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Statistical Committee
First session
6-9 November 1995
Amman

Agenda item 18

REPORT OF THE STATISTICAL COMMITTEE ON ITS FIRST SESSION

UN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION
FOR WESTERN ASIA
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UNITED NATIONS
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I. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. VENUE AND OBJECTIVES

1. The ESCWA Statistical Committee held its first session at the temporary headquarters of the Commission in Amman from 6 to 9 November 1995.
2. The ESCWA secretariat organized the session pursuant to ESCWA resolution 179 (XVI) of 2 September 1992 on setting up a statistics committee within the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, approved by Economic and Social Council resolution 1993/2 of 2 February 1993.
3. The main objectives of the session were as follows: (a) strengthening coordination and cooperation between the ESCWA Statistics Division and the countries of the region in various statistical programmes; (b) defining the terms of reference and mode of operation of the ESCWA Statistical Committee; (c) reviewing the programme of work of the ESCWA Statistics Division for 1996 and 1997; (d) implementation of the 1993 System of National Accounts in the countries of the region; (e) participation of ESCWA member States in the International Comparison Programme (ICP); (f) presenting activities of special importance such as the International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems, technical cooperation in the field of statistics and the Regional Household Survey Project in the ESCWA region.

B. PARTICIPATION

4. Participants in the first session of the ESCWA Statistical Committee included representatives of 10 of the Commission's members, as well as representatives of United Nations organizations and agencies, Arab and regional organizations, and national organizations (see annex I).

C. OPENING OF THE SESSION

5. In her opening statement, Her Excellency Mrs. Rima Khalaf, Minister of Planning of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, welcomed the session participants to Amman. She emphasized the importance of statistical work and the need for strengthening, coordination and expansion therein. She referred to the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) Economic Summit, which she said was important because it marked the beginning of a new development phase for the countries of the region.
6. She also said that such a stage of development required changing the economic management approach in order to achieve complementarity and integration, rather than competition or restriction, between the public and private sectors. The rehabilitation of the economies of the region was an arduous task necessitating accurate information and appropriate and consistent data.
7. The image of the United Nations has been associated with its great political role to the detriment of its development role. Through its various institutions, including ESCWA, the United Nations undertook activities in support of development, including statistical work and related activities. The current session was viewed as a new and remarkable shift in ESCWA activities and programmes in the field of statistics. The session would enable decision makers to take the right and appropriate decisions in the social and economic fields. It would also help to evaluate and compare achievements, to increase the efficiency of procedures, and to develop economic instruments leading to human development and the realization of peoples' desire to live in dignity. It would thus promote the spirit of giving.

8. In his statement, the Executive Secretary of ESCWA welcomed the participants and expressed his satisfaction and pride in opening the first session of the ESCWA Statistical Committee, the first specialized committee established by ESCWA since its inception 20 years previously. He stressed the importance of statistics and of relying on them, indicating that ESCWA, in its medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001, considered statistical work one of its top priorities. Statistical information, as much as any other commodity in a market economy system, had to have all the elements of quality needed for marketing it, or even selling it, in order to cover the huge costs required by the development of statistical work. The quality and effectiveness of statistical information depended mainly on timeliness and rapid delivery to the consumer. Since information was a perishable commodity, the greater the interval between its production and delivery to the consumer, the more its importance and relevance were reduced.

9. The Chief of the Demographic and Social Statistics Branch of the Statistical Division at United Nations Headquarters read out the statement of the Director of the Division on his behalf. The statement stressed the importance of the ESCWA Statistical Committee in strengthening cooperation and promoting statistical activities. Numerous conferences had been held since 1953 and had contributed to the standardization and coordination of statistical work among European countries and the expansion of their activities to include most Asian as well as other countries.

10. In his statement, the Chief of the ESCWA Statistics Division referred to the imminence of a new era when statistics would be unquestionably recognized and a fact of life. Such recognition, even if not based on conviction, would be required by society itself since the only acceptable means for it to make the right decisions was through accurate information and data.

D. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

11. Participants from the Statistical Committee members elected, unanimously, Mr. Abdulhadi Alawin, Director General of the Department of Statistics in Jordan, as Chairman; Mr. Mohammad Maouf Al-Noami, President of the Central Statistical Organization in Qatar, as Vice-Chairman; and Mr. Mohammed Melhim, Head of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and Natural Resources, as Rapporteur.

E. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

12. The participants adopted the provisional agenda as contained in document E/ESCWA/STAT/1995/IG.1/L.1 (see annex II).

II. DISCUSSION

A. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MODE OF OPERATION OF THE ESCWA STATISTICAL COMMITTEE

13. The Chief of the Statistics Division of ESCWA presented document E/ESCWA/STAT/1995/IG.1/3, "Definition of the terms of reference and mode of operation of the ESCWA Statistical Committee", as well as the text of the resolution establishing the Committee and the proposed functions of the elected Bureau for its first session.

14. After lengthy discussions about the functions of the Bureau, the Committee decided the following:

(a) At the beginning of each session, the Committee would elect, from among its members, a Chairman, a Vice-Chairman and a Rapporteur as members of the Bureau. The mandate of the elected Bureau would extend until the beginning of the following session;

(b) The Chairman would preside over the meetings of the session according to the rules of procedure of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. In the absence of the Chairman, his functions would be carried out by the Vice-Chairman;

(c) The secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia would consult with the Bureau on following up the implementation of the Statistical Committee's decisions;

(d) The secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia would consult with the Bureau on the agenda for the next session of the Statistical Committee, as well as its date and venue.

The representative of Jordan expressed a reservation on point (d).

B. FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS

15. The Chief of the ESCWA Statistics Division presented the document on "Fundamental principles of official statistics" (E/ESCWA/STAT/1995/IG.1/4). During the discussion, a representative indicated that the customs, traditions and religious beliefs of the region had to be taken into consideration in the application of those principles.

16. Following the debate, the following recommendations were made:

Recommendation 1

The 10 principles of official statistics should be adopted and applied to the extent possible.

C. FOLLOW-UP ACTION ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FOURTH MEETING OF HEADS OF CENTRAL STATISTICAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE ESCWA REGION

17. The Chief of the ESCWA Statistics Division presented the document on "Follow-up action on the recommendations of the Fourth Meeting of Heads of Central Statistical Organizations in the ESCWA Region" (E/ESCWA/STAT/1995/IG.1/5) and explained the efforts made by ESCWA in that regard.

18. The Committee took note, with satisfaction, of ESCWA efforts. Some of the points contained in the document would be taken up during the discussion of the remaining agenda items.

D. SUMMARY OF THE REPORT ON THE TWENTY-EIGHTH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS STATISTICAL COMMISSION

19. The Chief of the ESCWA Statistics Division presented document E/ESCWA/STAT/1995/IG.1/6, "Summary of the report on the twenty-eighth session of the United Nations Statistical Commission." The Committee took note of the information contained in that document.

E. WORK ACCOMPLISHED DURING THE PERIOD 1994-1995

20. Document E/ESCWA/STAT/1995/IG.1/7, "Work accomplished during the period 1994-1995", contained a description of the activities carried out by the ESCWA Statistics Division during the period 1994-1995 in the areas of training, statistics, data collection, compilation, processing and dissemination, as well as regional and international cooperation activities in the field of statistics and promotion of international standards.

21. Discussions covered the issues of the relation between data producers and users and the non-official statistical bodies. Ways to enable those bodies to carry out the required work were also discussed. Participants expressed their appreciation to the ESCWA Statistics Division for its efforts in the implementation of activities planned for 1994 and 1995. After a detailed discussion of the item, the Committee recommended the following:

Recommendation 2

(a) The importance of the cooperation between ESCWA and the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDMO) in issuing the Bulletin of Industrial Statistics for the Arab Countries, 1983-1993 and organizing the training workshop on industrial statistics, held in Damascus in November-December 1994, should be emphasized. It is hoped that such cooperation would continue and be intensified in the future and extended to other relevant organizations;

(b) The Central Statistical Organizations in the member States of the Commission should be called upon to provide ESCWA with available data it requests and to send to ESCWA, as soon as possible, any questionnaires or publications issued by them;

(c) The Statistical Newsletter of the ESCWA Statistics Division should be issued every six months.

