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Programme questions: evaluation

Triennial review of the implementation of recommendations made by the Committee at its sixty-third session on the evaluation of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia: subprogramme 3, Shared economic prosperity

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The present triennial review report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, prepared by the Inspection and Evaluation Division, determines the extent to which the three recommendations emanating from the Office's evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia: subprogramme 3, Shared economic prosperity ([E/AC.51/2023/4](#)), were implemented. It was determined that recommendations 1 and 2 were implemented, while recommendation 3 remained in progress.

In response to recommendation 1, to develop and implement a communication strategy that clearly shows the ESCWA niche and strengths to member States and United Nations partners, the Commission prepared a comprehensive communication strategy with a clear strategic narrative that defined the distinct value that the organization brought and why it mattered to the Arab region. Using this, the Commission strengthened its communication efforts through more proactive outreach, including reviving the technical cooperation network, integrating communication into intergovernmental meetings, expanding advocacy and visibility, increasing its presence in global forums and effectively using electronic media, including social media.

* [E/AC.51/2026/1](#).



In response to recommendation 2, to strengthen regional coordination efforts through collaboration and engagement with United Nations country teams, ESCWA strengthened its role as a member of the Regional Collaborative Platform for Arab States. In 2024, the Platform restructured its issue-based coalitions, and the Commission, as co-convenor of 4 of the 10 issue-based coalitions, collaborated closely with other United Nations agencies participating in the coalitions. Furthermore, ESCWA provided support to United Nations country teams such as expertise in data management, macroeconomic analysis, transboundary challenges and governance analysis. As of 2025, the Commission had contributed to the preparation of 12 common country analyses and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, delivering tailored technical papers, policy recommendations and analyses on critical topics, including climate change, poverty, gender-based violence and disability.

In response to recommendation 3, to strengthen the strategic use of its intergovernmental mechanism in subprogramme 3, in order to further its regional coordination mandate and to mainstream cross-cutting issues of gender, the environment, human rights and disability inclusion, ESCWA undertook several steps to further utilize its intergovernmental mechanisms to strengthen its regional coordination and the mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues. However, those steps were insufficient to meet the full intent of the recommendation. The three prevailing committees under subprogramme 3 were the Committee on Financing for Development in the States members of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the Committee on Trade Policies in ESCWA member States and the Committee on Transport and Logistics, involving only a few United Nations entities over the past three years. The environment was the only cross-cutting issue that appeared explicitly and repeatedly in the agendas of the three committees.

As a result of the implementation of the recommendations, ESCWA strengthened its profile and role in the Arab region as a coordinating body. The development and implementation of its communication strategy helped to convey the Commission's niche and strengths to member States and United Nations partners, thereby enhancing the potential to generate new requests for support from previously unengaged countries. The Commission's role in the Regional Collaborative Platform for Arab States as co-convenor of four issue-based coalitions was also central to enhancing shared economic prosperity in the Arab region, and its support for United Nations country teams in preparing their United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks potentially contributed to strengthening the planning frameworks for the United Nations system in the Arab region.

I. Introduction

1. At its sixty-third session, in 2023, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), prepared by the Inspection and Evaluation Division, on the evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA): subprogramme 3, Shared economic prosperity ([E/AC.51/2023/4](#)).
2. In the present triennial review, OIOS examined the status of implementation of the three recommendations. Two were assessed as implemented and one was assessed as in progress. The review also, where possible, assessed the extent to which implementing the recommendations contributed to early results.
3. The methodology for the triennial review included the following:
 - (a) Review and analysis of the biennial progress reports on the status of recommendations as at 31 December 2025, which are monitored through the OIOS recommendation database TeamMate+;
 - (b) Analysis of relevant written updates, documents and reports submitted by ESCWA related to the recommendations;
 - (c) Review of the ESCWA website and other United Nations document repositories.
4. The report incorporates comments received from ESCWA during the drafting process. A final draft was shared with the Commission for the management response, which is contained in the annex to the present report. OIOS expresses its appreciation to ESCWA for the cooperation extended in the preparation of the report.

