

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

National Workshop on Mapping data for SEM from public budgets of Tunisia

Virtual Meeting, 14-16 July 2020

Context

Public social expenditure is an important means of implementation for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Its effectiveness depends on how informed and efficient public expenditure choices are, given fiscal space and macroeconomic policy coherence.

Currently, member States of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) do not have a comprehensive mechanism for monitoring public social expenditure and for linking it to macroeconomic policy coherence. As a result, budget allocations sometimes support multiple and overlapping social programmes, and policies are often mismatched or inadequate for achieving social development priorities and realizing the SDGs. Given the pressure on public budgets across Arab countries, such expenditure management is unsustainable.

ESCWA has embarked on a project entitled *“Social Expenditure Monitor (SEM): An Integrated Framework for Supporting Macro-Fiscal Policies and the SDGs”*. A pioneering tool for Arab States, SEM will provide comprehensive mapping of public social expenditure to inform budgeting and social policy reforms. It is meant to improve allocative efficiency and effectiveness of budgeting.

SEM is an enabling tool for rationalizing expenditure components to achieve different objectives: delivering quality public services; making “social investments” that promote inclusive development and social stability; enhancing economic growth and revenues over time. Setting the right mix of expenditures is important to drive the economy and society towards achieving the SDGs, as emphasized in the ESCWA 2017 report *“Rethinking Fiscal Policy for the Arab Region”* ([E/ESCWA/EDID/2017/4](#)).

What is social expenditure?

The notion of social expenditure varies across countries and depends upon a country’s progress in social development priorities. Ideally, social expenditure aims to maximize levels of human well-being through access to quality services and social protection, including areas in which the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims for universal access. Appropriate social expenditures are “social investments” that promote inclusive and sustainable growth.

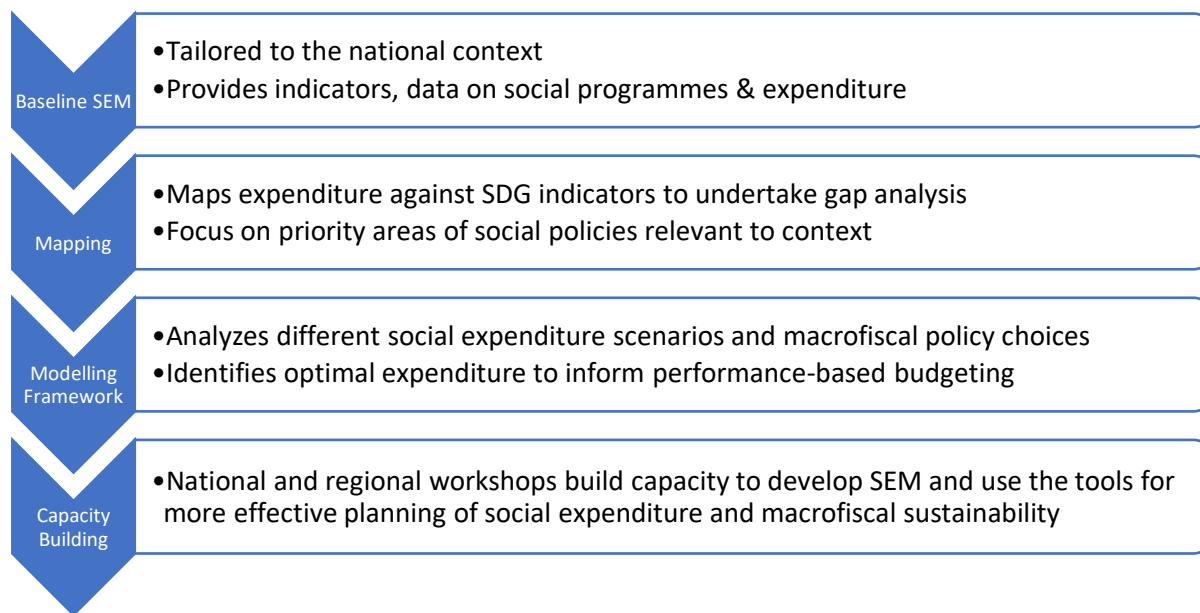
Any measure of social expenditure must take into consideration two guiding objectives: (a) targeting expenditure to ensure social justice and inclusive development, reduce poverty and inequality, and improve human development; and (b) targeting expenditure to enhance human capital and innovation, promote gender equality and foster sustainable economic growth.

ESCWA has developed an innovative framework of SEM for Arab States, which is aligned with the SDGs, flexible and can be adapted to national specificities. The monitor thus provides a more comprehensive measure of public social expenditure in seven areas including: (1) education; (2) health and nutrition; (3) housing and community amenities; (4) labour market interventions and employment generation; (5) social protection and food security; (6) arts, culture and sports; and (7) environment protection ([E/ESCWA/EC.6/2019/8/Rev.1](#)).

What are the milestones in developing SEM?