F. TECHNICAL COOPERATION IN STATISTICS

22. Introducing the document on "Technical cooperation in statistics" (E/ESCWA/STAT/1995/IG.1/8) the Chief of the ESCWA Statistics Division referred to the increasing demand on advisory services in the fields of national accounts and economic statistics, household surveys and electronic data processing. This reflected the interest of the countries of the region in the statistical development process as well as in the quality expertise of the advisory services provided by ESCWA in these fields. During the discussions, some participants raised the issue of using notebooks in statistical surveys in the field. It was suggested that this method be tested and evaluated before using it on a wider scale.

23. After a long discussion, the Committee expressed its appreciation for the services provided by ESCWA in that regard and made the following recommendation:

Recommendation 3

(a) Support for advisory services of ESCWA to the member States should continue to increase in the fields of national accounts and economic statistics, household surveys and electronic data processing;

(b) ESCWA should be called upon to make efforts in providing advisory services in sampling and environmental statistics and to continue its attempts to secure two posts for experts on sampling and environmental statistics.

G. NATIONAL HOUSEHOLD SURVEY CAPABILITY PROGRAMME

24. The representative of the ESCWA Statistics Division introduced document E/ESCWA/STAT/1995/IG.1/9, "National Household Survey Capability Programme and services offered by the Regional Household Survey Project in the ESCWA region." He explained the orientation of the project until the end of 1998 and the programme of work for 1996 and 1997 within the framework of that orientation. Participants expressed their appreciation for the efforts and services provided by the Regional Household Survey Project during the previous period. They also expressed their gratitude and appreciation to the Arab Gulf Programme of the United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND) for its participation in financing the activities and work programmes of this project and called on it to continue providing financial support for the project, enabling it to provide excellent services in the field of household surveys.

25. Following the discussion, the following recommendation was made:

Recommendation 4

(a) The importance of the services offered by the Regional Household Survey Project should be emphasized and the orientation of the project work until the end of 1998 should be approved;

(b) AGFUND should be called upon to participate in financing the regional project to strengthen the capabilities of national cadres in informatics. The aim of the project is to develop the human resources in this area, in particular those involved in household surveys concerned with special population segments, namely children, mothers, the disabled and the ageing, in household health surveys;

(c) The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Health Organization (WHO) should be invited to provide financial and technical support to conduct environmental household surveys through a regional project presented by ESCWA to the two organizations;

(d) The importance of the Geographical Information System (GIS) should be stressed in developing and supporting statistical work at the Central Statistical Organizations. Appreciation should be expressed to the University of Qatar for participating with ESCWA in organizing training programmes in statistics and GIS, and the University should be invited to continue to participate, financially and technically, in organizing these programmes. ESCWA should be called upon to work towards the preparation of a regional training project on GIS and building up cadres in this field;

(e) The importance of making use of the advances in computer technology should be stressed in improving the collection of household survey data, using notebooks as an alternative to the more traditional questionnaires. In this context, the Regional Household Survey Project should be called upon to contact funding entities to support this development process, to provide the necessary computer equipment and software, to test their use in certain household surveys and to evaluate the results with a view to disseminating their use in this field;

(f) The United Nations Statistical Division and WHO should be invited to participate with ESCWA in organizing a training workshop on household surveys for the disabled and the ageing. Similarly,

the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) should be invited to participate with ESCWA in developing the uses of household survey data and results relating to expenditure and income in food and health studies.

H. ESCWA PROGRAMME OF WORK IN THE FIELD OF STATISTICS, 1996 AND 1997

26. The Chief of the ESCWA Statistics Division reviewed document E/ESCWA/STAT/1995/IG.1/10, "ESCWA work programme in the field of statistics, 1996-1997." He indicated that the programme had been approved at the eighteenth session of ESCWA and that it reflected high aspirations regarding the scope of expansion in statistical activities and consequently the professional cadres. However, those aspirations were being limited by the United Nations' acute financial crisis.

27. Following the discussion, the Committee made the following recommendation:

Recommendation 5

The Statistical Committee has taken note of the ESCWA work programme in the field of statistics for the biennium 1996-1997 and requests ESCWA to work on providing the necessary financial resources for its implementation.

