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Activities implemented in the field of statistics

Technical cooperation activities

Summary

The present document sets out the technical cooperation activities undertaken by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in the field of statistics from January 2019 to December 2020, including advisory services, workshops and capacity-building activities.

The Statistical Committee is invited to take note of the present document and provide proposals on strengthening technical cooperation services in line with the needs and priorities of member States.

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Introduction

1. The Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC) is an essential tool for implementing the programme of work of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), allowing activities to be tailored as requested by member States to meet their needs. ESCWA ensures integrated planning in the technical support it provides to member States to improve efficiency, increase impact, and enhance transparency and accountability. ESCWA technical cooperation is a key tool for supporting efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2. The technical cooperation services provided by ESCWA fall into the following three categories: advisory services to support countries on issues related to formulating, developing and implementing public policies; workshops, training sessions, study tours and fellowships to build capacity; and pilot field projects in ESCWA areas of specialization that are then developed into larger projects with extrabudgetary financing from donors. Within the framework of technical cooperation, ESCWA follows a multidisciplinary approach that focuses on implementation results, meaning that services are provided in an integrated manner based on the diverse experiences of ESCWA. Technical cooperation activities are financed from the following three main sources: RPTC, the United Nations Development Account, and extrabudgetary resources. ESCWA aims to achieve integration between these three sources and its normative research work funded by the regular budget. ESCWA considers technical cooperation activities among its priorities, in addition to data collection, production and dissemination, ensuring coordination, and forging regional partnerships.

3. The technical support provided by ESCWA in the field of statistics aims to support national and regional statistical systems in producing and disseminating quality statistics to develop evidence-based policies and monitor progress towards inclusive and sustainable development. The majority of technical cooperation activities are carried out in coordination with the regional offices of specialized United Nations organizations and other regional and international organizations. The present document provides a summary of the technical cooperation activities undertaken by the ESCWA secretariat from January 2019 to December 2020, and addresses challenges and ways to improve technical cooperation programmes and services.

I. Advisory services

4. Table 1 sets out advisory services provided by the ESCWA secretariat from January 2019 to December 2020, listed by recipient and type of activity. They focused on achieving the recommendations of the Statistical Committee at its thirteenth session on building the capacity of member States to adopt the System of National Accounts (SNA) as a general and comprehensive framework. The adoption of SNA allows for the inclusion of various economic statistics in a single framework, such as supply and use tables, to achieve integration between different economic statistics, notably national accounts statistics, dependent accounts, trade and business statistics, statistics of various economic sectors, and estimates related to the informal economy.

5. The ESCWA secretariat also supported member States in developing the required statistical infrastructure, mainly international classifications, information and communications technology, and statistical business registers. The secretariat organized workshops and advisory missions to that end.

Table 1. Advisory services

Recipient country	No. of services	Activity
Jordan	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing technical assistance in developing the questionnaire of the Household Income and Expenditure Survey and its relationship to national accounts, 7 September 2020;

Recipient country	No. of services	Activity
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing advisory services during two visits to the Department of Statistics to assess the methods, data sources and procedures used in preparing quarterly GDP estimates and improving annual account estimates, 17-22 November 2019 and 19-21 December 2019; • Conducting two visits to assist the Department of Statistics in compiling GDP for the first and second quarter of 2020 during the lockdown when usual source data was not available, 24 May – 4 June 2020, and 23 August – 3 September 2020; • Evaluating supply and use tables to enable the Department of Statistics to prepare the required matrices needed to derive multipliers for use in evaluating the impact of economic policies, 19-30 April 2020; • Conducting two visits to enable the Department of Statistics to calculate final demand multipliers and explain how to use them in creating planning scenarios, 3-7 May 2020, and 17-21 May 2020.
Bahrain	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducting an advisory mission on calculating SDG 11 indicators, 28-31 October 2020; • Supporting the drafting of the 2019 Sustainable Development Goals Report, 24-26 February 2020; • Reviewing the provisions of the draft national statistics law (January-March 2020).
Oman	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing technical support to the National Centre for Statistics and Information in calculating the SDG indicator on consumption and production patterns, which is the local material consumption index, 26-30 October 2019; • Holding a consultative discussion on population estimates and projections, 15-17 April 2019.
Qatar	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing advisory services on assessing methods, data sources and procedures used in compliance with 2008 SNA based on the Data Quality Assessment Framework, 20-24 October 2019.
Kuwait	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submitting proposed projects to the Central Statistical Bureau and discussing issues related to the Social Expenditure Monitor at a technical workshop, 14-15 October 2019; • Conducting an advisory mission on population projections and sampling, 20-25 April 2019.
Saudi Arabia	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing two advisory services to evaluate the implementation of 2008 SNA, 5-11 October 2019 and 25-31 January 2020; • Providing advisory services on conducting a population and housing census, 19-24 January 2020; • Conducting an advisory mission on indicators of human development and sustainable development, 3-4 February 2020.
Group of Arab countries	30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verifying SDG data to improve the availability and quality of data and to develop national platforms for SDG monitoring under an ESCWA programme to improve the production and dissemination of SDG data to leave no one behind (2019-2020).

