Report

Meeting of the Technical Advisory Group on Economic Statistics (TAGES) in the Arab region

Beirut, 27-28 August 2018

Summary

The second Technical Advisory Group on Economic Statistics (TAGES) meeting was held in Beirut, 27-28 August 2018. It was attended by 21 participants, 11 of which were representatives from countries and 10 from regional and international organizations. Country representatives from Egypt, Jordan and Libya presented their national strategies for the development of statistics, representatives from Lebanon Morocco and Iraq shared their progress and challenges in the 2008 SNA implementation, and representatives from Tunisia and Saudi Arabia described their country experiences in business registers and economic surveys. Discussions focused on promoting Supply and Use tables, developing statistical business registers, improving short term economic statistics as well as supporting transport and digital economy statistics. ESCWA’s Statistics Division and UNSD also shared with participants the recent work done in the various areas of economic statistics and the guideline manuals and tools resulting from them.

Countries agreed on moving to a wholistic approach to statistics by involving all data producers and setting up a statistical infrastructure that will allow for efficiently sharing and better producing economic statistics based on international recommendations and methodologies. ESCWA and other organizations presented their priorities and discussed synergies between them with regard to economic statistics and national accounts and identified areas for capacity-building and combining resources at the regional and international levels. The meeting also discussed the selection of priority economic indicators for the region from the SDG economic indicators and other lists of short term economic indicators identified by ESCWA and other organizations.
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INTRODUCTION

1. The ESCWA Statistical Committee recommended the establishment of the Technical Advisory Group on Economic Statistics (TAGES) in the Arab region at its eleventh session in 2015. Its tasks include highlighting priority issues with regard to regional economic statistics programmes; providing guidance to the ESCWA secretariat on methodological and technical issues related to the development and periodic revision of such programmes; helping to enhance coordination and cooperation at the national, regional and international levels; and producing and disseminating economic indicators for use in implementing the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2. The present report sets out the main recommendations and outcomes to emerge from the meeting.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Technical Advisory Group on Economic Statistics concluded the meeting with the following recommendations:

(a) Requesting countries to adopt the System of National Accounts (SNA) as an overall arching framework for the integration of economic statistics and using the Supply and Use Tables and SEEA satellite accounts (mainly water and energy accounts) for the integrated compilation of recurrent national accounts, business, trade and economy-related SDG indicators for the region;

(b) Approving the priorities agreed upon during its first TAG meeting in 2016 and adding the areas of transport statistics and digital economy within the work program of the group and to provide support to build statistical capacities in countries from the Statistics Division at ESCWA and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD);

(c) Requesting ESCWA to develop an annual TAGES work program for economic statistics with the recommendations of this TAGES meeting in close consultation with the members of the TAGES and in line with the common priorities for the national programs of work on economic statistics and national strategy for the development of statistics (NSDS);

(d) Requesting ESCWA and UNSD to continue the technical support to countries working on the preparation of new or the update of existing NSDSs related to the program of work on economic statistics and emphasizing the importance of political support from decision makers in these countries;

(e) Requesting ESCWA and UNSD to provide technical support to countries in conflict in referring to specific data sources and applying suitable compilation methods on economic statistics in order to produce a minimum viable data set of economic statistics for decision and policy making e.g. the use of geospatial data and satellite imagery to estimate statistics for agricultural production and damaged buildings for use by decision makers. The group recommended to hold a workshop to design a clear and suitable plan of action for the concerned countries the soonest possible;

(f) Requesting ESCWA and UNSD to provide additional support for the implementation of the 2008 SNA and supporting statistics taking into consideration the regional gaps and needs assessed through several questionnaires and evaluations conducted, and utilizing the accessibility to all available data from various sources such as existing surveys, administrative records, business registers and other potential data sources before deciding to undertake new economic surveys;

(g) Stressing the importance of developing supply and use tables in Arab countries and drawing on the experiences of countries of similar economies and adopting the recommendations which would come out of the Regional Seminar on Supply and Use Tables that would follow the meeting of the Technical Advisory Group on 29-30 August 2018, and in which the members of the group would participate;
(h) Urging countries to develop statistical bulletins using modern technology available such as those presented by ESCWA to publish and analyze foreign trade statistics, requesting ESCWA in providing support to countries that wish to use similar tools;

(i) Elaborating the foreign trade statistics with focus on the multinational enterprises operating in global value chains in the Arab region by sharing and analyzing customs data;

(j) Requesting ESCWA and UNSD to continue to support the development of statistical business registers and related economic classifications, sharing the Palestinian experience in linking administrative files with statistical business registers. Commending ESCWA’s success in implementing regional programs for the development and harmonization of price statistics such as the ICP and building on the experience and results in developing harmonized CPI, similar work can be developed in the harmonization of supply and use tables for selected countries, in the compilation of national accounts and in developing statistical business registers;


