

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA

Statistical Committee
Fifth session
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Item 6 (b) of the provisional agenda

ACTIVITIES COVERED BY THE REGULAR PROGRAMME BUDGET

1. Action taken during the period between the fourth and fifth sessions of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) Statistical Committee included the collection, categorizing and dissemination of statistical data in socio-economic fields and on national accounts; training activities; the exchange of expertise in the field of statistics through the organization of workshops, expert group meetings and statistical seminars; participation in meetings of statistical committees and other bodies; and cooperation with regional and international organizations.

I. SOCIAL STATISTICS

A. DATABASES

2. In this field, ESCWA undertook the following activities:

(a) In accordance with the recommendations of the International Labour Organization (ILO), and as part of the ESCWA Statistical Information System (ESIS), it prepared the framework for a manpower database. The applications of this database make it possible to extract and categorize manpower statistics and indicators for any member country, together with the differences between men and women, urban and rural areas and nationals and non-nationals, provided the data exist;

(b) It prepared and disseminated on the ESCWA Web site a set of gender indicators for ESCWA member countries;

(c) It maintained and updated Common Country Assessment data and indicators for ESCWA member countries;

(d) It commenced the design and preparation of population policy and health and vital statistics databases as part of ESIS.

B. STATISTICAL PUBLICATIONS

3. The Commission issued the following statistical publications:

(a) *Compendium of Social Statistics and Indicators, Fifth Issue;*

(b) *Women and Men in the Arab Countries: Employment;*

(c) *Women and Men in the Arab Countries: Education;*

(d) *Women and Men in the Syrian Arab Republic: A Statistical Portrait;*

- (e) *Women and Men in Tunisia: A Statistical Portrait*;
- (f) An explanatory commentary on selected social indicators on the quality of life in the ESCWA region;
- (g) *Bulletin on Vital Statistics in the ESCWA Region, Fourth Issue*. The fifth issue of this bulletin will be issued at the end of 2002 on compact disc only.

C. WORKSHOPS AND EXPERT GROUP MEETINGS

1. *Third Regional Workshop on Gender Statistics in the Arab Countries, Tunis, 5-7 June 2001*

4. The Third Regional Workshop on Gender Statistics in the Arab Countries was held in Tunis from 5 to 7 June 2001. It was arranged by the ESCWA Statistics Division as part of the Project on the development of National Gender Statistics Programmes in the Arab Countries.
5. In addition to the specific remarks made by participants during the meetings, general recommendations included the following:

(a) That ESCWA, the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR) and the organizations of the United Nations should notify the relevant parties in the Government bodies of the Arab countries of the training courses which it intends to organize and inform them of the goals and subjects of study;

(b) That each Arab country should build an Internet web site on the previously agreed issues and indicators and network with every other country, in order to give some specificity and continuity to the provision and updating of information. In each country a party should be designated as having responsibility for that work;

(c) That coordination between ESCWA, CAWTAR and the League of Arab States should continue with respect to the exchange of information and the building of an Internet web site that would include a gender statistics database;

(d) That ESCWA, in cooperation with ILO, should organize a seminar on a time use survey.

2. *Workshop on Development Indicators, Beirut, 12-14 November 2001*

6. In cooperation with the United Nations Statistics Division and the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRTCIC), Ankara, from 12 to 14 November 2001, ESCWA held in Beirut the Workshop on Development Indicators.

7. At the end of the Workshop, the participants issued a set of recommendations, the most important of which may be summarized as follows:

(a) The list of development indicators issued by the Friends of the Chair should be adopted. That body comprises a group of experts and specialists in the field of development indicators, and the list should be adopted as a general framework for such indicators, that would be used to follow up the recommendations of the international conferences and summit conferences held by the United Nations during the 1990s. The list should be incorporated into national statistical systems and action taken to periodically provide ESCWA and other United Nations organizations with the statistics on those indicators;

(b) The development indicator manual should be further expanded and ESCWA should hold a workshop to build the capacities of producers and users of data in ESCWA member countries in the use of that manual. It should also endeavour to secure the necessary funding for that purpose;

(c) The list of development indicators considered at the workshop should be reviewed at national level and member countries should periodically update the statistics relating to the indicators and use them in preparing the reports on follow-up to international development-related conferences and summit conferences.

