

**UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA  
STATISTICS DIVISION**

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**STRATEGIC VISION FOR THE WORK OF ESCWA  
IN THE FIELD OF STATISTICS**

**VERSION 2**

**BEIRUT, JANUARY 2011**

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### A. OBJECTIVES

1. National Statistical Offices of the ESCWA member countries are primary clients of ESCWA's work in the field of statistics, together with other national producers of official statistics. The second important group of clients are other divisions of ESCWA that need statistical support in their activities. Finally, statistical outputs produced by ESCWA may be also useful to other users looking for statistical information about the region.
2. Taking into account the needs of its clients, there can be identified three main objectives of ESCWA's statistical work:
  - (a) The first objective is capacity building in the field of statistics, covering the following six issues:
    - (i) Skills – this involves training and learning activities aimed at upgrading professional skills of statisticians;
    - (ii) Knowledge – this involves acquisition and exchange of knowledge and experience on particular topics of interest, including exchange and sharing of experience and expertise and advisory services;
    - (iii) Competencies – this is related to human resources management in statistical institutions in the region, including ESCWA Statistics Division, as well as national statistical offices;
    - (iv) Legal framework – this is related to a systematic promotion of Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics aimed at improving statistical legislation in ESCWA countries;
    - (v) Institutional setup – this involves building national statistical systems, as well as the regional statistical system;
    - (vi) Organizational platform – this is related to strengthening the central role of national statistical offices within national statistical systems and the ownership of the ESCWA Statistical Committee by member countries.
  - (b) The second objective is the coordination of data collection and dissemination in the ESCWA region, involving member countries through the ESCWA Statistical Committee in a steering body capacity. The data related work aims at improving quality and consistency of data on ESCWA member countries dissemination by various national and international organizations, addressing two issues:
    - (i) Dissemination and harmonization of statistical data – this includes resolution of pertaining discrepancies between national and international data about the region, decreasing reporting burden on member countries, use of joint questionnaires with other international organizations, and making access to statistical information easier;
    - (ii) Data collection – this is the activity aimed at satisfying the data needs of ESCWA itself with respect to studies, policy advice and publications.
  - (c) The third objective is coordination of statistical activities within ESCWA, as well as with regional and international partners. This aims at avoiding duplications and inconsistencies, and in collectively covering some of the existing gaps without a need to increase resources.
    - (i) Coordination of statistical activities of various ESCWA divisions under the responsibility of the Statistics Division;
    - (ii) Coordination with regional (e.g. LAS, AITRS, IsDB, SESRIC, etc.) and international (e.g. DESA (UNSD), World Bank, etc.) partners

