

*ADVANCE, UNEDITED VERSION*

# System-Wide Annual Results Report Arab Region 2021

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## Executive Summary

In 2021, the Arab region continued to feel the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recovery efforts have been hampered by second and third waves of the virus, with lockdowns slowing economic recovery and health systems under extreme pressure. Furthermore, in the Arab region, conflicts have continued in many countries, whilst water scarcity has been steadily increasing due to climate change.

In this context, the UN development system at the regional level strives to support member States in making progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and tackling development challenges in the region. The UN system works together through the Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP), including eight Issue-Based Coalitions (IBCs).

The RCP supported member States and UN Country Teams (UNCTs) on a diverse range of issues in 2021. Support included efforts on recovering from COVID-19 and the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccination in the region; tackling inequality and leaving no one behind; mitigating climate change; linking humanitarian and development work and building the evidence base with research and analytical work. Specific achievements include a Ministerial agreement on inclusive Social Protection; analysis and recommendations for implementation of the Global Compact on Migration; supporting country-level engagement in the Food Systems Summit; and developing a regional community of practice on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

In 2022, the RCP will increase its engagement with UNCTs and will realign the IBCs to address changing regional priorities, building on progress made and lessons from 2020/2021. The RCP will also strengthen work on transboundary issues and provide common messaging on key strategic topics such as food security, the energy transition, migration, the green economy, youth unemployment and gender equality. As the region focuses on COVID-recovery and COP27, the RCP will foster partnerships with regional organizations and focus on accelerating progress towards the SDGs in the region, with the Secretary-General's report on Our Common Agenda providing additional impetus to accelerate progress.

## Introduction

### The Context of the Arab Region

As in other regions, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the vulnerability of the poor to economic and social shocks. The disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations, including informal workers, women, refugees and IDPs, persons with disabilities, and the elderly, have exposed pre-existing inequalities and underscored the need to increase the coverage of social protection programs. With the promise to leave no one behind of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the center, there is a need to bring to the dialogue stakeholders who have been marginalized as a result of conflict, poverty or discrimination. This is aggravated by pervasive inequality, which manifests itself not only in income inequalities but also inequalities in opportunities and access to services.

Despite the risks still facing the global economy two years after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, there remains some economic prospects for the Arab region. The recovery which began in 2021 is expected to continue and the regional gross domestic product (GDP) is likely to grow. However, the extent of that recovery will vary greatly among countries, due to the impact of the crisis in Ukraine on oil and food prices, political turmoil, vaccination campaigns, tourism revenues and remittances inflows.

For the Arab region as a whole, poverty is prevalent and growing, whilst social protection systems face severe shortcomings in coverage and effectiveness, particularly in countries with limited fiscal space and persistent political instability. Gender inequality is significant across the region, whilst youth face significant challenges in entering the job market, where structural obstacles are already a barrier to decent jobs. Youth unemployment is among the highest in the world, particularly among young women.

Furthermore, the Arab region has experienced frequent and severe conflicts. Seven countries/territories (Iraq, Libya, Lebanon, the State of Palestine, Somalia, Syria and Yemen) have directly experienced political, civil, and sectarian conflict for decades. With 26 million displaced persons (IDPs and refugees), the region also remains the global epicenter of the world's forced displacement crisis. Compounding these challenges, climate-related disasters have given rise to warnings about impending mass migration, with 1.7 million people in the region displaced by natural disasters in 2020 alone.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the expected GDP growth in conflict-affected countries is now threatened by recent developments in eastern Europe.

The Arab region is a global climate hotspot with temperatures rising faster than the world average, while ecosystems are facing serious threats from the pressures of development, pollution and conflict. Climate change, water scarcity, biodiversity loss and pollution together pose risks to the sustainability of development and crisis recovery goals in the region. In 2022, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UN-FCCC) Conference of Parties (COP) 27 will be hosted by Egypt, and the UN system will focus on scaling up Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) implementation, alongside the finalization of the new Global Biodiversity Framework at the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) COP 15.

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<sup>1</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Global Report on Internal Displacement 2021

## Key Achievements of the UN Development System at the Regional Level

In 2021, the RCP further increased its engagement with UN Resident Coordinators (RCs) in the region, facilitated by the UN Development Coordination Office's Regional Office for Arab States, leading to a further revision of IBCs' workplans based on country-level needs and priorities. Furthermore, IBCs individually provided direct support to RCs and UNCTs on a diverse range of topics, including disaster risk reduction, gender equality and the Food Systems Summit.