(l) Requesting the members of the group to review the priority short-term economic indicators presented by ESCWA during the meeting as well as the set of economic indicators related to the sustainable development goals proposed by UNSD, the League of Arab States and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, and allowing the group a period of one month to provide ESCWA with final review and feedback. ESCWA together with and giving the members of the group

I. TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

A. PRIORITIES, IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAMMES AND PERIODIC REVIEW OF PROGRESS

3. The representative from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Mr Saleh Al Kafri, chaired the first day of the meeting and took the floor to reiterate the importance of this meeting in identifying gaps and challenges facing Arab countries. According to Mr. Al Kafri, many of the challenges revolve around methodological issues as well as know-how in constructing and managing statistics tools and means of compilation. He added that Palestine requires a lot of knowledge and expertise-sharing and utilization of platforms such as this meeting in order to share, learn and benefit from other country experiences from inside and outside the region. He also shed light on the importance of improving decision-maker’s analytical skills for understanding and utilizing statistics in policy making.

After a tour de table, ESCWA Chief of Economic Statistics, Ms. Wafa Aboul Hosn, then took the floor to review the agenda items and explain the objective of each session during the two-day meeting. Participants then adopted the Agenda (Annex 1) and highlighted the items they considered as priorities to their countries. Participants identified the implementation of the System of National Accounts 2008 (SNA 2008) as well as the measurement of the informal sector among top priority areas and stressed that countries in conflict should be given special attention to cater to their specific capacity building needs. Palestine responded by mentioning that different tiers of indicators have been identified to consider the economic and political situation in different countries.

4. The National Accounts regional advisor at ESCWA, Mr. Omar Hakouz, highlighted the importance of establishing a strong and sound statistical infrastructure by using business registers, constructing supply and use tables and implementing the international standards and classifications. Such practice he claimed would better facilitate data production in various sub-areas as well as assist in measuring the informal sector. ESCWA Chief of Economic Statistics, Ms. Wafa Aboul Hosn, then gave a presentation of the progress achieved in previously identified priority areas. She also presented the rationale to develop two new priority areas of work,
transport statistics and digital economy in the programme of ESCWA and in the national statistical offices with the support of international and regional organizations\(^1\). (Annex 2)

**B. INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP**

5. The first session was dedicated to an overview and discussion of the institutional statistical set-up of member countries and thus the session was started with country presentations depicting their experiences and progress in developing a national strategy for the development of Statistics (NSDS) and a Strategy for Economic Statistics and National Accounts in the NSDS. Egypt, Jordan and Libya conducted presentations on the status of their NSDS which covered the preparation phases of the strategy and the reasons behind the strategy items and goals as well as the recommendations and future vision.

6. The Chair of the meeting stressed the need and importance of including transport statistics and digital economy statistics in the work of ESCWA and Statistical offices. Discussions followed by Lebanon agreeing that transport statistics should be among the priority areas and shared their experience in the area as they currently participate in the Medstat program for producing transport statistics. Mr. Hakouz pointed out to the importance of collaborating with area experts to better understand the dynamics of new areas of work such as digital economy. (See Summary in Annex 2 in this report).

7. Egypt elaborated on the different phases they had undergone in setting up their NSDS which was halted to conduct the national census. They mentioned that they are currently in discussion with various stakeholders in Egypt in order to complete and pursue the national statistical strategy. Jordan explained that their 2008-2012 NSDS has been revised and that they are bringing in experts to evaluate the strategy. They added that the priority areas of their future strategy will largely rely on Jordan’s 2025 developmental plan and what it requires in terms of statistical monitoring. Palestine spoke about their strategy as well, mentioning that their first strategy was developed through hiring experts and private companies while the second 2017-2022 was developed through in-house efforts. The 2017-2022 Palestine NSDS allows for a better understanding of the responsibilities of each data producer as well as constructs a simplified network for communication and cooperation. Palestine added that the strategy allowed them to unify the statistical infrastructure, improve the quality and quantity of statistics produced, as well as allowed for the training of various data producers on the different standards and classifications.

8. Mr. Hakouz mentioned that it is imperative for the NSDS in member countries to take into consideration promoting the definitions and concepts of the 2008 SNA in order to retrieve data more accurately and easily from various data producers and to adopt a quality assurance framework to guarantee that the proper methodologies are used. Ms. Aboul Hosn, on the other hand, inquired about how Syria dealt with statistical work and surveys in light of the ongoing conflict in the country. Syria representative clarified that a lot of their work shrank to safe areas and a lot of surveys were either halted or not conducted as frequently during the conflict period. He added that a lot of the data published relied on estimations instead of surveys and mentioned that with the current reduced level of conflict a lot of the surveys will be re-introduced.

