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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Statistical Committee
Thirteenth session
Beirut, 29-30 January 2019

Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda

**Activities implemented in the field of statistics****Follow-up on recommendations made by the Statistical Committee
at its twelfth session and previous recommendations****Summary**

At its twelfth session held in Beirut on 4 and 5 April 2017, the Statistical Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) issued recommendations to member States and to the ESCWA secretariat. The present document sets out measures taken by the secretariat to implement the recommendations issued to it, and outlines its efforts to implement recommendations made by the Statistical Committee prior to its twelfth session.

The Statistical Committee is invited to take note of the present document and comment thereon. It is also invited to review measures taken by member States to follow up on recommendations issued to them.

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Introduction

1. At its twelfth session held in Beirut on 4 and 5 April 2017, the Statistical Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) issued recommendations to member States and to the ESCWA secretariat.
2. The present document sets out measures taken by the secretariat between January 2017 and October 2018 to implement the recommendations issued to it, and outlines efforts by the secretariat to implement recommendations made before that period.
3. The present document also sets out recommendations to member States so as to enable representatives, during the discussions, to review measures taken by their countries in implementing those recommendations, or to provide written or oral summaries.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS TO MEMBER STATES

4. At its twelfth session, the Statistical Committee issued the following recommendations to ESCWA member States:
 - (a) Welcome progress made in implementing the recommendations adopted at the eleventh session, and request the secretariat to continue following up with member States on unimplemented recommendations;
 - (b) Welcome the ESCWA programme of work for the biennium 2018-2019, as presented in document [E/ESCWA/SD/2017/IG.1/6](#), focusing on the statistical challenges facing conflict-affected countries, poverty statistics, measuring poverty lines, and multidimensional poverty;
 - (c) Formulate new national strategies to strengthen statistics and benefit from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as an incentive for their use, based on guidelines developed under the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century (PARIS 21);
 - (d) Welcome the proposed Arab regional action plan for sustainable development data and its six strategic areas;
 - (e) Urge member States to provide the secretariat with the statistical indicators agreed at the first meeting of the Technical Advisory Group on Demographic and Social Statistics for the Arab Countries, held in Tunis on 17 and 18 October 2016;
 - (f) Document the experiences of population censuses in Arab countries, benefit more from census implementation methods and tools used regionally and globally, increase the number of trained census staff, conduct post enumeration surveys, evaluate census results using multiple methods, use census results in research and planning, and strengthen relationships between census data producers and users;
 - (g) Affirm the importance of national coordination between statistical offices, institutions responsible for civil registration and vital statistics and all actors involved in producing and disseminating vital statistics, and build the capacity of civil registrars, especially in terms of classifying causes of death, to improve the coverage and quality of civil registration systems;
 - (h) Highlight the need to collect, process, disseminate, publish, and evaluate statistics on refugees and displaced persons to ensure reliability and accuracy of official statistics, taking into account the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics;
 - (i) Encourage countries to implement the System of National Accounts 2008, integrated economic statistics, infrastructure, and economic indicators related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);

(j) Strengthen coordination between statistical offices, finance ministries, central banks and other government bodies to facilitate the use of financial reports as data sources for preparing national accounts, in line with confidentiality requirements;

(k) Expand gross domestic product (GDP) measurements to include small and medium enterprises and the informal sector, by linking it to statistical business registers based on tables designed for that purpose, so as to achieve certain features such as improved economic data consistency at the national level;

(l) Collect and publish short-term economic statistics, benefiting from ESCWA support and successful international and regional experiences, in accordance with international recommendations and standards;

(m) Develop and update work on price statistics, support the implementation of the International Comparison Programme, and incorporate its activities in national statistics action plans;

(n) Develop infrastructure for economic statistics by employing information technology, applying global economic classifications, using statistical business registers, and updating economic survey frameworks and linking them to other surveys to ensure consistency among them and compatibility with the System of National Accounts 2008;

(o) Develop SDG-related statistics on the environment and natural resources by coordinating with national partners and relevant organizations, and use geographic information systems (GIS) and global frameworks, such as the Central Framework of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting;