I. THE INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR ACCELERATING THE IMPROVEMENT OF VITAL STATISTICS AND CIVIL REGISTRATION SYSTEMS

28. The representative of the United Nations Statistical Division in New York presented document E/ESCWA/STAT/1995/IG.1/14, "International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems." He said that civil registration and vital statistics systems in many countries suffered from a lack of funding and a lack of technical guidance and support from higher authorities, and therefore were not working properly. The main objective of the International Programme was to mobilize, support and encourage developing countries to take relevant and sound measures for the establishment of various kinds of social and demographic databases needed for population and development programmes. He indicated that the United Nations Statistical Division had organized four regional workshops on strategies for accelerating the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems, one of them in cooperation with ESCWA and held in Damascus from 20 to 24 June 1993. He also reviewed activities aiming at developing those systems and the steps to follow by the States in order to join the International Programme.

29. After the discussion, the Committee made the following recommendation:

Recommendation 6

(a) The adoption of the recommendations made by the above-mentioned Western Asia Workshop on Strategies for Accelerating the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems should be stressed;

(b) The five-year period 1996-2000 should be declared as a time-frame for the adoption of strategies and plans for the promotion of civil registration and vital statistics in the region.

J. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 1993 SYSTEM OF NATIONAL ACCOUNTS
IN THE ESCWA REGION

30. The representative of the ESCWA Statistics Division presented document E/ESCWA/STAT/1995/IG.1/11, "Implementation of the 1993 System of National Accounts in the ESCWA region." He said that the 1993 System of National Accounts (SNA) represented a major advance in the field of national accounting while retaining the proven strengths of the previous system's conceptual economic and accounting basis. The main features of the new System were that it was up-to-date, simple, coherent and flexible. The role of ESCWA in the implementation of the 1993 System of National Accounts included activities undertaken by ESCWA such as workshops and training courses, in addition to the drawing up of a strategy for implementing the 1993 System and the preparation of the project document on the pilot project in Jordan. Follow-up activities had been carried out in cooperation with the Statistical Division in New York, UNDP and several Arab funds in order to obtain the necessary funding for the project. The representative of Jordan said that the project was a regional endeavour and that Jordan would start implementing the 1993 SNA even if the required external financing were not available. The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic stated that his country had already started implementing the 1993 SNA. The representative of Egypt said that preliminary steps had been taken to implement the System in Egypt.

31. After discussion the Committee made the following recommendation:

Recommendation 7

- (a) To approve the broad outlines of the strategy drawn up by ESCWA for implementing the System in the region;
- (b) To welcome the preliminary steps that have been taken by some States in this regard and to call on the other ESCWA member States to start implementing the 1993 SNA in a way commensurate with their statistical capabilities and analytical needs;
- (c) The scope of the pilot project for Jordan to implement the 1993 SNA should be broadened in order to encompass the Syrian Arab Republic and Egypt in addition to Jordan;
- (d) To call on Arab and international funds and organizations to provide the required financial support to implement this project;
- (e) The requirements of the 1993 SNA should be taken into account when undertaking any sort of statistical surveys and in particular household surveys, and the importance of coordination and cooperation between statistical organizations and the other authorities carrying out the surveys should be stressed, in order to ensure the availability of household data and other data needed for national accounts in the member countries.

K. PARTICIPATION OF ESCWA IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON PROGRAMME

32. The representative of the ESCWA Statistics Division presented document E/ESCWA/STAT/1995/IG.1/12, "Report on the participation of ESCWA member States in the International Comparison Programme (ICP)." He said that the Programme was important for making comparisons on the basis of purchasing power parity (PPP), which was better than the exchange rate as a criterion for comparison. He reviewed the action plan defining the role of the countries in the region as well as the roles of ESCWA and the World Bank. Ten countries in the region had informed ESCWA that they would join

the Programme and that the gathering of price data would begin soon and would be completed before the end of January 1996.

33. During the discussions, the participants expressed their gratitude and appreciation to ESCWA, the World Bank and the United Nations Statistical Division for the efforts made to organize the ESCWA Region Workshop on the International Comparison Programme, held in Amman in June 1995, and the practical steps taken to implement the ICP in the region.