**C. 2008 SNA IMPLEMENTATION AND SUPPORTING STATISTICS**

9. The second session of the meeting discussed the progress made in 2008 SNA Implementation and Supporting Statistics. National Accounts statistician at UNSD, Mr. Micheal Smedes, began by presenting the global view on economic statistical work and the achievements made in the implementation of the 2008 SNA in terms of the number of implementing countries, the resolution of issues on the research agenda and the completion of handbooks and manuals. Mr. Smedes also presented the findings of the national accounts questionnaire which was sent to countries by UNSD, and highlighted the progress made in terms of conceptual

\(^{1}\)Progress Achieved In The Field Of Economic Statistics And National Accounts In The Arab Region (2016-2018). Annex 1 and 2
compliance with the SNA, compliance with the minimum required datasets and the timeliness of producing the figures. The presentation also focused on what should be done in the future to assist countries that are lagging in the implementation of the SNA as well as identifying and addressing their symptoms. Mr. Smedes ended the presentation by sharing with participants the various elements of UNSD’s work program planned for the coming years. ESCWA statistician, Mr. Majed Skaini, took the floor next and presented the results of the questionnaires conducted by UNSD and the League of Arab States on the assessment of the implementation of the 2008 SNA in the Arab countries. Mr. Skaini explained the different sections of the questionnaires and talked about the challenges and gaps the questionnaires have identified.

10. ESCWA Regional advisor on National accounts, Mr. Hakouz, then conducted a presentation about the gaps and needs for developing economic surveys in the region. The presentation gave a regional perspective on various requirements and considerations countries should take into account when conducting economic surveys in order to reduce the cost burden and produce more accurate figures. Three country presentations followed by Lebanon, Morocco and Iraq depicting their experiences and practices in economic surveys and research as well as their progress in implementing the 2008 SNA.

11. The discussions following these presentations included a proposal from Palestine for ESCWA to establish a road map for implementing the 2008 SNA. Other comments mentioned that the 1993 SNA had an implementation manual that allowed for a more practical approach, and such a manual for the 2008 SNA would be very helpful. ESCWA Chief of economic statistics, Ms. Wafa Aboul Hosn, talked about the importance of making use of the available data and discovering new data sources such as satellite accounts and tax data. She also mentioned that there are resolvable and straightforward solutions for the problems facing customs data in terms of classifications as well as data quality.

12. The session continued with a presentation by UNSD on Islamic finance and how it is accounted for in the System of National accounts. The presentation provided examples of the issues and challenges faced when treating some Islamic Banking activities as well as provided participants with key conclusions and recommendations that were reached in the last workshop that took place in Beirut in October of 2017. Ms. Aboul Hosn added that there is no ongoing communication or dialogue between organizations on the practice and treatments of Islamic banking. She also mentioned that countries like Indonesia and Malaysia are advanced in accounting for Islamic banking activities in the system of National accounts and that a lot can be learned from them.

13. The next presentation was conducted by Mr. Ramzi Fanous from ESCWA on the dissemination tool of trade and industrial statistics. Mr. Fanous showcased the dashboards created for these areas and the step by step process of compiling, treating and finally disseminating these figures and data visualizations. ESCWA trade statistician, Mr. Majed Hamouda, also gave a briefing on the external trade bulletin that the Statistics Division publishes and explained all the challenges faced and recent improvements done. Mr. Hamouda mentioned that in addition to the created country trade profiles, SD will be continuously developing new products such as product profiles for exports and imports which will provide users with information on the most externally traded commodities. UNSD economic Statistics Chief Mr. Ivo Havinga commended ESCWA on the efforts leading to further developing the external trade bulletin and using advanced dashboard technologies for publishing them. He also added that UNSD utilizes the same technologies which allow for cooperation to further promote these publishing platforms. The reliability and importance of the Comtrade database as well as the discrepancies identified between the database and national data were also among the topics discussed. Mr. Hakouz also mentioned that cooperation with customs agencies is needed for an easier and more accurate exchange of data through enlisting better classification and reporting methods. Mr. Havinga added that transport statistics as well can be largely supported by aviation data.

14. Mr. Majed Skaini from ESCWA took the floor next to present ESCWA’s work in the Development of Price Statistics. Mr. Skaini explained how the Statistics Division has been continuously developing the area of price statistics in the Arab region through different initiatives such as the production of annual purchasing power parities (PPPs), the production of sub-national purchasing power parities and the harmonization of
15. Following these presentations, Mr. Havinga commended the success in the implementation of the ICP program and the development of the price statistics area through the commitment and efforts made for integrating PPPs into the regular statistical work, and he asked if countries could unify their GDP expenditure data production method through SUTs. Mr. Havinga stated that the management of the ICP program in ESCWA is a best practice and should be followed in other projects and efforts should be exerted to harmonize other areas of economic statistics similar to the harmonization of prices. Mr. Skaini thanked the participating countries’ commitment and explained that the benefits reaped and competitive spirit of the countries were their main incentive. Palestine also explained how their institution promotes committing to completing projects as well as how they incentivize their staff to do the additional work. Ms. Aboul Hosn mentioned that one of the tools that can help countries collect data faster is the use of scanner data. Mr. Smedes from UNSD then confirmed their support to this tool and mentioned that there is a lot of work currently on utilizing big data technology and analytics in collecting price data. Mr. Hakouz then responded about SUTs mentioning their importance in providing accurate GDP figures and the objective of developing them through identifying country gaps and treating them to reach complete and usable SUTs for GDP production.

