

REGIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISM (RCM) FOR ARAB STATES  
REGIONAL UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT GROUP ARAB STATES



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TERMS OF REFERENCE  
OF THE WORKING GROUP (WG) ON  
THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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**1. BACKGROUND**

**THE GLOBAL CONTEXT**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by world leaders during the United Nations global Summit in New York in September 2015, is a culmination of inclusive global consultations regarding the scope and shape of development over the next decade and a half. Having learned some key lessons from the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the new agenda includes a set of sequential interwoven frameworks designed to guide post-2015 decisions and put the global community on a pathway towards achieving sustainable development by 2030. These frameworks include the Sendai Framework for DRR 2015-2030 (Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction), the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (Third International Conference on Financing for Development), Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations Sustainable Development Summit), the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC COP21), the Nairobi Package (Tenth WTO Ministerial Conference), and the Quito Declaration on Sustainable Cities and Humans Settlements for All (New Urban Agenda).

Within these multiple frameworks, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) embody shared principles, aspirations and commitments to tackle a broad spectrum of development challenges. The SDGs are designed to be transformative, universal, applicable in a variety of contexts, and adjustable in scope and scale to national realities. They aspire to achieving the inclusion, empowerment and well-being of all and cover a much broader spectrum of issues than previous agreements. However, the SDGs are also far more complex, due to their indivisible nature. Operationalizing such an interconnected bundle relies heavily on integrating the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development, while ensuring full alignment with the principles of good governance, rule of law, human rights, access to justice, equality, transparency and accountability.

**THE REGIONAL CONTEXT AND THE RCM**

The 2030 Agenda recognizes the pivotal role of regional entities in achieving sustainable development. Increasingly, regional and sub-regional groupings of countries are identifying joint solutions to their common development challenges, and regional institutions are called upon to work collectively with member States to help identify and set priorities, develop regional strategies and approaches, not only on cross-border issues, but also on more traditional issues of economic and social development.

The Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) for the Arab States is one of five regional inter-agency mechanisms established by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to improve coordination among the work programmes of the organizations of the United Nations system. Its objective is to enhance thematic and policy coherence across UN agencies in the Arab region and support the alignment of operational work with analytical and normative work. Membership of the RCM in the Arab region includes all regional bureaus of UN agencies, as well as the League of Arab States (LAS). RCM meetings are also open to regional and international financial institutions as well as multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF, and ICARDA.

the Regional UN Development Group (R-UNDG) is an important part of this institutional structure and plays a key role in providing strategic guidance and support to Resident Coordinators (RCs) and UN Country Teams (UNCTs) for the achievement of country level results. Chaired by the head of the R-UNDG, the group drives UNDG priorities by supporting UNCTs with strategic priority setting, analysis and advice. Effective collaboration between the two coordination structures based on clear lines of responsibility and accountability is a precondition for coherent support to member States.

Members of the RCM coordinate and maximize collective action through working groups and task forces. **For the joint efforts on the 2030 Agenda, coordination will be centralized in one regional Working Group (WG) to be co-chaired by ESCWA and the R-UNDG with a joint secretariat managed by both ESCWA and the R-UNDG Secretariat.** Meanwhile, thematic Taskforces emanating from the Working Group will include representatives from interested entities and are expected to collaborate to produce joint outputs and policy positions or to organize joint regional events.

The proposed **WG on the 2030 Agenda** is the successor of the inter-agency MDG Thematic WG for Arab States (MDG TWG) established in 2004 to coordinate efforts of the different UN agencies in monitoring and reporting on the MDGs. The MDG TWG, chaired by ESCWA since 2004 produced four regional reports on MDG adaptation and implementation, and the challenges towards their achievement in the Arab region. The MDG TWG also carried out a number of joint activities and workshops to support the attainment of the MDGs.

