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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

**PROMOTING SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE ARAB REGION  
THROUGH CAPACITY-BUILDING INTERVENTIONS**



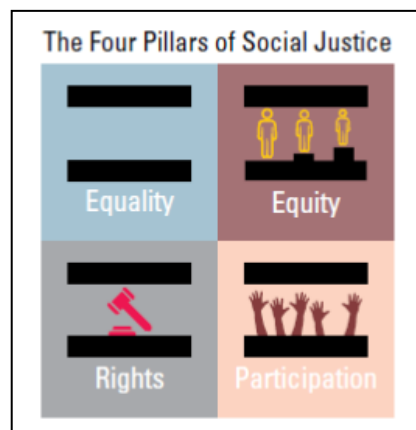
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## Social justice: a pressing need for Arab countries

Since 2011, a number of Arab countries have experienced periodic unrest, political uncertainty, economic downturns and socioeconomic deficits. Despite being faced with daunting challenges such as high population growth, increased influx of refugees, protracted conflict, socioeconomic inequalities, lost growth opportunities, sluggish participation and environmental degradation, the region has made humble progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Addressing these challenges requires a renewed commitment to respond to people's desire for drastic reforms, and to create a sense of justice and an environment of peace and prosperity for all. Ensuring social justice through full participation and the enforcement of socioeconomic and political rights remains the preferred way to achieve the SDGs.

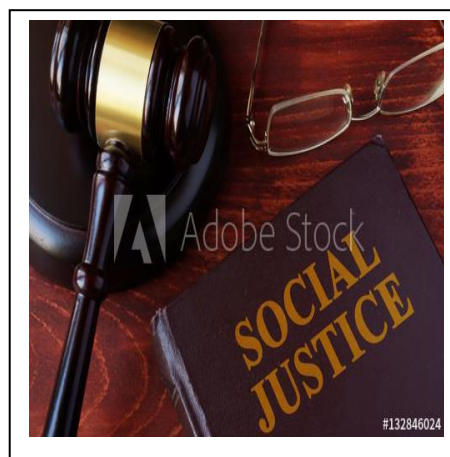
Against mounting pressure to address these legitimate grievances and achieve long-lasting justice in the region, ESCWA has advanced a new model for social justice that rests on the principles of equality, equity, participation and rights. ESCWA sees social justice as the act of ensuring "equal rights and access to resources and opportunities for all, men and women, paying particular attention to the removal of barriers that hinder the empowerment of disadvantaged groups to fulfil their potential to participate in decisions that govern their lives".<sup>1</sup>



## Achieving social justice through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The process of promoting participation, equality and justice has gained increased significance in the Arab region, and continues to be the central demand of countries undergoing transition. Following the Arab uprisings, social justice and the quest for inclusive economies and peaceful societies topped the list of people's priorities.

The SDGs emphasize the importance of reducing inequalities, and of linking equality, inclusiveness and justice. These global Goals, which promise an improved world that 'leaves no one behind', cover a broad range of targets and indicators guaranteeing that every person has equal rights and opportunities for a dignified life. Against this backdrop, ESCWA has spearheaded a series of initiatives to mainstream the principles and prerequisites of social justice in national development policies and plans to deliver on the SDGs by 2030.



The present bulletin explores ESCWA work in the field of social justice, and how member States' engagement and accelerated reform initiatives can help achieve people's aspirations for a better and fairer future.

<sup>1</sup> Tunis Declaration on Social Justice in the Arab Region, Twenty-eighth ESCWA session, Tunis, 18 September 2014. Available at <http://www.regionalcommissions.org/ESCWA28resEN1.pdf>.

## Strengthening capacity to transform lives

The Agenda for Development adopted by the General Assembly in 1997 underscores the role of the United Nations in strengthening the capacity of human resources through training and advisory services.<sup>2</sup> This was further emphasized in the 2030 Agenda that commits to accelerating human progress, and stresses the need to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development and improve human and institutional capacity to better manage development priorities, including climate change.<sup>3</sup>

Advancing people's capabilities and improving human wellbeing has long been recognized as a powerful instrument to transform lives and achieve lasting change. Improving people's knowledge, skills and competencies is key to strengthening their abilities to achieve self-development, and to increasing their opportunities and capabilities to contribute to positive change in their own communities and societies. Investing in human capacity and amplifying people's voices through specific skills is therefore central to empowering them to better shape the future they want. Accordingly, capacity-building emerges as an instrumental means to help individuals and institutions play a meaningful role in accelerating delivery of the SDGs.



