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

**Implementation of statistics-related activities under the programme of work
for 2015 and 2016**

Summary

The present report summarizes the main activities and accomplishments of the Statistics Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) since the eleventh session of the Statistical Committee. It reviews the technical publications, reports and materials, capacity-building activities, and technical advisory services provided to member States on the management of statistical systems, economic statistics and national accounts, demographic and social statistics, and gender statistics.

Members of the Committee are invited to take note of and comment on the progress achieved since the eleventh session of the Statistical Committee.

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Introduction

1. The present report summarizes the main activities and accomplishments of the Statistics Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) since the eleventh session of the Statistical Committee. It covers progress in the implementation of activities related to the management of statistical systems, economic statistics and national accounts, demographic and social statistics, and gender statistics.

I. MANAGEMENT OF STATISTICAL SYSTEMS

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND NATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF STATISTICS

2. Over the biennium 2016-2017, ESCWA is reorienting its activities to meet the statistical requirements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Goals at the institutional level and in terms of data compilation. The Statistics Division has cooperated with other ESCWA divisions on thematic Sustainable development Goals (SDGs), such as water-and energy-related goals. ESCWA has continued to cooperate with the League of Arab States, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Population Funds (UNFPA) and UN Habitat on the implementation of the SDGs and on the sustainable development indicators of priority to the Arab region.

3. ESCWA has obtained funds from the Development Account Programme on Statistics and Data to strengthen the statistical capacity of developing countries to measure, monitor and report on the SDGs in an accurate, reliable and timely manner for evidence-based policymaking. The Statistics Division published a report entitled “Measuring sustainable development in the Arab region a review of country experiences and recommendations for monitoring and evaluation in the post-2015 era” that it presented at the second session of the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development (Manama, 5 to 7 May 2015).

4. Regarding national strategies for the development of statistics (NSDS), the 19 Arab countries that do not have an active strategy can design new strategies in view of the 2030 Agenda. This will allow Arab countries to benefit from the newly updated NSDS guidelines, completed under the leadership of the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21). Several international and national statistical offices participated in this update, including ESCWA. The new guidelines provide specific guidance on the needs for a data revolution and the 2030 Agenda, and on the specific situation of conflict-affected countries.

5. ESCWA is assisting countries to assess national statistical systems and NSDS. Comprehensive assessments of national statistical systems preceded the NSDS design phase. Two assessments for Egypt and Jordan were undertaken by PARIS21 and ESCWA, in partnership with the Economic Commission for Africa and the African Development Bank.¹

II. ECONOMIC STATISTICS AND NATIONAL ACCOUNTS

6. ESCWA operational and normative work focused on priority areas in the field of economic statistics. ESCWA convened a Technical Advisory Group on Economic Statistics (TAGES) for the Arab region in Cairo on 9 and 10 November 2016,² following a recommendation by the ESCWA Statistical Committee at its eleventh session. TAGES provided guidance for focusing on priorities, building partnerships (United Nations Statistics Division, International Monetary Fund-Middle East Regional Technical Assistance Center, League of Arab States, United Nations Development Programme), sharing statistical knowledge, and setting out future action in the field of economic statistics, in the light of the 2030 Agenda.

¹ See www.unescwa.org/news/assessing-national-statistical-system-egypt; www.unescwa.org/news/escwa-assistance-jordanian-national-statistical-strategy.

² See www.unescwa.org/events/tages-statistics-arab-region.

7. ESCWA continued working on the implementation of the System of National Accounts 2008 (SNA 2008), the International Comparison Program; price statistics; trade and industry statistics; energy and environment statistics; accounts, business registers; and short-term economic indicators. This constituted a major cornerstone for the comparability of economic data and conformity to international standards, classifications and recommendations to monitor developments and trends in economic growth at the national, regional and international levels, and paving the way for an integrated economic statistics platform that is at the heart of the United Nations development agenda.

A. SUPPLY AND USE TABLES AND FINANCIAL SERVICES

8. Along with its efforts to develop and implement a regional strategic action plan for the implementation of SNA 2008, ESCWA focused on building the capacity of national accountants in compiling supply and use tables and methodologies to measure the output of the financial sector in the compilation of national accounts. ESCWA developed a study on regional guidelines for Arab countries on supply and use, organized training workshops and technical assistance missions, and facilitated cooperation between the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) and selected Arab statistical offices to implement a supply and use software application.

9. In addition to several technical assistance missions, ESCWA organized an expert group meeting on financial services and business registers (Istanbul, 25-27 November 2015) to build national statistical capacity in the area of economic statistics, in general, and national accounts, in particular.

10. Islamic banking in national accounts is subject to different interpretations in national accounts compilation. According to SNS 2008, further work on implementation issues related to the financial corporations sector is needed to find appropriate solutions to the problems facing countries regarding methods and sources for compiling accounts for this sector. ESCWA presented a paper entitled “Islamic banking in SNA 2008: Proposals by various experts” at the tenth meeting of the Advisory Expert Group on National Accounts (Paris, 13-15 April 2016).