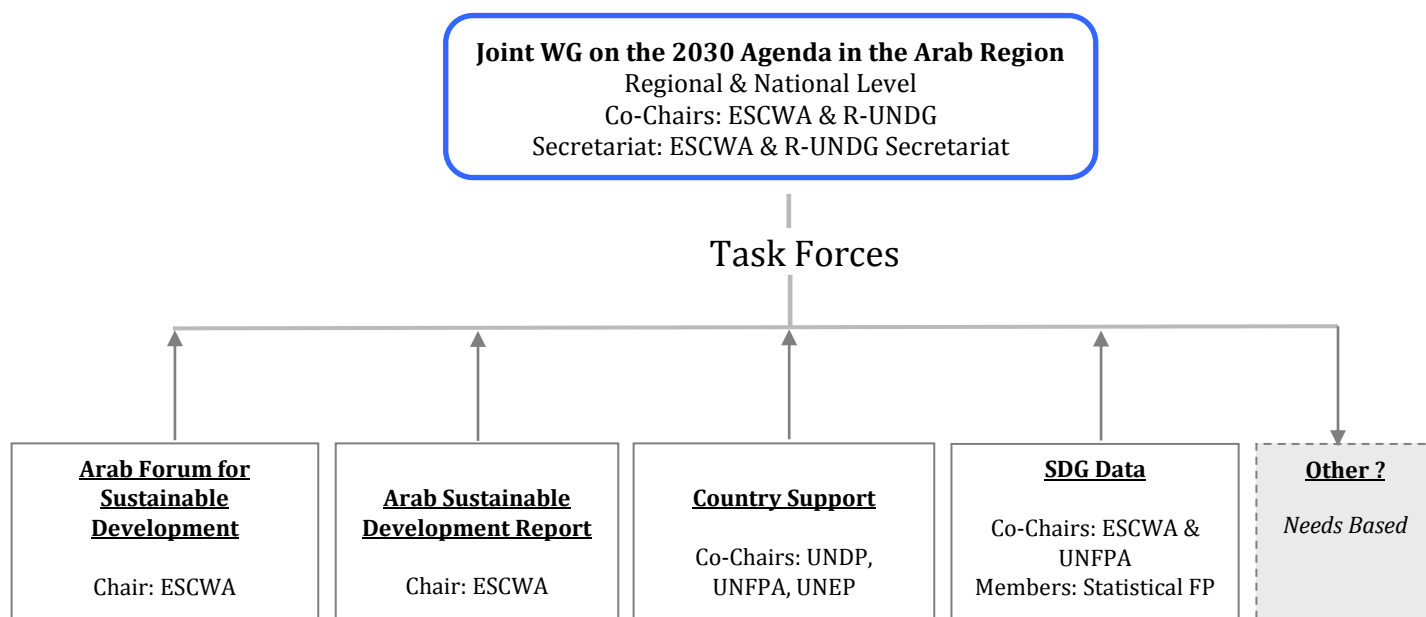
In 2013, RCM members agreed that the MDG TWG would revise its terms of reference to reflect the importance of inter-agency coordination during the transition to the post-2015 agenda and the SDGs. Between 2013 and 2015, a transitional TWG coordinated regional activities including the organization of two meetings of the Regional Forum for Sustainable Development and the production of the first prototype Arab Sustainable Development Report. At the 21st meeting of the RCM in November 2015, members agreed that the WG on the 2030 Agenda would be established to replace the MDG and Transitional TWGs. They also agreed that the RCM Task Force on Statistics, set up in 2011, would redefine its terms of reference to focus on SDG Data, and would coordinate the implementation of its workplan with the Working Group on the 2030 Agenda<sup>1</sup>.

In 2017, based on recommendations from RCM and R-UNDG members, it was agreed to consolidate thematic inter-agency work under focused Taskforces that would report to a Joint regional WG on the 2030 Agenda co-chaired by ESCWA and the R-UNDG. This consolidation responds to the spirit of the Statement of Collaboration between the Regional Commissions and UNDG, and to the recommendations of the 2016 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR).