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The provision of technical support and services to member States through capacity-building has been a key ESCWA mechanism to achieve its overarching goal of producing innovative knowledge, fostering regional consensus and delivering transformational policy advice.<sup>4</sup> Delivering on its promise to support member States in implementing equality-oriented, participatory-based and socially-just policies and plans, ESCWA has been advancing a social justice agenda through its knowledge products, including capacity-building toolkits and manuals that help member States integrate the concept of social justice into policymaking. These tools provide government officials and civil society actors with the opportunity to operationalize the concepts of social justice, equality, participatory development and democratic governance, and mainstream them in their policies, strategies, plans and programmes.

ESCWA toolkits and manuals are demand-driven and grounded in the underlying realities of the region. They were produced, tested and refined based on the needs expressed by Governments and civil society organizations to promote equality and social justice. These technical tools also draw on relevant publications and reports developed by ESCWA, and on scientific references and studies inspired by the changing socioeconomic and political landscape of Arab countries (figure below). The toolkits, which are utilized in capacity-building processes, are based on interactive participatory methods that provide beneficiaries with the necessary knowledge and tools to devise rights-based and equality-oriented public policies using a participatory approach. Through thematic workshops, the toolkits also offer a unique platform for dialogue, consensus-building and exchange of experiences between Governments, civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders.

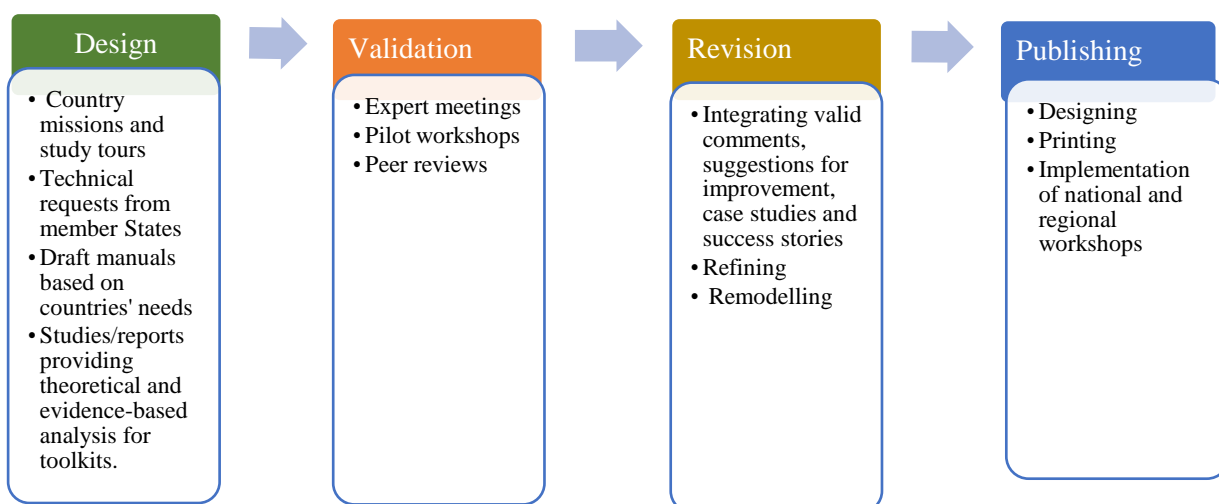
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<sup>2</sup> A/RES/51/240. Available at <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/51/240>.

<sup>3</sup> A/RES/70/1. Available at [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E).

<sup>4</sup> ESCWA, Annual Report 2018: Technology for Development, 2019. Available at <http://bit.ly/2MvOyM7>.

## Process of producing ESCWA capacity-building toolkits and manuals



Source: Developed by ESCWA.