II. Results

Recommendation 1

Develop and implement a communication strategy

5. Recommendation 1 reads as follows:

ESCWA should communicate its niche and strengths clearly to member States and global and resident United Nations partners, in order to enable them to fully utilize the Commission's potential in a manner that is aligned with its regional mandate.

Indicator of achievement: evidence of the development and implementation of a strategy by ESCWA communicating to its member States, global and resident United Nations partners how it can contribute in specific economic and/or social fields in a way that is complementary to, distinct from and not duplicative of the efforts of other organizations.

6. In response to the recommendation, in 2024 ESCWA prepared a communication strategy that encompasses the entire entity and addressed the elements required pursuant to the recommendation. The strategy is anchored in a strategic narrative that defines the organization, what distinct value it brings and why it matters to the Arab region. The narrative is meant to guide all external communication activities by ensuring consistent messaging, reinforcing institutional credibility and positioning ESCWA as a trusted regional reference for policy dialogue and development solutions. It is specifically noted in the strategy that, at its core, ESCWA is "the regional platform where global commitments are translated into regionally coherent and nationally actionable solutions. Through its intergovernmental mandate, ESCWA convenes

member States to address shared structural challenges – economic transformation, social inclusion, climate vulnerability, governance, and digital transition – through collective dialogue, evidence-based analysis, and policy coordination”.

7. The strategy also includes clear communication objectives and establishes annual targets for its annual communication and media plans. The overall objectives of ESCWA communication, as outlined in the strategy, are to:

- (a) Build a positive and transformative brand identity and reputation for ESCWA;
- (b) Strengthen public awareness about the work of ESCWA and induce change in the Arab region;
- (c) Develop a cohesive brand for all the sections within ESCWA;
- (d) Foster good relationships with the media;
- (e) Enhance reach to everyone without discrimination;
- (f) Gain trust through engagement with the target audience.

8. Another central part of the communication strategy is a stakeholder analysis, which includes policymakers, who are viewed as the primary audience for ESCWA communication activities. This group includes national Governments, ministries, ambassadors, legislators and parliamentary bodies. In addition, United Nations entities and the media are considered key stakeholders in communication. Other stakeholders include academia and think tanks, ESCWA staff, civil society organizations, regional organizations outside the United Nations system, donors and funding partners, the private sector and the general public.

9. Furthermore, the communication strategy lays out the various communication tools and channels. These include traditional channels (e.g., television, radio and print media); digital channels (e.g., email and websites); electronic media (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram); and other global, regional and partner channels (e.g., United Nations information centres).

10. On the basis of the communication strategy, ESCWA strengthened its communication efforts through more proactive outreach activities, including the following:

- (a) Strengthened email outreach and contact database management: ESCWA enhanced its email campaigns by consolidating and categorizing its contacts database – which now has approximately 90,000 stakeholders – and tailoring communications for member States, global partners and resident partners. Weekly newsletters and targeted campaigns, supported by new website subscription features, have expanded reach and engagement;
- (b) Revival of the technical cooperation network: ESCWA reinstated annual meetings of its technical cooperation network, using them as platforms to highlight its comparative advantages, share success stories and encourage experience exchange. Throughout the year, ESCWA circulates country intervention reports to further showcase its impact;
- (c) Integration of communication into intergovernmental meetings: each intergovernmental meeting now includes a dedicated agenda item on ESCWA technical cooperation services, raising policymakers’ awareness;
- (d) Expanded advocacy and visibility efforts: ESCWA increased its participation in more than 50 regional and global conferences and events annually,

communicating its niche, strengths and results. A dedicated internal database now tracks these engagements for strategic planning;

(e) Greater presence in global forums: ESCWA stepped up its visibility in major global platforms, including the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the high-level political forum on sustainable development and the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, organizing more side events to highlight its regional leadership and expertise;

(f) Large regional forums to engage diverse stakeholders: since 2022, ESCWA has convened major regional forums (e.g., Arab Forum on Equality and Arab Competition Forum), each drawing more than 1,000 participants across various sectors. These platforms have advanced regional priorities and showcased ESCWA contributions to sustainable development.