Addressing 'Leaving no one behind', Ministers were convened to agree on joint principles to build more inclusive, shock-resistant and equitable social protection systems. This was done through a Ministerial Meeting and Joint Declaration, followed by ongoing dialogue at the technical level with UNCTs. This translated into concrete actions to lift restrictions on school attendance (in Jordan), include migrant labour in health programs and coverage (in Bahrain and Kuwait) and rationalize the provision of services by assessing vulnerability and not status (Lebanon).

Priorities were outlined for improving migration governance in the Arab region, including the need to: widen regular migration pathways; ensure migrants' access to basic services also as part of post-COVID recovery priorities; include migrants in social protection systems and facilitate portability of benefits; improve labour rights frameworks for migrant workers, and address specific barriers to accessing services and rights for migrant children and their mothers, among other groups with specific vulnerabilities.

Countries were supported in planning and implementation of the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccination including development of National Deployment and Vaccination Plans (NDVPs), procurement, shipment and distribution of vaccines and resource mobilisation to ensure that all vulnerable population are reached with vaccines especially in low and middle-income countries.

Addressing Climate Action, member States were supported in prioritizing resource efficiency and resilience in rural communities, through consultations held in Sudan, Egypt, Jordan, Algeria and Lebanon, attended by rural communities, line Ministries, with members of the UNCT, in partnership with the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD). Recommendations and priorities were produced for each country, emphasising the need to invest in technology, raise awareness in rural areas, adapt low-cost solutions and improve data collection and sharing.

Preparations for the Food Systems Summit were undertaken, including technical support provided to nine countries (Kuwait, KSA, Bahrain, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Sudan), in addition to holding a regional preparation Dialogue, a youth dialogue, and a multi-stakeholder dialogue. Recommendations and outcomes fed into the global Food Systems Summit and its portal, including the need to transitioning to healthy foods, optimize sustainable production, advance equitable livelihoods, and respond to risks and hazards.

The visibility of the water scarcity crisis in the region was increased by providing a multi-sectoral forum to examine challenges and opportunities as well as to review advances and innovations. A series of recommendations were developed and subsequently endorsed at the High-Level Meeting on Water Scarcity within the 13th session of the Arab Ministerial Water Council (AMWC) for dissemination to governments in the region.

## Progress on Regional Reforms of the UN Development System

The Arab Region RCP has made significant progress towards implementation of the five recommendations of the Secretary-General, as spelled out in his report (A/74/73-E/2019/14) on the implementation of the General Assembly resolution A/ RES/71/243 on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR).

### *Recommendation 1: Enhance Regional Architecture to Accelerate Progress on the SDGs*

Following approval by the Economic and Social Council in July 2020, the Arab region's UN Development System had been working closely together to implement the Secretary-General's 5-point regional reform plan. It formalised the RCP which continued to implement the reform agenda in 2021. All previous mechanisms, including the Regional Collaboration Mechanism (RCM) and the Regional United Nations Sustainable Development Group (R-UNSDG), were transitioned to the RCP.

### *Recommendations 2 and 4: Establish strong knowledge management hubs; and consolidate existing capacity around data and statistics*

At the time of writing, the RCP is in the final stages of completing an online regional knowledge management and data hub called MANARA, meaning 'lighthouse' in Arabic. MANARA is operational and is due to launch in 2022. The system operates at the regional level and can communicate with other regional platforms as required.

MANARA is a one-stop-shop for all knowledge and data from UN sources, member States, the RCP and IBCs, and other partners to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in the Arab Region. It is intended to serve and will be accessible to regional cooperation organizations, UN Country Teams and member States, and will include several tools available in Arabic and English. It is linked to the regional platform in Europe and Central Asia, for inter-operability, and has multiple features.

For example, the Arab SDG Gateway has an interactive SDG monitoring tool to assess progress on SDG implementation at the regional and national levels, with regional and country SDG profiles; a comprehensive SDG data portal for UNCTs; and specific 'leaving no one behind' data dashboards, to analyze progress on this central principle of the SDGs.

It serves as comprehensive platform for data and statistics for the Arab region, based on nationally sourced data and data from UN agencies. These data are used by UNCTs for their Common Country Analyses and serves as a regional platform for knowledge and information sharing, through online communities of practice.

It also has a set of knowledge products including a regional e-learning platform for development issues, with public policy in Arabic and English, targeting civil servants, regional coordinators, United Nations staff members, and the general public. It also has a set of policy simulation tools based on various economic models to help users in assessing the impact of policies on various population segments and economic sectors.

