

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL  
COUNCIL**

Distr.  
LIMITED  
E/ESCWA/S-6/14  
16 December 2019  
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

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

Sixth special session  
Amman, 21-22 December 2019

Item 14 of the provisional agenda

**Progress in ESCWA reform****Summary**

The present document sets out proposed reforms to the structure of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). The present document provides an overview of the new areas of ESCWA work under six subprogrammes, reduced from seven, and an explanation of the logic underpinning the proposed structural changes, which will be submitted to member States for approval through the official budget process. This proposal may undergo amendments during upcoming reviews by United Nations intergovernmental bodies before being approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

The representatives of member States are invited to review the proposed structural reforms set out in the present document and comment thereon.

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## Introduction

1. The present document sets out proposed reforms to the structure of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). The present document provides an overview of the new areas of ESCWA work under six subprogrammes, reduced from seven, and an explanation of the logic underpinning the proposed structural changes, which will be submitted to member States for approval through the official budget process. ESCWA is requesting additional resources for the proposed changes in structure.
2. The new structure proposed in the present document is subject to amendment based on future mandates and priorities that may emanate from global and regional conferences and from decisions related to the ongoing realignment of the United Nations Development System.

## I. BACKGROUND

3. Against a backdrop of an uncertain and volatile global environment, weakened multilateralism, slow growth and rising inequality, there is a need to revisit the development paradigm in Arab countries and the role of ESCWA, to ensure the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. The realignment of the United Nations Development System and continuing turmoil in the region require that ESCWA look inward to take stock of its achievements and to reflect on the way forward. The new strategic direction and proposed reforms offer a vision and implementation roadmap to better support member States in their efforts to deliver on their development visions and achieve the SDGs.
4. The revised organizational structure and the new strategic vision were informed by a series of consultations, which underscored the need for urgent change. At its fifth session, the ESCWA Executive Committee took note of the ESCWA Executive Secretary's vision to keep pace with organizational reforms, respond to the region's development priorities, and implement the 2030 Agenda through the following: developing the secretariat's internal structure; increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the secretariat's work; facilitating administrative procedures; and maximizing benefits from new technologies. The Committee also requested that the secretariat prepare a report on progress in implementing the ESCWA Executive Secretary's vision for developing the Commission's work, to be presented at the Executive Committee's seventh meeting. Moreover, the Executive Secretary consulted the permanent representatives of ESCWA member States on the proposed reforms at a meeting held in July 2019.
5. The reforms also respond to a number of other processes that support the need for change, including the results of the Enterprise Risk Management exercise at ESCWA that highlighted four out of five high-level risks related to leadership and staff empowerment. In addition, the results of the United Nations global staff satisfaction surveys and other staff surveys conducted by the ESCWA secretariat informed the decisions underpinning the proposed reforms.
6. The overall objective of the proposed reforms is to support member States in adapting and implementing policies and programmes towards achieving the SDGs. Special interventions will be tailored to target least developed and conflict-affected countries.
7. In response to the Secretary-General's call for a more nimble, efficient and effective organization, ESCWA proposes to consolidate its programme plan into six subprogrammes, with an emphasis on the 2030 Agenda and on integration and complementarity between all its areas of work.
8. Moreover, in response to the Secretary-General's call for a stronger focus on delivery rather than process to empower people over bureaucracy, ESCWA is transitioning to an agile, decentralized, results-oriented way of working that centres on empowering staff while focusing on outcomes rather than procedure.
9. Based on the guiding framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the proposed structure is designed to address the most pressing obstacles that hinder the achievement of the SDGs in the

Arab region. It emphasizes the fundamental principles of 'leaving no one behind' and reducing inequality between social groups and regions. It aims to provide support to member States in building inclusive, resilient and peaceful societies that guarantee a brighter future for coming generations; ensure that strong and transparent institutions provide access to basic services and infrastructure for the people of the region; create employment opportunities by drawing on the potential of technological advancements; mitigate the impact of climate change; strive towards social justice; engage young people; advance gender equality; and capitalize on the positive effects of migration.

10. ESCWA will also strengthen the delivery of evidence-based policy advice and expertise, strive to ensure consensus on vital topics, and conduct cutting-edge research and studies to inform and guide equitable and sustainable development in the region.

11. Rapid regional and global developments require a proactive approach that optimizes ESCWA convening power. The Commission strives to act as an innovative catalyst for positive change in the region, to assist in building entrepreneurial and knowledge societies, to support a people-centred transition towards the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and to move towards a new reality of stability, justice and prosperity.

