High Level Seminar on the Future of Economic Statistics for the Arab region
21-22 January 2020
Riyadh Saudi Arabia

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) co-organized with the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) a High Level Seminar on the Future of Economic Statistics for the Arab region hosted by the General Authority of Statistics during the period of 21 to 22 January 2020 in Riyadh Saudi Arabia. The seminar was attended by 40 participants, 26 representatives of 12-member States and 14 representatives from UN and other international and regional organizations and independent experts. The seminar provided a consultative platform whereby senior economic statisticians in the Arab Statistical offices discussed in groups and in plenary sessions the regional priorities, the gaps and challenges for the conceptual update of the system of economic statistics in light of the emerging global policies and the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. 1) the informal economy, 2) economic well-being and inequality (with a focus on the regional/sub national accounts, human capital, disaggregation and distributional analysis of macroeconomic indicators) 3) Socio-demographic change (with a focus on migration and displacement) 4) Digitization and globalization (with a focus on e-commerce) and 5) Sustainability and SDGs.

The existing initiatives at the regional and international level of new data sources, successful applications and modernization of the statistical infrastructure from countries were shared and discussed by ESCWA, UNSD, GCC stat; with examples from Canada, Australia, Latin America, and Saudi Arabia. The participants were also informed on the governance of economic statistics and made recommendations how to make the process more participatory and efficient.

The seminar provided a regional perspective of priorities in economic statistics, the statistical infrastructure and governance put in place to address these priorities as well as to ensure that future priority needs are addressed responsively and efficiently. The outcome of the seminar will feed into the global process and the report to the Statistical Commission at its 51th Session in 2020.

CONTENTS

Introduction

The 50st session of the United Nations Statistical Commission established a Friends of the Chair (FOC) Group on Economic Statistics and requested to convene regional meetings to discuss whether the current planned updates to the system of economic statistics considers priority areas of development or whether gaps exist including in incorporating broader measures of progress in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Commission also asked the FOC Group to examine whether the current governance and statistical infrastructure supporting the system of economic statistics is sufficient to meet the need for an increasingly responsive and comprehensive system of economic statistics. The FOC Group has been asked to report back at the 51st session of the United Nations Statistical Commission. In that context, The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) co-organized a High Level Seminar on the Future of Economic Statistics for the Arab region on 21-22 January 2020 in Riyadh Saudi Arabia with the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and hosted by the General Authority of Statistics in Saudi Arabia (GA-Stat). An on-line survey was designed by ESCWA to seek the feedback of countries on the issues one month before the date of the seminar the results of which are presented in Annex 3.

I.   Recommendations from seminar sessions and working group discussions

The High-level Seminar on the Future of Economic Statistics in the Arab region 21-22 January 2020 Riyadh, Saudi Arabia concluded on the recommendations through presentations and break-out groups during three main sessions on a) regional policy priorities; b) institutional modernization and transformation of national statistical systems; and c) role of regional and international agencies and donors:

A.   Recommendations related to regional policy priority themes
   The seminar recommended to focus on the following regional priorities in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and respecting the diversity of the policy demand in the Arab region:

1.   The informal economy in national accounts for an exhaustive measure of GDP.
2.   Economic well-being and inequality (with a focus on the regional/sub national accounts, human capital, disaggregation and distributional analysis of macroeconomic indicators (income, expenditures, employment, assets, access to services).
3.   Socio-demographic change (with a focus on migration, displacement and youth).
4.   Digitization and globalization (with a focus on e-commerce, global value chains, role of the multinational enterprises, national and regional input output tables, trade data sharing and trade asymmetry).
5.   Sustainability and SDGs, Energy and Water accounts (SEEA), Climate Change and Disaster related statistics.

   For each of the regional priorities selected from the global priorities, the issues should be addressed with an emphasis on the importance of legal support, the provision of human and financial resources, technical assistance, and confidence-building in an integrated statistical system.

B.   Recommendations to countries related to the required institutional modernization and transformation to better respond to the demand
   The seminar concluded the following recommendations in support of the implementation of the system of economic statistics at country level:

1.   Unifying concepts, definitions and classifications used in economic statistics and standardizing coding and classifications guides in administrative records to achieve integration across the national statistical system and to ensure comparability over time and between countries.