*Recommendation 3: Enhance transparency and results-based management*

The RCP, through its joint secretariat, provides guidance to IBC Co-Conveners on results-based management and development of their workplans. The 2020 – 2021 RCP workplan was jointly developed by RCP members and implementation was monitored by the RCP joint secretariat which provided comprehensive updates at the RCP meetings where strategic adjustments were made as needed. This development of this report, the System-Wide Annual Results Report for the Arab Region, also involved a consultative process whereby RCP members jointly reflected on the challenges in the region and the required response as well as progress on the UN development system reform agenda within the region, including RCP and IBC workplans.

The RCP is kept updated on the IBCs' progress throughout the year by the co-conveners and a consolidated report is prepared by the RCP joint secretariat. In addition, the RCP reports annually to the Chair, through the Annual RCP Meeting, held in the margins of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD).

*Recommendation 5: Improve back-office efficiencies*

The Regional Operations Management Team (ROMT) was established to develop a Regional Business Operations Strategy (R-BOS) and support the implementation of efficiency initiatives in the region. The Regional BOS has been approved and focuses on location independent services that all countries in the region could benefit from, both in terms of quality and cost effectiveness. The Regional BOS is estimated to lead to cost savings of USD \$1.9 million.

## Regional Challenges and Opportunities

The Arab Region has been suffering from decades-long conflicts, political instability, and structural impediments to sustained and equitable growth and social justice. The COVID-19 pandemic coupled with climate change have further exacerbated the situation, obstructing transformation towards inclusive sustainable development in the region, and slowing down progress towards achieving SDG targets by 2030. The region is considered 'on track' in only 29 out of the 169 targets, and 'in progress' on 31 targets.<sup>2</sup> The lack of data on many indicators prevents a comprehensive assessment, and figures on the status of SDG implementation may not be comparable from year to year.

Despite a decrease in the rate of officially reported positive COVID-19 cases in 2021, the number of reported cases in the region exceeded 9 million people, from a population of around 436 million.<sup>3</sup> By early 2021, most of the countries in the region started the deployment of the COVID-19 vaccination campaigns: at the end of the year, Arab high income countries have had nearly 80-100% of the population fully vaccinated, which some of the lower income countries, conflict affected states have not even achieved 10% coverage with the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine, with the risk that important shares of the region's population excluded from the protection provided by COVID-19.

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<sup>2</sup> ESCWA (2021), 'Between Now and 2030: A statistical overview of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab region'.

<sup>3</sup> See the Worldometer, "Reported Cases and Deaths by Country or Territory". Available at [www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/#countries](http://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/#countries).

The cumulative regional fiscal stimulus invested in responding to the COVID pandemic in the Arab region amounted to \$102 billion, equivalent to nearly 4% of the Arab region's GDP and significantly lower than the global average.<sup>4</sup> Economic growth was estimated at 4.1% in 2021 in the region and was expected to grow by 3.7% in 2022; however, risks are expected to lead to slower growth, at 2.4% in 2022, whilst further risks may emerge from the unfolding Ukraine crisis.<sup>5</sup> These risks include the latest Omicron variant, the instability of oil prices, the slowdown in economic activities, particularly tourism and trade, and the decline and investment flows. Public revenue in the Arab Region continues to be heavily dominated by the hydrocarbon sector, generating more than 50 % of revenue for most Arab oil-exporting countries. In addition, the region's stagnating diversification in the export portfolios makes it more vulnerable to global commodity price shocks.<sup>6</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic is estimated to have pushed an additional 16 million people into poverty, swelling the number of people living in poverty in the region to over 116 million, almost one quarter of the population.<sup>7</sup> As a result, food insecurity and hunger are also on the rise, with an estimated 141 million people facing moderate or acute food insecurity in 2020, without regular access to sufficient and nutritious food.<sup>8</sup> Several other factors contribute to poverty and food insecurity in the region, including conflict, political instability, supply chain disruption, insufficient diversification, high levels of informality, and the lack of investment and growth in job-creating and high value-add sectors.