3. *The Workshop on Strengthening Statistical Capacity in the ESCWA Region, Muscat, 6-9 April 2002*

8. As part of the project entitled Strengthening Statistical Capacity in the ESCWA Region, the ESCWA Statistics Division and the United Nations Statistics Division held in Muscat from 6 to 9 April 2002 a workshop on the organization and administration of statistical systems.

9. Participants made a number of recommendations, the most important of which was to the effect that the institutional frameworks of national statistical systems should continue to be developed, in order to ensure that those systems are able to assume their responsibility to provide the necessary statistical data to planners and policy makers. Consideration should be given to national coordination mechanisms; the role and position of the head of the system; information technology (IT); information management; and the allocation of resources for statistical activities.

4. *Meeting on a Core Set of Census Topics for ESCWA Region, Cairo, 8-12 June 2002*

10. As part of the project to support national capacities in the ESCWA member countries, the ESCWA Statistics Division and the United Nations Statistics Division held in Cairo from 8 to 12 June 2002 a workshop on statistics relating to disability and a core set of census topics.

11. Participants made recommendations in a number of areas, the most important of which were the following:

(a) In the field of statistics relating to disability:

- (i) The quality of such statistics must be improved throughout the region. Population censuses are one of the foremost sources of primary data on the disabled;
- (ii) Users of data relating to disability must be involved in the establishment of national statistical systems for such data;
- (iii) When disability statistics systems are designed and census-related data are collected, the international standard classifications of occupations, disabilities and health should be adopted;
- (iv) Census questionnaires should contain three standard questions on disability in order to facilitate international comparisons (see annex);

(b) With respect to a core set of census topics: the participants adopted a standard list of census topics for ESCWA member countries, which may be incorporated into the next round of census questionnaires. The topics focus on the basic demographic and social issues; educational characteristics; economic characteristics; fertility and mortality; internal and international migration; disability and housing and living quarters.

5. *Expert Group Meeting on Poverty Statistics, Beirut, 10-12 September 2002*

12. The recommendations will be presented once the meeting has been held.

D. PARTICIPATION IN MEETINGS AND SEMINARS

13. Participants were sent by ESCWA to the following meetings:

(a) An expert consultation on birth registration and the publication of a digest on the subject, held in Florence, Italy, on 26 and 27 April 2001;

(b) A meeting of the League of Arab States subcommittee on population, labour force and social statistics, held in Manama on 22 and 23 December 2001;

(c) A seminar on the preparation of a manual on the methodology of producing gender statistics, held in Tunis from 11 to 15 February 2002;

(d) A seminar on the promotion of information statistics in Tunisia and the Paris 21 meeting concerning the organization of an Arab conference on statistics, held in Tunis on 18 and 19 April 2002.

E. FIELD SURVEYS

14. As part of the training project aimed at building statistical information systems on the Palestinians living in refugee camps in the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon, which is funded by the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND), ESCWA cooperated with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and Natural Resources in Damascus in conducting a comprehensive survey of the Palestinian population of the Syrian Arab Republic and an ongoing demographic sample.

II. NATIONAL ACCOUNTS

A. DATABASES

15. The ESCWA Statistics Division continued to update the data relating to national accounts that are available on its databases and the electronic tables which include a set of relevant data.

B. STATISTICAL PUBLICATIONS

1. *National Accounts Studies, Bulletins 21 and 22*

16. The Commission published Bulletins 21 and 22 of its annual National Accounts Studies of the ESCWA Region. This has been improved by altering the way in which the data and indicators are displayed. Graphs have been included for the first time, and the publication includes simplified analyses of the major items, with a view to facilitating the use and analysis of the statistical data.

2. *The distribution of guides and documents related to national accounts*

17. A number of the documents published by the United Nations Statistics Division have been distributed by ESCWA to all the statistical bodies and departments concerned with national accounts in the ESCWA member countries. Those documents have included the following:

(a) Documents in English:

- (i) *Links between Business Accounting and National Accounting*;
- (ii) *Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework*;
- (iii) *Household Accounting*, volumes 1 and 2;

(b) Documents in Arabic:

- (i) *Handbook of Input-Output Table Compilation and Analysis*;
- (ii) *A Systems Approach to National Accounts Compilation*;
- (iii) *Classifications of Expenditure According to Purpose*;
- (iv) *Use of the System of National Accounts in Economies in Transition*.