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the RCM and its Working Groups, visit: [www.unescwa.org/about-escwa/regional-coordination-mechanism](http://www.unescwa.org/about-escwa/regional-coordination-mechanism)

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



## 2. PURPOSE

The goal of the Working Group on the 2030 Agenda (2030 WG for short) is to support coordination efforts of regional UN actors and the League of Arab States in their efforts to adapt, implement, monitor and report on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## 3. FUNCTIONS AND SCOPE

The 2030 WG will seek to harness the collective strength of all the agencies to undertake joint research, consensus building, capacity building, advocacy and knowledge exchange, follow up and review and monitoring of progress on the new global agenda. It will promote an integrated approach in the four broad areas of its activities:

- I. **Regional Consultations** serve as an important mechanism for debate and exchange of lessons learned and good practices among different actors in the region. While the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development taskforce takes the lead on the planning and implementation of one of the region's key Follow-up and Review mechanisms, the 2030 Agenda WG may also consider the organization of other regional meetings and consultations as needed.
- II. **Knowledge production** in the form of reports, working level papers and policy briefs will be useful to ensure a common understanding of the priorities and challenges of the region in the achievement of the new agenda. The Arab Sustainable Development Report taskforce will take the lead on one of the region's key knowledge products. In addition, the 2030 Agenda WG will also put forward a plan for other joint knowledge products, with a particular focus on the integration aspects of the SDGs.

- III. **Follow-up and review, monitoring and data collection** are central tenets of the 2030 Agenda. The WG will oversee the work of the SDG Data taskforce, through regular consultations and coordination activities.
- IV. **Capacity building and Advocacy** activities aimed at member State governments and major groups may be streamlined and coordinated through the 2030 WG, which may consider the possibility of maintaining a common platform for all capacity building material, guidelines and modules as well as a common calendar of regional and sub-regional training activities to ensure coherence and avoid duplication. Members will also seek to harmonize public and private advocacy efforts on the 2030 Agenda. Capacity building support to UN Country Teams will be done through the Country Support Taskforce.

The 2030 WG will provide overall guidance to the four established taskforces and other needs-based taskforces that might be set up in the future. Each of the four taskforces is expected to develop its own workplan and report bi-annually on the progress achieved to the 2030 WG. The taskforces will organize face-to-face and virtual meetings as needed. Detailed Terms of References for the taskforces are included in the Annex 1 of this document

#### **4. MEMBERSHIP, GOVERNANCE & ORGANIZATION**

All members of the RCM will be invited to express their interest in participating in the 2030 WG. Membership in the WG will be at the level of the Regional Directors of UN agencies, represented by focal points to facilitate working-level communication and coordination.

The 2030 WG will be co-chaired by ESCWA, represented by the Deputy Executive Secretary for Programme, and the R-UNDG, represented by the R-UNDG Chair with a joint secretariat managed by both ESCWA and the R-UNDG Secretariat.

The Co-Chairs have the authority to convene meetings (either in-person or virtual) and will organize at least one meeting of the 2030 WG every year. Meetings may be organized on the sidelines of other regional events, including the annual RCM meeting or the Arab Regional Forum for Sustainable Development.

The Co-Chairs, with support from the secretariat of the 2030 WG, will develop a biennial workplan and budget, and organize regular meetings with members. In consultation with other members, the Co-Chairs may establish additional taskforces to support the preparation of specific events or other major outputs. Member entities may participate in all or selected taskforces, as relevant, noting that only members of the 2030 WG may be members of the Taskforces.

#### **5. FINANCIAL AND IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS**

All members of the 2030 WG are expected to make contributions to the WG and its affiliated taskforces based on the established annual or biennial work plans and budgets. Contributions may be made in-cash or in-kind, such as through covering participant and staff travel, supporting consultancy costs, contributing to meeting costs, or providing staff time and resources. The amount of contribution and the modality of disbursement will be determined on an individual basis.

## **6. MONITORING AND REPORTING**

The 2030 WG will regularly assess its progress against the biennial work plan through consultations with members on lessons learned. The joint Secretariat of the 2030 WG will prepare and submit an annual progress report to the RCM, describing its successes, challenges and future plans. Individual activities and outputs of the WG will be assessed through surveys, questionnaires and on-line monitoring tools.

