Note to the reader

The Arab Sustainable Development Report (ASDR) is a **quadrennial United Nations inter-agency publication** produced by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) to support the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the regional level. The 2024 edition of the ASDR engaged a taskforce composed of 18 United Nations agencies working in the region.[1]

Building from ASDR 2020 and its analysis of the main barriers to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Arab region, ASDR 2024 examines **SDG policy trends** at the regional and subregional levels (see below on the composition of subregions). It identifies the main approaches taken by Arab Governments to progress on priority policy areas under each of the 17 SDGs. In doing so, it also identifies policy gaps and provides contextual analysis for each trend.

ASDR 2024 includes **17 chapters** – one for each SDG – in addition to an **umbrella chapter** that summarizes the main findings of the policy trend analysis, along with important contextual elements related to the policymaking environment and state of development in the Arab region.

The 17 SDG chapters combine **qualitative and quantitative analysis** and are structured similarly, as explained below. Each chapter focuses on one SDG, while addressing the interlinkages among all SDGs and cross-referencing other chapters where relevant.

Information across the report is presented in **bullet points** for a user-friendly experience.

ASDR 2024 is only available in **digital format**. In addition to the ability to browse all content online, an innovation was introduced that allows the reader to "**build own report**" – collating selected parts of the report that are of interest into a downloadable custom-made file.

Queries and feedback may be addressed to escwa-2030agenda@un.org.

Qualitative analysis

The qualitative analysis is based on the input and expert opinions received from the **United Nations agencies working in the region** and builds on a wealth of United Nations publications and databases. The **Voluntary National Reviews** (VNRs) issued by Arab States have been an important source of country examples in several chapters. In addition to extensive desk research, the analysis also builds on a rigorous **review process by independent experts** from the region (see Acknowledgments).

The qualitative analysis focuses on a few of the most **essential policy areas for each SDG**, based on a close reading of the Goal and its constituent targets and indicators and vetted by the United Nations interagency taskforce. The selection of main policy areas takes into consideration that some policy areas may appear under more than one interlinked SDG — for example, the chapter on SDG 1 focuses on poverty reduction and social protection policies, while the closely related and equally important policy area of employment generation is analysed in the chapter on SDG 8.

> **Policy trends** do not draw on comprehensive mapping of every single policy at the national level. Rather, within each selected SDG policy area, policy trends identify a concentration of **current policies (i.e. policies that are presently in effect)** that aim to achieve similar results (the what) and/or take similar policy measures to achieve them (the how). The trends are grouped as they appear as common for the region or for a particular grouping of countries, as applicable.

The **key regional and subregional policy trends** are identified based on existing efforts to review the policy landscape in the region by different United Nations entities and are supplemented through an additional desk review of current SDG policies at the national level. Each policy trend is illustrated by notable **country examples** that are by no means comprehensive.

While it is not possible, given the scope of the report, to offer robust analysis of the effectiveness and impact of each policy direction, the report identifies **policy gaps and missing policy elements** that hinder regional progress on the SDGs. This information is typically provided in **side-boxes**. A set of actions is proposed in the introduction of each SDG chapter to address these major policy gaps **on the road to 2030**.

Each SDG chapter dedicates a section to the **groups of people at risk of being left behind:**[2] those identified in ASDR 2020, along with new groups that may have emerged, showcasing notable examples of national policies that target each of these groups.

Given the relative scarcity of information available on **SDG financing** in the region, it is not always possible to draw regional and subregional financing trends for each SDG. While the financing section of the chapter on SDG 17 analyses regional policies to achieve overall fiscal sustainability, the **financing landscape** section

in each SDG chapter focuses on financing issues specific to the SDG under consideration, such as the level of government expenditure on the SDG, the role of subsidies and official development assistance, and emerging financing mechanisms.

Information presented in the **regional dimensions** section of each SDG chapter highlights existing regional collaborations, notably those in the frame of the League of Arab States and its subsidiary bodies. It also sheds light on what could and needs to exist if Arab countries are to progress on the SDGs.

Table.
Typical SDG chapter structure

Section title	Section content
A. Introduction	Brief qualitative assessment of where the region stands on the SDG under consideration.
	On the road to 2030 – suggested policy approaches to accelerate progress: priority actions to address policy gaps and accelerate the achievement of the SDG in question in the region.
	What the data say: regional/subregional level data (see quantitative analysis below).
B. The policy landscape	Policy trends common to most countries of the region, irrespective of income level or country situation, indicative of policy trends.
	Illustrative examples of relevant national policies for each policy trend.
	Policy gaps or missing policy elements, presented in side-boxes.
C. Policy trends by subregion	Policy trends specific to each subregion, or policies that are being pursued differently in different subregions.
	Illustrative examples of relevant national policies for each policy trend.
	Policy gaps or missing policy elements, presented in side-boxes.
D. Policies to leave no one behind	Groups of people at risk of being left behind and what causes their vulnerability.
	Illustrative examples of targeted national policies that are helping these groups.
E. The financing landscape	Financing challenges and opportunities specific to each SDG in the region.
F. Regional dimensions	Existing and potential opportunities for regional integration and cooperation.