C. WORKSHOPS AND EXPERT GROUP MEETINGS

Workshop on Implementation of the 1993 System of National Accounts, Beirut, 22-26 October 2001

18. This Workshop was organized by ESCWA in cooperation and coordination with and with funding from the United Nations Statistics Division. Participants included representatives of the ministries concerned with national accounts and the central statistical bodies from 12 of the ESCWA member countries. It was also attended by representatives of the Institute of National Planning, Egypt, and of the United Nations Statistics Division, and a number of experts.

19. It was clear from the discussions that the Workshop achieved the purpose for which it was held. During its 12 meetings, including one on the organization of work, a number of issues relating to the 1993 System of National Accounts (SNA) were clarified. On the final day, all the participants took part in a round-table discussion of the most important issues that had emerged during the Workshop. They concluded by making a number of recommendations, including the following:

(a) Countries were urged to prepare appropriate mechanization programmes that were in accordance with their needs, and to consult the guides and methodologies issued by the United Nations Statistics Division, taking into account the experiences of Egypt, Jordan and Oman in this field;

(b) Countries were urged to incorporate their data into the national accounts questionnaires prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division and ESCWA and, to the extent possible, expand databases in the various statistical fields;

(c) Aggregated data should be prepared on the basis of the concepts of business accounting and adapted in the national accounts questionnaires in order to facilitate their use by business accountants;

(d) The relevant parties were urged to focus on training in practical application because ESCWA, in cooperation with the United Nations Statistics Division, has already held a number of seminars and workshops in the field of national accounts;

(e) Household accounting surveys should be used in order to complete the coverage required by 1993 SNA;

(f) Simplified tables should be prepared if there are any shortcomings in the data and when preparation of supply and use tables is begun;

(g) The participants urged ESCWA to hold a follow-up expert group meeting in October 2002, in order to discuss national accounts-related issues including household sector accounts, supply and use tables, the outside world, non-regular and unofficial projects and the seeking of financing for such projects from international, regional and Arab funds.

D. PARTICIPATION IN SEMINARS AND WORKSHOPS

20. The Commission took part in two periodic meetings on national accounts, namely:

(a) The Inter-Secretariat Working Group on National Accounts, held in Geneva on 15 and 16 October 2001;

(b) The meeting of the League of Arab States subcommittee on national accounts, held in Manama from 24 to 26 December 2001.

III. ECONOMIC SECTOR STATISTICS

A. DATABASES

1. *Foreign trade database*

21. The Statistics Division has established a foreign trade database for the countries of the ESCWA region, using the Sybase system. It should be noted that the database is still being tried and tested and is in need of additional improvements. In cooperation with the United Nations Statistics Division, the ESCWA Statistics Division has obtained data relating to earlier years on the countries of the region from the United Nations Compressed Trade Database (COMTRADE), and will shortly use a special programme to incorporate those data into the new database. Once the trial period is over, entry into that database of data on the external trade of the countries of the region will begin.

2. *Industrial database*

22. The Statistics Division has established an industrial database that includes data relating to the Arab countries and certain other countries, and has begun to electronically store and update industrial data including, *inter alia*, numerical data, sources of data, methodologies, definitions and notes. Data are updated once they have been verified. The database is used to produce all types of statistical reports and in order to calculate certain key indicators and carry out various clarificatory and analytical data-related procedures.

B. STATISTICAL PUBLICATIONS

23. The Statistics Division has issued the following publications on economic sector statistics:

(a) *External Trade Bulletin of the ESCWA Region, Eleventh Issue, 2002*;

(b) *Bulletin of Industrial Statistics for the Arab Countries, Fifth Issue, 2001* (joint publication with the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDMO)).

24. It should be noted that the ESCWA Statistics Division has published issues twenty one and twenty two of the *Statistical Abstract of the ESCWA Region*, which include sectoral, financial, economic and social data. It has also published issues eleven and twelve of the biannual *Statistical Newsletter*.

C. WORKSHOPS AND EXPERT GROUP MEETINGS

1. *Seminar on International Merchandise Trade Statistics, Beirut, 19-21 June 2001*

25. This Seminar was organized by ESCWA in cooperation with the United Nations Statistics Division. Participants included experts from the statistical bodies, customs departments and central banks of the countries of the region. Countries presented papers which explained their experiences in this field.