### *Delivering social justice in the Arab region through systematic, analytical and practical toolkits and manuals*

#### **Toolkit on “Mainstreaming social justice in development plans, policies and programmes”**

The toolkit provides practical tools and steps that can assist policymakers in upholding social justice principles and mainstreaming them into national development policies, plans and programmes. Considering disparities between Arab countries in terms of capacity, needs and institutional, socioeconomic and political structures, the toolkit outlines the theoretical underpinnings of social justice and its linkages to the 2030 Agenda and other recent global treaties. It also reviews the interventions, institutional mechanisms and various policy components that strengthen national policymaking, guided by the four principles of social justice. More specifically, the toolkit describes how to integrate social justice concerns in selected policy areas that are key to achieving social justice, such as policies on wages, taxation, food security, subsidies, social protection and investment, while highlighting the importance of partnerships and the role of civil society in this process. It includes a set of practical examples, skills and tools required to formulate, implement, finance, evaluate, build consensus, apply and promote social justice policies, and to address the needs of all segments of society.

Through this toolkit and its corresponding training programme, member States are encouraged to mainstream social justice concepts into national development plans, policies and programmes, and to implement national strategies based on the concept of social justice and its fundamental four principles, while taking into account country-specific needs.

#### **Manual on partnership in democratic governance**

In response to the Arab uprisings, ESCWA developed a manual entitled “Building capacities on partnership in democratic governance” that aims to develop good governance competencies among government officials, civil society actors and community leaders, and enable them to more effectively manage political transitions in the region. The manual recognizes the centrality of rethinking governance systems, social contracts and socioeconomic strategies that would enable citizens to influence decisions and help achieve long-lasting justice.

The manual explores nine competencies that support political leaders, civil society actors and other stakeholders involved in the transition process: practicing just and good leadership; engaging civil society in the reform process; building alliances for public policymaking; building public institutions; upholding accountability and transparency; promoting dialogue and building consensus; designing public policies based on the principles of equity and social justice; promoting local development; and developing communication and social media strategies. The manual includes national and international cases and experiences, in addition to field knowledge grounded in today's Arab and international contexts. It is complemented by a Training of Trainers (ToT) toolkit with specific training skills to ensure its replicability and widespread application in the region, particularly in countries undergoing transition.

This manual and its corresponding ToT toolkit assist in developing the capacity of individuals and institutions concerned with social movements and democratic transitions, and provide them with the needed knowledge and competencies to participate in reform, systems transformation and conflict resolution processes.

### **Toolkit on “Building national capacities in the design of social protection policies using a participatory approach”**

This toolkit provides government officials with tools, models and participatory methods for use in the design, financing, implementation and evaluation of social protection policies. These include dialogue and consensus-building methods and specific participatory approaches to social protection policy processes that enhance the effectiveness and success of these policies, and ensure that they meet the needs of different social segments. The toolkit assists member States in enhancing the engagement of stakeholders in social protection policy processes, and guaranteeing meaningful participation in designing and implementing social protection policies.

Through this specialized training programme, member States are expected to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to deliberate with other stakeholders on proposals for reforming social protection programmes and policies. It will also help them to consider innovative and practical ways to transform these programmes from tools that provide fragmented social protection services into effective mechanisms that integrate citizens' needs and aspirations into a more comprehensive policy development agenda.

### **Manual on “Enhancing youth participation in public issues and decision-making mechanisms”**

Empowering young people in the Arab region is a top priority in the ESCWA vision for shared prosperity and dignified life. This manual responds to the needs of Arab young people to restore confidence in State institutions and actively participate in public policy processes, including in the formulation and implementation of inclusive and sustainable development policies.

The manual and its accompanying participants file present a set of practical models, skills and knowledge tools that are crucial to enhancing youth participation in decision-making processes. It builds on specific training tools and encompasses regional experiences and case studies that are beneficial to Arab countries, notably in the area of designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating youth-related policies. This training curriculum aims to strengthen the capacity of policymakers, youth activists, civil society actors and other stakeholders engaged in youth initiatives, in general, and in the design, implementation, financing and monitoring of youth policies, in particular, to foster a genuine and sustained participation of young people in policy design and decision-making processes.