B. BUSINESS REGISTERS

11. Recognizing the need to modernize and improve statistical production efficiency and quality and to follow up on the recommendation of its Statistical Committee at its eleventh session, ESCWA organized a regional workshop on statistical business registers for Arab countries, in collaboration with the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics, the United Nations Statistics Division and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) (Amman, 26-29 September 2016).³ The workshop assisted member States in the development of their statistical systems by establishing statistical business registers, which are increasingly becoming pillar infrastructure that provide the statistical unit frames on which different economic statistics are built.

C. SHORT-TERM STATISTICS

12. ESCWA focused its efforts on regional integration by undertaking regional projects on short-term economic indicators and on price statistics, in line with globally implemented initiatives. ESCWA is currently implementing a project on short-term statistics (STS) and has completed technical assistance missions to pilot countries to conduct needs assessments, and identify a list of core priority indicators and individual training and technical assistance needs. Expertise was provided to countries according to identified needs, mainly on export and import indices, production and construction indices and tendency surveys.

13. A regional guideline on STS was presented and discussed at an expert group meeting, held in Amman in February 2016. Participants shared their experiences on compiling STS and on data gaps. A STS workshop

³ See www.unescwa.org/events/statistical-business-registers-arab-countries.

(Tunis, 14-17 November 2016)⁴ for beneficiary countries was held to provide training on quarterly national accounts, production and construction indices. Beneficiaries also participated in a workshop on rapid estimates statistics, and the thirty-third CIRET Conference (Copenhagen, 13-16 September 2016).

D. PRICE STATISTICS

14. Regional comparability of price statistics will be further enhanced through the successful implementation of a global statistical initiative in the Arab region, known as the International Comparison Program (ICP), which involves 199 countries including 12 from the Arab region.⁵ The project produces purchasing power parity (PPP) estimates and price indices that are more comparable and reliable and that reflect the reality of economic indicators, such as growth and welfare. Such indices not only contribute to regional integration, but also have a great impact on measuring real growth and promoting equitable growth and sustainable development.

15. Given the absence of a global ICP round over the period 2012-2016, ESCWA implemented a complete regional round in 2016 for the production of PPPs at the GDP level and its main aggregates. This interim PPP production round was launched in two back-to-back workshops with two separate groups of member States (Istanbul, January 2016). ESCWA will also take part in the global ICP round in 2017, producing PPPs for 2017, 2018 and 2019.

16. ESCWA is working towards achieving integration between price statistics activities, mainly consumer price indices (CPIs) and PPPs. An innovative project with a comprehensive methodology was developed by ESCWA for the production of a harmonized consumer price index (HCPI), and was introduced to a small group of member States at a workshop on a subregional harmonized consumer price index for Western Asia (Istanbul, 25 January 2016).

17. ESCWA submitted a paper entitled “Synergies between CPIs and PPPs and integration of survey activities”, highlighting Western Asia’s achievements under the framework of integration between CPIs and PPPs, to the Group of Experts on Consumer Price Indices at a meeting organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the International Labour Organisation (Geneva, 2-4 May 2016). It also presented a paper at the fifteenth International Association of Official Statistics (IAOS) Conference (Abu Dhabi, 6-8 December 2016) entitled “Developing a strategy for the continuous production of purchasing power parities and improvement of price statistics in the Arab region”.

E. ECONOMIC CLASSIFICATIONS AND TRADE AND INDUSTRY STATISTICS

18. In 2014, ESCWA organized a regional workshop on implementing the international standard industrial classification for all economic activities (ISIC rev.4) for Arab countries, in collaboration with the Arab Institute for Training and Statistical Research (AITRS), UNIDO and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD).

19. Regarding international trade statistics, ESCWA organized a workshop (Abu Dhabi, 25-29 January 2015) with UNSD, the World Trade Organization and the Arab Monetary Fund to build capacity in regional trade in services, so as to help with the implementation of the recommendations of the Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services (MSITS) 2010. A follow-up workshop is planned with the same partners in December 2017.

⁴ See www.unescwa.org/events/statistical-business-registers-arab-countries.

⁵ Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

F. ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT STATISTICS AND RELATED SDGS

20. ESCWA, in collaboration with the technical secretariat of the Arab Ministerial Water Council and the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association, organized an Expert Group Meeting on the Water-related Sustainable Development Goals (Beirut, 12-13 April 2016). The main objectives of the meeting were to increase understanding of the water-related goals and targets adopted in the 2030 Agenda, and review the outcomes of the United Nations Statistical Commission's deliberations on the global indicators framework as it relates to the water-related SDGs.

21. The ESCWA Statistics Division and the Energy Section organized an expert group meeting on the theme "Tracking progress towards the implementation of energy related SDGs in the Arab region" (Beirut, 24-25 January 2017) as a follow-up to the Global Tracking Framework for Sustainable Energy, in coordination with the World Bank, the International Energy Agency (IEA), UNSD and other partner agencies. The objective from the statistical perspective was to understand national statistical capabilities and perspectives on energy data collection challenges for SDG7, and to harmonize methodologies for measuring SDGs and indicators related to energy resources. A study on the role of official statistics in climate change indicators was also presented.