(p) Fill data gaps, improve the production and publication of national consolidated data on SDG indicators, strengthen comparability and conciliation between national and global data, and document and disseminate metadata by establishing knowledge exchange platforms and using effective reporting mechanisms;

(q) Welcome progress by the regional working group, comprising ESCWA, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the League of Arab States, in developing a set of sustainable development indicators based on the International Conference on Population and Development, in coordination with national population councils and committees, and in identifying 39 indicators reflecting the integration of population dimensions to monitor progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda at the regional level;

(r) Study the potential benefits of the data revolution and the volumes of new data possessed by the private sector to assist national statistical offices in filling data gaps in official statistics, limit costs, guide efforts, and reduce the time it takes to prepare more detailed data, taking into account the risks and challenges resulting from using and processing new data sources, especially regarding data privacy and confidentiality;

(s) Confirm the importance of using information and communication technology and geospatial technology to develop information and data collection and analysis, and include geospatial data along with social, economic and other development data in official statistics;

(t) Update and develop national statistical systems, as called for by the Arab Conference on a Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics, to strengthen global, regional and national statistical systems, and build their capacity to respond more efficiently and effectively to new policy needs, especially the 2030 Agenda and the role of statistics in measuring and monitoring the SDGs;

(u) Commend the secretariat's efforts in linking normative activities it has undertaken, including studies and research papers, with advisory services it provides to member States, and with its efforts to build consensus on methods to deal with challenges facing the region through the results of its studies, research and meetings;

(v) Reaffirm the importance of providing the secretariat with the data required to prepare studies, so that it can base them on national statistics.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ESCWA SECRETARIAT

5. At its twelfth sessions, the Statistical Committee issued several recommendations to the ESCWA secretariat. The following table sets out the recommendations as presented in the report of the twelfth session of the Statistical Committee, and their respective implementation measures. The details of measures summarized in the table are covered under item 4 of the provisional agenda for the current session.

Recommendation	Implementation measures
<p>(a) Provide support to member States in collecting, processing, publishing, and evaluating refugee statistics, and continue providing technical coordination and cooperation in the field of statistics on refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Refugee Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, and national statistical offices in member States; facilitate the exchange of knowledge and skills; and transfer new guidelines and tools developed by the International Expert Group on Refugee and IDP Statistics for ESCWA member States</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Contributing to the preparation of a report entitled "International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics", which was published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and presented at the forty-ninth session of the United Nations Statistical Commission (New York, March 2018). 2. Working with UNHCR on preparing similar recommendations on IDP statistics. 3. Signing a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) on assessing the completion of birth and death registration in their records (April 2017).
<p>(b) Continue building country capacity to implement the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme, and develop vital statistics from civil registers in member States in collaboration with relevant organizations</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Holding regional meetings on technology use in censuses and on census planning in countries that did not conduct censuses in the 2010 round. 2. Publishing two studies on implementing alternative methodologies in censuses and emerging methods to disseminate and use data from population and household censuses. 3. Updating the website on censuses in the Arab region. 4. Visiting several countries to provide technical support in planning, conducting and evaluating censuses. 5. Organizing workshops on planning censuses in countries that face implementation difficulties, and on benefiting from other countries' experiences.

