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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

Statistical Committee  
Twelfth session  
Beirut, 4-5 April 2017

Item 5 (c) of the provisional agenda

**Role of official statistics in the implementation  
of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region**

**Proposed Arab regional action plan for sustainable development data**

**Summary**

Based on the Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission at its forty-eighth session (New York, 7-10 March 2017), the present document provides an outline of the action plan for the Arab region.

The Statistical Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) is invited to consider this outline and propose a course of action for developing it in to a regional action plan for sustainable development data.

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## Introduction

1. At its forty-sixth session (New York, 3-6 March 2015), the United Nations Statistical Commission created the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (HLG), comprising member States and regional and international agencies as observers. HLG is tasked with providing strategic leadership for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with regard to statistical monitoring and reporting.
2. HLG approved the Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data (GAP), presented and informally launched at the first United Nations World Data Forum in Cape Town, South Africa, on 15 January 2017. GAP was then adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission at its forty-eighth session (New York, 7-10 March 2017).

### I. STRATEGIC AREAS OF THE GLOBAL ACTION PLAN FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DATA

3. GAP sets out the following six strategic areas:
  - Strategic Area 1: Coordination and strategic leadership on data for sustainable development;
  - Strategic Area 2: Innovation and modernization of national statistical systems;
  - Strategic Area 3: Strengthen basic statistical activities and programmes, with particular focus on addressing the monitoring needs of the 2030 Agenda;
  - Strategic Area 4: Dissemination and use of sustainable development data;
  - Strategic Area 5: Multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainable development data;
  - Strategic Area 6: Mobilize resources and coordinate efforts for statistical capacity-building.
4. HLG also identified objectives and potential implementation actions in each of the strategic areas, which need to be adapted to meet regional priorities.

### II. OUTLINE OF THE REGIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DATA

5. When preparing the outline of the regional action plan for sustainable development data, the ESCWA Statistics Division used the six strategic areas of GAP as a basis, and proposed potential objectives and areas of action consistent with the status and needs of the regional statistical system for capacity development, as follows.

#### **Strategic Area 1. Coordination and strategic leadership on data for sustainable development**

##### *1.1 Strengthen inter-agency coordination in the region*

- Recognizing the importance of statistics and data in implementing the 2030 Agenda, the Regional Coordination Mechanism for the Arab States established the Thematic Working Group on SDG Data. The Working Group, co-chaired by the Regional Office of the United Nations Population Fund and ESCWA, comprises representatives of the League of Arab States and of United Nations agencies that have a significant statistical component in their mandates and work programmes.
- Membership of the Working Group should be further expanded to include important statistical players in the region, such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Statistics Centre, the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics (AITRS) and the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIIC).

1.2 *Establish links between inter-agency and intergovernmental coordination*

At its first meeting, held in October 2016, the Working Group recommended that the ESCWA Statistical Committee establish a steering group on SDG statistics and data. The Committee is therefore invited to consider this proposal.

**Strategic Area 2. Innovation and modernization of national statistical systems**

2.1 *National and regional strategies for development of statistics*

Most Arab countries currently lack valid national strategies for the development of statistics – strategies have either expired or are missing. Moreover, the new guidelines agreed upon within the framework of the Partnership for Statistics in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (PARIS21) recommend that national and regional statistical agencies formulate and endorse regional strategies.

2.2 *Data sharing*

Arab countries receive data and information requests from various United Nations and non-United Nations agencies undertaking statistical activities in the region. Two United Nations regional commissions cover the Arab region (the Economic Commission for Africa and ESCWA), along with other organizations. It is therefore necessary to establish data sharing protocols and technical tools (for the latter, the Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX) can serve as an established data portal on key SDG indicators/data); harmonize structures; and allow for technology assisted access (such as SDMX).

2.3 *Geospatial information*

Given the possibilities offered by modern technology and the need for statistics on small areas, it is important to step up the integration of statistical and geospatial information. In this regard, the national statistical offices that use geospatial information in data collection can share their experiences and expertise with other offices in the region.

