to changes in living standards in different countries, rather than looking at the poverty line as fixed for all countries.

VII. Progress on migration

61. ESCWA launched an online campaign to raise awareness about migration issues in the Arab region and their link to sustainable development, to mark the International Migrants Day. The week-long campaign (14-18 December 2020) included the dissemination of statistics and related knowledge tools.

62. ESCWA, in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and in collaboration with 14 United Nations organizations, issued the *Situation Report on International Migration 2019: The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the Context of the Arab Region* ([E/ESCWA/SDD/2019/3](#)), which presents the latest analysis of regional data on migration trends and patterns. The report addresses the latest developments on migration-related policies in the Arab region, discusses the impact of the Global Compact for Migration on the policies of Arab countries, and identifies priority areas to harness migration for the service of all.

63. The main report was complemented by an executive summary ([E/ESCWA/SDD/2019/3/SUMMARY](#)) to highlight the report’s key conclusions and recommendations.

64. ESCWA prepared *The Global Compact for Safe Orderly and Regular Migration: The Promise of Making Migration Work for all in the Arab Region* ([E/ESCWA/CL2.GPID/2020/TP.5](#)). The paper outlines the

process that led to the adoption of the Global Compact for Migration, and reviews the principles and objectives of the Compact and its importance for the Arab region. The report also details the follow-up and review process for the Global Compact for Migration at the global and regional levels. Moreover, it explains the essence of the new approach adopted by the Global Compact for Migration in addressing migration issues, including its focus on data, evidence, rights, gender and children, and its call for collaboration between various sectors and at different levels of government and with all stakeholders.

65. ESCWA has accompanied Arab countries after their adoption of the Global Compact for Migration. It held the [Regional Review Conference on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#) (Cairo, 3-4 December 2019), in partnership with IOM and the League of Arab States, and in collaboration with members of the Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region. The Conference raised awareness about the effects of the Global Compact for Migration at the policy level in the Arab region, and launched a dialogue on the regional review. Representatives of key stakeholders, including Arab Governments, civil society organizations, international organizations, experts and academics, participated in the Conference.

66. ESCWA organized a [capacity-building workshop on migration governance in the Arab region](#) (Cairo, 5 December 2019), in partnership with IOM and the League of Arab States, and in collaboration with members of the Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region. The workshop was based on the outcomes of the Regional Conference on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, and aimed to raise participants' awareness of the Compact's impact on policies in Arab countries, and on ways to participate in the Compact's implementation and review processes.

67. ESCWA worked with IOM and the League of Arab States, in collaboration with United Nations organizations members of the United Nations Network on Migration the Arab region, to prepare the [first regional review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the Arab region](#). The review process was initiated by the development of guidelines on reviewing the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which include instructions to assist States in preparing national reviews. They also includes questions on the methodology used to produce national reviews; public policies and an enabling environment; progress in implementing the Compact; means of implementation; and the way forward.

68. In line with the Global Compact's guiding principles, which call for a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, the review process lasted about a year and included the following activities aimed at ensuring the widest possible participation:

(a) Two capacity-building workshops on the regional review of the Global Compact for Migration in the Arab region (25 June 2020, 13 August 2020). The two workshops identified the principles and objectives of the Global Compact and the comprehensive and inclusive implementation approach it calls for. Participants discussed the guidelines for preparing national reviews. The second workshop provided an opportunity for representatives of member States to discuss progress in preparing voluntary reviews of the Global Compact, exchange experiences and lessons learned in that regard, and ensure their alignment with the spirit and text of the Global Compact;

(b) An online consultation (20 October 2020) with member States in preparation for the Regional Review Conference on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, to consult with representatives of Arab countries on regional review processes. The discussion between representatives of member States focused on the regional review of the Global Compact for Migration in the Arab region, in view of the restrictions placed on movement in the region. Participants agreed on the appropriate mechanism to follow up on the review process, including holding the Regional Review Conference at the start of 2021;

