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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Statistical Committee
Twelfth session
Beirut, 4-5 April 2017

Item 4 (d) of the provisional agenda

**Actions taken in the field of statistics since
the previous session of the Statistical Committee**

**Implementation of recommendations
made by the Committee**

Summary

At its eleventh session, held in Amman on 4 and 5 February 2015, the Statistical Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) made recommendations to the ESCWA secretariat and member States. The present document sets out the actions taken and activities carried out by the secretariat over the period 2015-2016 pursuant to the recommendations, and the actions taken to implement pending recommendations issued prior to eleventh session.

The Committee is invited to review the current implementation status of these recommendations and to reflect this status in the recommendations of its twelfth session.

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Introduction

1. At its eleventh session, held in Amman on 4 and 5 February 2015, the Statistical Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) made recommendations to the ESCWA Secretariat and member States. The present document sets out the actions taken and activities carried out pursuant to those recommendations made to the ESCWA secretariat over the period 2015-2016. Each recommendation is presented below, followed by the action taken to implement it.
2. The present report also aims to clarify the implementation status of the recommendations issued at the eighth, ninth and tenth sessions of the Statistical Committee that were still pending or in progress when the eleventh session was held.

I. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE STATISTICAL COMMITTEE TO THE ESCWA SECRETARIAT AT ITS ELEVENTH SESSION

Recommendations

- (a) To prepare a manual on measuring social justice that takes into account the specificities of the Arab region, using available resources and data.
- (b) To conduct an evaluation study on the availability of social justice indicators and their role for national statistical offices in the Arab region.

Action taken

Given that ESCWA does not have resources specifically allocated to social justice statistics, the secretariat expects to finance these activities from the upcoming tenth tranche of the United Nations Development Account.

Recommendations

- (c) To prepare a project document on a standardized multipurpose Arab survey, in collaboration with the national statistical offices of member States,* to cover gaps and shortfalls, drawing from public policies for achieving social justice and proposed sustainable development goals; and to determine a time frame for the project.
- (d) To affirm the importance of benefiting from the experiences of countries that conduct multipurpose surveys and of sustaining such censuses, identifying their periodicity and coordinating with statistical offices and regional and international institutions in that regard.

Action taken

Following discussions at the eleventh session of the Statistical Committee and the two recommendations to proceed with the project on pan-Arab harmonized multi-purpose household surveys, a concept note with provisional resource requirements was approved by the ESCWA Project Committee.

The project will require substantial resources. Several potential donors have been approached, but discussions are ongoing.

Recommendation

- (e) To proceed with the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century (PARIS21) initiative, ensuring that the development of national statistical strategies takes it into consideration.

* The Syrian Arab Republic has expressed some reservations to the project.

Action taken

In cooperation with PARIS21 and other partners, including the African Development Bank, the Economic Commission for Africa and the Statistical Office of the European Union (Eurostat), ESCWA has begun the initial assessment and steps towards developing national strategies for statistics development in Egypt and Jordan.

Recommendation

(f) To follow developments in Big Data and support the capacity of statistical offices in this field through studies and specialized training.

Action taken

The first Arab Conference on a Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics, in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was held in Ankara from 5 to 7 April 2016. It is part of a series of annual regional conferences on the Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics to be held in the Arab region. It builds on the outcome of the Global Conference on a Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics held by the United Nations Statistics Division and Eurostat, in New York on 15 and 16 January 2015, and the recognition by the forty-sixth and forty-seventh sessions of the Statistical Commission of the emerging demands for high quality statistics and the need for transformation and modernization in national, regional and international statistical systems.

The Arab Conference took stock of the various international, regional, subregional and national initiatives for integrating and modernizing statistical systems and formulating national and (sub) regional roadmaps for a transformative agenda for the Arab region, while taking into account disparities in national statistical development and maturity levels.

The Conference's main conclusions related to recommendation (f) are as follows:

1. The ESCWA Statistical Committee is to take the lead in advancing the transformative agenda in the Arab region by taking immediate action in setting up the High Level Group in 2016, drafting its Terms of Reference and circulating them among Arab countries and its main regional bodies for comments and suggestions.
2. A regional advisor for the ESCWA Statistics Division should be recruited and tasked with the advancement of the transformative agenda in the Arab region.
3. The recommendations of the Arab Conference should be moderated in upcoming high-level meetings and conferences of regional statistical bodies, such as the twelfth session of the ESCWA Statistical Committee.
4. Maximize the use of administrative data, Big Data, and geospatial data in the statistical production processes by establishing the necessary institutional and physical infrastructure, and building the skills of staff members.
5. Establish sound partnerships with new data community stakeholders, such as public and private data providers (for access and use of Big Data and geospatial data management information systems in statistical production), data users and civil society to promote data access and open data initiatives.
6. Develop a regional information and communication technology (ICT) strategy for national statistical offices that addresses the need for sharing innovative ICT tools, the advancement of service orientated information system architecture based on the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM), multi-source and multi-mode data collection and the introduction of national integrated database systems and modern dissemination and visualization methods based on Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX).

Recommendation

(g) To present a report on progress in implementing long-term recommendations at the twelfth session of the Statistical Committee.