2. Updating the statistical operations with modern technology to make better use of administrative data, integrated registers, new data sources, big data, microdata linking, geo-coding, open data platforms for data sharing and exchanging.
3. Developing IT infrastructure of the statistical offices to guarantee data confidentiality
4. Advancing experimentation and testing of new economic statistics by developing incubator teams consisting of members across the national statistical system.
5. Enhancing staff capacity in the new statistical areas.
6. Updating legislation to reflect new developments statistics to ensure better use of data and to request private sector and multinationals to cooperate on data sharing for while ensuring confidentiality
7. Developing quality assurance frameworks for different data sources (e.g. for administrative data, for big data, etc)
8. Prioritizing the update of the system of economic statistics as per country needs with support from government and adopting national statistical strategies and implementation mechanisms that address those new statistical areas.
9. Strengthening partnerships and communication between national statistical agencies, data producers and users from government agencies and the private sector in an organized and institutional framework to ensure that statistics is relevant and to make much better use of data already available.
10. Establishing a network of experts in economic statistics, economists and academics.
11. Cooperating with academic bodies to update the curricula and ensure the graduation of students who have capabilities in dealing with modern technologies.
12. Scaling-up communication and outreach by statistical offices.
13. Inviting countries to participate in the task force and committees concerned with updating economic statistics and activating mechanisms for reviewing the guidelines.

C. Recommendations to International and Regional organizations and donors

The seminar concluded the following recommendations for assistance from regional and international agencies and donors in support of the implementation of the system of economic statistics at country level:

1. Requesting UNSD and the global statistical community to update guidelines and methodologies and related to the global and digital economy, natural capital, wellbeing, human capital and international classifications
2. Providing guidelines and standards in Arabic language
3. Providing guidelines on best practices for using administrative records and alternative data sources.
4. Adapting the system of governance at the global, regional, and national level to become more participatory in reviewing guidelines and methodologies related to the new developments in economic statistics.
5. Developing partnerships and initiatives for innovative data solutions and mutual country support through multi-country partnership and set up a regional mechanism to share knowledge and best practices, on new technology systems and methodologies appropriate to the regional situation,
6. Collaborating in in experimentation and testing of economic statistics based on agreed priorities in economic statistics.
7. Developing capacity of statistical offices in Arab region on new developments in economic statistics and the use of new data sources, with the participation of academics and research centers.
8. Supporting the capacity of countries in crisis in rebuilding the national statistical system using alternative data sources with training, technical assistance and infrastructure development.
9. Requesting the Arab Institute for Training and Statistics (AITRS), Gulf Statistics (GCC-Stat) and other regional organizations to cooperate and coordinate their support in understanding and capacity building in the topics of the update of the system of economic statistics.

10. Inviting the Islamic Development Bank to participate with ESCWA on developing a multi-year project to support capacities of Arab countries in the field of new economic statistics areas such accounting for global value chains.

II. TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

The first session "A responsive and relevant system of economic statistics" aimed at identifying what makes the system of economic statistics responsive and relevant to the emerging global and regional policy priorities such as digitalization, globalization, economic well-being, inequalities, sustainability, climate change, socio-demographic change, urbanization, technological development and the informal sector. It looked at how the national, regional and global statistical systems have contributed to the Arab and global policy priorities in the context of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

GA-Stat president started the session by referring to the Saudi vision 2030 further opening for society and economy, enhancing regional development and housing, improving government services, and calling for fiscal prudence. The vision recognized the statistical needs and commitment to modernize communication on statistical development. He noted the measurement challenges to compile regional accounts, to produce more accurate and timely statistics and more granular data, to measure inequality and distributional analysis. He highlighted the importance of Census 2020 as basis for all future work in GA-Stat. An important task would be to link Saudi society to labor market. The current problem is the high number of surveys carried out, and the need to collaborate with ministries to build up registers.