Job losses resulting from the COVID crisis were particularly severe among vulnerable groups such as women, young adults and persons with disabilities, as well as those working in the informal sector without access to social protection and unemployment insurance, including irregular migrants, refugees and asylum seekers who are at heightened risk of socio-economic marginalization. These challenges were further compounded by a lack of social protection floors in some Arab countries. Unemployment is high in the region, at 11.8 %, double the world average.<sup>9</sup> The region has the highest rate of youth unemployment, more so among females. More than 18 % of Arab young people are not in employment, education, or training. The rate is 10 % for men and 27 % for women.<sup>10</sup> Even though the total unemployment rate is projected to decline to 10.7 % by 2023, the rate is expected to remain high in countries facing political and economic instability.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, the pandemic has severely impacted micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the region. Whilst business has slowed, Governments have moved to support MSMEs, with nearly 40 % of fiscal stimulus targeted at supporting SMEs in the region. In the region, 94 % of the stimulus announced to SMEs and businesses (\$11 billion) are in the form of soft loans. Loans and interest deferment, and cash-flow assistance to SMEs and businesses are the other important measures announced in the region.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> UN COVID-19 Stimulus Tracker. Available at <https://tracker.unescwa.org/>

<sup>5</sup> ESCWA (2022) Realities and Prospects in the Arab Region: Survey of Economic & Social Developments 2020-21

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> ESCWA (2020) Impact of COVID-19 on Money Metric Poverty in Arab Countries

<sup>8</sup> FAO (2021) *Near East and North Africa – Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2021: Statistics and trends*. Cairo.

<sup>9</sup> World Bank Data (modeled ILO estimate)

<sup>10</sup> ESCWA (2020) Arab Sustainable Development Report.

<sup>11</sup> ESCWA (2022)

<sup>12</sup> ESCWA (2020) 'Limited fiscal space puts the Arab region recovery from COVID-19 at risk'

Conflicts hit 40 % of Arab countries in the past decade, affecting governance, institutional development, social cohesion as well as limiting capacities and available resources, and undermining sustainable development. By 2019, the number of Internally Displaced People reached 17.3 million, and by 2020, the number of refugees reached 8.7 million across the Arab Region.<sup>13</sup>

Armed conflict and occupation are also considered major issues affecting water and sanitation in the already water scarce region. Around 60% of water in the region originates outside the countries' borders, amplifying dependency on external water resources.<sup>14</sup> In addition, droughts affected over 44 million people from 1990 to 2019 in the region. By 2030, climate change will further exacerbate the water situation: renewable water resources are expected to drop by 20 % due to decreased rainfall, increased water demand, and expanding seawater intrusion into coastal aquifers due to rising sea levels.<sup>15</sup>

Despite these challenges, there remain avenues for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the region. The COVID-19 pandemic has slowed development progress in the region but has also highlighted the need for strong social protection systems. Governments have provided a variety of protections and support offers to populations suffering through the pandemic. This creates opportunity for expanded social protection systems in future, offering increased coverage, support and shock-responsiveness than before.

The demographic bulge currently represents a large number of unemployed youth – but also enormous potential. If young people are engaged in political and development efforts, and given opportunity to contribute to the workforce, this can drive change and economic growth across the region. The UN system will continue to support young people with education and training, whilst promoting their voices in national dialogue.

Furthermore, the region will host the next two UN Climate Change COP conferences, in Egypt and UAE respectively. This serves as a major opportunity to promote climate action and healthy environments in the region. As Governments prepare their positions and actions in advance of the COP27 and COP28, the UN system will support at both the regional and national level, with technical advice, programmes and advocacy.

Finally, the use of evolving technology presents innovative solutions to many challenges, including the need for high quality data. The region boasts a number of tech-hubs, as well as many local entrepreneurs working at the cutting edge of innovation. With the support of the UN, national governments can open space for technology to support development, data collection and political engagement.

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<sup>13</sup> IDMC (2020). GRID 2020: Global Report on Internal Displacement.

<sup>14</sup> ESCWA (2020)

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

## Highlights of system-wide results at the regional level

### System-wide and integrated support to the development of quality CCAs and UN-SDCFs

A key achievement of the RCP is the system wide and integrated support provided through the Peer Support Group (PSG)<sup>16</sup> to UNCTs in developing their Common Country Analysis (CCA) and Cooperation Frameworks. In 2021, the PSG, chaired by DCO, provided strategic planning support to all CCA/Cooperation Framework cycles, reviewed drafts of 9 CCAs and 4 Cooperation Frameworks, and promoted regional level experience exchange on good practice and examples in advancing the 2030 Agenda through country-focused sub-groups, including for Iraq, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Yemen. In addition, tailored support was provided to countries in complex settings which were developing their Cooperation Frameworks in 2021, in particular Iraq, Syria and Yemen. In addition, to support implementation, technical support missions were conducted to support countries in developing and updating the Joint-Work-Plans (JWPs).

The Arab Region RCP also convened ad hoc meetings in the course of 2021 to discuss pressing issues facing the UN development system in crisis contexts, including for example with the Resident Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territories, strategizing on meeting development challenges in such a unique context.