Recommendation	Implementation measures
<p>(c) Continue building country capacity to implement the System of National Accounts 2008, and supporting economic statistics and related fields, especially in the area of developing supply and use tables to improve GDP estimates by enhancing estimates of informal activities, and to increase benefits from household surveys in this field</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Estimating annual expenditures through the Model Report on Expenditure Statistics (MORES) questionnaire through activities of the International Comparison Programme (ICP), and holding several workshops to validate national accounts data at the GDP and GDP aggregates levels. 2. Organizing a regional seminar on supply and use tables (Beirut, 29-30 August 2018), at which participants discussed countries' experiences in developing supply and use tables and made presentations to clarify issues related to supply and use tables and their components and data sources. 3. Organizing a regional workshop (Cairo, 3-6 September 2018) to review and validate the time series of national accounts data for the period 2011-2016, which resulted in amendments to the data by member States. 4. Undertaking twinning projects to develop supply and use tables in member States by exchanging expertise and lessons learned.
<p>(d) Continue updating and developing the various areas of price statistics and purchasing power parities, and build country capacity in these fields and in short-term statistics and economic statistics on agriculture and tourism activities</p>	<p>The ESCWA secretariat continues to prepare projects and initiatives to develop price statistics, enhance integration between all price indicators, and integrate price statistics activities and ICP activities through the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collecting Consumer Price Index (CPI) data from all countries and preparing a quarterly newsletter to monitor inflation in the region and highlight key developments. 2. Improving the dissemination of inflation rates using an online publishing tool (Microsoft Power BI). 3. Developing innovative initiatives to produce annual purchasing power parities (PPP) even if global ICP sessions are not held, as in 2014, 2015 and 2016, by holding regional sessions on PPP through a combination of data extrapolation and real data collection. Work is continuing on those initiatives to produce PPP for 2017. 4. Carrying out other activities in the field of price statistics that combine PPP activities with CPI activities to produce a unified index on consumer prices at the national and subregional levels. 5. Implementing national projects in some member States to produce PPP at the subnational level.

Recommendation	Implementation measures
<p>(e) Strengthen partnerships with the United Nations Statistics Division, the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics, the League of Arab States, Statistical Centre of the Gulf Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC-Stat), United Nations programmes on building national statistical capacity, UNFPA and the United Nations Development Programme, and benefit from the outcomes of statistical forums and events held in the Arab region to unify efforts, such as the Doha Declaration on a Data Revolution in the Arab Region and the Riyadh Declaration: A New Era of Strategic Partnership</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Holding joint meetings with the subcommittee on economic statistics and the subcommittee on national accounts of the League of Arab States, and providing research material on methodologies for preparing quarterly accounts and applying the System of National Accounts 2008. 2. Organizing several joint workshops on economic statistics with the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics (AITRS), the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), the Arab Monetary Fund, and the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC). 3. In the area of improving environment statistics and the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) and using geospatial systems to monitor the environmental dimension of the SDGs, joint meetings were held with UNSD, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the European Environment Agency, the League of Arab States, AITRS and the University of Malaga in Spain. 4. Regarding disability statistics, meetings were organized with UNSD, the Washington Group on Disability Statistics and several United Nations organizations. 5. Concerning gender statistics, joint meetings were held on gender statistics with UNSD, the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO). 6. Contributing to the formulation of the terms of reference of a working group on employment statistics in the Arab region.
<p>(f) Support member States' efforts in developing economic statistical infrastructure by applying economic classifications, collecting statistics on international trade in services, using statistical business records, and implementing targeted activities in this field</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Undertaking many activities to build capacity in the field of statistics on international trade in services, given that Arab countries suffer from weak infrastructure required to collect and disseminate those statistics. At the national level, the ESCWA secretariat held a meeting in Dubai on 19 November 2017, which was attended by several international experts to assist in evaluating national efforts in the field of statistics on international trade in services and to formulate visions for their future development. At the regional level, the secretariat held a training workshop on statistics on international trade in

Recommendation	Implementation measures
	<p>services from 20 to 23 November 2017, in collaboration with the World Trade Organization (WTO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Arab Monetary Fund and UNSD.</p> <p>2. Preparing a study aimed at familiarizing experts from national statistical offices with the importance of using institutions' statistical registers in statistical work and producing economic statistics. The study presents practical ways of establishing statistical registers, especially technical and legislative aspects; the relationship between statistical offices and various government departments; and the potential uses of such registers.</p>
<p>(g) Develop an Arab framework of SDG indicators, taking into account regional priorities and thematic frameworks, monitor the availability of national data including classified data, report on progress for all, and continue providing technical coordination and cooperation in the field of data collection and publication for SDG indicators and present reports on the findings to the Statistical Committee</p>	<p>1. Preparing the first draft of the Arab framework for SDG indicators, assessing national data available on the SDG platform of the ESCWA Statistics Division, and monitoring national data disseminated by statistical offices and presenting a follow-up report on the issue.</p> <p>2. Developing a draft Arab framework for disability statistics comprising around 100 indicators, and collecting indicators based on national, regional and global sources.</p> <p>3. Preparing a draft implementation framework for the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda, in collaboration with UNEP and the League of Arab States, which provides proposals on ways to incorporate the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda in national development plans and policies in the Arab region. Statistical offices participated in reviewing the framework to assess the feasibility of its implementation within existing national statistical systems, in line with available and required data for analysis, monitoring and reporting in the region, and to support the formulation of integrated policies therein.</p>
<p>(h) Complete the regional action plan on sustainable development data and its six strategic areas, covering building capacity in the region and providing technical services to countries, in collaboration with regional and international organizations</p>	<p>Developing the Arab Regional Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data with its six strategic areas. A report on the Action Plan is presented to the Statistical Committee at its current session in document E/ESCWA/C.1/2019/5-E/ESCWA/EC.5/2018/6/Rev.1.</p>