Action taken

The present report sets out progress in implementing long-term recommendations and is submitted to the twelfth session of the Statistical Committee.

Recommendation

(h) To follow up on unimplemented recommendations issued at the tenth session of the Committee and present reports thereon at future meetings using the logical framework approach.

Action taken

The report of the eleventh session of Statistical Committee was checked for unimplemented recommendations.

Recommendation

(i) To stress the importance of the role of statistical offices by inviting them to participate in ESCWA sessions as part of their national delegations, noting that enough notice should be given to allow for preparations.

Action taken

Representatives of selected national statistical offices have participated in the last two ESCWA sessions. The distribution of invitations to ESCWA sessions follows the established procedures, included in the ESCWA Rules of Procedure and adopted by member States. Composition of delegations to intergovernmental meetings is decided by member States.

Recommendation

(j) To stress the importance of strengthening partnerships between statistical bodies in the Arab region and with the secretariat of the League of Arab States, the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics, the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf, the Economic Commission for Africa, relevant international bodies and the United Nations Statistics Division.

Action taken

ESCWA has implemented a number of joint activities through a coordinated approach to technical cooperation and statistical capacity development. It collaborated with regional organizations, such as the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics (AITRS), the Gulf Cooperation Council Statistics Centre, the League of Arab States and United Nations agencies, to organize the following key activities:

1. A joint workshop with the United Nations Statistics Division and UNIDO on statistical business registers (26-29 September 2016).
2. A training course on the theme “Quarterly national accounts” (28-31 December 2015), attended by 14 trainees from 12 Arab countries.

3. A training workshop on supply and use tables (4-7 April 2016), attended by 12 trainees from 9 Arab countries, followed by an e-training workshop on supply and use tables for 23 trainees from 11 Arab countries.
4. A contribution to the League of Arab States' technical committees on national accounts and economic statistics in 2015, and a working group on sustainable development indicators with UNEP (December 2015 and March 2017).
5. The first meeting of the Technical Advisory Group on Demographic and Social Statistics and the Technical Advisory Group on Economic Statistics, in collaboration with the United Nations Statistics Division; ESCWA invited the regional office of the IMF (METAC) and the regional office of UNDP (UNDP-RBAS) to prioritize issues and coordinate activities and capacity-building at the regional level.
6. The Workshop on Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3, for Arabic-speaking countries (Muscat, 14-17 November 2016), in collaboration with the GCC Statistical Centre and the United Nations Statistics Division. It was attended by representatives of the Eastern Mediterranean Region Office of the World Health Organization (WHO-EMRO) and UNICEF.
7. The Arab Conference on a Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics (Ankara, 5-7 April 2016), to support the post-2015 development agenda, in collaboration with SESRIC and the United Nations Statistics Division.

Recommendation

(k) To approve the proposal for forming two advisory groups on economic and social statistics, and to discuss their terms of reference and amend them in line with the views of their members, so as to ensure sufficient continuity and flexibility in their work and that they comprise representatives of civil society and of the private sector.

Action taken

The two technical advisory groups on demographic and social statistics and on economic statistics have been established, have held their inaugural meeting, and are engaged in the follow-up work. Reports by the technical advisory groups are submitted to the twelfth session of the Statistical Committee at in documents E/ESCWA/SD/2017/IG.1/3(Part I) and E/ESCWA/SD/2017/IG.1/3(Part II).

Recommendation

(l) To include issues related to business registers, a manual on measuring social justice and a multipurpose census in the work programme on statistics for the biennium 2016-2017.

Action taken

1. Pursuant to this recommendation, ESCWA organized a regional workshop on statistical business registers (SBRs) for Arab countries in Amman, from 26 to 29 September 2016, in collaboration with AITRS, the United Nations Statistics Division and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). The workshop aimed to assist member States in developing their statistical systems by establishing SBRs that are increasingly becoming pillar infrastructure, providing the statistical unit frames on which different economic statistics are produced. In modern statistical processes, SBRs serve as a cost-effective sample frame that greatly reduces the response burden using administrative sources and ICT tools and database innovations. The workshop covered a variety of topics, including reviewing the concepts, standards and methods related to business registers, and analysis and presentation of international standards.

2. In November 2016, technical assistance was provided to countries to assess the status of existing business registers and the work needed to improve and link records used for statistical purposes.
3. A study is being prepared on the regional guidelines for statistical business registers and good practices in Arab countries, to be published in the first quarter of 2017.

Recommendation

(m) To organize a preparatory meeting on the sidelines of the forty-sixth session of the United Nations Statistical Commission, to be held in New York, to coordinate the positions of ESCWA member States in accordance with the agenda items of that session.

Action taken

Two meetings were organized in New York, prior to the sessions of the United Nations Statistical Commission in 2015 and 2016. The 2016 meeting was preceded by a WebEx teleconference. National statistical office representatives discussed the issues on the agenda to formulate common positions.

Recommendation

(n) To communicate with States that are not attending the session of the United Nations Statistical Commission, so as to present their concerns at the session.