(c) An online stakeholder meeting on the regional review of the Global Compact for Migration in the Arab region (two dialogue sessions on 27 October and 3 November 2020). The meeting was held in partnership with IOM and in collaboration with members of the United Nations Network on Migration in the Arab region,

and included two dialogue sessions with stakeholders concerned with migration in the Arab region. The dialogues brought together representatives of civil society, migrant and diaspora organizations, authorities, local communities, the private sector, employers, trade unions, national human rights institutions, the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, academia, the media, and other stakeholders at global and regional levels. The dialogues raised participants' awareness of the Global Compact and the review process in the Arab region. They also provided an opportunity to discuss ways to activate the role of participants in this process;

(d) An online dialogue with inter-State consultative mechanisms on the regional review of the Global Compact for Migration in the Arab region (28 January 2021). This dialogue was held in partnership with IOM, in collaboration with members of the United Nations Network on Migration, and with inter-State consultative mechanisms on the regional review of the Global Compact for Migration. The dialogue raised participants' awareness of the Compact and the review process in the Arab region. It also provided an opportunity to discuss ways to activate the role of participants in this process;

(e) An online dialogue with Arab parliaments on the regional review of the Global Compact for Migration in the Arab region (4 February 2021). The dialogue was held in partnership with IOM and in collaboration with members of the United Nations Network on Migration and representatives of Arab parliaments. The dialogue raised participants' awareness of the Compact and the review process in the Arab region. It also provided an opportunity to discuss ways to activate the role of participants in this process;

(f) A special session on the theme "Migration governance in the Arab region: trends, challenges and priorities for the future" (19 January 2021). The session was held in partnership with the League of Arab States and IOM on the sidelines of the thirteenth Summit of the Global Forum on Migration and Development. The session, which was attended by representatives of Arab Governments and stakeholders, focused on the initial outcomes of the regional review process of the Global Compact for Migration, and on the priorities for migration governance reform in the region;

(g) ESCWA has supported several regional consultations, including the Regional Stakeholder Consultation for the Arab States on Advancing the Implementation of the Global Compact for Migration for Women Migrant Workers, Migrant Children and Youth in the Arab Region: Reviewing Progress and Addressing Continuing Challenges. UNICEF and UN-Women held the consultation on 15 February 2021, and key messages were issued that were annexed to the outcome document of the regional review. The preparatory meeting on the Global Compact for Migration: consultations of trade unions on the regional review of Arab countries, organized by the Solidarity Center, was held on 17 February 2021;

(h) An online consultative meeting with stakeholders to review the Global Compact for Migration in the Arab region, held on 23 February 2021 in partnership with IOM and the United Nations Network on Migration, in collaboration with members of the United Nations Network on Migration in the Arab region, one day before the Regional Review Conference, to assess progress in implementing the Global Compact for Migration in the Arab region; discuss challenges and opportunities for meaningful stakeholder engagement in the Arab region; draft key messages and recommendations for submission to the 2022 Regional Review Conference and the International Migration Review Forum;

(i) The online [Regional Review Conference of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the Arab Region](#) (24-25 February 2021). The Conference was held in partnership with IOM and the League of Arab States, and in collaboration with members of the Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region.

69. Representatives of government institutions, including ministers and high-level officials from relevant ministries, participated in the Conference alongside representatives of various stakeholders, including civil society, migrant organizations, diasporas, faith-based organizations, authorities, local communities, the private

sector, trade unions, parliamentarians, national human rights institutions, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, academia, the media and United Nations organizations.