## Annex 1: Terms of References for the Taskforces

### Arab Forum for Sustainable Development Taskforce (AFSD TF)

**Background:** ESCWA, like all Regional Commissions, has the mandate to organize annual regional multi-stakeholder forums, known as Regional Forums for Sustainable Development, as the main regional mechanisms for FUR reporting to the High Level Political Forum. In line with the ToR<sup>2</sup> of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD), endorsed by member States in Doha in 2016, the taskforce under the 2030 WG will carry out functions related to the substantive and logistical preparations of the AFSD and provide joint support towards its implementation.

**Objective:** To ensure the contribution of the members of the 2030 WG to the planning and implementation of the AFSD, whose objectives and functions are detailed in the ToR, and include:

- Providing a multi-stakeholder platform to discuss transnational issues from a perspective that takes into account integration between sectors and that targets government and non-government organizations;
- Engaging Arab countries to share experiences in operationalizing commitments to the goals and principles of the 2030 Agenda through integrated strategies, programmes and policies;
- Designing roadmaps to achieve common regional goals and address emerging challenges, while ensuring consistency between national plans and strategies and regional priorities;
- Strengthening regional and international cooperation to implement, follow up and review the 2030 Agenda, including cooperation between Arab countries and trilateral cooperation, and identify methods to finance development and build strong partnerships between countries and across regions based on peer learning and the exchange of expertise and best practices;
- Exploring means to mobilize implementation methods to achieve the SDGs, including the development of statistical systems, science, research, technology and innovation;
- Fostering a peer learning platform building on Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) experiences and encouraging Arab States to conduct VNRs;
- Consolidating a network of practitioners and resources persons on implementation of the various components of the 2030 Agenda.

**Scope and Function:** The AFSD is convened annually and shall be implemented at least three months prior to the High Level Political Forum. The AFSD TF is composed of members of the 2030 WG and has the following core functions:

- i. **Substantive Planning:** Agree on the thematic focus of the AFSD, and roles and responsibilities of the members. The TF will discuss the concept/design and agenda, and identify inputs including background papers, presentations, issue briefs, etc. Accordingly, the TF will identify resources persons, consultants, speakers and forum participants.
- ii. **Logistical Planning:** Discuss and agree on the proposed date and venue for the AFSD and coordinates the attendance of participants and speakers. While ESCWA usually provides the core resources for AFSD, members may be required to financially support the preparation of substantive input and/or travel and accommodation as necessary. In line with the agreed concept and agenda of the AFSD, TF members may also engage in co-leading relevant side events and/or workshops.

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<sup>2</sup> [AFSD ToRs available in the report of the ESCWA 29<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Session \(Page 12-13\)](#)

- iii. **AFSD Outcome Report:** Contribute inputs to the Outcome Report of the AFSD, which sets out key messages emanating from the meeting, to be submitted to the HLPF.
- iv. **Follow-up:** Ensure broad dissemination of the AFSD Outcome Report, to serve as a guiding tool for subsequent activities and events. The TF may also consider planning joint side events during the HLPF around the focus and results of the AFSD.

**Membership and Organization:** The AFSD TF is chaired and coordinated by ESCWA and open to all members of the RCM Working Group on the 2030 Agenda interested to contribute to the preparation of the annual Forum. Membership in the TF is on a voluntary basis and may change on an annual basis. The TF will meet at least once per year physically, preferably in January, and as required virtually, earlier and later in the cycle. A detailed AFSD work-plan will be developed in November of each year to serve as the main guiding document for the planning and implementation of the AFSD.

## Arab Sustainable Development Report Taskforce (ASDR TF)

**Background:** ESCWA is mandated to produce a Regional Report on the 2030 Agenda—The Arab Sustainable Development Report—at regular intervals in support of follow-up and review at the regional level. Specifically, ESCWA’s Executive Committee Resolution 322 (December 2015) requested the Commission to implement a set of activities including: “*monitoring progress made in the Arab region towards achievement of the SDGs; and the preparation of regional follow-up reports using official data.*”

The Arab Sustainable Development Report (ASDR) will be produced every four years, in time for submission to the High-Level Political Forum at the level of Heads of State and Government (in 2018, 2022, 2026, and possibly 2030). All ASDRs are expected to be presented first to the multi-stakeholder Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD) as a stepping stone to their presentation at the High Level Political Forum.