34. After discussion, the Committee made the following recommendation:

Recommendation 8

(a) The participation of States in the programme should not be confined to the collection of data but should also include familiarization with all the stages of the implementation of the ICP, covering methodology and the preparation, processing and analysis of data;

(b) ESCWA should provide technical assistance for the implementation of the ICP by the countries in the region;

(c) The World Bank should allocate sufficient resources to secure the implementation of the Action Plan in the region and to enable ESCWA to execute its role in the plan;

(d) Countries participating in the ICP should hold a seminar to assess the results of this first phase of ICP implementation.

L. GENDER STATISTICS IN THE ARAB COUNTRIES

35. The representative of the ESCWA Statistics Division presented document E/ESCWA/STAT/1995/IG.1/13, "Gender statistics in the Arab countries: current issues and plans," which reviewed the contribution of Arab women to economic and social development as well as their participation in international conferences on women. All of those conferences had recommended that effective strategies should be adopted for the advancement of women and for achieving equality between men and women. The document also reviewed the topics that were discussed at the Fourth World Conference on Women as well as the Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2005; it emphasized the importance of gender statistics and the need to compile gender statistics on relevant issues. In response to worldwide realization of the importance of gender issues and of plans of action adopted by international conferences, the representative of the ESCWA Statistics Division presented a plan aimed at developing national gender statistics in cooperation with the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR) in Tunis.

36. After discussion, the Committee expressed its appreciation for the efforts made by ESCWA in the field of data collection, storage and dissemination and made the following recommendation:

Recommendation 9

The ESCWA future plan should be adopted to develop national gender statistics, and Arab and international funds and concerned organizations should provide adequate financial support for the implementation of the plan.

M. PERSPECTIVE FOR THE ESCWA SUBPROGRAMME ON STATISTICS
WITHIN THE MEDIUM-TERM PLAN 1998-2001

37. The Chief of the ESCWA Statistics Division presented document E/ESCWA/STAT/1995/IG.1/15, "Perspective for the ESCWA subprogramme on statistics within the medium-term plan 1998-2001." The goals of this subprogramme and proposed plans of action were outlined, as well as the results expected to be achieved on completion of the subprogramme.

38. After discussion, the Committee made the following recommendation:

Recommendation 10

(a) To endorse the orientation of the ESCWA subprogramme on statistics within the framework of the medium-term plan 1998-2001;

(b) To give special importance to training activities and to the development of human resources in the field of statistics within the subprogramme;

(c) To establish cooperation between ESCWA, the League of Arab States and concerned Arab organizations as regards the standardization of Arabic terminology used in the field of statistics.

Annex I

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Annex II

AGENDA

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda and the proposed organization of work.
4. Definition of the terms of reference and mode of operation of the ESCWA Statistical Committee.
5. Fundamental principles of official statistics.
6. Follow-up on the recommendations of the Fourth Meeting of Heads of Central Statistical Organizations in the ESCWA Region.
7. Summary of the report on the twenty-eighth session of the United Nations Statistical Commission (27 February - 3 March 1995).
8. Work accomplished during the period 1994-1995.
9. Technical cooperation in statistics.
10. National Household Survey Capability Programme (NHSCP) and services offered by the Regional Household Survey Project in the ESCWA region.
11. ESCWA work programme in the field of statistics, 1996-1997.
12. Implementation of the 1993 System of National Accounts in the ESCWA region.
13. Participation of ESCWA member States in the International Comparison Programme.
14. Gender statistics in the Arab countries.
15. The International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems.
16. Perspective for the ESCWA subprogramme on statistics within the medium-term plan 1998-2001.
17. Other matters.
18. Adoption of the report of the ESCWA Statistical Committee.

Annex III

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

<u>Title</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Symbol</u>
Provisional agenda	3	E/ESCWA/STAT/1995/IG.1/L.1
Proposed organization of work	3	E/ESCWA/STAT/1995/IG.1/L.2
Definition of the terms of reference and mode of operation of the ESCWA Statistical Committee	4	E/ESCWA/STAT/1995/IG.1/3
Fundamental principles of official statistics	5	E/ESCWA/STAT/1995/IG.1/4
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