

**Economic and Social Council**

Distr.: General
31 January 2020

Original: English

2020 session
25 July 2019 – 22 July 2020

Item 15: Regional cooperation

**New strategic vision of the Economic and Social
Commission for Western Asia**

Note by the Secretary-General

Summary

On 21 December 2019, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) adopted resolution 335(S-VI), which included the adoption of the new programme plan for of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia for 2021 as set out in document E/ESCWA/S-6/16. The new programme plan, informed by a new strategic vision for the Commission, as set out in document E/ESCWA/S-6/14, calls for ESCWA to strengthen the delivery of evidence-based policy advice and expertise to better support Member States in the Arab region in their efforts to deliver on their development visions and achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In advance of the presentation and consideration of the 2020 report on Regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields and its addenda, which will present the resolutions and decisions of the regional commissions to the Economic and Social Council in July 2020 as per established practice, the Secretary-General requests the Council to take action on the new strategic vision of ESCWA, which informs its 2021 proposed programme plan, as captured in the present Note and per annexed draft resolution.

I. Introduction

1. On 21 December 2019, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) adopted resolution 335(S-VI), which included the adoption of the new programme plan for of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia for 2021 as set out in document E/ESCWA/S-6/16. The new programme plan, informed by a new strategic vision, as set out in document E/ESCWA/S-6/14, calls for ESCWA to better support Member States in the Arab region in their efforts to deliver on their development visions and achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Towards that goal, it calls for ESCWA to, among others, strengthen the delivery of evidence-based policy advice and expertise, and conduct cutting-edge research and studies to inform and guide equitable and sustainable development in the region. The Secretary-General presented an Oral Statement to the Commission that sets out the budgetary implications of the adoption of the resolution 335(S-VI).
2. In advance of the presentation and consideration of the 2020 report on Regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields and its addenda, which will present the resolutions and decisions of the regional commissions to ECOSOC in July 2020 as per established practice, the Secretary-General requests the Economic and Social Council to take action on the new strategic vision of ESCWA, which informs its 2021 proposed programme plan, as captured in the present Note. The related draft resolution for action by ECOSOC is annexed to this Note.
3. The early action by the Council on this draft resolution on the new strategic vision of ESCWA is requested to meet the timeline for the preparation and presentation of the Secretary-General proposed programme budget for 2021, including for Section 22 for ESCWA.

II. Background

4. In an uncertain and volatile global environment, where growth is slow, inequality rising and multilateralism questioned, there is a need to revisit the development paradigm in Arab countries and the role of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia in that regard, to ensure the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development including the Sustainable Development Goals.
5. The continuing turmoil in the region together with the reform of the United Nations Development System also require that the Commission look inward to take stock of its achievements and reflect on the way forward.

6. The new strategic direction and proposed reforms offer a vision and implementation road map to better support Member States in their efforts to deliver on their development visions and achieve the 2030 Agenda including the Sustainable Development Goals.

III. Rationale for a new strategic vision of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

7. In order to meet effectively and efficiently the integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda and the indivisibility of the SDGs, 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. The new ESCWA programme plan, informed by a new strategic vision set out in document E/ESCWA/S-6/14, has been designed to better support Member States in the Arab region in their efforts to deliver on their development visions and achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Special interventions will be tailored to target least developed and conflict-affected countries. The new plan emphasizes the fundamental principles of 'leaving no one behind' and reducing inequality between subregions and social groups. It also aims to support member States in building inclusive, resilient and peaceful societies that guarantee a brighter future for younger generations; ensure that strong and transparent institutions provide access to basic services and infrastructure for the people of the region; create employment opportunities through reforms and 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.
9. Towards the above goals, the new programme plan strengthens 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.
10. The new plan calls for ESCWA to act as an innovative catalyst for positive change in the region, assist in building entrepreneurial and knowledge societies, support a people-centred transition towards the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and to move towards a new reality of stability, justice and prosperity. It also calls for ESCWA to strengthen the delivery of evidence-based policy advice and expertise and conduct cutting-edge research and studies to inform and guide equitable and sustainable development in the region.

IV. Regional consultations and adoption of the new strategic vision of ESCWA

11. The new strategic vision and the related new organizational structure were informed by a series of consultations, which underscored the need for urgent change. At its fifth meeting held on 15 and 16 June 2019 in Marrakech, Morocco, the ESCWA Executive Committee took note of the Executive Secretary's new vision and requested that the secretariat prepare a report on progress in implementing the Executive Secretary's vision for developing the Commission's work, to be presented at the Executive Committee's seventh meeting.
12. ESCWA developed its new proposed subprogrammes structure and way of working adopting a more modern, agile and results driven approach to programme delivery, while ensuring the integration and consolidation of efforts focusing on becoming a more effective agent for change in the region.
13. On 21 and 22 December 2019, ESCWA held its sixth special session during which it adopted resolution 335(S-VI) "Programme Plan of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia for 2021" as set out in document E/ESCWA/S-6/16. In resolution 335(S-VI), ESCWA also welcomed document E/ESCWA/S-6/14 that set out the new strategic vision for the Commission.
14. The new vision aims at keeping 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.
15. 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 processes.

V. Implementation of the new strategic vision of ESCWA

16. The new programme plan for ESCWA for 2021 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's 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.

17. To implement the new strategic vision, ESCWA will implement a more dynamic, agile and flexible operating model. This shift will address emerging challenges and maximize opportunities to:

(a) Strengthen ESCWA's collaboration with the wider United Nations development system in the region, as well as with the reinvigorated resident coordinator system and UN country teams, including by empowering them to access directly ESCWA's developed knowledge tools in a most efficient manner at country level;

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

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

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

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

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

(g) 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;

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

(i) 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.

VI. Action by ECOSOC

18. The Secretary-General requests the Economic and Social Council to consider the resolution annexed to the present Note by which ECOSOC would take action on the new strategic vision of ESCWA, as captured in the present Note.

Annex to the Note by the Secretary-General E/2020/XX

Draft Resolution to the Economic and Social Council¹

New Strategic Vision of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

The Economic and Social Council,

Noting the Note by the Secretary-General E/2020/XX of 31 January 2020 entitled “New Strategic Vision of The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia”

Noting the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia documents E/ESCWA/S-6/14 and E/ESCWA/S-6/16 on “Progress in ESCWA reform” and “Proposed programme plan for 2021”, respectively,

Noting resolution 335 (S-VI) of 21 December 2019 of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia adopting the “Programme Plan of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia for 2021”

Endorses the new strategic vision of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia as captured in the Note by the Secretary-General E/2020/XX.

¹ An Oral Statement of programme budget implications will be submitted to the Economic and Social Council prior to its action on this draft resolution in accordance with rule of procedure 31 of the Council and rule of procedure 153 of the General Assembly.