2.4 *Transformative agenda for official statistics*

Following the outcomes of the first Arab Conference on a Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics (Ankara, 5-7 April 2016) and of the Arab Forum on Building Statistical Capacity for a Data Revolution (Doha, 10-11 October 2016), especially the Doha Declaration on Data Revolution in the Arab Region, the region should plan and pursue activities on modernising and transforming official statistics.

**Strategic Area 3. Strengthen basic statistical activities and programmes, with particular focus on addressing the monitoring needs of the 2030 Agenda**

3.1 *Economic statistics*

National accounts, business registers, short-term indicators, price indices (PPPs, CPIs), sectoral and economic statistics.

3.2 *Demographic and social statistics*

Civil registration and vital statistics, Pan-Arab Harmonized Household Surveys, population and housing censuses, poverty statistics, and social and population indicators.

### 3.3 *Environment statistics*

Statistics on water energy, land and climate change, and the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting.

## **Strategic Area 4. Dissemination and use of sustainable development data**

### 4.1 *Modernising data dissemination and communication*

- The region should seek new and innovative ways to disseminate and communicate statistical data, while honouring the values set out in the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. Data should be provided in an open and transparent way to all potential users, without discriminating against some user groups. The objective is to build trust in and acceptance of official statistics, and include statistics in all decision-making processes.
- New and emerging channels, including mobile phones and social media, should be explored when modernising data dissemination and communication.

### 4.2 *Statistical literacy*

National, regional and global statistical agencies active in the Arab region should strengthen cooperation with policymakers, economic decision-makers, civil society, researchers and other potential data users with the ultimate goal of better integrating official statistics and data into various kinds of decision-making processes.

## **Strategic Area 5. Multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainable development data**

### 5.1 *Regional partnerships*

Regional partnerships will work well only if national, regional and global statistical agencies participate, and if relationships between the Arab region and other regions and subregions (Africa, Asia, Europe, GCC, Islamic countries, Euro-Mediterranean, etc.) are also addressed.

### 5.2 *Promote national partnerships*

- Although the first step should entail inviting policymakers and statisticians to workshops, seminars, meeting and events organized by regional statistical agencies, the ultimate goal is to integrate all actors producing and using data at the national level.
- National statistical offices should confirm their coordinating role, while becoming equal and valid partners within the national planning and policy-setting mechanisms. National statistical production should be integrated with national development strategies and plans.
- It is vital to share data between different ministries and offices, to pool these data, and to optimally use integrated data sets in the production of statistics and indicators for policy formulation, planning and monitoring.

## **Strategic Area 6. Mobilize resources and coordinate efforts for statistical capacity-building**

### 6.1 *Inter-agency partnerships*

Regional United Nations and non-United Nations agencies can generally be categorized as either funding agencies or implementing agencies (with some overlap in their mandates). A common understanding must be established on the substantive statistical needs for capacity development at the

regional and national levels, and on related funding gaps. Better coordination and understanding of mandates must also be ensured between development banks, funds and knowledge-based organizations.

6.2. *United Nations development programmes*

The United Nations Secretariat has launched the Programme on Data and Statistics, funded under the tenth tranche of the Development Account. The Programme consists of the following four pillars: means of implementation, demographic and social statistics, economic statistics, and environment statistics.

6.3 *Partnerships with funds and development banks*

In addition to partnerships with regional funds and development banks, it is necessary to develop and maintain partnerships with European and global public and private donors, funds and foundations.

**III. ACTION REQUIRED OF THE STATISTICAL COMMITTEE**

6. The Statistical Committee is invited:

- (a) To comment on the proposed outline for a regional action plan for sustainable development data;
- (b) To consider establishing a steering committee for SDG Data that would focus on strengthening partnerships and coordination within the Arab region;
- (c) To task the steering committee and ESCWA with finalizing the regional action plan for sustainable development data and a related road map for its implementation, taking into account the experiences of other regions.

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