The establishment of SEM would require collection and analysis of data according to the agreed-upon definition of social expenditure in a national context at the first stage. Adequacy and effectiveness of expenditures, as well as their efficiency, will be analysed through mapping sector-specific social policies and programmes and economic modelling. National workshops and trainings will be designed to build the capacity of various stakeholders, including national officials and civil society groups, to use SEM to influence budgeting and policy. ESCWA's digital platform on SEM will provide easy access to these tools to help advancing budgeting and policy reforms.

Four key stages of implementing the SEM at the national level



What are the benefits of SEM to member States?

SEM is designed as a multipurpose policy tool offering several benefits:

- SEM is a **pioneering tool for Arab States** to **assess** social policy **spending** and **reallocate** resources to the neediest sectors of development;
- SEM provides a comprehensive mapping of social expenditure and informs Governments on **rebalancing public expenditures priorities** towards enhancing social protection

reforms, addressing poverty and inequality, improving young persons' capabilities, and furthering economic diversification, productivity and growth;

- (c) To establish SEM, ESCWA will offer national workshops and training events on mapping and modelling tools to **strengthen capacity** of policymakers to undertake reforms in **fiscal policy choices** and make more efficient and effective budget decisions;
- (d) SEM could be **an advocacy tool** for Governments to better highlight their needs for greater international cooperation and financing for sustainable development;
- (e) SEM builds **coherent statistics**: it connects financial statistics to National Accounts, which enables better macrofiscal analysis.

Current Status

Jordan and Tunisia are currently implementing the SEM, which was initiated as a pilot project under the technical assistance program (Request No. 0135/2018 and 0153/2018 respectively), and subsequently the project is being supported by sponsorship of Development Account funds. Following the initiative in Jordan and Tunisia, and discussions with representatives of other member States on a framework of social expenditure, several member States have expressed their interest to implement the SEM. At the sixth ESCWA Executive Committee meeting held in Marrakesh during 14 and 15 June 2019, representatives of member States expressed their support to the SEM project, highlighting the importance of adapting it to the varied contexts of individual Arab States, and collaborate with the secretariat to develop and use the framework to identify different aspects of public expenditure and promote social development and macro fiscal sustainability.

ESCWA has developed a framework on SEM titled "[Social Expenditure Monitor for Arab States: A Tool to Support Budgeting and Fiscal Policy Reform](#)", in English and Arabic languages, which was developed during the course of discussions in 2019 with representatives of Jordan, Tunisia and other member States, UN agencies, and with inputs from regional and global experts. The framework is aligned with the SDGs, flexible and can be adapted to national specificities.

Given this background, the SEM framework has been applied to Tunisia to compile data from the budgets since 2014 to the latest available years. As the first stage of implementation of the SEM, national workshop with different ministries/entities of Tunisia would help improving the SEM in Tunisia national context, methodological issues relating to compilation of data, and it would be an opportunity to discuss preliminary analysis of the data, identify data gaps and solutions and discuss the course of action for moving to other stages of implementation of the SEM, as outlined.

Meeting Objectives

The primary objectives of the meeting with representatives of Tunisia are:

- To discuss the indicators of SEM in Tunisia context, data compilation methodology and preliminary analysis of SEM of Tunisia; identify data gaps and explore possible disaggregation of data sources/methods.
- To discuss the roadmap regarding future activities relating to the project.

Expected participants

Ministries/Entities from Government of Tunisia: Tunisian Agency for Technical Cooperation (ATCT), Finance, Social Affairs, CRES, Statistics agency, Women, Family, Childhood and Seniors, Health, Education, Higher Education and Research, Employment, Environment, Culture, Agriculture, Equipment, Housing and Territorial Development

ESCWA and UNCT Tunisia

Agenda

(Tunis time: 9.00 to 13.30/ Beirut time 11.00 – 3.30)

Mapping data for SEM from public budgets of Tunisia	
14 July 2020	
11:00 – 11:15	Welcome and opening remarks --ESCWA --Tunisian Agency for Technical Cooperation
11:15 – 12:15	SEM for Tunisia: Updates on the project Overall data and key trends and its usefulness for budgeting and fiscal policy decisions (ESCWA) Mapping framework for Tunisia data (ESCWA) Discussion round the table
12:15 – 13:15	Focused discussion on programmes and activities related to data on Education dimension
13:15 – 13:30	Break
13:30 – 14:30	--Focused discussion on programmes and activities related to data on Health and nutrition dimension
14:30 – 15:00	Summary of discussions on Education and Health dimensions; identification of possible disaggregation of data (source/method)
15 July 2020	
11:00 – 13:15	--Focused discussion on programmes and activities related to data on Social Protection and Food Security
13:15 – 13:30	Break
13:30 – 15:00	--Focused discussion on programmes and activities related to data on Employment and labour market interventions --Focused discussion on programmes and activities related to data on Housing and community amenities --Summary of discussions; identification of disaggregation of data (source/method)
16 July 2020	
11:00 – 13:15	Focused discussion on programmes and activities related to data on Environment protection Focused discussion on programmes and activities related to data on Culture, arts and sports dimension
13:15 – 13:30	Break
13:30 – 15:00	Summary of discussions; Way Forward; Next steps for implementation of the project activities Wrap up