70. The Conference provided an opportunity for Governments to present the results of the first review of progress in implementing the Global Compact in the Arab region, highlight challenges and opportunities, identify gaps, discuss regional priorities, trends and approaches, and determine resource needs for implementing the Global Compact. The Conference resulted in the following two documents to be submitted at the 2022 International Migration Review Forum to ensure the Arab region's contribution to the global dialogue on migration:

(a) A regional report analysing the voluntary national reviews submitted by 13 Member States, and showing the main priorities, challenges, successful experiences and progress towards achieving the objectives of the Global Compact for Migration in the Arab region;

(b) An outcome document highlighting the key messages that emerged from the regional review, expressed by member States and other stakeholders at the Regional Review Conference. The outcome document identified a number of migration governance priorities in the Arab region, including expanding regular migration pathways and curbing irregular migration; ensuring that migrants have access to basic services; protecting and empowering migrant workers and activating their role in the sustainable development process in countries of origin and destination; respecting the human rights of all migrants, especially the most vulnerable; strengthening national, bilateral, regional and international cooperation; and providing detailed and easily accessible data.

VIII. Progress on older persons' issues

71. ESCWA designed a tool for integrating older persons' issues into the policymaking process in Arab countries. This tool, the first of its kind in the Arab region, assists decision makers in promoting the integration of older persons' issues into the policymaking process, as a means of empowering them and protecting their rights in Arab countries. This tool includes an introduction, a conceptual framework for integrating older people's issues into policy development, and three modules with guiding questions, relevant international frameworks and sources of information. The tool can be used to develop a comprehensive strategy for older persons, or to formulate sectoral policies that respond to their issues. It can be used at various stages of the policy development process.

72. ESCWA started preparations for the fourth review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing through several activities, including holding a workshop on the theme "Ageing with dignity in the Arab region: priorities for policy interventions" (11-12 November 2020). The workshop aimed to build the capacity of Arab countries to integrate the priorities and issues of older persons into policymaking processes. It provided an opportunity to start discussing preparations for the national review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing scheduled for 2021, and to devise a methodology for conducting the review in the Arab region with member States.

73. In accordance with the agreed methodology, ESCWA has drafted a manual for preparing national reviews. An online regional workshop was also held to build the capacity of Arab countries on the review process at the national level (8 April 2021). The workshop was attended by Arab countries' focal points on older persons' issues, and aimed to review the draft manual prepared by ESCWA to support member States in preparing their national reviews. It also provided a platform for country representatives to discuss initial ideas and questions related to the preparations for national reviews of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. The workshop will be followed by a second workshop in the summer of 2021 to review progress in preparing national reviews, and to support member States in that regard.

IX. Implementation of recommendations made by the Committee on Social Development at its twelfth session

74. At its twelfth session, the ESCWA Committee on Social Development Committee made several recommendations to member states and to the ESCWA secretariat. The following section sets out those recommendations and the actions taken to implement them.

Recommendation

Support member States' efforts and build their capacity to mainstream a nexus approach to social policies in national plans and programmes aimed at achieving national development and the SDGs.

Action taken

- Preparing a paper on integrated social development;
- Preparing a set of policy briefs on the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Continuing a number of ESCWA projects that have reinforced the idea of a coherent approach, such as the "Technology for persons with disabilities: policies and applications" project and the "Promoting ICT accessibility for persons with special needs" project;
- Holding three panel discussions, in partnership with the New York University Center for International Cooperation, with government officials in Arab countries on the importance of developing and implementing policies and programmes aimed at achieving social justice, and establishing equality principles and integrating them in national development strategies and programmes. These workshops dealt with topics that intersect with social justice, such as social protection policies from a social justice perspective; a nexus approach to food security and social justice policies; wage policies and their role in achieving justice;
- Holding a workshop to mainstream the principle of leaving no one behind in strategic planning: the social inclusion of the most vulnerable groups (persons with disabilities and older persons).

Recommendation

Continue providing technical support in response to requests from member States, with a focus on enhancing effectiveness and efficiency in the work of the secretariat, facilitating administrative procedures, and optimizing the benefits of new technologies.

Action taken

Implementing activities within the framework of technical cooperation in several areas, such as social protection, social justice, support for persons with disabilities, support for older persons, employment, and poverty reduction.

Recommendation

Strengthen the interlinkages between ESCWA activities at the regional level, whether in the framework of its governmental mechanisms or in other forums, and those undertaken at the bilateral level with member States through technical cooperation activities.

Action taken

Implementing regional and bilateral activities under the technical cooperation framework.