ESCWA is committed to the production of the ASDR with the concerned members of the United Nations in the region and under the umbrella of the RCM Joint Working Group on the 2030 Agenda.

**Objective:** The TF ensures the contribution of the members of the 2030 WG in the planning and production of the ASDR. The TF further ensures that the ASDR:

- Provides an analytical lens on the achievements in the adaptation, implementation, follow-up and review and monitoring of the SDGs in the region;
- Raises awareness on regional challenges at different levels and among various stakeholders and development partners;
- Provides Member States with recommendations that support them in achieving progress on the SDGs;
- Ensures that the voice of the Arab region is consolidated and projected to the global arena.

**Scope and Function:** The TF supports the production of the ASDR through in-kind and/or financial contributions as follows:

- i. **Planning:** Contribution to the conceptualization of the ASDR by providing input on its objectives, structure and focus areas;
- ii. **Production:** Contribution to the identification, tracking and collection of national and regional data for the ASDR as well as the analysis as relevant. The TF may also support the drafting of chapters or sections of the report, as well as the provision of case studies, testimonials, examples, and pictures. In addition, members may fund experts or consultants as contributors to the analysis and/or review of the report;
- iii. **Launch and Dissemination:** Support the launch of the report and promote its dissemination at various national, regional and global fora as appropriate.

**Membership and Organization:** The ASDR TF is chaired and coordinated by ESCWA and open to members of the RCM WG on the 2030 Agenda. Membership in the TF is on a voluntary basis and may change with each 4-year cycle of the production of the ASDR. The Chair of the TF is responsible for coordinating an action plan with clear timelines and deliverables for the report’s production; TF members are responsible for the due implementation of the action plan. The TF will meet physically at least once a year and will conduct virtual meetings as necessary.

## SDG Data Taskforce (SDG Data TF)



**Purpose:** The SDG Data TF aims to coordinate and harmonize data generated by all parties reporting on SDGs and other relevant internationally endorsed frameworks.

**Objective:** The TF has the following objectives:

- Develop a regional indicator database;
- Select indicators that will inform regional studies and reports and promote evidence-based policy making in the context of the 2030 Agenda;
- Propose regional and sub-regional monitoring and accountability mechanisms;
- Ensure full cooperation and coordination with other Data entities at national and regional levels.

**Scope and Function:** The role of the SDG Data TF is to bring coordinated support to the 2030 WG and the related taskforces, most notably the TF on the Arab Sustainable Development Report (ASDR). Specific functions and scope of work of the TF include:

- i. **Regional framework of SDG indicators and other relevant internationally endorsed frameworks:** Taking the Global SDG Indicators Framework as a starting point, the SDG Data TF will consider the relevance of indicators to regional priorities, availability of data, and their importance for regional studies and reports. Primarily, the indicators should be based on national official statistics, further harmonized and aggregated as appropriate by the responsible RCM member agencies. However, some of the indicators (most typically indicators related to climate change, sea/ocean water, indicators on means of implementation, etc.) shall be produced directly by the agencies. The underlying principle is to come up with indicators for which data can be collected soonest.
- ii. **Sources and means of data collection:** Following up to the decisions by the 47<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Statistical Commission, the compilation of the indicators will be based to the extent possible on comparable and standardized national official statistics provided by the countries to the international statistical systems. However, in the interest of comparability of data and ensuring that these are produced according to standardized methodologies, the TF should precisely define specific surveys from which data shall be drawn, and data processing methods. Furthermore, in the interest of coordination and harmonization of data, responsibilities of individual agencies in data collection shall be specified.
- iii. **Sharing of data:** The SDG Data TF will agree on means of sharing data, i.e. ensuring that all relevant data are made available to all agencies, regardless which agency is the original custodian. A regional SDG indicators database will be the central point for data sharing.
- iv. **Liaison with the intergovernmental processes:** The SDG Data TF shall, through its Secretariat (ESCWA Statistics Division) liaise with the Steering Committee of National Statistical Offices on SDG Indicators (SC-SDG) to be established by the ESCWA Statistical Committee. This should extend to the representatives of the Arab States in global groups, namely the Inter-Agency Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDG) and the High Level Group on Partnership and Capacity Development (HLG). The inter-agency and the inter-governmental processes have distinct constituencies, however, it is important that ultimately there is consensus on indicators and modalities of collection and harmonization of data throughout the regional statistical system.