12. The proposed change aims to reposition ESCWA as a forward-looking organization, recognized in the region and beyond for spreading knowledge, disseminating good practice, stimulating insightful debate, generating measurable impact and value-added products for member States, and benefiting citizens of the region.

## **II. ESCWA MISSION, OBJECTIVE AND STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS**

13. Over the past years, ESCWA has proven its capacity to implement its programme of work and allocate resources, as mandated by the General Assembly of the United Nations. However, despite producing valuable research and supporting a significant number of policy changes, ESCWA can do more to be acknowledged for the value of its work and merit as a regional institution and house of expertise.

14. ESCWA is now embracing change. Its new vision and mission reflect the Commission's aim to become an innovative catalyst for a stable, just and flourishing Arab region. In accordance with this vision of the future, the mission of the ESCWA team is to produce innovative knowledge, foster regional consensus and deliver transformational policy advice to achieve a sustainable future for all, in line with the 2030 Agenda.

15. To live up to this mission, it is imperative to rethink the way the Commission fulfils its mandate to meet the changing expectations of member States, to preserve the organization's comparative advantage, and to produce the added value that makes a desirable difference to people's lives.

16. To this end, ESCWA will replace the current operating structure with a more dynamic, agile and flexible framework. This shift will address emerging challenges and maximize opportunities to ensure the following:

(a) Enhance organizational performance to the level required to realize the needed synergies and complementarities for achieving organizational goals and significant impact;

(b) Accelerate decision-making with openness and transparency at all levels;

(c) Streamline processes (less layers) and develop new practices based on success stories towards a more efficient and effective use of human and financial resources;

(d) Make the best use of accountability systems equipped with key performance indicators;

(e) Encourage management to act as enablers of the delivery process through a balanced role of coaching, guiding, inspiring and leading change;

(f) Build cross-sectoral approaches to create a more collaborative environment that nurtures individual talents and expertise, enhances team spirit, encourages proactive initiatives, and facilitates the exchange of ideas, innovation and creativity;

(g) Create incentives for innovation and entrepreneurship that optimize the use of talents and sense of ownership across functional and administrative boundaries;

(h) Ensure effective responses by ESCWA to new challenges presented by the changing needs of member States, including by employing new technologies to enable informed and effective interventions and optimize decision-making.

### III. REVISED PROGRAMME PLAN BY SUBPROGRAMME

17. The revised ESCWA programme plan will adopt a **cluster approach**, rather than the siloed approach fostered by the one subprogramme-one division structure. The cluster approach will ensure the integration and complementarity of ESCWA work, in effect replicating the integrated approach of the 2030 Agenda. The programme plan will be organized around six interdependent and complementary subprogrammes, as follows:

(a) **Subprogramme 1: Climate change and natural resource sustainability:** Act as a pioneer and multi-stakeholder regional platform for deliberation, consensus-building, peer learning, and policy solutions to address the challenges of climate change, water scarcity and energy inefficiency that impede sustainable development in the Arab region;

(b) **Subprogramme 2: Gender justice, population and inclusive development:** Act as a pioneer and multi-stakeholder regional platform for deliberation, consensus-building, peer learning, and policy solutions to achieve gender equality and gender justice for all women and girls; promote equitable, inclusive and participatory social development; reduce poverty and unemployment; and apply a rights-based approach to migration issues;

(c) **Subprogramme 3: Shared economic prosperity:** Act as a pioneer and multi-stakeholder regional platform for deliberation, consensus-building, peer learning, and policy solutions on inclusive fiscal policy, public finance management, illicit financial flows and trade development, to achieve a basic standard of living for all people in the Arab region through sustained and integrated economic development. The subprogramme will also support member States in complying with the commitments made in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda;

(d) **Subprogramme 4: Statistics, the information society and technology:** Act as a pioneer and multi-stakeholder regional platform for deliberation, consensus-building, peer learning, and policy solutions to strengthen the institutional framework for official statistics in the Arab region, and enhance the production and use of harmonized, timely and reliable statistics for evidence-based policymaking, to enable the measurement of national and regional progress towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda; and advance information society in the Arab region and promote the integration of technology and innovation for inclusive and sustainable development;

(e) **Subprogramme 5: 2030 Agenda and SDG coordination:** Provide regional leadership on SDG policy advice, support, assistance and knowledge production to ensure the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region; and act as a platform for multi-stakeholder regional deliberation, consensus-building and peer learning to strengthen cooperation and coordination on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs with international and regional intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, especially the League of Arab States and its subsidiary bodies, to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs;

(f) **Subprogramme 6: Governance and conflict prevention:** Act as a pioneer and multi-stakeholder regional platform for deliberation, consensus-building, peer learning and policy solutions to ensure participation and partnerships for governance and institution building, and to enhance the capacity of member

States in conflict or post-conflict settings on conflict prevention for more just, equitable and inclusive societies in the Arab region.