Recommendation

Focus on conflict-affected countries in ESCWA social development activities.

Action taken

ESCWA provided support to a number of Arab countries affected by successive conflicts, wars or shocks, through many means, including the following:

- Preparing a technical paper entitled “Wealth distribution and poverty impact of COVID-19 in Lebanon”;
- Preparing a policy brief entitled “Poverty in Lebanon: solidarity is vital to address the impact of multiple overlapping shocks”;
- Conducting an assessment of the impact of the Beirut port explosion on the population of the affected areas from the perspective of gender equality;
- Preparing a study on social protection in the Syrian Arab Republic;
- Implementing technical cooperation activities for the benefit of Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Sudan and Yemen.

Recommendation

Continue assessing reforms of the various components of social protection systems, while maintaining an inclusive approach to these systems.

Action taken

- Activating the Expert Group on Social Protection Reform (EGSPR), which was established on the recommendation of the ESCWA Committee for Social Development at its twelfth session in 2019. EGSPR has met three times since its establishment;
- Preparing a policy brief entitled “Social protection responses to the COVID-19 crisis in the MENA/Arab States region”;
- Preparing a policy brief for the Social Development Report 4 entitled “Social inequalities in the Arab region post-COVID-19: the road to structural transformation”;
- Preparing a paper on targeted social protection in Arab countries;
- Establishing the Social Expenditure Monitor for Arab States;
- Implementing several activities related to social protection within the framework of technical cooperation;
- Implementing a regional project on strengthening social protection for pandemic response, and related activities within the framework of technical cooperation.

Recommendation

Continue building knowledge and supporting member States in dealing with population dynamics with the aim of developing inclusive evidence-based policies that ensure decent living standards for all age groups.

Action taken

- Publishing two reports on the status of migration in Arab countries (2019, 2021);

- Holding the first regional review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the Arab region, including organizing a series of workshops to build the capacity of stakeholders, a number of consultative sessions with Governments, civil society and decision makers; convening a regional conference to present the main findings of the first review; and issuing key messages on the topic;
- Marking International Migrants Day;
- Developing a tool for integrating older persons' issues into the policymaking process in Arab countries;
- Providing technical support to several Arab countries (Iraq, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic) to develop national strategies on older persons and population issues;
- Issuing a report on the demographic profiles of Arab countries (2021);
- Publishing the Population and Development Report (2021).

Recommendation

Support member States' efforts to integrate policies on reducing social and economic inequality and multidimensional poverty in national development plans and programmes, in line with the SDGs, with a focus on dialogue as an effective means to formulate and implement policies that address inequality.

Action taken

- Publishing a revised multidimensional poverty index for Arab countries;
- Issuing a series of policy briefs on poverty and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on poverty rates in Arab countries or in selected countries;
- Designing a tool for building the multidimensional poverty index, and implementing it in several Arab countries;
- Preparing the third and fourth social development reports;
- Design a tool to assess gaps in public policies for social justice, to assist countries in analysing national policies and their compatibility with the principles of social justice. The tool has been applied at the national (Tunisia) and regional levels, through a study to assess national policies on wages and worker protection.

Recommendation

Continue holding meetings of the Intersessional Group of Experts on Disability, present an assessment of its activities at the thirteenth session of the Committee, and devise ways to finance its activities.

Action taken

Two meetings of the Intersessional Group of Experts on Disability (IGED) were held. IGED members participated in regional meetings on specialized topics, including a high-level meeting to support persons with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Arab region, and a consultative meeting with the Arab Digital Inclusion Platform, which focuses on e-accessibility.

Recommendation

Hold meetings of the expert group on social protection emanating from the Committee on Social Development, which will convene in the period between ESCWA sessions, present an assessment of its

activities to the Committee at its thirteenth session, invite non-governmental experts to the expert group's meetings, and find ways to fund its activities.

Action taken

Two regional meetings were held, focusing on a number of issues, including countries' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic by improving and strengthening policies and programmes related to social protection.
