

Ministerial Forum Declaration

The future of Social Protection in the Arab Region:

Building a vision for a post-COVID-19 reality

Adopted 30 November 2021

We, the participants in the Ministerial Forum of 30 November 2021.

Firstly, acknowledging:

- the commitments assumed by the Arab States¹ in **the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, especially regarding SDG 1.3, which calls to “implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable”
- the **universal right to social security**, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Right of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women as well as the Arab Charter on Human Rights, the Global Compact for Refugees and the Global Compact on Migration, and as reflected in national constitutions and legal frameworks
- the **guidance and principles provided by international and regional instruments** in the field of social protection, including – amongst others - the ILO Convention Minimum Standards of Social Security, 1952 (No. 102), the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) and other international labour and social security standards
- the **commitment to achieving universal access to comprehensive, adequate and sustainable social protection**, ensuring that all in need have access to basic income security and to essential healthcare included in Global Call for Action for a Human-Centred Recovery that was adopted by the International Labour Conference in June 2021
- the **UN Secretary-General call for a Global Accelerator for Jobs and Social Protection** to boost investment in Jobs and Social Protection for Poverty Eradication and a Sustainable Recovery

Secondly, recognizing:

- that the Arab region, despite efforts and advances in social protection coverage, faced **challenges in ensuring inclusive coverage** prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially for groups such as the informal labour force, children, women and populations on the move, including refugees and internally displaced people.
- that the Arab region - like other regions in the world – is likely to **continue to face a multiplicity of shocks**, including economic, social and climate and environment related shocks, requiring inclusive, robust and shock-responsive social protection systems

¹ Arab countries participating in the Forum: Algeria (People’s Democratic Republic of), Bahrain (Kingdom of), Egypt (Arab Republic of), Iraq (Republic of), Jordan (The Hashemite Kingdom of), Kuwait (State of), Lebanon (Lebanese Republic), Libya (State of), Mauritania (Islamic Republic Of), Morocco (Kingdom of), Oman (Sultanate of), Palestine (State of), Qatar (State of), Saudi Arabia (Kingdom of), Somalia (Federal Republic of), Sudan (Republic of the), Syria (Syrian Arab Republic), Tunisia (Republic of), United Arab Emirates, Yemen (Republic of).

- that, prior to the pandemic, **the region was already facing important deficits with regard to coverage, financing, adequacy and comprehensiveness** of benefits and services and challenges in relation to governance, coordination and financing of social protection

- as well as the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has **exacerbated structural social, labor and economic challenges** in the region, associated with poverty, inequality, unemployment, underemployment, gender inequalities and labor informality in most of the Arab region,

- that Arab governments' have put in place considerable responses **and policy innovations** in social protection responses to the pandemic

Lastly, reaffirming

- the critical role of social protection for accelerating a **human-centered and green recovery from the pandemic**

- the importance of continuing to **strengthen social protection systems** and providing comprehensive, adequate, inclusive and sustainable contributory and non-contributory programmes for achieving social justice, human development and inclusive growth

We commit to working on the following four axes of reform and related principles for the future of social protection in the Arab region, in line with national priorities, progressive realization of commitments to international agreements, conventions and charters, and within available capacities and resources:

1. Enhanced Coverage - Delivering on the right to Social Protection for all through inclusive, adequate and comprehensive Social Protection systems that leave no-one behind

- **Progressively achieving universal social protection**, thereby ensuring no one is left behind, by promoting rights- and life cycle-based social protection floors, with its principles of non-discrimination and equality
- Reviewing efforts to **extend social protection to especially vulnerable groups** such as children, older persons, persons with disabilities, women, workers in the informal and in the rural economy, all migrant workers, refugees and people on the move.
- Ensuring access to adequate social protection for **workers in all types of employment** – formal and informal – and making social protection systems more inclusive and effective as enablers of national formalization strategies
- Accelerating efforts to improve **financial protection when accessing health, education and other basic social services** as a cornerstone of social protection
- Ensuring **social protection benefits are adequate**, foster a dignified life for their recipients and cover relevant life-course risks and contingencies

2. **Shock-responsiveness** – Enhancing resilience of Social Protection systems for future shocks

- Investing in **strong regular social protection systems**, which need to be comprehensive in the types of risks they address, inclusive, based on entitlements, well resourced, and enshrined in legislation and thereby provide a strong basis for system's shock-responsiveness
- **Enhancing the preparedness of national social protection systems**, including comprehensive and flexible databases for timely identification, broad based registration, payment mechanisms and effective grievance redressal mechanisms for beneficiaries to react quickly and adequately in times of crises
- **Recognizing and fulfilling the joint responsibility** between national and humanitarian social protection actors² to improve **alignment and integration** of humanitarian efforts within the overall agenda of strengthening national social protection systems, especially in fragile countries.

3. **Improved Financing** – for comprehensive, adequate, and sustainable Social Protection systems

- Progressively expanding the social protection financing base to fill coverage and adequacy gaps, while enhancing **efficiency, sustainability and equity in financing**
- Promoting universal and mandatory social protection approaches through a combination of **contributory and government financed schemes** that ensure fairness and solidarity in the financing mix both within and across generations.
- Utilizing **progressive tax and contribution-based finance mechanisms** to expand Social Protection financing, together with efforts to reprioritize and rationalize public spending as well as better leveraging alternative means of financing, including Zakat and other sources.
- Where needed, work together with relevant partners to complement domestic financing sources with **international and humanitarian financing**, especially for countries facing crises and influx of refugees.

4. **Better Governance and coordination**– Integrated and coordinated social protection approaches for greater impact

- Strengthening **legal and policy frameworks** that guarantee comprehensive and adequate social protection across the life cycle for all, enhance the coordination, increase impact and avoid fragmented and parallel systems

² Humanitarian actors are civilians, whether national or international, UN or non-UN, governmental or non-governmental, which have a commitment to humanitarian principles and are engaged in humanitarian activities.

- **Improving national social protection coordination arrangements and promoting integrated social protection responses.** To this end fostering **coordination** between contributory and non-contributory social protection schemes, strengthening linkages between social protection and other sectors such as health, education, and employment, including through referrals and case management, and ensuring effective engagement of all national and international social protection actors.
- Strengthening **data collection, integrated information, inspection, monitoring and evaluation as well as outreach and grievances and complaints management** systems to ensure those in need are identified, reached and provided with social protection and high-quality services.
- Investing in the development of **unified and integrated social protection registries** to ensure coordination between social protection institutions and schemes, and in the digitization of social protection services - including payments - for easier access, increased transparency and accountability, while giving due consideration to matters of individual data privacy and protection.
- Ensuring, through **social dialogue**, participation of citizens, workers, private sector employers and beneficiaries in the **good governance** of social protection systems and enhancing the **engagement and empowerment** of governments, civil society, religious institutions in an **accountable, participatory, transparent** and **nationally owned** policy development process, in collaboration with United Nation bodies, and international actors.