D. INFRASTRUCTURE AND OPERATIONS

16. The second day of the meeting was chaired by Mr. Ali Grera from the Libyan Statistical office and began with the third session which took off with a presentation by Mr. Majed Hamouda on statistical business registers (SBR) and economic classifications. Mr. Hamouda explained what business registers are, the international recommendations followed, the status of business registers in Arab countries as well as the challenges countries face. The presentation also briefed participants on cooperation efforts between national statistical offices and other entities, what is needed to develop these registers as well as ESCWA’s activities that support and promote their development. Discussions took place following the presentation where Morocco mentioned that they have setup a business register but the problem remains with regularly updating it. Participants then discussed the importance of maintaining and updating business registers, the role international organizations can play in building capacities and sharing country experiences, and the importance of legitimizing the process of collecting business registers data by law. Participants also discussed the database software and technological needs for developing and maintaining business registers as well as the required cooperation between national statistical offices and other governmental entities to retrieve data.

17. Tunisia representative next presented their experience with the establishment of business registers and described the legal process leading up to creating the registers, how they are being updated and the objective behind creating them. Tunisia also talked about the linkages they created between various data inputs as well as what information the registers gather and the processes to gather and validate the data. Tunisia conducted another presentation on product and activity classifications where they explained how these classifications were developed and how they came to adopt them and mainstream them into their statistical systems.

18. Palestine representative next presented an update on the Medstat working group on business registers where he briefed participants on the activities that are being undertaken to support countries in creating these registers. Mr. Al Kafri explained that business registers require an electronic network between the national statistical offices and various government entities to gather data and gave the example of the European Union’s work as a best practice. He further explained that the European model and networks employed in many
developed countries are automated and hence minimize most of the manual work which is what is needed for Arab countries. The floor was then opened for discussion and started with a comment from Libya mentioning that part of their problem in collecting SBR data is the lack of cooperation from different entities refusing to share data. Ms. Aboul Hosn stated that statistical areas and entities need updating in terms of understanding statistical concepts and classifications, and that the lack of legislative backing doesn’t mean there’s not a lot of work to be done from now. Jordan reiterated the importance of having a legislative backing to retrieve statistical business registers data and look at ESCWA and other international organizations to support this legislative request from decision makers. Syria then took the floor to share their experience in conducting economic surveys especially during the conflict taking place in the country. Syria explained how they conduct their economic surveys and mentioned that they are currently only being conducted in 5 governorates; the Syrian delegate also explained how they complement the surveys with administrative records from the Ministry of Finance which classifies companies as closed, temporarily closed or operational. Mr. Havinga then commented on the Medstat trainings by mentioning their importance and that the trainings are related to the statistical outputs desired and which require identifying priorities and outputs that are needed to be able to establish a complete business register within three to four years’ time. Mr Havinga added that there are different aspects of the statistical business registers that need to be addressed such as linkages with customs and developing an SBR for trade and went on to explaining the importance of having an SBR to fully understand and realize the impact of various economic fluctuations on output, employment and other variables. He then concluded by calling for an integrated approach in developing national SBR as well as using SUTs and a practical round of training. The United Arab Emirates also commented by stating that they have a lot of gaps between survey data and their administrative records and that it would be hard to rely on and continuously update business registers in the absence of legislative support. Regional advisor on National Accounts, Mr. Hakouz, added that there are problems in differentiating between an establishment and a unit in the business register and that there are often mistakes arising in the treatment of cases where an establishment owns several business units. He also mentioned that an integrated approach linking the SBR to several data producers will require first a unification of classifications among the national statistical offices and various data sources.

19. The next half of the third session was dedicated to discussing economic and business surveys in the ESCWA region. Morocco conducted the first country presentation which talked about the economic and business surveys and studies in Morocco as well as the implementation of the 2008 SNA. The presentation looked into Morocco’s studies on economic statistics, the annual study for establishments, economic statistical surveys and their statistical business registers. The presentation concluded with a brief on the 2008 SNA implementation where Morocco showcased that they have been following international recommendations of the 2008 SNA using the proper classifications of activities and products as well as definition of establishments and units in their registers. Saudi Arabia also conducted a presentation on economic surveys starting with the objectives from conducting various surveys, explaining the methodologies used, the field work required and the challenges they face in conducting economic surveys which revolve around a lack in human resources, statistical awareness and issues relating to mismatch in classification and business practices. Discussions then took place among countries and experts sharing their experiences concerning the frequency of economic surveys conducted as well as the implementation of establishment censuses and the method and frequency of updating them among countries who have business registers.