Action taken

A Webex meeting was held on 23 February 2017 for member States to voice their comments and concerns on the proceedings of the forty-eighth session of the Statistical Commission.

Recommendation

(o) To communicate directly with statistical offices to invite them to attend the sessions of the ESCWA Statistical Committee, in coordination with national focal points.

Action taken

Invitations to events organized by the ESCWA Statistics Division and other ESCWA divisions involved in statistics are sent directly to national statistical offices, unless member States request that they be sent to embassies or designated focal points. Invitations to intergovernmental meetings are communicated according to the established procedures agreed with member States. Composition of delegations to intergovernmental meetings is decided by member States.

II. IMPLEMENTATION OF PENDING RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE STATISTICAL COMMITTEE AT PREVIOUS SESSIONS

3. The present section aims to clarify the implementation status of the following recommendations issued at the eighth, ninth and tenth sessions of the Statistical Committee that were still pending or in progress when the eleventh session was held.

Recommendation

To assist countries wishing to conduct a pilot assessment of their national statistical systems (Bahrain, Egypt, Morocco, the Sudan and Yemen).

Action taken

The implementation of this recommendation began in 2015. Assessments were completed in Egypt and Jordan and preparations are underway in the Sudan. To implement this recommendation, ESCWA relies on the expertise and cooperation of other agencies, including PARIS21, the Economic Commission for Africa, the African Development Bank and Eurostat.

Recommendations

To implement the system of national accounts based on a conceptual and institutional framework.

To execute the implementation strategy of the System of National Accounts 2008, taking into consideration the specificities of each country.

Action taken

ESCWA continues to assist member States in implementing the System of National Accounts 2008 and in improving data collection and indicator production. ESCWA is committed to maintaining resources on national accounts, and considers this a high priority area.

Recommendations

To facilitate technical cooperation and the exchange of expertise among Arab countries in the areas of adopted methodologies; the content of censuses; used technologies; data use, assessment, analysis, and use in policy formulation; and in areas related to regional planning.

To revive the regional team concerned with population censuses and benefit from its efficiency and effectiveness in building national capacities for carrying out successful cost-effective censuses; to request the ESCWA secretariat to prepare a preliminary report on the activities of the team and distribute it to the members of the Committee, while States wishing to finance it should notify the secretariat within one month of receipt of the report; and to build a communication network between census experts in the Arab region for consultation on emerging issues.

To examine and reconsider the functions of the Task Force on the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses. To consider as well the issue of funding future meetings, provided such considerations are presented to the Commission meeting which will be held in February 2011 for proper deliberation.

Action taken

ESCWA, in collaboration with the Arab Regional Office of UNFPA and the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics, organized the first meeting of the Task Force on Population and Housing Censuses in Amman on 8 and 9 November 2015, and the second meeting in Cairo on 22 and 23 January 2017. ESCWA also published a study on the use of administrative records in population and housing censuses, based on meeting outputs. In addition, ESCWA designed a webpage on censuses in the Arab region in both Arabic and English.

ESCWA and the Arab Regional Office of UNFPA are preparing a study on census implementation using different sources, mainly administrative registers, and a study on census data dissemination and uses.

With regard to regional cooperation and capacity-building, ESCWA sent an advisory mission to support the Ajman Census in Palestine and the United Arab Emirates, and organized workshops on using technology in population censuses and transferring the experience of Jordan to Libya and the Sudan.

Recommendation

To use data issued by statistical agencies and refrain from relying on other sources in ESCWA statistical bulletins.

Action taken

The ESCWA Statistics Division strives to gather necessary data for publications and studies from national sources.

Recommendation

To coordinate directly with statistical agencies on topics related to ESCWA statistical work in member States.

Action taken

The ESCWA Statistics Division coordinates regularly with national statistical offices. Various consultations are held through WebEx or side meetings attached to other international and regional events.

Recommendation

To invite the representative of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) secretariat to attend ESCWA statistics-related meetings.

Action taken

ESCWA cooperates with the GCC Statistical Centre, and undertakes activities in areas jointly mandated to both organizations whenever there are expected benefits from such cooperation.

Recommendation

Respond, as resources allow, to the requests of member countries for advisory services.

Action taken

Technical cooperation and assistance activities are the core focus of the ESCWA Statistics Division, and requests are met subject to existing ESCWA expertise and available resources.

Recommendation

Accelerate the process of recruiting to fill all vacant posts in the ESCWA Statistics Division and nominate, as soon as possible, a regional advisor on social statistics so that the Division can better perform its duties.

Action taken

All posts at the ESCWA Statistics Division are staffed or in an advanced stage of recruitment. Owing to budget limitations, the ESCWA Statistics Division is entitled to only one regional adviser – currently the Regional Adviser on Economic Statistics and National Accounting. Given the lack of resources for recruiting a Regional Adviser on Social Statistics, advisory services are performed by regular ESCWA staff.

III. ACTION REQUIRED OF THE STATISTICAL COMMITTEE

4. The Statistical Committee is invited to review the implementation status of the recommendations made at its eighth, ninth, tenth and eleventh sessions, and to reflect this status in the recommendations of its twelfth session.