After this introduction, the Saudi delegate noted the importance that the statistical units in the various government agencies producing administrative records adopt the statistical definitions and classifications in place and to disseminate data with appropriate periodicity so that the statistical agencies can benefit from those records. The Omani delegate raised the point that the bulk of economic statistics comes mostly from the private sectors, not from government, so it is very important to partner with the private sector which controls the markets. The Moroccan delegate mentioned their statistical experience in informal economy and sharing knowledge with Arab countries in this area, and the need for more guidance on digitalization. GA -Stat president replied that all data should be collected from private not only to serve government but society as well.

Ivo Havinga, from UNSD presented a background on the Friends of the Chair Group on Economic Statistics, global policy priorities and the update of the system of economic statistics in four different fields (macroeconomic statistics, business & trade statistics, Price statistics and household statistics), to meet and manage global trends for a sustainable development. He noted that to meet the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, various reforms within the statistical agencies, statistical, institutional, transformational need to be implemented. He also tackled the need to be more agile and responsive, and proposed steps to implement those changes within constraints, mainly documenting the system to improve the decision-making process and prioritization, networking the system to increase the collaboration and coordination and challenging the system in order to be more innovative and finally engaging the system to harness the expertise responsiveness.

Wafa Aboul Hosn, from ESCWA briefed on the regional policy priorities, the follow-upon the Technical Advisory group on Economic Statistics (TAGES), are consistent with recommendations from the ESCWA's statistical committee in it s13th session, and the FOC global policy priorities, so the work in the region can be directed according to identified priorities. In light of a proposed statistical update to meet the 2030 agenda, broader measures in the conceptual framework of economic statistics need to extend the core accounts, to human and natural capital. She referred to the results of the survey of in the low implementation of the changes of the 2008 SNA in the Arab Countries, the data gaps in Goal 8 and 9 of the SDG's and the challenges and opportunities to apply the broader measures while reassuring on ESCWA's continuous support for the national statistical offices.

Areef Suleiman of the Islamic Development Bank (ISDB) presented the Economic data needs for Sustainable Development. He introduced the operational model and services of the Bank with emphasis on the benefits of data and statistics and the role data revolution in the context of Corporations and Multilateral Development Institutions. The regional priorities of projects undertaken with the ISDB were listed for Asia and Africa and he expected that the seminar would provide insights for the priorities for the Arab region.

Moctar El-Hacene, from ESCWA presented the from the data user side for policy the "Needs for Economic Data for Regional Economic Policies" and to develop models and improving policies, specifically the Social Accounting Matrix (SAM) which is a comprehensive framework for data across the economic system and the necessary statistical data needed to build the matrix. He provided an example of ESCWA's support on SAM to Saudi Arabia.

Peter van de Ven, Head of National Accounts, OECD, shared with the participants a presentation on-line, explaining that it is time to broaden the SNA framework to account for sustainability and well-being because policy questions became more and more multi-dimensional, (e.g. not only maximization of economic growth but integrating climate change and ageing society). The presentation provided examples of OECD in this field such as using "How's Life[1]" and SDGs dashboard of indicators. With policy requirement to put "People at the Centre", broader measures were developed on Households' Economic Well-being Dashboard[2], distributional aspects, experimental results of Unpaid Household Activities.

Three Groups in break-out sessions discussed the following three questions, 1) whether NSOs receive requests related to the global policy themes from users of economic statistics 2) what are the regional priorities, the new policy requirements and implications for new statistics for the Arab region and 3) if there is policy and user demand in their countries for integrated and broader measures of progress, generally not classified as economic statistics. The summary of the group discussion mentioned the following: 1) the offices do receive requests related to the global policy themes from users but the challenges for meeting the policy needs require legal support, provision of human and material resources, receiving technical support and building confidence; 2) The need for an integrated statistical system and the establishment of statistical units. 3) The most important priorities are the activities of the informal sector, e-commerce, equality issues, sub-national accounts, and climate change issues at a lesser . GA-Stat group mentioned that they work in cooperation with each counterpart within the Vision 2030 programs, most of which are consistent with SDGs. GA-stat also provided the example on close cooperation with meteorological authority in connection with issuing indicators related to climate change and making use of available data.