In 2017, ESCWA provided targeted assistance to Jordan, Kuwait and Tunisia, involving over 300 youth leaders and decision makers in policy dialogues, and built the capacity of over 70 young activists and local leaders in the areas of participation in public life and decision-making processes.

### **Toolkit on the “Design and implementation of equality-oriented policies in Arab countries”**

This toolkit sets out a rights-based approach to equality-oriented policymaking through specific methodologies, including data analysis tools, strategic approaches to equality mainstreaming, and reform of existing policies. It introduces the concepts, principles, dimensions and drivers of inequality, and provides the core principles and alternative approaches for mainstreaming equality in policies, plans and programmes.

This toolkit introduces new mechanisms to integrate equality in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of socioeconomic policies, and underscores the various roles of stakeholders, including public, private and civic organizations, in safeguarding the rights and dignity of all. The toolkit specifically calls for forging robust partnerships and ensuring that processes leading to public policies are comprehensive, inclusive, participatory and based on a human rights approach. Drawing on a set of scientific references, interviews and case studies, the toolkit incorporates global experiences that have been successful in mainstreaming equality in socioeconomic policies, and considers important lessons learned that can be adapted to the Arab region.



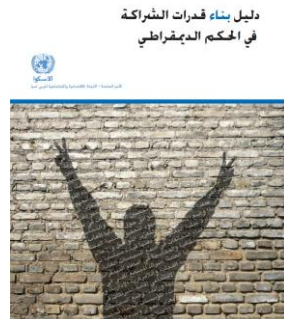
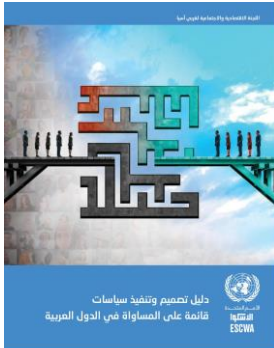
Through this diagnostic and practical toolkit, ESCWA hopes that member States will acquire the knowledge and skills needed to conceptualize, design, implement and evaluate the impact of multidisciplinary and equality-prone public policies that adopt progressive social spending and fiscal policies within the context of the 2030 Agenda.

### **Toolkit on the “Analyses and measurement of socioeconomic inequalities in the Arab region”**

This technical toolkit aims to strengthen member States’ capacity to analyse and measure socioeconomic inequalities, and to take corrective measures to adjust development planning and policy formulation and transform them into inclusive and equality-oriented policies, plans and programmes. The toolkit provides the necessary statistical tools, measures and indicators to measure and analyse the extent of inequality in specific socioeconomic sectors. It identifies the core elements of inequality to be measured in selected sectors, the indices and data to be developed for that purpose, and the requisite tools and instruments to be used. These include factors that lead to inequalities in rights and opportunities in the fields of education, health, employment, social protection and income. It therefore aims at enhancing the knowledge and technical capabilities of government officials in utilizing these tools and indicators for measuring and analysing inequality, ultimately leading to evidence-based national policies and programmes that reduce inequality.

The toolkit includes good practices and success stories from across the world on measuring and tracking inequality at the national level. It also covers practical and transferable skills in communication and consensus-building to assess the results of inequality analysis and measurement processes.

Using this toolkit in the policymaking process in the Arab region will eventually lead to the formulation of evidence-based national policies and programmes that ensure the reduction of inequalities within Arab countries



### A snapshot of ESCWA participatory capacity-building outcomes

Through its capacity building programmes, ESCWA has succeeded in fostering greater civil society engagement in national development policies and plans, and in generating demand for participatory-related and social justice-oriented manuals and initiatives. Below are main highlights of a 2018-2019 administered survey undertaken by ESCWA to measure the outcomes of its participatory-oriented capacity-building programmes over the past few years.