Quantitative analysis

ASDR 2024 is not a progress report. The quantitative analysis in the "**What the data say**" section and other sections of the SDG chapters offer a snapshot of available regional and subregional averages with an indication – where possible – of the direction of change (progress/regress) since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, and a comparison against the world average.

While it is impossible to establish causality between observed policy and data trends, the data story provides important context to improve the reading of policy trends.

Data were mainly sourced from the ESCWA Arab SDG Monitor and supplemented as needed by other sources. Data from the Monitor reflect the global indicator framework for the SDGs and targets of the 2030 Agenda developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators.[3] Readers are encouraged to refer to the Monitor for the most up-to-date figures.

Composition of subregions

The Arab region as presented in this report is composed of the 22 member States of the League of Arab States: Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

The report adopts a flexible approach to the definition of subregions across chapter; each chapter opted for the country groupings that best bring out the subregional policy trends. Nevertheless, and unless otherwise stated, the subregional country groupings used in most chapters of the report are the following:
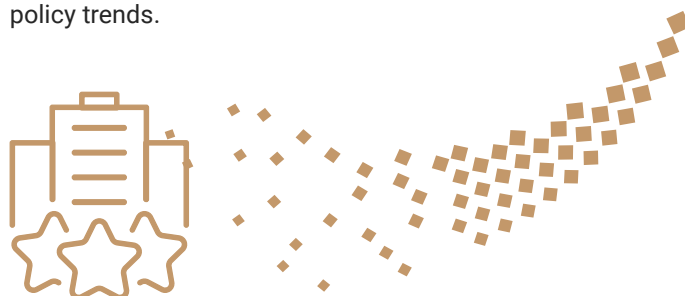
◆ The **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** subregion: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates;
◆ The **middle-income countries (MICs)** subregion excludes countries in situations of conflict and those classified as least developed countries: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia;[4]
◆ The **least developed countries (LDCs)** subregion follows the United Nations classification: the Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen;
◆ The **countries in conflict** subregion: Iraq, Libya, Somalia, the State of Palestine, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.[5]

Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen are included in both the least developed countries and countries in conflict subregions. In some chapters, very similar policy trends were observed for these two groups, and hence the two groupings were combined under one heading, for example in the chapters on SDG 3 "Good health and well-being"; SDG 8 "Decent work and economic growth"; SDG 9 "Industry, innovation and infrastructure"; SDG 10 "Reduced inequalities" (Migration policies); SDG 11 "Sustainable cities and communities"; SDG 12 "Responsible consumption and production"; SDG 15 "Life on land"; and SDG 17 "Partnerships for the goals" (Technology).

The chapter on SDG 10 "Reduced inequalities" identified common fiscal and wage policy trends in middle-income and least developed countries and common migration policies in middle-income countries and conflict-affected countries.

In the chapter on SDG 14 "Life below water", geographic groupings based on regional sea basins were used because they offer a more suitable frame for the policy trend analysis.

In the chapters on SDG 5 "Gender equality", SDG 16 "Peace, justice and strong institutions" and SDG 17 "Partnerships for the goals" (Finance and Data, monitoring and accountability), no clear subregional differences could be identified and the policy analysis was confined to regional policy trends.

Endnotes

1   International Labour Organization (ILO); Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); World Health Organization (WHO); International Organization for Migration (IOM); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); World Food Programme (WFP); United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO); United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); United Nations Volunteers (UNV); United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA); United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT); United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC); United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR); United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN WOMEN); United Nations Development Coordination Office (UNDCO).

2   Including *inter alia*: Women and girls; Young people, children; Informal workers; Migrant workers; Refugees and internally displaced persons; Persons with disabilities; Older persons; People living in poverty and less well-off persons; Rural communities; People living in slums or inadequate dwellings.

3   Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

4   Some chapters, for example the chapters on SDG 1 "No poverty" and SDG 4 "Education for all" include some conflict-affected countries within the group of middle-income countries, resulting in a larger group: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, the State of Palestine and Tunisia.

5   Some chapters, for example the chapters on SDG 1 "No poverty", SDG 4 "Education for all" and SDG 10 "Reduced inequalities", consider a larger category, namely "countries experiencing conflict and fragility", which include the seven countries in conflict plus Lebanon.