Recommendation	Implementation measures
(i) Confirm the usefulness of official websites belonging to national statistical offices in obtaining data	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Periodically updating the ESCWA database from national sources primarily via the official websites on statistical offices, or, when national data are unavailable, by referring to data provided by United Nations organizations and other regional and international organizations. 2. Publishing a second issue of a booklet on gender statistics based on disseminated national data. 3. Issuing the first e-publication of the report entitled “Arab disability statistics in numbers 2017”, based on national statistics. 4. Assessing available national data for SDG indicators that have been disseminated on the official websites of statistical offices to monitor their comparability at the international level and the accuracy of related metadata, so as to facilitate their migration to the global SDG platform or their accurate production through future data collection. 5. Publishing a report entitled “Arab Society: A Compendium of Social Statistics 2017”, based on national data.
(j) Support countries in collecting and disseminating SDG-related statistics on the environment and natural resources, and use the Central Framework of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting	Organizing an e-training session and workshop on the Central Framework of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (Amman, 26-29 March 2018), and a workshop on contemporary approaches to environment statistics, especially a framework for developing environment statistics, to support countries in producing SDG indicators on the environmental dimension (Beirut, 12-16 November 2018).
(k) Develop work methodologies for statistics production in crisis-affected countries, and provide training programmes to meet their special needs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Forming a working group and holding a workshop on planning and adopting alternative ways to conduct population, housing and facilities censuses in crisis-affected countries (Iraq, Libya, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen), and benefiting from the experiences of countries that conducted censuses using technology (Beirut, 24-27 July 2018). 2. Developing a plan for the Syrian Arab Republic in the field of statistical work, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund. 3. Holding a national workshop in Libya on disability statistics (Tripoli, 7-9 August 2018). 4. Providing technical cooperation services to Yemen, and holding a consultative meeting on planning a survey of humanitarian needs in Yemen (Beirut, 14-16 November 2018).

Recommendation	Implementation measures
<p>(1) Complete the “Transformation agenda for the Arab region”, in collaboration with the United Nations Statistics Division, the League of Arab States, Islamic Development Bank, GCC-Stat, the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics, and other international and regional partners</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Forming a team within the secretariat concerned with big data that uses new data sources, such as geospatial data, in statistical production, and building capacity in that area. 2. Conducting a survey on the use of geospatial information and related techniques in member States, which covered the use of such information in environment statistics, land use and climate change. Survey findings will be used to strategically link statistical initiatives with spatial geography. 3. Since early 2018, the ESCWA secretariat has been the regional facilitator of the Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for the Arab States (UN-GGIM Arab States), and has joined the Group on Earth Observation (GEO) to link geospatial technology with ESCWA work programmes in all fields. 4. Continuing work on a new ESCWA statistical information portal, which comprises a data management unit comprising the data warehouse, data conversion and analysis tools, and a tool for preparing and disseminating statistical reports. An additional unit was established in 2018 to disseminate data. 5. Launching an e-learning platform in March 2018, which provides the first e-training session on gender statistics in Arabic, aimed at building the capacity of stakeholders in data production. The secretariat will work on developing other statistical training sessions on the platform.