3. The following chart summarizes the objectives defined above.

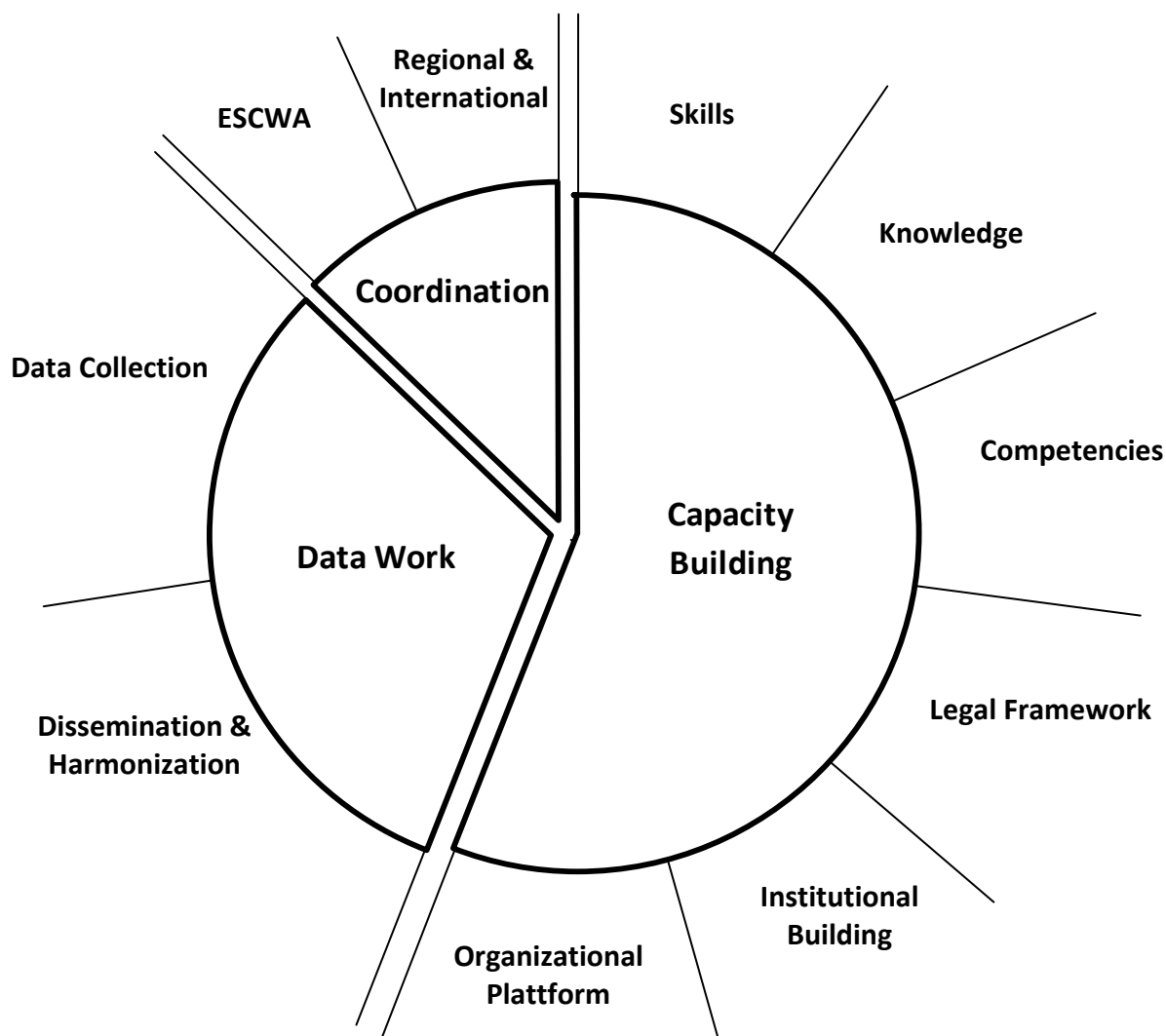


Chart 1. Objectives of ESCWA's work in the field of statistics

4. The geographical coverage of ESCWA's work consists of 14 member countries. In order to take benefits of possible synergies with countries outside the region, in particular considering cultural and language issues, some of the activities would benefit from inclusion of Arab countries. To this end the Statistics Division should seek partnership with other organizations whenever feasible, namely League of Arab States, UN Economic Commission for Africa and others.

## B. PRIORITIES AND AREAS OF FOCUS

5. Work programme of ESCWA in the field of statistics should focus on most important regional priorities. In this respect there should be a distinction between regional and national priorities, and it should be recognized that some of the issues remain in responsibility of national statistical offices. With respect to national priorities countries may still seek assistance from the ESCWA Statistics Division on bilateral basis.

6. Regional priorities in statistics in the ESCWA region reflect the needs of information needed for policy making in addressing the most important issues of socio-economic and political development. These are summarized as follows:

- (a) Implementing key methods and techniques of official statistics like the System of National Accounts;
- (b) Harmonizing statistical databases;
- (c) Capacity building in various subject-matter areas (e.g. poverty measurement and livelihood levels, population estimates and statistics on informal sector, trade in goods and in services, environment, water, energy, agriculture, progress towards MDGs, labour and employment, etc.);
- (d) Developing statistics related to conflicts and production of statistics in conflict areas;
- (e) Researching new methods for data collection, in particular administrative registers (including quality criteria for administrative registers used for statistical purposes);
- (f) Advanced approaches to disseminations and communication of statistics;
- (g) Defining national quality frameworks for official statistics;
- (h) Expanding utilization of geographic information systems for statistics;
- (i) Unifying the classifications used at national statistical offices in the region.

7. In support of the above, the ESCWA Statistics Division is expected to undertake the following projects in the course of the coming five years (2011-2016):

- (i) Implementation of the System of National Accounts;
- (ii) International Comparison Programme in Western Asia, 2011 round;
- (iii) Measuring informal sector (in cooperation with DESA and other regional commissions)
- (iv) Support to population and vital statistics including support to censuses;
- (v) Support to projects on measuring progress of societies and measuring human development;
- (vi) Gender statistics and statistics on special population groups (e.g. nomadic
- (vii) Streamlining data collection within ESCWA and between ESCWA and other international organizations, including implementation of a centralized database on ESCWA member countries.
- (viii) Regional Project for Strengthening Statistical Capacity for the ESCWA Countries in Energy Statistics and Energy Balance
- (ix) Other projects identified by the ESCWA Statistical Committee.