20. After some discussions, Mr. Hakouz conducted a presentation on the need to change the methodology for carrying out economic surveys. The presentation started off with the considerations and requirements that need to be addressed before conducting an economic survey and explained how the questionnaire itself can be designed to be less burdensome on the respondents. Mr. Hakouz concluded by presenting the suggested methodology and requirements for conducting a structural survey. Discussions following the presentation included the need to set up an integrated business statistics program to provide a common statistical business frame. UNSD also mentioned that a manual is being developed on SBRs and that there are new methods to maximize administrative data use instead of conducting surveys. Participants also discussed the need to move towards e-questionnaires and standardize them as well as the need to standardize sampling methods. Experts and country representatives concluded the discussion by agreeing that they should identify, with the rest of the member countries, priorities for the region and propose an integrated business statistics program.
E. ECONOMIC INDICATORS: SHORT TERM, CORE SET, AND SDG-RELATED

21. The fourth and final session of the meeting commenced with a presentation by Mr. Roy Doumit from ESCWA who briefed participants on the three-year project that aimed at strengthening statistical capacities for producing short term economic statistics in the region to create early warning system to respond to various economic fluctuations. The presentation shed light on the various capacity building activities such as trainings, technical assistance, study tours and fellowships conducted throughout the project and the indicators and areas targeted. The presentation was concluded with a briefing on the evaluation results of the project which was found to be of great value and relevance to countries and considered the effort mostly effective and partially sustainable. Participants and experts discussed the results for the project and asserted that this project was a good start and created a valuable network of expertise but that it will need to be integrated in the statistical work programs as it cannot remain a stand-alone effort. Jordan commented that some of the indicators they had identified as priorities during the project were not considered to which ESCWA responded that the selected indicators were the ones that overlapped among pilot countries. Ms. Aboul Hosn mentioned that ESCWA will continue working on promoting the infrastructure for short term economic statistics and address the gaps and challenges in member countries. Mr Havinga also mentioned that, at the global level, UNSD is thinking about automating the collection of short term economic indicators from countries in on platform. Mr. Hakouz also talked about the potential for collaboration among member countries as the expertise and know-how varies between countries.

22. Ms. Aboul Hosn then took over to discuss the core set of economic indicators for Arab countries which will be derived from the League of Arab States’ list of priority economic indicators, the SDG economic indicators and the priority short term economic indicators identified in the ESCWA project. All three lists of indicators were presented to participants, after which ESCWA presented a data availability assessment on SDG indicators to help identify the gaps and mentioned that a lot of the SDG indicators found on UNSD database are not found in national statistical office websites. After pointing out to the availability of some of the SDG metadata in Arabic and the importance of adopting it for cross country comparability, Ms. Aboul Hosn discussed with participants the criteria upon which the core list of priority indicators will be selected. Lebanon added that they will choose their indicators upon the feasibility of producing them as well. Palestine suggested that a clear plan detailing the capacity building activities for the core set of economic activities is developed on a yearly basis, and they also stated the importance of the TAGES members to be continuously engaged and stay active in terms of communication and participation regarding the issue. Egypt questioned why the League of Arab States has developed another list of short term economic indicators and hasn’t abided by the international list, to which Ms. Aboul Hosn responded that ESCWA has already communicated this point as well as the international list of indicators along with its metadata. The following part of the session was dedicated to identifying a set of recommendations and priorities for the committee to adopt.

After the working group discussions for identifying a set of priority indicators, participants agreed to further study and evaluate the indicators with their respective offices and communicate their feedback accordingly. The recommendations produced during this meeting for future work in economic statistics where then reiterated and discussed among participants. Ms. Aboul Hosn then mentioned that ESCWA will draft the list of recommendation along with the report and communicate it to everyone for final feedback. Ms. Aboul Hosn also stressed on the importance of maintaining communication through email and video conference after the meeting in order to keep the group active and share additional discussions and review meeting recommendations. Mr. Havinga reiterated the message of continued communication and cooperation and thanked everyone for attending this meeting.

II. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. DATE AND VENUE

23. The Advisory Group held its meeting in Beirut on 27 and 28 August 2018.
B. OPENING

24. The meeting was opened by the Executive Secretary of ESCWA, ESCWA Statistics Division and UNSD.

25. The Director of ESCWA Statistics Division, Mr Juraj Riecan, welcomed everyone and thanked the participants for attending this very important meeting of the Technical Advisory Group for Economic Statistics which aims at promoting and improving the availability and compilation of economic statistics in the Arab region.

26. The Executive Secretary of ESCWA, Dr. Mohamed Ali Alhakim, opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and wishing them a fruitful outcome. Dr Alhakim stressed on the importance of this technical advisory group meeting in promoting economic statistics in the region based on international standards and recommendations. He called for more cooperation as well as political and financial backing to improve the quality and frequency of producing economic statistics in member countries. Dr Alhakim finally thanked ESCWA’s Statistics Division for organizing this event as well as the participants for taking time off their busy schedules to attend this important Technical Advisory Group Meeting.