**Membership and Organization:** Co-chaired by ESCWA and UNFPA, membership is restricted to statisticians in RCM entities or staff who work directly in the collection and production of SDG data.

The TF may invite observers from the regional statistical agencies who are not members of the RCM. The TF will meet at least once a year physically and above that as required to discuss progress against the workplan as well as other global, regional and national developments related to the 2030 Agenda. These meetings may be organized on the sidelines of other (regional) meetings. In addition, there will be remote ongoing dialogue/discussion within the group through the exchange of information, sharing of tools, review of strategies etc. The Co-Chairs of the TF are responsible for calling meetings, leading on the development of the workplan and assigning tasks to deliver on the milestones as determined in the workplan.

## **Country Support Taskforce**

**Purpose:** The overall purpose of the Country Support Taskforce is to provide coordinated R-UNDG support to RCs/UNCTs with regard to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, in line with the agreed UNDG MAPS approach.

**Objectives:** The taskforce aims to reach the following objectives:

- Ensure that support provided by R-UNDG member agencies to RC/UNCTs is coordinated and where possible, integrated;
- Provide a platform for knowledge management and collaboration among UN agencies on country level support;
- Provide periodic stock taking of UNCT country level progress and support needs;
- Provide a bridge between the needs of UNCTs and the knowledge and expertise that can be drawn from agencies regional and global headquarters.

**Scope and Functions:** To coordinate UN support to UN Country Teams in achieving development results at the national level. This includes coordinated support on mainstreaming the SDGs into UNDAFs as well as organizing inter-agency missions under the framework of MAPS.

- i. Technical Support/Advisory Services:** The taskforce aims to provide ongoing technical support/guidance to UNCTs in providing support to Governments in line with the MAPS approach, including Voluntary National Reviews and review/input to SDG documents/strategies etc. Further, the taskforce shall provide technical support and input to country specific MAPS missions, as well as follow-up to missions and support to follow up implementation support of recommendations. In collaboration with the regional UNDAF Peer Support Group, the taskforce shall ensure that UNDAFs are aligned with and integrate the 2030 Agenda and identify relevant expertise to provide support to UNCTs in specific areas.
- ii. Knowledge Management and Collaboration:** The taskforce will support the documentation of lessons learnt and best practices and ensure information flow from the global/regional levels to the national level. The taskforce aims to ensure effective information flows from global/regional level to country level, and vice-versa, through a regional SDG network (e.g. the SDG Community of Practice) made of national SDG focal points. The taskforce will provide a mechanism for engagement of country level SDG focal points.

**Membership and Organization:** Co-chaired by UNDP, UN Environment and UNFPA, membership is open to R-UNDG entities who have national level activities in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Membership of the taskforce is open to all R-UNDG member agencies, funds and programmes on a voluntary basis. Other non-R-UNDG members may also be invited to participate in the taskforce. Members of the taskforce will be regional staff, at the senior programme/expert level, ideally 1-2 per agency.

The taskforce will meet (either physically or remotely) on a quarterly basis (or as required) to discuss progress against the work plan as well as other global, regional and national developments related to 2030 agenda. In addition, there will be ongoing dialogue/discussion within the group through the exchange of information, sharing of tools, review of strategies etc. Country Level SDG Focal Points may also be invited to participate in specific meetings. The R-UNDG Secretariat will provide secretariat support for the taskforce.