11. The communication strategy and its implementation demonstrated ESCWA activities and could convey its niche and strengths to member States and to global and resident United Nations partners, so long as the communication activities consistently align with the defined strategic narrative. The integration of communication into intergovernmental meetings with a dedicated agenda item on ESCWA technical cooperation services has the potential to generate new requests for support from previously unengaged countries.

12. On the basis of the evidence above, OIOS considers the recommendation to be implemented. OIOS also considers that, with the implementation of the recommendation, ESCWA has the potential to generate new requests for support from previously unengaged countries in the Arab region.

Recommendation 2

Strengthen regional coordination efforts

13. Recommendation 2 reads as follows:

ESCWA, in line with its regional mandate, should strengthen regional coordination efforts through the regional collaboration platform and contribute to country coordination through ongoing engagement with United Nations country teams.

Indicators of achievement: evidence of (a) ESCWA participation in the regional collaboration platform and (b) increased engagement with United Nations country teams in the region.

14. In response to the recommendation, ESCWA undertook several measures to strengthen regional coordination through the Regional Collaboration platform for Arab States and to support country coordination through its ongoing engagement with United Nations country teams. First, ESCWA strengthened its role as a member of the Platform, which is the primary regional coordination mechanism of the United Nations in the Arab region and which is intended to optimize United Nations assets to assist member States in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Platform operates under the Deputy Secretary-General, who serves as Chair, with ESCWA and the United Nations Development Programme serving as co-Vice-Chairs. The Platform holds annual meetings and regular sessions to discuss ongoing collaboration, assess progress and address specific in-country situations. Although the Platform was in place prior to the OIOS evaluation in 2021–2022, in response to the recommendation it restructured its issue-based coalitions in 2024 in order to enhance alignment with strategic priorities and maximize impact. The new structure, as shown in the table below, comprises 10 issue-based coalitions, including

6 aligned with the six transitions of the Sustainable Development Goals and 4 addressing cross-cutting regional issues. This reconfiguration ensures that the Commission's work is demand-driven and enhances the coherence of the reconfigured structure with ongoing initiatives. As co-convenor of 4 of the 10 issue-based coalitions, the Commission collaborates closely with other United Nations agencies to deliver nine key outputs, focusing on areas such as energy access, digital connectivity, macroeconomic growth and the use of data and artificial intelligence tools.

Regional Collaborative Platform for Arab States: issue-based coalitions

Six transition issue-based coalitions (co-convening agencies)

- Issue-based coalition on food systems: World Food Programme and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
- Issue-based coalition on energy access and affordability: ESCWA and United Nations Industrial Development Organization
- Issue-based coalition on digital connectivity: ESCWA and International Telecommunication Union
- Issue-based coalition on education: United Nations Children's Fund and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- Issue-based coalition on jobs and social protection: International Labour Organization and United Nations Children's Fund
- Issue-based coalition on climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution: United Nations Environment Programme and United Nations Development Programme

Four cross-cutting issue-based coalitions (co-convening agencies)

- Issue-based coalition on macroeconomic growth: ESCWA and United Nations Development Programme
 - Issue-based coalition on gender equity: International Labour Organization and United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)
 - Issue-based coalition on humanitarian, peace and development nexus – recovery and reconstruction: United Nations Environment Programme and United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)
 - Issue-based coalition on data and artificial intelligence tools: ESCWA
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Source: Meeting of the Regional Collaborative Platform for Arab States, April 2025.

15. With regard to enhanced engagement with United Nations country teams in the region, ESCWA participated in country team retreats and facilitated sessions, as required. Moreover, the Commission fostered collaboration with resident coordinator offices, actively engaging them in relevant missions and events, including the 2024 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development. The Commission, committed to translating analysis into actionable outcomes and strengthening capacity at the country level, has significantly expanded its support through these channels. Moreover, the Commission provided 20 United Nations country teams with custom-made national data profiles to provide them with existing data and statistics from national statistics offices, United Nations custodian agencies and other reliable data sources, thus equipping them with reliable data, Sustainable Development Goal tracking tools and training.