### Coherent and coordinated responses on migration governance through a whole of society and One UN approach

In 2021, the IBC on Migration aimed to ensure coordinated and coherent responses on migration governance in the region among different stakeholders through a whole-of-society, whole-of-government and ONE UN approach, including through providing active support to UN Country Teams in their migration related inputs towards Common Country Analysis, and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. The IBC sought to provide support to Arab Countries to implement the Global Compact on Migration, and coordinate efforts in conducting the Global Compact on Migration follow-up and review in coordination with the Global UN Network on Migration. The IBC also aimed to produce policy-oriented research on migration issues in the Arab region, including through producing a flagship Situation Report on International Migration in the Arab Region.

More specifically, this was achieved through assessing and analysing migration in the region and developing policy recommendations for member States, through the Situation Report on International Migration (SRIM) in the Arab Region, in collaboration with the UN Regional Network on Migration for the Arab States. Coordination, response interventions and sharing of knowledge, good practices and

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<sup>16</sup> The PSG met monthly in plenary in addition to 10 ad-hoc meetings organized by country-focused small-groups.

challenges among the UN in support of country-level operations and trans-boundary initiatives was enhanced through the Task Force on COVID-19 and Migration/Mobility.

With the Regional United Nations Network on Migration (the Network), the IBC on Migration in the Arab region organized the GCM Regional Review in the Arab Region in February 2021. Prepared through a series of stakeholder dialogues, including with the Inter-state Consultation Mechanisms and Parliamentarians, the event, attended by 3171 UN representatives, 70 Member States representatives and more than 140 multi-stakeholders and regional entities resulted in 14 members states providing Voluntary GCM Review reports on the progress and implementation of the GCM in their countries. The regional review found that several Arab States members made long strides in adopting new migrant-relevant policies, reform existing policies or strengthen previously adopted reforms in key areas at the heart of the GCM Objectives, including the protection of migrants' rights.

For example, countries including Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco and Qatar have taken necessary steps, to improve the working conditions of migrant workers with a protection- and rights-based approach. In the context of COVID-19 Pandemic, Egypt and Morocco aimed at standardising migrants' stay and/or facilitate their departure without enforcing penalties. Bahrain, Iraq and Morocco have engaged in enhancing protection mechanisms and access to education and work for displaced individuals. Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Morocco, Qatar and Tunisia, have highlighted data-sharing systems and the collection of accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies and for improving migrants' livelihoods, access to protection and working conditions.

The capacity of Member States' Migration Focal Points was strengthened for the upcoming International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) to inform them on the roadmap, modalities and preparation, possible support from the Regional and Country level United Nations Networks on Migration, and featured presentations by the GCM Champion Countries in November 2021.

## Support to local authorities in managing their COVID-19 response and recovery

In 2021, the IBC on Urbanization aimed to support RCOs and UNCTs in helping local authorities manage their COVID-19 response and recovery. The IBC contributed by sharing tools and knowledge products to support UNCTs in advancing SDG 11 during the COVID-19 recovery in the Arab region, including an Urban Guide which provides an overview of existing tools and products, as well as an upcoming regional spatial data platform. Healthy Cities indicators were developed and an associated Guide to include measures for outbreaks and epidemics.

Analysis was developed to assess cities that were supported by the "Making Cities Resilient" Programme, including targeting local governments and cities to kickstart the next phase of the programme. In addition, research was conducted to adapt diagnostic tools for city administrations to assess inclusivity of mobile, migrant and refugee populations in the region, and diagnostic tools were developed to support city administrations to assess their migrant integration policies in urban areas especially in the context of COVID-19 and access to healthcare.

## Strengthened ability to implement the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus

In 2021, the IBC on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus aimed to advance Nexus approaches through fostering enhanced opportunities for advocacy, knowledge-sharing, and capacity building amongst UNCTs/HCTs and beyond. In 2021, the IBC made major strides on these fronts.

High-level advocacy was conducted on the criticality of improved collaboration of humanitarian, development and peace operations for preserving and sustaining SDG progress in the region through the joint hosting of a dedicated Special Session on 'The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus as a transformative pathway for SDG progress in protracted crises', including COVID-19: Challenges and opportunities.', as part of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development.

While much of the conversation remains within the boundaries of the UN system, a unique feature of the event was to engage stakeholders from national institutions (Somalia, Yemen), Civil Society (Lebanon) and Donor community (Germany). Attended by around 70 participants, the event especially called upon humanitarian actors to place a greater focus on long-term recovery while keeping people (vulnerable groups of women, girls, boys, and men, including refugees, IDPs and vulnerable host communities) at the center.