Session 2, chaired by Ivo Havinga, Assistant Director, UNSD addressed the institutional transformation, new methods, services and roles – the how of a relevant and responsive system of economic statistics
This session looked at how the system of economic statistics can be more responsive and relevant to the new policy demands through institutional transformation, new technological infrastructure, methods and services required to meet the changing needs of policy makers and economists. The discussion focused on whether the existing frameworks integrate new data sources and methods and make available microdata to meet the needs of policy makers in the context of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

Michael Smedes, from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, presented the "Global initiatives in the use of new data sources and methods including big data, new data services related to data sharing, exchange and linking including microdata and the new role as data stewards." He presented the various factors that are changing on the scene of economic statistics such as data revolution, new metrics, cost of statistics and emerging demands. Examples of economic data obtained from scanner data of transactions (CPI, SUT and IOT), card payments (BOP) and payroll data were presented. The GWG (Global Working Group) global

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[1] http://www.oecd.org/statistics/how-s-life-23089679.htm
[2] https://www.oecd.org/sdd/na/household-dashboard.htm

platform architecture with it is various structure, some new statistical products on macro accounts were presented such the System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA), Tourism and Health accounts and Labor accounts and its four components (Jobs, Persons, Volume and Payments). He ended with the new roles for the NSO's, where the data is a service, asset, accessible, secure and private.

Omar Hakouz, from ESCWA, presented the "Modernization within integrated economic statistics in the Arab region". He focused on the requirements of a modern and integrated including the System of National Accounts (SNA) as a basic reference in addition to the Statistical Business Register (SBR), modifying the methodology of data collection, application of data quality assurance frameworks, use of Supply and Use Tables to estimate GDP, organizing an advanced release calendar, linking between SBR and administrative records, and coordination between users and data producers. Further work is required to ensure consistency and linkages among the system of national accounts, the balance of payments, government finance statistics, monetary statistics, sectoral statistics, and financial statistics. Furthermore, a methodology for the implementation of structural surveys was presented with the various component of the methodology as well as estimation for the informal sector.

Issam Alsammak, from IMF-METAC, presented experience from Canada on the new data sources and methods such as scanner data for the CPI, the digital economy, crowdsourcing, wastewater analysis, supply and use tables balancing. The digital economy was introduced and its implications on production, private asset usage, and data with example on measuring the impact of Airbnb on the Canadian market along with the steps taken by StatCan to overcome the challenges. Advantages such as timeliness and low cost were mentioned, as well as limitations. Finally, he gave the example of the IMF's tool on SUT balancing.

Majed Skaini, from ESCWA, shared the initiatives undertaken by ESCWA in the use of new data sources and methods for capturing data in selected economic statistics areas such as the use of weather data and data on road quality for road safety analytics, and the use of humanitarian data sources for analyzing and understanding Syrian refugees and host communities behaviors in Lebanon, yellow pages for data on business activities, locations and contacts, web scraping to get data from multiple sources and to keep track to any changes, and scanner data that can be used for several purposes such as PPPs, detailed average prices and advanced economic analysis.

Mr Ahmed Al Farid, from GCC-Stat, presented the GCC data services related to data sharing, exchange and linking, He briefed on the project **"Integrated End to End Statistical Solution, "**MRSA" that connects electronically the GCC-Stat to the GCC national statistical centers, with the aim to establish high quality updated central database for national statistics of the member States at the sub-regional level, where data are compiled, exchanged, processed and disseminated electronically and safely.

Giovanni Savio, from ECLAC, shared a presentation on-line on the initiatives in the use of new data sources and methods in the LAC region, using remote sensing to make spatial disaggregation of GDP, poverty and other SDGs, with web scraping - obtaining 10-15% of GDP and with Google trend.

Oman representative informed that their office stopped using surveys to collect prices. They developed server to collect prices automatically from outlets but this came after few years of work and testing. On the other hand, AITRS director, commented that the automatic collection presents a problem of having representative samples, urban rural, and whether the data collection is sustainable, and data is trusted.