18. The modalities for implementation will be aligned with the Commission's role as a regional house of expertise and think tank engaged in multisectoral policy research and analysis, with a view to harnessing the three pillars of sustainable development.

19. ESCWA serves as convener of intergovernmental platforms and multi-stakeholder forums, such as the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development, to exchange solutions, promote peer learning and establish a common Arab position at the global level in support of the 2030 Agenda. Building on its convening power, ESCWA will serve as the secretariat of the Regional Collaboration Platform (pending intergovernmental approval) and will lead the development of a Regional Knowledge and Data Hub (MANARA). In this role ESCWA will foster collaboration on sustainable development across the United Nations development system; enhance policy coherence between global and regional United Nations processes; promote consensus on the United Nations system support and response to regional development priorities and needs; ensure the implementation and follow-up of regionally agreed frameworks, norms and standards at the national level; and deliver integrated policy advice.

20. ESCWA will also serve as a provider of capacity development services, including supporting member States in their efforts to comply with international agreements, treaties, norms and standards through policy advocacy, consensus-building, technical support, policy advisory services, and training measures.

#### A. ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES

21. The following organizational changes will be carried out to ensure organizational effectiveness and efficiency:

(a) Subprogramme 1: Climate change and natural resource sustainability will be the responsibility of all ESCWA clusters, with principal responsibility lying with the **climate change and natural resource sustainability cluster**;

(b) The former subprogramme 2 on social development and subprogramme 6 on the advancement of women will merge and be designated as subprogramme 2 on gender justice, population and inclusive development. This subprogramme will be the responsibility of all ESCWA clusters, with principal responsibility resting with the **gender justice, population and inclusive development cluster**;

(c) Subprogramme 3 will change its title from 'Economic development and integration' to 'Shared economic prosperity' to focus on the link between the economic and social aspects of development, to make ESCWA work more people centred and ensure that economic development plans leave no one behind. This subprogramme will be the responsibility of all ESCWA clusters, with principal responsibility resting with the **shared economic prosperity cluster**;

(d) The former subprogramme 4 on technology for development and regional integration and subprogramme 5 on statistics for evidence-based policymaking will merge to become subprogramme 4 on statistics, information society and technology, to better reflect the intersection of statistics and technology in providing the necessary drivers for equitable and sustainable development. This subprogramme will be the responsibility of all ESCWA clusters, with principal responsibility resting with the **statistics, information society and technology cluster**;

(e) ESCWA will introduce subprogramme 5 on the 2030 Agenda and SDG Coordination to ensure coordinated focus on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. This Subprogramme will be the responsibility of all ESCWA clusters, with principal responsibility resting with the **2030 Agenda and SDG coordination cluster**;

(f) The former subprogramme 7 on conflict mitigation and development will be redesignated as subprogramme 6 on governance and conflict prevention. This subprogramme will be the responsibility of all ESCWA clusters, with principal responsibility resting with the **governance and conflict prevention cluster**;

(g) The Administrative Services Division (ASD) will be redesignated as 'Resource Management and Service Development Division' (RMSD) and will play a significant role in providing an administrative, financial, logistics and resource services hub to the United Nations Development System at the regional level;

(h) ESCWA will move from human resource management to talent management, to ensure a more flexible and efficient workforce. The organization will establish a talent management office to maximize existing skills and conduct workforce planning for future needs and priorities;

(i) The Programme Planning and Technical Cooperation Section will be redesignated as the 'Strategy, Planning, Accountability, Results and Knowledge Section' (SPARK). The Section will focus on promoting dynamism and innovation in the ESCWA business model and medium-term strategy. It will be the focal point for the Annual Results Framework and related applications in UMOJA. It will shift the evaluation function to become a basis for organizational learning processes, focus accountability on the attainment of results, and ensure ESCWA operational excellence through risk reduction and change management processes. The Section will manage the broader knowledge management and dissemination processes of ESCWA, including the Regional Knowledge and Data Hub (MANARA), and forge strategic partnerships to establish ESCWA as a development knowledge source in the region;

(j) The ESCWA Library will expand its focus to become a dedicated Knowledge Centre in charge of overall knowledge management, including responsibility for MANARA. The section will be integrated into SPARK;