In this regard, the conversation also stressed the need to secure, whenever feasible, a greater national and local ownership, including through further engaging the civil society. The event also called upon the donor community to secure enabling financing environments, through stronger commitments to multi-year, flexible funding. These key messages were further conveyed to High Level Political Forum (HLPF).

A common understanding was fostered of advances and persisting challenges of ensuring greater collaboration of humanitarian, development and peace operations, including through a pilot Issue Paper (currently under editing) which reviews and reflects on regional and country level efforts made by UNCTs/HCTs to improve coordination and collaboration prior to and in the wake of COVID-19, including within the framework of Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs), UN Socioeconomic Response Plans (SERPs) and new Sustainable Development Cooperation frameworks (UNSDCFs).

Moving forward, the IBC will create opportunities to disseminate, discuss and build upon the key findings and recommendations emerging from this work. These will feed into the IBC's broader efforts to establish a regional community of practice and address common and most pressing knowledge and capacity gaps facing UNCTs/HCTs preventing further collaboration across peace, development and humanitarian settings.

## Timely climate, food security and energy efficiency knowledge and action in Arab States

In 2021, the IBC on Food Security, Climate Change and the Environment aimed to serve as a regional platform to promote relevant and timely climate and energy efficiency knowledge and action in Arab States through collaboration and strengthened partnership with key regional UN and non-UN stakeholders. This was achieved through enhancing capacity for climate change policy and action in Arab States and streamlined COVID-19 responses by reviewing NDC's and enhancing transparency frameworks and NDC tracking, including regional and inter-regional workshops.

The formulation of the Arab position on climate change was supported, including assisting the Arab Negotiation Group Meeting in coordination with League of Arab States, held on 17-18 October 2021 in preparation for the COP 26. UNCTs in Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon were supported to integrate Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and climate change considerations in their CCAs/UNSDCFs in 2021. Support to the three UNCTs included developing diagnostic papers on DRR and Climate Change for the next cycle of CCA updates, and implementing the Guidance Note on Integrating DRR and Climate Change Action into the next cycles of UNSDCF.

Natural resource management in Arab States was strengthened through sharing knowledge on advancing resource efficiency and resilience in rural communities were held in Sudan, Egypt, Jordan, Algeria and Lebanon.

Capacity was enhanced to manage systematic risk and reduce disaster risk in Arab States by the assessment and analysis on DRR in the Arab region, through research and advocacy organized during the 5th Arab Regional Platform for DRR, and ongoing research on public health system resilience post-COVID in the Arab region.

The IBC also aimed to support countries in adopting coordinated approaches to ensuring water and food security (SDG 2 and 6), taking into consideration people's vulnerabilities and priorities. It also aimed to raise awareness and advocate the role of food systems transformation in achieving the SDGs in preparation for the UNSG Food Systems Summit.

The IBC contributed by enhancing knowledge and information to strategically address hunger and malnutrition, with special focus on impact of COVID-19. This included analysis and assessment on the state of food security and nutrition in the Arab region for 2020, with 2021 prepared and 2022 already under preparation. Seven countries supported for developing national action plans and nutrition strategies: Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Syria, Libya, UAE, and Kuwait. Yemen and Sudan finalized the multisectoral action plan to accelerate the achievement of the SDG for wasting.

Support was provided to ten countries (Kuwait, KSA, Bahrain, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Sudan) in their preparation for the Food Systems Summit, and a Regional Dialogue in preparation for the Food Systems Summit was organized, including one youth dialogue and one multi-stakeholder dialogue. Report fed into the Food Systems Summit portal. The Zero Hunger regional strategic framework was launched, and the action plan prepared and shared by LAS with all countries of the region.

Knowledge and best practices on water governance was shared and enhanced in the region through an integrated water-food-energy approach. Four working clusters were established within the water collaborative platform comprising of 17 partner organizations. Each working cluster is coordinated by two leading organizations and meetings are organized on a quarterly basis. The Water Allocation Guidelines were presented at the High-Level Joint Technical Committee meeting (October 2021), to be raised to the next meeting of the Joint Ministerial Council for endorsement, and consultations held with stakeholders on the progress of implementation of the 2030 agenda in the region. The capacities of Arab countries were strengthened to ensure safe domestic water supply and wastewater treatment and reuse during COVID-19 pandemic considering of the priorities of the most vulnerable groups.