- The survey results showed the high level of beneficiary engagement in development projects and decision-making processes using the ESCWA participatory approach to development;
- Beneficiaries were reportedly able to localize the ESCWA participatory approach and internalize it in academic courses and community-based programmes;
- The survey results revealed the positive outcomes of the ESCWA capacity-building programmes and manuals, particularly in the field of youth participation and partnership in democratic governance. With the technical support of ESCWA, selected end-users were able to replicate the ESCWA training programmes on democratic governance, and youth participation in decision-making and community-based development. Over a hundred workshops were reportedly implemented on these topics targeting students, civil society actors and social activists, local authorities and refugees. This highlights the multiplier effect of the ESCWA capacity-building programmes and their impact on participatory development initiatives, national dialogues and consensus-building;
- The acquired skills and knowledge from the ESCWA programmes provided Tunisians, for example, with the opportunity to develop a participatory municipality project that was celebrated as a success by the World Organization for Electoral Systems. Other beneficiaries have reportedly developed strategic development plans for around eight municipalities in Lebanon, and established a Union of Community Organizations in Libya using ESCWA tools and methods for building alliances and partnerships;

“The ESCWA training programmes helped me gain the needed skills to lead on participatory planning and implementation, and to succeed in building dialogue and consensus with decision makers on vital social issues.”

“These manuals helped me devise new ideas for development, and empowered me to participate in public policymaking through decentralization channels.”

Source: Beneficiaries of the ESCWA training programmes.

- Several development projects based on the ESCWA approach to youth participation in policymaking were reportedly conceptualized and implemented in Jordan, using the acquired tools and skills provided in the related ESCWA manual and workshops. These include the ‘Future Leaders’ project, ‘My Municipality, how are you?’ Project, and ‘My right is to learn’ project;
- End-users expressed increased self-empowerment thanks to ESCWA social justice-related programmes that enabled them to secure sustained membership in regional consultation mechanisms, such as the regional Youth Advisory Board in Western Asia and North Africa. According to the survey results, the programmes also helped them hone their skills in project formulation and implementation using a participatory approach to development;
- ESCWA workshops resulted in the establishment of national committees of practice in Iraq, Jordan and Tunisia, aimed at sensitizing Governments and civil society activists to the relevance and application of the ESCWA participatory approach in public policy processes.

According to the survey results, the overall impact of the ESCWA capacity-building manuals and programmes was substantively and technically significant. The workshops provided an opportunity to share knowledge and experience on participatory practices and post-conflict transitions. They also helped beneficiaries acquire skills on a range of vital issues, such as leadership, participatory public policymaking, transparency and accountability, reform strategies, effective networking, trust building, dialogue and consensus-building.



#### *Impact of ESCWA capacity-building on mainstreaming social justice in development policies*

In recent years, ESCWA has implemented a series of regional and national workshops on the toolkit for developing social protection policies using a participatory approach, in Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Oman. The workshops allowed participants to exchange experiences and discuss the challenges that their countries face in the implementation of social protection programmes. The workshops also generated high demand for a TOT, and for implementing similar workshops at the national level to engage all government constituencies and other stakeholders in a national dialogue on social protection priorities and reforms.

“The application of the toolkit on social protection requires concerted and integrated efforts from all national stakeholders, particularly when it comes to collecting and analysing data and information.”

*Source:* Participant in one of the workshops

In Egypt, participants created a communication group to apply the knowledge and skills gained from the training in their work, and use it as a platform for exchanging information on their experience in using the toolkit.

In tandem, ESCWA piloted the toolkit on mainstreaming social justice in development plans and policies in Beirut in 2017, which brought together government officials from diverse backgrounds to assess and endorse the toolkit. One of the main messages emerging from the workshop was the need to involve high-level officials responsible for formulating plans and policies in these trainings, and the importance of applying the knowledge gained from the toolkit in all policy areas.