GA-Stat discussed in a presentation the priorities of the institutional transformation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He listed the strategic including: Customer support and building strategic partnerships, statistical production with the latest international standards, Statistical culture and knowledge, use of technology and capacity building. The workplan and the time frame to achieve the strategic transformation was also shared.

Group discussion in the second break-out session discussed the institutional transformation, new methods, services and roles and the how of a relevant and responsive system of economic statistics. The discussions can be summarized as follows: 1) developing guidelines and updated methodologies to keep pace with developments in economic statistics. 2) updating statistical processes requires a set of accompanying procedures, including standardizing concepts, definitions and classifications used at the country level, 3) keeping pace with the development in modern technology, new systems and programs in collecting, processing and exchanging data, working on data linking spatially, 4) updating legislation and laws to ensure maximum use of data. enhancing human capabilities through training, coordination with academia to update curricula in line with new statistical areas and data expertise.

Session 3 chaired by Heidi Saidi, AITRS Director, aimed at reflecting on the present coordination and governance mechanisms to update the international statistical standards, and the role of the region within these mechanisms for standard setting and implementation for economic statistics to improve the mechanisms be to make them more efficient, effective, responsive and relevant.

Michael Smedes, of the Australian Bureau of Statistics Inventory of current governance arrangements for economic statistics standards and need to improve Existing Governance Arrangements to be more responsive and agile to emerging issues, more connected across various subject matter and more efficient of operating and deliver greater value to countries. Guiding Principles accountability, coordination, transparency. Increasing the collaboration and coordination, creating a network of Chairs of existing groups, including groups operating in UN system OECD, IMF and others, requesting the network to solve a measurement problem in a coordinated way such as digital platforms, MNEs, informal economy and finding a mechanism to piloting and testing the System and to be more innovative.

Wafa Aboul Hosn, from ESCWA provided feedback on the regional process of setting and implementation of standards in economic statistics through several channels, such as participation and sponsoring representatives from countries in Advisory groups, related task Force, City groups, contributing to research agendas from regional perspective, liaising with member countries, and coordinate with regional partners. Global Consultations on standards and methodologies on Economic Statistics initiated by UNSD are followed up by ESCWA with NSOs of the region. ESCWA also provides and reviews Arabic content, raises funds to address specific issues in the region, and follows-up and support countries Arab Countries in the implementation and customization of standards and facilitates experience and knowledge sharing.

Issam Al Sammak provided a brief on the governance on the update of specific standards of the IMF such as the guides and manuals Consumer Price Index (CPI) and the Manual and the Real Property Price Index (RPPI) to incorporate developments, update material on data sources, data collection methods and related calculation methods. He presented the process of the update of the CPI Manual: Concepts and Practices (Manual) and (Theory) to reflect recent developments of e-commerce and digital economy and the emerging data sources – scanner data, and web scraping. Formal consultation of Member States was run by UNSD until October 31, 2019. For the RPPI, a public consultation was launched in November 2019, open to RPPI compilers and other stakeholders world-wide and the Guide was piloted with several countries.

GROUP SESSION 3. The group discussion revolved around the governance structure that ensures a responsive and relevant system and the current coordination and governance mechanisms for updating international statistical standards, and the region's role within these mechanisms for setting standards and implementing them for economic statistics. the main point of the discussion as follows:

• The importance of active participation by countries, the geographical representation of countries and the selection of representatives with experience to be able to contribute to the updating international statistical standards process (whether formal sharing with NSOs or guide available online for review) before adopting methodologies and international standards to take into consideration the requirements of the region. The group emphasized the need for assistance by regional organizations,

- Language was noted as an important obstacle in the governance process, , especially that the translation sometimes does not fully correspond with the guide in English and the deliberations of expert groups are done in English only.
- The need to make greater efforts to enable the region to participate more effectively. ESCWA contributed to covering the participation of some countries in some groups and committees, but this depends on the available resources and UNSD to extend its knowledge platform to share Arab countries experiences
- Establishing a group of experts at the level of the Arab region to make observations and to make a strong contribution at the international level. For example, in Palestine and Tunisia, there is a committee of statisticians, academics, and others to provide advice.