Seven national studies on non-conventional water resources (Desalination and treated Wastewater) were initiated in Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and United Arab Emirates. The studies will lead to a sub-regional Report (GCC) in 2022.

## Integrated, evidence-based policy analysis and advice to advance effective integration of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in COVID-19 response and recovery

In 2021, the IBC on Gender Justice and Equality for Arab States strived to advance Agenda 2030 and relevant normative frameworks for gender equality and women's empowerment in the region, and within the UN system, through the development of, and advocacy for, common UN positions based on research, data and analysis, information-sharing, and joint planning and implementation of regional initiatives, to ensure gender equality and women's empowerment and leadership are front and centre in COVID-19 recovery efforts.

The IBC contributed by producing integrated, evidence-based policy and programming analysis and advice to advance effective integration of gender equality and women's empowerment in COVID-19 response and recovery policies and programmes through the decade review (2010 -2020) and regional situational analysis for women and girls in MENA and Arab States region, which uses a life cycle approach to highlight the situation for women and girls in areas of health and wellbeing, education and livelihoods, freedom from violence and participation and leadership. The main launch of the report, followed by five thematic sessions, brought together 240 stakeholders from government, academia, civil society, youth activists, and INGO's in-depth discussions on how to move from recommendations to implementation and action in the strive for gender equality.

National reports were prepared under the Gender Justice Regional Initiative, which provides a comprehensive assessment of laws and policies affecting gender equality and protection against gender-based violence in Arab countries.

Awareness of stakeholders of the key gaps and challenges to gender equality and women's empowerment was increased, including opportunities to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in the region through various events, such as the plenary session of the Arab State Forum on sustainable development on SDG 5, as well as special sessions on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment and Agenda 2030; and hosting a side-event at the Commission on the Status of Women on "working together to end violence against women."

In addition, Gender-responsive COVID-19 recovery measures were tracked and shared, and a dialogue organized for Arab States to support higher integration of gender in national response initiatives.

More than 190 participants from 11 UNCTs representing 20 UN entities attended the online training to share best practices from the region (Morocco, Egypt and Jordan) to enhance the capacity of UNCT personnel to use the UNCT-SWAP gender equality scorecard and gender marker for more gender-responsive coordinated strategic planning and programme implementation.

The publication of the "Child Marriage in the context of COVID-19: Analysis of trends, programming and alternative approaches in the MENA region", that documents good practices, programmatic interventions and alternative approaches and provides key recommendations for strengthening child marriage prevention programming during COVID-19 response and recovery phases, drawing from examples from six countries (Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan and Yemen).

## Enhanced capacity of states in the region to address adolescents' and young people's priorities through advocacy and evidence-based policy

In 2021, the IBC on Adolescents and Youth for Arab States aimed to enhance capacity of states in the region to address adolescents' and young people's priorities in key thematic areas through creation of regional platforms, programmes and evidence feeding into evidence-based regional policy. The IBC contributed by promoting civic engagement, participation and inclusion of youth in the Arab region, through the Youth Forum in the Arab Region and its Flagship Youth-Led Projects.

Support was provided for the health and wellbeing of youth in the region, including through the launch of the Regional Innovative Tool "SHABAB IT" as a platform for sharing knowledge on adolescent and youth issues.

Access to education, skills and employment of youth was promoted, by supporting the transition from learning and earning, through a youth-led round table, with Ministries of Education and private sector stakeholders from across the region that will feed into the Regional High-Level forum on 'Young People's Learning, Skilling, Social Inclusion and Transition to Decent Work' in May 2022.

## Advancing reforms in social protection and fostering a better understanding of current and emerging macroeconomic issues in the Arab States

In 2021, the IBC on Macro-Economics and Social Protection aimed to strengthen the UN's ability to influence key social protection discussions in the region via better collaboration in knowledge leadership, advocacy and capacity building; including to support UNCTs/COs that are engaged in critical social protection reform discussions (also in humanitarian and post-crisis early recovery contexts).

An important achievement was the facilitation by the IBC of a Ministerial Event Declaration, stating key guiding principles for post-COVID-19 social protection that will inform policy making for countries and international partners. The Ministerial Declaration was the outcome of the Social Protection Ministerial Meeting, held virtually on 30 November 2021 that the IBC organized, with the engagement of UN country teams under the leadership of Resident Coordinators.

The IBC aimed to facilitate effective, timely and coordinated efforts to promote a better understanding of current and emerging macroeconomic issues in the Arab States, and to foster dialogue and collaboration between different relevant stakeholders to support macroeconomic policy in line with the SDG agenda, UN principles and standards on macro-economics, trade, financing for development and debt.