Recipient country	No. of services	Activity
Group of Arab countries	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following up with member States on the collection and verification of data submitted for the ESCWA transport questionnaire by relevant national oversight institutions (October 2019 – August 2020).
Total	51	

II. Workshops

6. Table 2 sets out workshops held as part of technical cooperation services to build capacity in the field of statistics from January 2019 to December 2020.

Table 2. Workshops

Topic and objectives	Venue	Date		
A workshop on strengthening the statistical capacity of censuses and the SDGs, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund	Amman	10-15 March 2019		
Workshop on open government and open data	Amman	24-25 March 2019		
Workshop on building national capacity to process data and use a special statistical tool to review and process price data for the International Comparison Programme (ICP)	Dubai, United Arab Emirates	19-23 May 2019		
Regional workshop on SDG indicators for the Arab region related to the International Conference on Population and Development	Amman	26-27 June 2019		
Regional workshop on measuring poverty in Arab countries	Tunis	23-25 July 2019		
Regional workshop on developing transport statistics and SDG indicators on transport in Arab countries	Beirut	16-18 September 2019		
Regional workshop on disability statistics in the Arab region: expanding coverage so that no one is left behind	Online	28 October – 1 November 2019		
Regional workshop on updating official statistics	Doha	4-5 November 2019		
Sixth meeting of Arab-stat to present the challenges and obstacles facing national statistical offices in Arab countries regarding classification systems, seasonal adjustments and financial service estimates	Abu Dhabi	5-8 November 2019		

Topic and objectives	Venue	Date		
Workshop on the use of civil registries in vital statistics	Amman	Several sessions in November 2019		
Workshop on introducing the concept of web scraping in collecting price data	Manama	10-18 January 2020		
Workshop on ISIC in the Tayseer programme, headed by the Minister of Commerce and Investment and the National Competitiveness Centre	Riyadh	28-30 January 2020		
Training session on building regional capacity in price statistics and integrating ICP with the Consumer Price Index	Amman	2-6 February 2020		
National workshop on the SDGs within the framework of urban monitoring and integration as part of local and national goals	Riyadh	5-7 February 2020		
Workshop on introducing the concept of web scraping in collecting price data	Kuwait City	11-13 November 2020		
National workshop on ensuring the quality of administrative records for the General Population and Housing Census	Dubai, United Arab Emirates	12 February 2020		
National workshop on data exchange between United Nations agencies and the Government of Bahrain: institutional arrangements, methodologies and best practices	Manama	16-17 February 2020		
National workshop on building capacity related to urban observatories and the City Prosperity Initiative	Manama	24-26 February 2020		
Regional workshop on evaluation preparations for census data	Muscat	15-17 April 2020		
National training workshop for Lebanon on the use of the ICP toolkit for data entry and validation	Online	19-23 May 2020		
Workshop for Qatar to build capacity in implementing price data scraping tools under ICP	Online	Several sessions in May 2020		
First regional workshop on the use of the Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX) in reporting on SDG indicators	Online	16-22 June 2020		
Regional workshop on the use of geospatial information in population and housing censuses in the Arab region	Online	20-22 July 2020		

Topic and objectives	Venue	Date		
Preparatory meeting for a regional workshop on the exchange of experiences on the collection and dissemination of road and railway transport statistics: statistics on the volume of road traffic (vehicle-kilometre)	Online	29 September 2020		
National training workshop for Lebanon on the use of the ICP toolkit for data entry and validation	Online	Several sessions in November 2020		
National workshop for the Sudan on using supply and use tables when there are data shortages and gaps	Online	30 November – 3 December 2020		
Preparations for workshops for Iraq on the principles and recommendations of the population and housing census	Online	2 December 2020		
Regional workshop on the exchange of experiences on the collection and dissemination of road and railway transport statistics: statistics on the volume of road traffic (vehicle-kilometre)	Online	8-10 December 2020		
National workshop for Morocco on population and housing census planning	Online	15-17 December 2020		
Second regional workshop on the use of SDMX in reporting on SDG indicators	Online	22 December 2020		
Total		30 workshops		

III. Challenges and the way forward

7. The Arab region continues to witness transformations and economic and social crises as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, thus requiring a special focus on the challenges that countries will face in providing statistics. This entails reviewing priorities in statistical fields and amending methodologies and methods for compiling these statistics, so as to ensure that they are based on innovative measures that take into account developments in electronic platforms and databases, which have been established in various countries owing to the current health crisis. This requires increasing statistical activities at all national, regional and international levels, intensifying advisory missions in the field of social, demographic and economic statistics.

8. It is vital to strengthen regional cooperation with regional statistical agencies, such as the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics, the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC-Stat), the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries, and the Arab Monetary Fund. The participation of such agencies in the regional coordination mechanisms, which include United Nations organizations working in the Arab region, should be enhanced, given their role in the field of statistics. Efforts by those regional and international bodies can therefore be guided in more effective ways. The ESCWA secretariat continues to invite those organizations to participate in the sessions of the Statistical Committee, which can provide a platform for dialogue on regional priorities in the field of statistics, and thus increase coordination of technical cooperation activities.

9. The secretariat aims to support national statistical offices in their work to monitor progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda and to prepare reports in that regard. It will also increase understanding of key developments in data collection, processing, updating and dissemination, especially using modern technologies.

10. The Statistical Committee is invited to provide proposals on operationalizing technical cooperation services, in line with member States' needs and priorities, especially given the circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic.