8. ESCWA member countries agreed on a specific strategy for implementation of the System of National Accounts that is available in document E/ESCWA/SD/2010/IG.1/4(Part II) "Strategy of Implementation of the System of National Accounts". For more information on individual subject-matter areas see document E/CN.3/2011/20 "Report of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia on regional statistical development in Western Asia" prepared for the 42<sup>nd</sup> session of the United Nations Statistical Commission.

9. Participants at the 9<sup>th</sup> session of the Statistical Committee stressed that it is important to agree on a common classification of statistical subject-matter areas. A possible classification is reproduced in the Annex to this document, following the classification adopted by the Statistical Data and Metadata Initiative (SDMX). Members of the Statistical Committee are invited to consider the classification and, if necessary, make recommendation on how to adjust it to the needs of ESCWA region.

### C. COORDINATION AND STEERING MODES OF THE ESCWA STATISTICAL COMMITTEE

10. Supported by the ESCWA Statistics Division, the objectives of the ESCWA Statistical Committee include the following:

- (a) To act as a centre of expertise and a forum for ESCWA member countries to exchange views on statistical issues;
- (b) To promote the exchange of expertise amongst member countries;
- (c) To identify priorities and gaps in statistical capacity-building; organizing and, where appropriate, coordinating capacity-building activities in cooperation with other regional and global organizations, including (but not limited to) the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics (AITRS); the Euro-Mediterranean Statistical Cooperation programme (MEDSTAT); the League of Arab States; the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC); the United Nations Statistics Division; and the World Bank;
- (d) To work in close cooperation with professional staff in national statistical offices of ESCWA member countries in areas including data quality assurance and the implementation of international classifications and recommendations;
- (e) To act as the steering body for ESCWA subprogramme 5: Statistics for evidence-based policymaking.

11. In order to better assume this role, it is proposed to change the frequency and timing of sessions of the Statistical Committee. The ESCWA Statistics Division is requested to seek approval of the ESCWA session in 2012.

- (a) The sessions of the Statistical Committee should be annual;
- (b) The timing of the Statistical Committee's session should be at the beginning of the calendar year (January-February), so that it enables member of the Statistical Committee also to discuss a regional position on issues on the agenda of the UN Statistical Commission;
- (c) Subject to approval of the ESCWA session in 2012, the meetings of the Working Group of the Statistical Committee will not be needed, should be discontinued and their functions absorbed by the Statistical Committee sessions.

12. It is suggested to re-think the approach to creating work programmes of ESCWA so that they fit the needs of national statistical offices, and take benefits of activities of other regional and global statistical organizations.

- (a) The strategic vision will serve as a basis for short-term planning for the statistical activities of ESCWA (biennial strategies and work programmes) and will therefore be periodically reassessed. Biennial work programmes will be submitted to the UNGA for final approval.
- (b) Each year the Statistics Division will prepare an annual work programme, based on the biennial work plans and other selected inputs, which will reflect the changing priorities of member countries and take into account the statistics-related plans of AITRS, SESRIC, the League of Arab States, the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), the World Bank, and other regional and global organizations. It will be subject to consultation with the Committee and, once agreed, will constitute the work programme for the forthcoming year;
- (c) The Bureau of the Statistical Committee (which steers the statistical work of ESCWA between sessions of the Committee, either through direct meetings or written consultation) will oversee and review the work done, and take measures to adjust work priorities between sessions.

#### D. OPERATING MODE OF THE ESCWA STATISTICAL COMMITTEE AND THE ROLE OF PERMANENT GROUPS OF EXPERTS

13. The following principles reflect the operating mode of the Statistical Committee as it is currently formulated, with the addition of a number of recommendations offered with a view to making the statistical work programme of ESCWA more systematic and more closely focused on broad statistical areas, rather than on individual outputs:

- (a) The Statistical Committee of ESCWA meets periodically (see also paragraph 11 above);
- (b) The Bureau of the Statistical Committee may initiate written consultation with member countries on issues that it deems to be of importance;
- (c) The Working Group of the Statistical Committee meets once a year in February, prior to the session of the UNSC, with a major objective to coordinate the regional position on issues to be discussed at the UNSC;
- (d) Permanent teams of experts will ensure the sustainability of statistical capacity-building. Their role will be to follow up development in statistical areas, both within ESCWA and globally; prepare recommendations; and advise the Statistical Committee, its Bureau and Working Group.