16. Furthermore, ESCWA has provided support to United Nations country teams that is aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, which help countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. This included expertise in data management, macroeconomic analysis, transboundary

challenges and conflict and governance analysis. As of 2025, the Commission had contributed to the preparation of 12 common country analyses and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, delivering tailored technical papers, policy recommendations and analyses on critical topics, including climate change, poverty, gender-based violence and disability. Some examples of ESCWA support to United Nations country teams included the following:

- (a) Support for two policy briefs on youth employment in Egypt;
- (b) Support for a situation analysis of international immigration in Jordan;
- (c) Support for the development of the climate/Sustainable Development Goal debt swap programme in Tunisia;
- (d) Support for a policy brief on “restoring care, rebuilding communities: path to recovery in Lebanon”.

17. The steps discussed above have resulted in strengthened coordination in the Arab region in support of member States. In 2024, ESCWA assessed the progress of all 10 issue-based coalitions in achieving their deliverables. Notwithstanding the challenging context in the region, most deliverables were on track for completion. The ESCWA Executive Secretary encouraged all members of the Regional Collaborative Platform for Arab States to identify strategic actions in which regional priorities aligned with global efforts and to participate in the Summit of the Future working groups to enhance the regional implementation of global priorities. In addition, the Commission’s support provided to United Nations country teams in preparing the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks has potentially strengthened the planning frameworks of the United Nations system as a whole in the Arab region.

18. On the basis of the evidence above, OIOS considers the recommendation to be implemented. OIOS also determined that implementing the recommendation has yielded early results, namely, that the 10 issue-based coalitions are largely on track to achieve their expected deliverables.

Recommendation 3

Strengthen the strategic use of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia intergovernmental mechanism in subprogramme 3

19. Recommendation 3 reads as follows:

ESCWA should strengthen the strategic utilization of its intergovernmental mechanism as a means to further its regional coordination mandate and the mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues, including gender, the environment, human rights and disability.

Indicator of achievement: agendas and other documents that reflect varied and purposive agenda-setting and inclusion of relevant United Nations entities in subprogramme 3 intergovernmental mechanism sessions.

20. In response to the recommendation, while ESCWA undertook several steps to further utilize its intergovernmental mechanism to strengthen its regional coordination and mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues, these were insufficient to meet the full intent of the recommendation. The intergovernmental mechanism is comprised of the following three committees of ESCWA subprogramme 3:

- (a) The Committee on Financing for Development in the States members of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, which focuses on macro-financial and systemic issues. Its agenda spans fiscal policy, international taxation, financial architecture reform and data-driven financing instruments;

(b) The Committee on Trade Policies in ESCWA member States, which addresses trade-specific priorities, with an emphasis on emerging technologies;

(c) The Committee on Transport and Logistics, which covers specific sectoral issues.

21. An analysis of the documents provided by ESCWA, as well as information obtained from the Commission's website and other United Nations repositories, showed that only a few United Nations entities were involved in the three committees during the past three years. Examples of this engagement for two of the three committees include the following:

(a) The Committee on Financing for Development in the States members of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia interacted with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs mainly through joint workshops, technical cooperation and inter-agency coordination;

(b) At a 2024 meeting of the Committee on Transport and Logistics, the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law submitted a paper and made a presentation;

(c) Also in 2024, the Special Envoy for Road Safety delivered a video message and the head of the Global Road Safety Facility at the World Bank participated in person and gave a presentation.

22. No evidence was found indicating the participation of other United Nations entities in the Committee on Trade Policies in ESCWA member States.

23. Additional analysis of documents provided by ESCWA, as well as information obtained from the Commission's website and other United Nations repositories, revealed that the cross-cutting issue of the environment appeared explicitly and repeatedly in the agendas of the three committees:

(a) For example, the Committee on Trade Policies in ESCWA member States dedicated a discussion on the European Union carbon border adjustment mechanism during its fourth session (2025);

(b) The Committee on Transport and Logistics discussed climate change impacts, in particular the transport sector's role in wildfire response and disaster preparedness, during its twenty-sixth session (2025);

(c) The ESCWA initiative on debt swaps for climate and the Sustainable Development Goals was discussed in the Committee on Financing for Development in the States members of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

24. Apart from the topic of "women in trade facilitation", which was addressed in 2025 in the Committee on Trade Policies in ESCWA member States and the Committee on Transport and Logistics, the gender dimension was not consistently and systematically addressed as a cross-cutting issue in the three committees, on the basis of the documents reviewed. While road safety, linked to the human rights to life and health, was a recurring topic for the Committee on Transport and Logistics, human rights and disability inclusion were not explicitly addressed as cross-cutting issues across the three committees.