22. A series of national, regional and subregional trainings were undertaken, in collaboration with IEA and UNSD. The training material developed by IEA and the international guidelines developed by UNSD were translated into Arabic. E-learning courses are now online on a joint portal developed by ESCWA and the Regional Center for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency, entitled TaqaWay Sustainable Energy Network.

23. The Compendium of Environment Statistics in the Arab Region 2014-2015 was published in 2015. Chapter IV on climate change included more detailed data on carbon dioxide emissions by sector and index calculations for emissions.

III. DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL STATISTICS

24. The ESCWA Demographic and Social Statistics Section reactivated the Working Group on Population and Housing Censuses, which has held two meetings and a workshop since the eleventh session of the Statistical Committee. The activities focused on the use of technology in censuses, and administrative data sources and preparations for the 2020 round of censuses. ESCWA has conducted five advisory missions at the request of members States.

25. The Demographic and Social Statistics Section has successfully expanded its activities on civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS). In addition to capacity development workshops, ESCWA has published technical material on the status of CRVS in Arab countries, with recommendations on the future development of capacities in this area. The preparation of the project on CRVS for Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon was a success – a pilot project was approved for funding in February 2017.

26. ESCWA has closely cooperated with other regional offices under the leadership of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on priority indicators for the Arab region, emanating from the International Conference on Population and Development. This activity significantly contributes to efforts on the relevant goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda.

27. In cooperation with the Sustainable Development Division, the Statistics Division has launched activities on disability statistics. The initial focus on collecting data for ESCWA studies was expanded to include capacity development activities, in cooperation with the Washington Group on Disability Statistics.

28. The Technical Advisory Group on Demographic and Social Statistics was launched in 2016. It has provided recommendations for future work and discussed a list of indicators for goals and targets under the 2030 Agenda that are of importance to the Arab region.

IV. GENDER STATISTICS

29. The Statistical Policies and Coordination Unit of the Statistics Division has prepared the following three technical publications on gender statistics:

(a) *Gender in Figures Bulletin 2013-2014*: This publication raises issues of gender equality, and invites stakeholders to conduct detailed analysis and formulate policies for more accountable and transparent commitments to human rights. It covers the following areas of concern in the region: human rights, population demographics, poverty and inequality, education and learning, power, influence and decision-making, violence against women, health, refugees, paid and unpaid research and development, and science and technology;

(b) *The Arab Gender Statistics Framework and Handbook*: This is a tool for data producers, which builds on synergies from ongoing work in the area of gender statistics by forging common methodological knowledge among stakeholders to facilitate the production of comparable statistics for evidence-based policymaking and planning;

(c) *The Country Profile-Gender Lens Pocket Book*: This is a new publication that provides readers with a statistical portrait of Western Asia through sex-disaggregated data and gender indicators on population, education, inequality, health, power and work. The data originate from national sources extracted from various publications issued by ESCWA and from United Nations databases.

30. The Unit concentrated its activities during the reporting period on producing technical materials, such as dashboards, portals and newsletters, which included an Arab Development Monitor on Societal Progress Dashboard. The Dashboard provides a regional picture of the status of key development indicators and profiles for 22 Arab countries with a focus on national development indicators, gender and youth. The Unit also developed an e-catalogue of gender statistics in response to the recommendation of the second Inter-Agency and Expert Group Meeting on Gender Statistics in the Arab Countries (2008). It is a compilation of gender statistics-related activities and outputs implemented by Arab countries. The catalogue aims to promote good practices in compiling and disseminating gender statistics. The Unit has also continued to publish the *Ensaf* Newsletter on Gender Statistics, in collaboration with national statistical offices, containing the latest national and regional activities and products related to the promotion of equity through the production of gender statistics.

31. The Statistical Policies and Coordination Unit organized the following three capacity building workshops and training meetings:

(a) The Regional Workshop on Development of National Gender Statistics Programmes in Arab Countries (Istanbul, 19-21 May 2015) which aimed to exchange experiences between member States and enhance their capacity to start or strengthen an existing gender statistics programme and to draft national action plans to improve the production of gender-sensitive indicators and sex-disaggregated data;

(b) The fourth Inter-Agency and Expert Group Meeting on Gender Statistics in the Arab Countries (Dead Sea, Jordan, 9-10 May 2016) which discussed four themes: improving coordination and cooperation in producing gender statistics for policymaking; sharing good practices on new collection tools for monitoring and reporting; enhancing measurement methods to analyse gender statistics for effective programme and policy making; and sharing good practices on capacity-building activities and dissemination methods;

(c) The Training of Trainers Workshop on Gender Statistics Curricula (Dead Sea, Jordan, 11-13 May 2016) which aimed to improve the capacity of national statistical offices in Arab countries. Participants also contributed to the finalization of the relevant e-learning software. Trainers are expected to implement the course at the country level.

32. The Unit also provided technical advisory services to member States upon request. Two missions travelled to Egypt to train 144 field workers on the violence against women survey (23-26 February 2015; and 30 March – 2 April 2015).