26. Seminar discussions concluded with the making of a number of recommendations, of which the import may be summarized as follows:

(a) Member countries should apply the concepts and definitions adopted in the United Nations publication entitled *International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Concepts and Definitions* (ST/ESA/STAT/SER/M/52/Rev.2) and adopt the recommendations contained therein;

(b) With respect to the preparation of statistical publications, the countries of the region should adopt standard working practices that accord with international concepts and definitions, in order to facilitate regional and international comparison;

(c) The countries of the region should establish close coordination and cooperation between customs departments and central statistical bodies, with a view to obtaining prompt access to reliable data on international trade statistics;

(d) The United Nations Statistics Division should distribute to all participating countries the rules for conversion from 1968 SNA to 1993 SNA, together with any new developments in the field, in order to assist them in standardizing concepts and working mechanisms in the field of international trade statistics;

(e) Stress should be laid on the use of metadata and the clarification of the concepts and methodologies applied by ESCWA member countries, in order to minimize differences and make it feasible to compare the data of various countries.

*2. Workshop on Industrial Statistics,
Cairo, 4-8 November 2001*

27. This Workshop was organized by ESCWA in cooperation with AIDMO and with further funding from the United Nations Statistics Division and SESRTCIC.

28. This Workshop differed from previous workshops in that the issues addressed focused on the practical problems in various fields of statistical work in the industrial sector, and proposed certain practical solutions in the light of international concepts and measures.

29. The Workshop sessions provided a wealth of important and useful interventions and discussions. The Workshop concluded with a round table which considered all the main focuses of its meetings and adopted a set of recommendations, of which the import may be summarized as follows:

(a) A technical statistical committee should be formed, comprising experts from ESCWA, AIDMO, the Gulf Organization for Industrial Consulting, League of Arab States, United Nations Statistics Division, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which would undertake the following:

- (i) Accord increased attention to the design of sample surveys;
- (ii) Prepare standard samples of questionnaires on industrial statistics;
- (iii) Prepare pamphlets in Arabic on concepts and definitions and industrial classifications;
- (iv) Prepare manuals for Arab countries on the conducting of industrial surveys, using the agreed concepts;

(b) Central statistical bodies and industrial statistics departments in ministries and institutes, companies and factories in the public and private sectors are urged to do the following:

- (i) To use IT and electronic mail (e-mail) and to take action to build industrial databases and establish Internet sites and link them to the AIDMO Directory of Arab Industrial Information Sources;
- (ii) To use the International Standard Industrial Classification, Revision 3;
- (iii) To accord attention in industrial surveys to small and traditional enterprises;

(iv) To accord attention to the calculation of quantitative index numbers for industrial output and sustainable development indicators, with the emphasis on environmental indicators and data related to the industrial sector;

(c) The number of inter-Arab meetings and amount of joint ongoing training in the field of information and industrial statistics should be increased, and seminars should be held, at which solutions will be sought to the problems and obstacles faced in this important sector;

(d) The private sector should be urged to recognize the importance of developing and maintaining information and providing industrial statistics;

(e) The importance should be stressed to all producers of industrial statistics of ensuring the highest level of coordination, cooperation and dialogue with the users of industrial data;

(f) All producers of both industrial and national statistics are urged to use the final accounts and balance sheets of organized sector institutions and to refer to the United Nations handbook entitled *Links between Business Accounting and National Accounting*.

D. PARTICIPATION IN MEETINGS AND SEMINARS

30. The Commission took part in the following meetings:

(a) The Meeting of Experts on Labour Statistics: Household Income and Expenditure and Consumer Price Indices, organized by the International Labour Office and held in Geneva from 22 to 31 October 2001;

(b) The Expert Group Meeting on the International Indicators for Monitoring Implementation of the Millennium Declaration, organized by the United Nations Statistics Division and held in New York from 19 to 22 March 2002;

(c) The Expert Group Meeting on International Trade Statistics which was hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) from 16 to 18 April 2002.

IV. COOPERATION WITH INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

A. IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL STATISTICS

1. *In the field of gender statistics*

31. The third regional workshop was held in cooperation with CAWTAR, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and ILO. A memorandum of understanding has been signed by CAWTAR and ESCWA with respect to cooperation in building a joint gender statistics database and the issuance of joint publications. A similar instrument has been signed by UNIFEM and ESCWA regarding a project for using statistics to evaluate equality.