Session 4, chaired by Palestine, focused on rebuilding Economic Statistics in post-conflict countries.
The chair of the session started by giving a historical view of the development of statistics in Palestine since to 1994. Palestinian Central Bureau of statistics benefited from intranational experiences and most recent at the time. He mentioned that the establishment census in 2017 and the development of statistical business registers provided a rich source for economic data in Palestine.

Iraq representative provided a short intervention on the history NSO in Iraq, the difficulties of post-crisis reestablishing the statistical system and the efforts made by the national accounts directorate, the methodologies used for GDP estimates. He pointed out Iraq will use the Palestine experience in electronic Population and Establishment Census. He also asked for technical support by international organizations regarding Supply and Use Tables, informal sector, GDP by governorate and Quarterly GDP.

The delegates from Libya and Syria, were supposed to participate as countries in conflict but could not attend. Arab countries under conflict requested assistance from ESCWA during several previous meetings for rebuilding their statistical system. Yemen delegate made an intervention on the implications of the war on the disruption of statistical activities. He called on the organizations and countries to provide support for capacity building for Yemen in rebuilding the national statistical system using alternative data sources with training, technical assistance and infrastructure development. The session ended by calling organizations and donors to assist Yemen and the countries in crisis to set a road map for rebuilding statistical system.

Finally, the recommendations from the group discussions and from the session were presented to be summarized and share with precipitants. In the closing, UNSD noted that the seminar allowed to focus the priorities in the region on certain elements of policy questions: ecommerce within digitalization, informal sector not only in the traditional way, migration and human capital manifested with emphasis on the role of youth, and diversification elements in sustainability. GA stat president closed by advising to limit the areas of work for the future of economic statistics, bundle resources and provide training opportunities.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. Date and venue
The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) co-organized with the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) a High Level Seminar on the Future of Economic Statistics for the Arab region hosted by the General Authority of Statistics during the period of 21 to 22 January 2020, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

B. Opening
Welcome and opening remarks to the seminar were made by the co-organizers, the host and the resident coordinator in Saudi Arabia. Konrad Pesendorfer, president of the Saudi General Authority of Statistics (GA-Stat), inaugurated the session by highlighting the importance of the system of economic statistics in informing about the shape of the economy regarding: 1) the global trends through Globalization and digitalization, 2) the role of individual sectors such reliance on energy and 3) the different levels in data

needs such as need for highly sophisticated data, need for capacity building and the need for more detailed and granular.

Juraj Riecan, Director Statistics at ESCWA welcomed the delegates and thanked the co-organizers, he iterated the importance of the seminar high-level seminar provides a collaborative regional response to the need for broader measures for economic statistics to support evidence-based policymaking and better respond to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development where macroeconomic indicators are included in the calculations in many other SDGs indicators from Goal 1 on poverty to Goal 17 on means of implementation. Setting priorities at the regional level is needed for a gradual update of the system of economic statistics to combine measures of economic activity technological, demographic, environmental and social change.

Ivo Havinga Assistant Director at UNSD informed on the new network of economists that covers all UN agencies including the regional commissions to develop "the new economics for sustainable development", a new direction with a multidimensional approach in economics covering the economy, environment and society in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He mentioned the UN Statistical Commission that launched the update of the system of economic statistics in March 2019 under the supervision of the FOC Group on Economic Statistics chaired by Chief Statistician of Canada with the statistical groups at the global level to seek their views on the new requirements for the update of the components of the system of economic statistics, that is the methodological frameworks of the statistics standards, and the statistical operations and infrastructure

Areef Suleman, Director, Economic Research and Institutional Learning (ERIL) Islamic Development Bank, refereed to the partnership with ESCWA dating back 1987, and the support to statistical capacity building. He highlighted the need for consistent, reliable and timely data in order to align the ISDB development financing activities to development aspirations of member countries by properly identifying critical sectors of priority and formulate strategies for interventions accordingly. As the challenges become increasingly complex, and the sources and amount of data grow at an unprecedented p[ace, the need to explore ways and means of using this different data sources to improve the quality of data It is imperative for development partners to support their member countries to enable them deliver better statistics on sustainable basis.