The IBC contributed by assessing and analysing the regional landscape of social expenditure, identifying the trends, patterns and gaps in allocation of budget resources to achieve social development objectives and to support vulnerable populations; reviewing critical macroeconomic and institutional challenges in balancing social sector spending and capital investments, including aspects related to gender, vulnerable groups, quality of public investment and efficiency, macro-fiscal risks associated with debt vulnerabilities and options for prioritizing public expenditure and providing recommendations / options on sustainable debt financing of social spending and productive capital investments.

Revised draft: 12 May 2022

A policy brief was developed on the assessment of public budgets toward fostering inclusive recovery that included recommendations for improving efficiency of public social expenditure toward achieving social development objectives in key areas, toward fostering inclusive recovery in the context of COVID-19.

## Enhanced knowledge and capacity of member states to improve integration, accessibility and quality of education and healthcare services

In 2021, the IBC on Quality Social Services aimed to accelerate actions for SDG3 and SDG4, using evidence-based tools/frameworks and innovative science-based/technological approaches for building linkages across sectors, overcoming challenges, and adapting to changing contexts (post-COVID-19). The IBC contributed by setting priorities for realizing inclusive education (for vulnerable children and youth), with specific National Action Plans for the next two years, through the Fourth Arab Meeting for Education (ARMED IV) that invited education sector government and development partners from 19 countries and beyond.

Common challenges and key gaps were identified, sharing best practices and developing practical measures for the success of the Open Science Project in the Arab States, through the 'Regional Forum for Open Science in the Arab Region' 21st -22nd September 2021. The event helped build capacity of representatives of Arab government officials, UN officials, a wide range of researchers, academics, and youths.

The publication of a series of reports on the region, including, on 'Social Inequalities in the Arab Region Post-COVID-19: The Road to Structural Transformation'; the 'Foresight Report 2030' and a report on 'COVID-19 Learning Losses: Rebuilding Quality Learning for All in MENA'.

Countries were supported in planning and implementing the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccination including development of National Deployment and Vaccination Plans (NDVPs), procurement, shipment and distribution of vaccines and resource mobilisation to ensure that all vulnerable population are reached with vaccines especially in the low and middle-income countries in the region.

## Engagement with regional and sub-regional organizations and other regional stakeholders

In the Arab region, the RCP works closely with the League of Arab States (LAS), particularly on Migration, Industrial Policies and Food Security. The LAS is a co-convener of the IBC on Migration and co-hosted a webinar on responses in the Arab Region to COVID-19, focusing on the efforts of governments, the vaccine rollout programs and the inclusion of migrants and refugees. The LAS has been a key partner in the preparation and coordination of the first GCM Regional Review Conference in the Arab region to the Regional United Nations Network on Migration. The RCP is also helping LAS prepare a strategy and a road map to upgrade Arab Industrial Policies, currently under development to be presented to LAS's Council of Arab Unity. Finally, LAS worked closely with the IBC on Food Security to launch the Zero Hunger regional strategic framework.

LAS was also involved in the Social Protection Ministerial Meeting, which brought together a number of important actors in the region. It was held in partnership with socialprotection.org and the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) and was supported by the Arab Poverty Center.

## Conclusion

The Arab Region RCP is continuing to provide support to member States and UNCTs in the region, through analysis, research, capacity building, knowledge platforms, country-level data and technical support. IBCs are increasingly demand oriented, and the RCP will soon launch the MANARA platform, increasing access to the UN system's products, tools and resources.

In 2022, the RCP will continue its support to member States and UNCTs, while also supporting key UN events, including Forums of the Economic and Social Council on Youth, Financing for Development (including taxation) and Science and technology; the UN Oceans Conference; COP 27 with particular emphasis of support to the host country (if requested); and other major global and regional events.

In 2022, the RCP will assess whether the topics of existing IBCs are still relevant and whether new IBCs need to be established. IBCs are considered time-bound and focus on priority issues corresponding to regional priorities. As the RCP moves forward it will further integrate the recommendations of the Secretary-General's report on 'Our Common Agenda', to provide impetus and focus to its objective of supporting the implementation of the SDGs in the region in the Decade of Action. The RCP will also engage more frequently with RCs to ensure that results are demand-driven and providing support to UNCTs. IBCs will foster regular engagement with RCOs, whilst the RCP will engage with RCs at important strategic junctures. Joint meetings and webinars will be held for RCs and RCOs to work directly with IBC Co-Conveners and partners.