25. ESCWA staff emphasized that the subprogramme mainstreamed cross-cutting issues, including gender equality, environmental sustainability, disability inclusion and human rights, through an integrated, human rights-centred approach embedded across all areas of its work. They stated that, as a regional economic commission with a mandate for economic and social development, the Commission anchored its work in international human rights instruments, ensuring that cross-cutting priorities were

systematically addressed in line with States' obligations and internationally agreed standards. ESCWA staff also stressed that the Commission's secretariat could influence the meeting agendas of intergovernmental committees only to a limited extent because those agendas were typically member State-driven and decided through discussions in previous sessions, with subjects proposed by delegates. They further noted that the Commission's work on economic and social issues focused on supporting people-centred economic and social development, as reflected in its intergovernmental committee discussions.

26. OIOS reviewed the extent to which the cross-cutting issues of gender, human rights and disability inclusion were addressed in the other seven ESCWA intergovernmental committees, which do not function under subprogramme 3. The review showed that gender, human rights and disability were explicitly addressed by the other committees. For example, the ESCWA Committee on Women was the primary intergovernmental body within the Commission addressing gender equality, women's empowerment, gender justice, violence against women and human rights-related gender issues. The Statistical Committee supported gender and disability inclusion through data frameworks. While ESCWA did not have a disability inclusion committee, it operated an intersessional group of experts on disability to strengthen links and exchange information on disability policy among countries in the Arab region and support the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

27. On the basis of the evidence above, OIOS considers the recommendation to be in progress. In order for the recommendation to be considered fully implemented, the three committees will need to further enhance the involvement of other United Nations entities in their deliberations and activities and make greater efforts to explicitly incorporate cross-cutting issues, in particular gender, human rights and disability inclusion, into their agendas. OIOS could not determine any early results from the partial implementation of the recommendation.

III. Conclusion

28. Over the past three years, ESCWA has strengthened its profile and role in the Arab region as a coordinating body. The development and implementation of its communication strategy helped to convey the Commission's niche and strengths to member States and United Nations partners, thereby enhancing the potential to generate new requests for support from previously unengaged countries. The Commission's role in the Regional Collaborative Platform for Arab States as co-convenor of four issue-based coalitions was also central to enhancing shared economic prosperity in the Arab region, and its support for United Nations country teams in preparing their United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks potentially contributed to strengthening the planning frameworks for the United Nations system in the Arab region. However, more work is needed to strengthen the strategic utility of the three committees operating under ESCWA subprogramme 3 by involving other United Nations entities further in their deliberations and activities, as well as ensuring the consistent and explicit incorporation and mainstreaming of gender, human rights and disability inclusion into their agendas.

Annex*

Comments received from the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia on the draft report

I am pleased to share with you the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia's (ESCWA) management response in connection with the above-mentioned evaluation report.

ESCWA welcomes this report and feedback on the implementation of three Evaluation Recommendations contained in the original Evaluation.

ESCWA accepts the recommendations of the report to further strengthen the strategic utility of the three Intergovernmental Committees operating under Subprogramme 3 and to further involve other United Nations entities in their deliberations and activities, as well as to ensure the consistent and explicit incorporation and mainstreaming of gender, human rights, disability inclusion in their deliberations. These are a priority for us and we have already included a session on gender, human rights and disability inclusion in the meeting of ESCWA's Executive Committee.

I would also welcome any recommendations OIOS may have with regard to indicators ESCWA could use to track its progress in implementing the recommendations made.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank you and the evaluation team for the collaborative engagement throughout the evaluation process.

* In the present annex, the Office of Internal Oversight Services sets out the full text of comments received from the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. The practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution 64/263, following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.