27. The Director of the UNSD Economic Statistics, Mr. Ivo Havinga, thanked the Executive Secretary for his support as well as the ESCWA Statistics Division for their collaborative efforts to organize this important meeting in order to understand and better face the challenges of compiling economic statistics in Arab Countries. Mr Havinga elaborated on the importance of this meeting as it focuses on an integrated economic statistics approach that addresses all stakeholders and data producers in countries. “Economic statistics are at a level of maturity that would allow countries to more accurately and less costly measure and understand the interrelationships between various economic entities, which will in turn enable us to study, analyze and better comprehend these dynamics”, Mr Havinga said.

C. ATTENDANCE

28. The meeting was attended by 21 participants, including representatives of 11 countries and 10 regional and international organizations. (Annex 3). The evaluation of the meeting is provided in Annex 4.

D. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

29. The representative of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics continued in assuming the role of Chair of the Advisory Group as per the mandate that ends in 2020. The representative from Libya was elected as co-chair of the Advisory Group Whereas ESCWA acted as rapporteur for the meeting.

E. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Annex 1. Agenda

### Day 1 – 27 August 2018

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<td>ESCWA: Mohamed Ali Alhakim, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary</td>
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<td>UNSD: Ivo Havinga; Assistant Director, United Nations Statistics Division, DESA, Latest development on economic statistics at the global level</td>
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<td>- Review of Priorities for Economic Statistics and National Accounts and New Areas of Interest. Wafa Aboul Hosn, ESCWA</td>
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<td>- Iraq</td>
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<td>- Participating Organizations</td>
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<td><strong>Discussion</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>13:00 - 14:00</td>
<td><strong>Lunch Break</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>14:00 - 14:30</td>
<td><strong>Islamic Finance in National Accounts</strong></td>
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<td>- UNSD and ESCWA</td>
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<td>14:30 - 15:00</td>
<td><strong>Trade and Industry Statistics</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Recent Updates on Compilation and Dissemination. Majed Hamoudeh and Ramzi Fanous, ESCWA</td>
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<tr>
<td>15:00 - 15:30</td>
<td><strong>Price Statistics Regional Programmes</strong></td>
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**Day 2 – 28 August 2018**

**Session 3: Infrastructure and Operations. Chair Libya**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>09:00 - 10:00</td>
<td><strong>Statistical Business Registers and Economic Classifications</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>– Regional Perspectives. Majed Hamoudeh, ESCWA.</td>
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<td>– Country Experiences</td>
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<td>– Tunisia</td>
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<td>– Update on Medstat Working Group, Palestine</td>
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<td>Discussion</td>
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<td>10:00 - 11:00</td>
<td><strong>Economic/ Business Surveys</strong></td>
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<td>– Country Experiences</td>
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<td>– Morocco</td>
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<td>– Saudi Arabia</td>
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<td>– Needs for Change. Omar Hakouz, Regional Advisor on National Accounts, ESCWA</td>
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<td>Discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:00 - 11:30</td>
<td>Coffee Break</td>
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**Session 4: Economic Indicators: Short Term, Core Set, and SDG-related, Chair**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>11:30 – 12:00</td>
<td><strong>Short Term Economic Statistics</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>– Completion of ESCWA’s Project on Short Term Statistics. Wafa Aboul Hosn and Roy Doumit, ESCWA</td>
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<td>– Updates on Short Term Economic Statistics: UNSD</td>
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<td>– Countries Feedback</td>
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<td>12:00 - 13:00</td>
<td><strong>Core Set of Economic Indicators for Arab Countries and Links to SDGs</strong></td>
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<td>– Proposal of Core Set of Economic Indicators and LAS</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Economic related-SDG Indicators. Wafa Aboul Hosn and Omar Hakouz, ESCWA</td>
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<td>– SDGs related Economic Indicators and Monitoring at the Global Level - DA pillar on Economic Statistics. UNSD</td>
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<td>13:00 - 14:00</td>
<td>Lunch Break</td>
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<td>14:00 - 15:00</td>
<td><strong>Working Groups on Economic Indicators</strong></td>
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<td>15:00 - 16:00</td>
<td>Reporting of Working groups</td>
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<td>Discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>16:00 – 17:00</td>
<td><strong>Closing and Way ahead for TAGES</strong></td>
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Annex 2: New proposed economic statistics areas of work

Transport Statistics and the Digital Economy

1. COLLECTION AND DISSEMINATION OF TRANSPORT STATISTICS

a. THE CASE FOR TRANSPORT STATISTICS:

Noting the importance of the transport sector and how it impacts peoples and individuals’ lives, economies, societies and the environment, the United Nations Independent High-Level Advisory Group on Sustainable Transport (HLAGST)-appointed by the Secretary-General appointed in 2014 to provide a focused set of recommendations on how the transport sector can advance sustainable development with poverty eradication at its core, promote economic growth, and bolster the fight against climate change- defined sustainable transport as the “provision of services and infrastructure for the mobility of people and goods— advancing economic and social development to benefit today’s and future generations—in a manner that is safe, affordable, accessible, efficient, and resilient, while minimizing carbon and other emissions and environmental impacts.” It also noted that transport is a main driver of development and sustainability, making a paradigm shift moving the focus on transport away from providing mobility based on individual motorized transport and improved traffic speed, to the idea of access through transport, thus putting people first.