2. *In the field of manpower statistics*

32. As part of ongoing cooperation with ILO through its regional office in Beirut, its statistics centre in Geneva and its International Training Centre in Turin, Italy, labour market statistics were identified and produced in accordance with the list of the principal labour market indicators adopted by ILO. In cooperation with the Turin Centre, a training workshop on the analysis of labour market indicators was held in Amman from 19 to 23 August 2002. Cooperation will continue, in the field of building national capacities and the production of labour market statistics and indicators.

3. In the field of development statistics

33. A workshop on development indicators was held in cooperation with the United Nations Statistics Division and SESRTCIC, with the participation of FAO, UNIFEM, the World Health Organization, World Food Programme, UNDP and United Nations Population Fund Country Support Team for Arab States and Europe.

4. As part of the project entitled Strengthening Statistical Capacity in the ESCWA Region

34. The Commission cooperated with the United Nations Statistics Division in respect of the following:

(a) The holding in Muscat from 6 to 9 April 2002 of a workshop on the organization and management of statistical systems;

(b) The holding in Cairo from 8 to 12 June 2002 of a workshop on disability statistics and the principal issues relating to population censuses.

5. In the field of poverty statistics

35. An expert group meeting on poverty statistics was held by ESCWA in cooperation with the World Bank, FAO, UNDP and Paris 21 at ESCWA headquarters from 10 to 12 September 2002. The Commission will cooperate with the World Bank Institute and Paris 21 in strengthening the national capacities of member countries in the field of poverty statistics.

6. In the field of building national capacities

36. Currently, ESCWA is cooperating with Paris 21 with a view to holding a number of meetings, the most important of which is the Arab statistical conference.

7. In respect of field surveys

37. The Commission cooperated with AGFUND and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and Natural Resources in conducting a comprehensive survey of the Palestinian population of the Syrian Arab Republic and an ongoing demographic sample, with a view to building population databases using information from field surveys.

B. IN THE FIELD OF ECONOMIC AND SECTORAL STATISTICS

In the field of environmental, power and industry statistics

38. Cooperation is continuing between ESCWA and the United Nations Statistics Division in general; cooperation with the Environment, Energy and Industrial Statistics Branch takes various forms, including the following:

(a) Assistance with funding for the Workshop on Industrial Statistics which was held in Cairo from 4 to 8 November 2001. The Chief of the Energy and Industry Statistics Section presented two interesting papers at the Workshop and made valuable contributions to the meeting discussions;

(b) Approval of the standardization of questionnaires and the interchange between member countries of data and information;

(c) The provision to ESCWA of the necessary manuals and guides in English and Arabic;

(d) Continued provision of all possible financial and technical assistance in organizing expert group meetings and specialized workshops;

(e) The exchange of views and ideas on issues of joint concern.

39. Pursuant to the memorandum of understanding between ESCWA and AIDMO, cooperation in the field of industrial statistics has been taking place since 1995, and has included the following:

(a) The preparation and dissemination of five joint publications on industrial statistics in the Arab countries;

(b) The organization of five workshops on industrial statistics.

40. Pursuant to the memorandum of understanding between ESCWA and UNIDO, coordination and cooperation between the ESCWA Statistics Division and the UNIDO Department of Statistics has included the following:

(a) Using identical definitions and methodologies in the preparation of industrial statistics and exchanging information and statistical data by means of database entries and the interchange of publications;

(b) Technical participation in meetings and workshops arranged by ESCWA and involvement in proposed workshops.

41. Cooperation has also begun between ESCWA and OECD with the hosting of two experts in the field of industrial statistics, who presented interesting papers at the Workshop on Industrial Statistics which was held in Cairo from 4 to 8 November 2001, and agreed to join the working groups responsible for developing the proposed industrial statistics. The OECD Chief of Industrial and Trade Statistics expressed his satisfaction with the cooperation with ESCWA in all statistical fields and his desire that it should continue.

Annex

1. As the result of a specific medical condition that has lasted for at least six months, does the person face difficulties in carrying out their usual duties in the home, at school or at work?

Yes, always Yes, sometimes No

2. In which of the following does the person experience difficulty?

Hearing Speech Personal care

Sight Learning Mobility

3. What are the main causes of such difficulties?

Congenital Illness Accident

Old age Other