(k) The Strategy Evaluation and Partnership Section will be redesignated as the 'Resource Mobilization and Partnerships Section' and will undertake the following: strengthen relationships with funding agencies and donors; maintain up-to-date regional and global donor mapping; coordinate and support project development, budgeting and fundraising; support and track implementation of extrabudgetary projects; assist cluster leaders in building and enhancing institutional partnerships (regional and global); support cluster leaders' relationships with civil society and non-State actors/partners; and develop and negotiate legally binding partnerships and donor agreements;

(l) The Office of the Secretary of the Commission will change its name to the Section of External Relations and Communications. Moreover, the management of the technical cooperation programme will move from the former Programme Planning and Technical Cooperation Section to the new Office of External Relations and Communications to ensure consistent and ongoing communication with member States, and better links to intergovernmental processes. The ESCWA Communication and Information Unit will also be integrated into the Office of External Relations and Communications to ensure stronger coherence between the consensus-building function of the Commission and the delivery of advisory services to member States. This undertaking will ensure a robust approach to communicating with policymakers in the region and beyond;

(m) ESCWA will establish the Decision Support and Data Science Unit under subprogramme 4 on statistics, the information society and technology.

22. ESCWA, and the United Nations in general, is increasingly being called upon to respond to the needs of member States for improved support tools using frontier technologies. This requires the development of online, interactive policy tools to maximize the opportunities that new technologies afford in providing interactive modelling and decision support for policy development. These tools can be instrumental in providing a level of certainty in policy design not available to Governments in the past. These functionalities include the use and development of interactive dashboards that enhance understanding of the impact of interventions in one policy area on other policy areas and also provide, in conjunction with data systems, an

increased level of machine-intelligent analysis support, and expand research capacity while tailoring and focusing results to support policy design and real-time risk/benefit analysis of government decisions.

23. These needs require skills defined by a new data science paradigm that is not part of the traditional United Nations data and statistics workplans.

24. ESCWA is aspiring to be a leading institution within the United Nations Development System in developing these policy decision support applications by launching a number of new initiatives. ESCWA has been successful in the early development of these tools, and is expanding this work to provide access to the rest of the United Nations system.

25. To continue in this work, ESCWA must bring in new skills and capacities.

#### B. LATERAL MOVEMENTS

26. The reformed and restructured ESCWA will necessitate the movement of talent across organizational units to revitalize and enrich the talent base, and provide staff members with the opportunity to experience new assignments and duty stations through mobility.

27. The term ‘lateral move’ is defined in section 1 of ST/AI/2010/3 on the staff selection system as follows:

“Lateral movement: movement of a staff member to a different position at the same level for the duration of at least one year. The new position may be in the same or a different department or office, in the same or a different duty station and in the same or a different occupational group. Inter-agency loans or other movements to and from other organizations of the United Nations common system are recognized as ‘lateral moves’. Within the same department or office, a lateral move will normally involve a change in functions with or without a change of supervisor. When the supervisor remains the same, there will be a lateral move if the responsibilities are substantially different; for example, if there is a different area of responsibilities or a change in the departments/offices serviced by the staff member. A change in supervisor without a change in functions does not represent a lateral move. Temporary assignments of at least three months but less than one year, with or without special post allowance, shall also qualify as a lateral move when the cumulative duration of such assignments reaches one year.”

28. Heads of Office have the authority to effect lateral movements of staff members within their offices. Section 2.5 of ST/AI/2010/3 on the staff selection system states that:

“Heads of departments/offices retain the authority to transfer staff members within their departments or offices, including to another unit of the same department in a different location, to job openings at the same level without advertisement of the job opening or further review by a central review body.”

29. Staff moving across organizational units or assuming new functions will be issued transfer memos. Directors and officers in charge are to ensure that they have completed detailed terms of reference for their respective divisions, sections, units and teams, and that the terms of reference are developed for each position and shared with the staff members concerned.

#### C. FINAL PROVISIONS

30. The revised organizational structure of ESCWA shall enter into force on 1 January 2020. Detailed communications on areas impacted by the change management process, such as performance management, learning and development, physical relocations of individual staff members or teams, alignment of Umoja and



Inspira, amendments to the ESCWA intranet and external web portal and other administrative changes will be issued periodically.

31. The repositioning of ESCWA is being undertaken in response to changing global and regional dynamics, including the new macroeconomic environment in the Arab region, global and continental development frameworks and United Nations reforms.

32. Under this revised framework, ESCWA will deliver more dynamic and responsive services to its member States by turning innovative ideas into implementable actions and policy tools, which will empower and transform ESCWA to better serve its member States.

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