The HLAGST outcome document called for making transport planning, policy and investment decisions to be based on the three sustainable development dimensions: social development, environmental impacts and economic growth with a full life cycle analysis and to integrate all sustainable transport planning efforts with an appropriately-balanced development of transport modes. It also called for the creation of supportive institutional, legal and regulatory government frameworks to promote effective sustainable transport and to establish the necessary monitoring and evaluation frameworks for sustainable transport. The need to build capacity for gathering and analyzing sound and reliable data and statistics; and to build technical capacity of transport planners and implementers, especially in developing countries, was also emphasized.

These results were highly echoed in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the 2030 Agenda), emphasizing the role of sustainable transport (ST) in realizing significant progress in achieving the 2030 Agenda’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). ST in SDGs is not addressed as a standalone goal. It is reflected however among the targets of 8 goals out of the 17. Transport related indicators are found to relate to eight SDGs because of their direct and indirect linkages to transport systems. The themes relate mainly to accessibility; affordability; environment and climate change; production and employment, connectivity (including rural-urban), safety, tourism, sustainability and energy.

Adequate ST information systems and data to inform the planners and policy makers in a timely manner will equip them with the necessary means to better plan in a more holistic way, forge policies and implement in a systemic, evidence based and efficient manner. Comprehensive data availability, comparability and timeliness continues to be one of the main challenges facing many countries and especially developing ones including ESCWA member states (MSs). Advent of new technologies and advances can better equip member countries in the collection and dissemination of such data and indicators.

b. PROPOSED FUTURE SCOPE OF WORK ON TRANSPORT STATISTICS:

ESCWA secretariat has started lately to give transport statistics more attention noting its importance as a sector and its cross cutting nature and importance to other sectors and indicators, and especially those indicators relating to the SDGs. Focus of work is four pronged: Data Compilation; Glossary of Terms and Metadata;

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4 Ibid.

For the 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs and related targets refer to the following: www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment
Partnerships and Technical Cooperation

In its review and updating the data for 18-member countries from the year 2010 as a base year, comprising inland transport, the following preliminary insights and shortcomings were noted relating to sources of data, definitions, harmonization and comparability of data, comprehensiveness, reliability, timeliness and completeness of data sets. This gives rise to much room for collaborative work among ESCWA member countries together with ESCWA secretariat, UNSD, and other regional and international organizations, to produce more reliable, timely, standardized and comparable data.

In line with the above, it is proposed that ESCWA secretariat, in close collaboration with member states’ NSOs, UNSD and other regional and international bodies, will promote and foster the following:

1. Harmonization of transport inland statistics across the ESCWA and Arab region and the International community;
2. Ensuring the collection, availability, comprehensiveness and reliability of statistics for inland and sustainable transport in MS and (in line with the SDG indicators);
3. Improvement of regional and international comparability of transport statistics through the development of appropriate methodologies and terminologies for the harmonization of statistics on inland transport in the ESCWA
4. Dissemination of regional inland transport statistics through publications and online;
5. Provision of technical assistance and capacity building for Member states on methodologies for the collection and compilation of statistics on road, rail, inland waterway, pipeline and combined transport as well as on road traffic accidents, in cooperation and coordination with other regional and international organizations with the objective of realizing comprehensive, reliable, comparable and timely statistics for sustainable transport statistics.
6. Promotion of best practices, success stories and lessons learned across the ESCWA region.
7. Strengthening collaboration with regional and international related organizations to streamline, harmonize and ensure the comparability of collected and compiled data at the regional and international levels.

c. THE WAY FORWARD:

Members of the committee are invited to take note of ESCWA’s current work on Transport statistics and data; provide ESCWA’s secretariat with the necessary mandates to work on transport statistics while ensuring the collaboration of the member countries’ NSOs in the collection and dissemination of transport data. advise on their priorities and actively collaborate with the secretariat to achieve the targeted objectives.

2. MEASURING THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

a. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PROGRESS MADE TO MEASURE THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

Rapid and massive technological advancements have resulted in new information technologies which had, and continue to have, great impact on economic activity worldwide. It has led to the emergence of new goods and services, new processes, rapid transactions and new modalities for the exchange of goods and services within the economy and globally. It impacted the way things are produced or provided, the nature of the goods and services themselves as well as the emergence of new products, processes and market channels. These developments have raised many methodological questions among which the questions of: capturing such activities in the current macroeconomic frameworks; adequacy of compilation methods and the price/volume split of nominal developments and; the measurement of the digital economy.

