



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



Istanbul Competition Forum Webinar

Intervention on the role of International Cooperation during and in the aftermath of COVID-19 crisis

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Good morning and good afternoon everyone from Beirut and thank you for inviting me to speak briefly about the role of international cooperation during and in the aftermath of COVID-19 crisis. It is a great opportunity to hear about the different initiatives taken by countries to mitigate the impact of the crisis which may seem polarized but actually are very similar and create many prospects for cooperation between countries to complement each other, fill other's gaps and achieve mutual benefit for all. The sharing of expertise and learning from each other through this seminar or other similar initiatives is a proof on the importance of international collaboration to facilitate the response and resilience to the crisis and commend the efforts of the Turkish competition authority in collaboration to UNCTAD to bring together this expertise and initiative.

Since the Second World War, international cooperation has played a major role in recovery from different kinds of crises as international cooperation raises mutual benefits especially in recovery stages. As the covid-19 pandemic continues to impact economies and societies, Governments around the world are taking different approaches to deal with the crisis at the national level, however international cooperation unfortunately is weakening¹. In the global survey that marked the UN 75th anniversary around 95 percent of respondents agreed on the need for countries to work together in order to manage the global trends² and today the desired international cooperation should play a visible role in the global economic recovery after the outbreak through a clear and coordinated approach for building back societies and continuing the path for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030. The SDGs can be a window for countries to collaborate to enhance both the recovery progress and the international cooperation and attain mutual benefits for all.

As we have seen from the presentation of countries and needs, we all agree that International cooperation is critically needed in three main areas: sharing information and research across

¹ United Nations Global Compact - Global Cooperation for Crisis Response
<https://unglobalcompact.org/academy/global-cooperation-for-crisis-response>

² Preliminary Assessment of the UN75 Survey and Dialogues- April 2020
<https://www.un.org/pqa/74/wp-content/uploads/sites/99/2020/04/UN75-Update-Report-April-2020.pdf>



borders, manufacturing and access to health products,³ and financing measures to ensure that resources are equally distributed especially reaching to those in the LDCs.

governments around the world should exchange information, data, and research results as quickly as possible to understand what upcoming measures the world should take in the fight with the global crisis. Also, this information sharing should play a major role in the next steps toward the attainment of the SDGs as international cooperation is essential in formulating plans to help countries and communities rebuild their economies and societies.

Responsible consumption and production (Goal 12) is one of the most important SDGs as the outbreak has led to closed borders, shortage in commodities, and forced confinement that challenged the demand and supply balance. Many countries prohibited the exports on medical supplies and equipment⁴ and many others implemented exports ban on food products⁵. Such prohibitions were made as governments want to mitigate critical shortages at the national level, however on the global level it is disastrous as many countries faced significant shortages to access to basic products.

International cooperation is needed to regulate trade across borders and ensure responsible production and fair competition and diverse global value chains. Such agreements and negotiations can be regulated under the UN and international organs to ensure the mutual benefits for the global community and direction toward Agenda 2030.

At UNESCWA, as a regional commission its main aims is to support Arab countries in economic and social development and to promote regional integration. UNESCWA started working from the start of the outbreak in supporting its member countries to address the impact of Covid-19 pandemic.

- UNESCWA developed the Regional Emergency Response:
- Our member States were called to cooperate in order to form the social solidarity fund that supports vulnerable countries, including the Arab least developed countries⁶ and provide relief during health emergencies or food shortages.

³ Dr Suerie Moonexternal (The co-director of the Global Health Centre at the Geneva Graduate Institute and an expert in global health, governance and infectious diseases)

⁴ World Trade Organization - EXPORT PROHIBITIONS AND RESTRICTIONS
https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/covid19_e/export_prohibitions_report_e.pdf

⁵ International Trade Centre - <https://www.macmap.org/covid19>

⁶ ESCWA Regional Emergency Response to mitigate the impact of Covid19
https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/20-00116_rer_mitigatingimpact_covid-19_eng_april8.pdf#overlay-context=publications/socioeconomic-impact-covid-19-policy-briefs



- Arab Governments were called to ensure the ability of migrants to remit funds to their families at low cost and to remove all barriers on imports and exports, mainly on food, medical products and inputs for industries producing essential goods.
- ESCWA invited the Arab central banks to enhance liquidity, encourage lending and investment, and to adopt the necessary measures to uplift the burdens on SMEs also to establish Arab specialized funds to provide lending incentives in sectors employing the working poor and women⁷.
- ESCWA made an initial assessment of the economic cost in the Arab region in order to help member countries design appropriate regional and national recovery and response plans.
- ESCWA addressed a regional and national policy response to mitigate the impact of the outbreak on water scarcity, poverty, food security, and gender equality in the region. These responses mechanisms were done in coordination with regional and international organizations such as the League of Arab States (LAS).
- UNESCWA is collaborating with OECD and UNCTAD on the joint initiative for improving competition, competition policy, and consumer behavior in the Arab region. Our joint programme is centered on advocacy, technical advice, research and assessment towards the improvement or formulation of competition law, policy, and procedures and to accelerate progress toward economic governance reforms.
- In addition, UNESCWA is also collaborating with UNCTAD and OECD to develop a regional capacity-building programme on competition policy and produce a set of capacity building activities, ranging from online courses and workshops based on priorities and needs. The objective is to facilitate more information sharing between competition authorities and support and enrich the operation of competition policies and improve enforcement outcomes. And Finally, our collaboration on the organization of the annual Arab Competition Forum that became a very important millstone and initiative in the region to build relationships and engage on a multilateral level, learn best practices, share expertise, and develop projects and initiatives in the region.

This is only a summary; I would be happy to provide additional information if needed and all other information can be found on the UNESCWA website (www.unescwa.org).

⁷ THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 on Arab Financial Systems
https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/20-00190_pb8_eng_may14_mod_web.pdf