14. There should be a small number of permanent groups of experts. It is proposed that there should be three to five, one following each of the main statistical areas dealt with at ESCWA. Members of each group should be delegated by national statistical offices and the Statistics Division at ESCWA should assign a staff member to the group. The groups will follow matters in their respective areas, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and experience, ensuring that links with such global groups as the UNSD City Groups are maintained, and making expert recommendations to the Statistical Committee and its Working Group. Such recommendations may include the adoption of common positions with regard to the UNSC, suggestions for workshop programmes and the ongoing maintenance of website content on best practice.

15. Drawing on experience from other regions, it may be wise to restrict the number of groups to the main strategic areas in order to keep them optimally manageable. Suggested start-up list of groups is as follows:

- (a) National accounts (as a major statistical issue, the implementation of SNA arguably warrants a specific group, the terms of reference for this group are defined in E/ESCWA/SD/2010/IG.1/4(Part II) “Strategy of Implementation of the System of National Accounts”);
- (b) Economic statistics, other than national accounts;
- (c) Social statistics, including the work of the Task Force on Population and Housing Censuses;
- (d) Poverty and livelihood
- (e) Disability
- (f) Employment sector;
- (g) Environment, water and energy statistics;
- (h) Gender statistics, including the work of the Task Force on Gender Statistics.

16. Subject to approval, the following is the general operating mode:

- (a) The creation and dissolution of the groups should be subject to approval by the Statistical Committee and the Bureau.
- (b) Each group should have clear Terms of reference defining the following:
  - (i) Scope: the needs leading to the creation of the group of experts and statistical areas to be covered by the group;
  - (ii) Deliverables: expected outputs and timeline for delivering these outputs;
  - (iii) Leader (lead country or lead expert from a member country of ESCWA);
  - (iv) Membership;
  - (v) Support from the ESCWA Statistics Division (section and staff member facilitating the work of the group)
- (c) Each group should be periodically reviewed by the Statistical Committee and/or its Bureau approximately every two years, considering deliverables and further needs for such group. As a result of the review the mandate (terms of reference) may be narrowed or expanded or the group may be discontinued. The ESCWA Statistics Division should be responsible for providing information needed for the review.

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**ANNEX**  
**DRAFT CLASSIFICATION OF STATISTICAL DOMAINS**

Statistical subject-matter domains (can be used also for dissemination and exchange of statistical data)

- 1- Demographic and social statistics
  - 1.1 Population and migration
  - 1.2 Labour
  - 1.3 Education
  - 1.4 Health
  - 1.5 Income and consumption
  - 1.6 Social protection
  - 1.7 Human settlements and housing
  - 1.8 Justice and crime
  - 1.9 Culture
  - 1.10 Political and other community activities
  - 1.11 Time use
2. Economic Statistics
  - 2.1 Macroeconomic statistics
  - 2.2 Economic accounts
  - 2.3 Business statistics
  - 2.4 Sectoral statistics
  - 2.5 Government finance, fiscal and public sector statistics
  - 2.6 International trade and balance of payments
  - 2.7 Prices
  - 2.8 Labour cost
  - 2.9 Science and technology
3. Environment and multi-domain statistics
  - 3.1 Environment
  - 3.2 Regional and small area statistics
  - 3.3 Multi-domain statistics and indicators
  - 3.4 Yearbooks and similar compendia

Domains related to managerial and cross-cutting issues of official statistics:

4. Methodology of data collection, processing, dissemination and analysis
  - 4.1 Metadata
  - 4.2 Classifications
  - 4.3 Data sources
  - 4.4 Data editing and data linkage
  - 4.5 Dissemination, data warehousing
  - 4.6 Statistical confidentiality and disclosure protection
  - 4.7 Data analysis
5. Strategic and managerial issues of official statistics
  - 5.1 Institutional frameworks and principles, role of official statistics
  - 5.2 Statistical programmes, coordination within statistical systems
  - 5.3 Quality frameworks and measurement of performance of statistical systems and offices
  - 5.4 Management and development of human resources
  - 5.5 Technological resources (including standards for electronic data exchange and data sharing)
  - 5.6 Co-ordination of international statistical work
  - 5.7 Technical cooperation and capacity building programmes