

EVALUATION BRIEF “STRENGTHENING CAPACITIES TO UTILIZE WORKERS’ REMITTANCES FOR DEVELOPMENT”



Background & Context:

Millions of migrants from ESCWA member States live and work abroad. In 2010, migrants from Yemen, Syria, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia sent approximately USD\$36 billion worth of remittances back to their home countries. Lebanon, Egypt and Morocco were in the top 20 remittances receiving countries world wide. Despite such a high level of remittances, a lack of national strategies and policies, weak financial and institutional infrastructures and the lack of sufficient data on workers’ remittances has prevented many ESCWA member States from utilizing remittances to finance development.

Against this backdrop, ESCWA developed a United Nations Development Account project “Strengthening Capacities to Utilize Workers’ Remittances for Development” that was implemented between January 2014 and February 2016 with a budget of USD\$464,000. The project planned to support nine member States in their efforts to mobilize and better utilize remittances to finance development. To this end, the project targeted policymakers from ministries of investment, finance, development, international cooperation, planning and emigration affairs, as well as bankers from financial institutions. The project strove to provide a set of skills and tools to policy makers and finance officials in these ministries in nine selected member States.

Summary of the evaluation:

The end of project evaluation assessed the achievements of the project, and determined key challenges, best practices, and lessons learned. The evaluation exercise was forward looking and based on four OECD-DAC criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability), with a view to contribute to ESCWA's future project implementation and strategic decision-making processes. The evaluation included a desk review of over 20 documents, observations of the project's final workshop, and interviews with over 20 stakeholders and participants, project partners and staff.

Key Results:

The evaluation assessed the project's two-pronged approach to build the capacity of selected member State officials. It confirmed that the project first produced eleven national studies and conducted two sub-regional seminars to increase the knowledge base and enhance the understanding of policy makers of the positive impact of workers' remittances to finance development. The evaluation also determined that, secondly, the project team provided advisory services on remittances to member States, and organized nine national workshops and one sub-regional workshop to help member State officials acquire a set of skills and tools to develop national policies on remittances.

"The topic of this project is highly relevant to our region, and there is not enough attention on the matter from national stakeholders and international development agencies" (member State official)

The evaluation found that the project over performed against its original outputs. Instead of the six studies that were planned, the project produced ten national studies and one technical paper proposing a new approach to mobilising migrants' savings. These studies offered a conceptual foundation and outlined policies and strategies to enhance the impact of worker's remittances in financing for development. These studies were then presented at six national and two regional workshops, where participants discussing findings and recommendations of these studies. Workshop participants, largely consisting of government officials and bankers, exchanged knowledge on common challenges and deliberated possible common solutions with policymakers and bankers from relevant institutions.

"The studies of this project act as an excellent baseline for any future project concerned with remittances" (researcher)

The evaluation demonstrated that amid the political turmoil in the Arab region project participants nevertheless found the project relevant and effective to a large extent, providing a forum to work together on a common issues. Given the relevance of the project, Mauritania and

Palestine requested to join the project after it was launched. ESCWA also provided advisory services to Egypt (at the request of the member State) to advise relevant government departments on national strategies and policies on remittances.

Key Accomplishments:

Apart from the research outputs and capacity building workshops, the evaluation found that the project team undertook a number of additional activities that contributed to this project's achievements. ESCWA's project team provided technical assistance to the Tunisian government to establish a national remittances fund and advised the Sudanese government on issuing a new remittances law. Eleven substantive and technical studies informed policy makers and bankers on how to utilise remittances to finance development and develop policies to this end. The evaluation noted that the project also established two national committees in Sudan and Lebanon, as well as one regional taskforce, both unanticipated in the original project document, to coordinate policies and initiatives aimed at enhancing the impact of remittances on development.

"The establishment of a regional taskforce of seven member countries is a major achievement of the project" (member State official)

The evaluation found that these achievements confirm the project's degree of relevance, as well as the ownership of project participants. The establishment of national and regional mechanisms in the current political context represents an important success allowing comparative analysis and networking between national policymakers. Finally, a dedicated platform (<https://www.unescwa.org/SCUWRD>) showcasing key project outputs serves as a knowledge hub for those interested in remittances and financing for development.

The evaluation determined that, along with the web platform, the two national committees and the regional task force ensure the project's outputs remain sustainable and accessible to all beneficiaries.

Recommendations:

Among others, the evaluation made four key recommendations that will be taken into account in future planning. First, targeted countries demonstrate varying levels of capacity and development on remittances. Thus, any intervention requires a tailored approach, including clustering countries with similar levels of capacity, development and needs together, to ensure effectiveness. Second, the two national committees and the regional task force will be most useful in influencing government policies if more government officials participate in these networks. Third, ESCWA is encouraged to further leverage partnerships with UN and non-UN partners with clear roles and responsibilities to advance future project effectiveness. Finally, it is proposed that objectives and resources allocated to achieve project goals be better aligned to ensure that the project realises its goals.