*Impact of ESCWA capacity-building activities on analysing and measuring socioeconomic inequalities and designing equality-oriented public policies*

Since 2017, ESCWA has organized six national capacity-building workshops, two in the Sudan and four in Tunisia, to train government officials from various ministries and other national stakeholders, including civil society representatives, on using the toolkits. The workshops aimed at assisting Tunisia and the Sudan in implementing new measurements of socioeconomic inequalities, and subsequently contributing to the design of evidence-based equality-oriented social protection, labour and green fiscal policies. The workshops brought together diverse stakeholders representing various ministries and government institutions and some civil society representatives. The workshops constituted a timely opportunity to discuss socioeconomic trends relating to inequality at the national level, and to set out key concerns and circumstances that perpetuate disparities in Tunisia and the Sudan. Discussions underlined many drivers of inequalities, and drew attention to major issues that must be taken into consideration in the toolkits. Participants from both target countries emphasized that the workshops presented an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen coordination and networking, exchange experiences and information, and build synergy among government entities and with civil society. In addition, participants highlighted the need to pursue those efforts and organize additional workshops in the future to enhance their capacity at the technical and substantive levels. They also underscored the need to establish continuous avenues of coordination and follow-up to ensure that the momentum created did not stop at the level of capacity-building but continued throughout the process of policymaking and beyond through advisory services and the provision of other technical services. There seems to be an overall requirement for building technical capacity and leveraging knowledge and skills at all levels of government officials, in line with national priorities. Therefore, the provision of technical support and capacity-building activities is highly needed and demanded by member States - it should be strengthened and increased in line with their priorities.

Participants in all workshops echoed the tremendous benefits gained and iterated that the knowledge and technical skills acquired will add value to their work and ultimately contribute to the whole process of formulating pro-equality multi-dimensional public policies.

In particular, the outcome of the capacity-building activities and the regional advisory services undertaken in Tunisia constituted a firm commitment from a multitude of policymakers representing various sectors to adopting the approach put forward through the ESCWA toolkits on analysing and measuring inequalities, as a prelude for designing and implementing equality-oriented public policies. The success of the implemented capacity-building activities and advisory services has generated two additional requests from the Government of Tunisia for the provision of technical cooperation services, aimed at providing technical support, guidance and advice to policymakers. ESCWA was also requested by the Tunisian Government to expedite and sponsor a multi-stakeholder consultation among senior management from various ministries, as a first step towards establishing an inter-ministerial working group/committee on mainstreaming equality in public policies. Accordingly, ESCWA developed a roadmap for the establishment of the inter-ministerial working group/committee, which was adopted at a high-level inter-ministerial meeting held in Tunis on 16 October 2019. The working group/committee will lead the discourse on reducing inequalities in Tunisia by championing ongoing consultations, exchanging experiences and lessons learned, building much needed consensus, and institutionalizing collaboration and partnerships on policy issues related to reducing inequalities; all of which will ultimately chart a national blueprint and strategy for eliminating multidimensional socioeconomic disparities in Tunisia.

Moreover, ESCWA has established the first core pool of 22 policy experts and trainers representing various ministries in Tunisia, who have acquired the requisite technical knowledge, skills and tools through the various capacity-building workshops to lead the policy formulation processes in their sectors, and to ensure that public policies and programmes are based on the principles of equality, rights equity and participation. These policy experts will transmit the knowledge and skills learned to other government officials and administrators, thus creating a snowball effect and widening the scope and impact of the approaches and principles spearheaded in the capacity-building activities to reach a wider pool of beneficiaries and government administrators.



## CONCLUSION

Social justice should be seen as a key vehicle for transformational change. The Arab region is replete with structural challenges, including protracted conflicts, which urgently requires a nexus approach to equality, inclusion and justice that is adopted by rights holders (the people) and duty bearers (Governments). Partnerships are also required to promote justice in the region, to ensure the proper articulation of public demands, the enlargement of participation channels, and the availability of equitable opportunities.

In a time of growing inequality, worsening poverty and prolonged conflict, ESCWA technical support and knowledge products are more relevant than ever. Today, there is an unprecedented need for specific knowledge and skills that help achieve social justice and social cohesion, for which people desperately yearn. Applying ESCWA tools and measures in the prevailing social, economic and political contexts will undeniably lead to constructive relationships among all stakeholders in the long run, including the most vulnerable, establish deep participatory foundations, and create reinvigorated States built on solid bases of the rule of law, equitable power sharing, and equality and rights principles.

Only when the active participation and equal rights of people are upheld, will Arab countries be able to deliver on their commitment to ‘leaving no one behind’ and strengthen their determination to accelerate actions towards achieving the SDGs by 2030.