The Advisory Expert Group on National Accounts (AEG) addressed these issues in its 11th Meeting held during 5-7 December 2017, at UN headquarters in New York. AEG requested that its conclusions be

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5 The aim of the AEG is to assist the ISWGNA in carrying out its work programme, to resolve issues on the research agenda of the SNA and to review documents and tools for the SNA implementation programme. SNA/M1.17/RM.1
communicated directly to the Chairs of the various taskforces, committees, working and expert groups related to macroeconomic accounts and economic statistics by the Chair of the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on National Accounts (ISWGNA). These conclusions reconfirmed that there is no desire at present for an update of the SNA, but recognized the need to advance the research on issues that may go beyond the 2008 SNA in addition to guidance on practical implementation issues. Among the priority areas on the SNA research agenda identified requesting further research was digitalization.

The AEG welcomed the initiative undertaken by the OECD Advisory Group to develop a satellite framework to measure the digital economy. and recommended that the OECD Advisory Group, in conjunction with Eurostat, elaborate on concrete examples on how digital production activities fit in the conceptual framework of the SNA alongside the broader analytical satellite account framework. It also emphasized the need to involve the developing countries in the formulation of the satellite account framework for the digital economy while noting that further work needs to be done to measure the impact of digitalization on the economy. It also noted that the OECD proposed framework is consistent with the framework put forward on digital trade by the IMF Committee on Balance of Payments Statistics (BOPCOM). Close collaboration between AG and the Task Force on International Trade Statistics (TFITS) is envisaged. The AG will produce a final report recommending a typology for the digital economy and agreed satellite account framework by the end of 2018.

b. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND THE WAY FORWARD

The intention of this memorandum is to brief the participants on the recent developments that are taking place in the realm of measuring the digital economy and the modalities proposed to incorporate its transactions in the national accounts. The following needs to be highlighted:

- A conceptual framework has already been developed.
- A satellite account based on the conceptual framework is being developed with the intention to respond to two important concerns relating to the representation of and/or the presence of the digital economy within the core accounts, and to ensure that important transactions are properly accounted for in the National Accounts.
- The level of information prescribed may currently be beyond the capabilities of many national statistical information systems, and might require a more thorough investigation and reflection on feasibility, confidentiality and meeting policy needs.
- While noting that it may go beyond the 2008 SNA, the AEG recognized the need to advance research on digitalization in addition to guidance on practical implementation issues, and the need to measure the impact of digitalization on the economy.
- The OECD Advisory Group, in conjunction with Eurostat, are to further elaborate on concrete examples on how digital production activities fit in the conceptual framework of the SNA alongside the broader analytical satellite account framework.
- Developing countries are invited to be involved in the formulation of the satellite account framework for the digital economy;
- The OECD Advisory Group will be producing its final report recommending a typology for the digital economy as well as an agreed satellite account framework by the end of 2018.

Noting all the above, members of the committee are invited to take note of the latest developments made in measuring the digital economy and the need to account for its transactions in the national accounts; to keep abreast of further developments in this realm; assess whether the level of information prescribed by the proposed satellite framework responds to their needs and capabilities and to consider collaborating with regional and international organizations in the formulation of the satellite account framework for the digital economy.

7 The mandate of the ISWGNA is found on https://unstats.un.org/unsd/nationalaccount/docs/mandate.pdf
8 SNA/M1.17/RM.1
9 In 2016, the OECD’s Committee for Statistics and Statistical Policy (CSSP) created an Advisory Group (AG) on Measuring GDP in a Digitalised Economy, consisting of national experts, and representatives from international organisations, the Eurostat, IMF, and UN. SNA/M1.17/4.1
10 SNA/M1.17/4.1
Annex 3

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Annex 4

Evaluation of the Meeting

Meeting Details

Objectives

The meeting aimed at following up on the work carried out in the priority areas, identified by the members of the Statistical Committee, notably in economic statistics and national accounts in the Arab region.

Results expected

The Advisory Group aimed to develop a strategy on economic statistics and the implementation of the System of National Accounts 2008 and the supportive economic statistics, statistical business registers, economic surveys, and short-term economic indicators as well as on issues related to the production and dissemination of a set of special economic indicators for the follow-up and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Estimated Nr. Participants 20 Actual Nr. Participants 21

Observations – Suggestions

1. Overall, participants rated the quality of this advisory group as excellent or very good.
2. Most participants (7 out of 10) found the presentations and time for discussion good. The pdf report provides more details;
3. SD is advised to follow up with participants on the strategy development by outlaying concrete steps/activities for its development.
4. SD to utilize the ESCWA revised evaluation forms for future meetings to ensure consistency and to reconsider the use of anonymous evaluation forms.

Q1 Content and conduct of the meeting. Please evaluate the following

Q2 Organization of the meeting. Please evaluate the following