Nathalie Fustier, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Saudi Arabia, highlighted in her opening role of the Human Development Report as a touchstone for the past 30 years. emphasizing people as the real wealth of nations which sparked a turning point in the global development debate. She also mentioned that measure of inequality needs to provide comprehensive assessment of inequality that goes beyond income and wealth and takes into account inequalities in key human development such as health, education, dignity and human rights. To"Leave No-one Behind", there is need to fully harness technology and fine-tune global tools to suit the needs of the region building on and improving existing systems for measurement and analysis.

C. Attendance
The seminar was attended by 40 participants, 26 representatives of 12-member States and 14 representatives from UN and other international and regional organizations and independent experts.

Annex 1
High Level Seminar on the Future of Economic Statistics for the Arab region
21-22 January 2020
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
InterContinental Hotel
Provisional Agenda

Tuesday 21 January 2020

08:30 – 09:00	**Registration of participants**
09.00 – 09.30	**Welcome and opening remarks** Saudi General Authority of Statistics (GA-Stat), President UNESCWA, Juraj Riecan Director Statistics United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), Ivo Havinga, Assistant Director Islamic Development Bank, Areef Suleman – Director, Economic Research & Institutional Learning (ERIL) United Nations Resident Coordinator Office, Saudi Arabia, Nathalie Fustier,
9:30 – 11.30	**Session 1 - A responsive and relevant system of economic statistics** This session will identify **what** makes the system of economic statistics responsive and relevant to the emerging policy needs. It will identify the global and regional policy priorities for policy themes such as digitalization, globalization, economic well-being, inequalities, sustainability, climate change, socio-demographic change, urbanization, technological development and the informal sector. Moreover, it will identify what the national, regional and global statistical systems have contributed to the Arab and global policy priorities in the context of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.
	Chair of Session, Juraj Riecan
9-30 - 10.45	The Future of Economic Statistics in Saudi Arabia Chief Statistician, GA-Stat
	Friends of the Chair Group on Economic Statistics, global policy priorities and the update of the system of economic statistics, Ivo Havinga, UNSD
	Regional policy priorities and the institutional reform to meet the new statistical needs, Wafa Aboul Hosn, ESCWA and TAGES Chair
	Economic data needs for Sustainable Development, Islamic Development Bank
	It's time for a change: broadening the SNA framework to account for sustainability and well-being Peter van de Ven, Head of National Accounts, OECD
	Economic Data needs For Regional Economic Policies, Moctar El-Hacene, Director Economic Development and Integration Division, ESCWA
10.45-11.30	Group Discussions in break-out session What are the regional and country policy priorities?

11:30-12:30	Group Photo
	Coffee/ Tea Break
12:30-13:30	Report back from the Groups in break-out session and Round Table Discussion
13:30-14:30	**Lunch**
14:30-16:30	**Session 2 - The institutional transformation, new methods, services and roles – the how of a relevant and responsive system of economic statistics** This session will explore **how** the system of economic statistics can be more responsive and relevant to the new policy demands through institutional transformation, new technological infrastructure, methods and services required to meet the changing needs of policy makers and economists. The discussion will focus on whether the existing frameworks integrate new data sources and methods and make available microdata to meet the needs of policy makers in the context of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development
	Chair of the Session: Ivo Havinga, Assistant Director, UNSD
14:30 15:30	Global initiatives in the use of new data sources and methods including big data, new data services related to data sharing, exchange and linking including microdata and the new role as data stewards Michael Smedes, Australian Bureau of Statistics
	Modernization within integrated economic statistics in the Arab region, Omar Hakouz, Regional Advisor on National Accounts, ESCWA
	IMF-METAC initiatives and the use of new sources and methods for macro-economic data, with experience from Canada, Issam Alsammak, Real Sector Statistics Advisor, IMF-METAC
	Initiatives in the use of new data sources and methods in selected economic statistics areas Majed Skaini, Statistician and ICP regional coordinator, ESCWA
	GCC data services related to data sharing, exchange and linking, Ahmed Al Farid, GCC-Stat
	The institutional transformation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia GA-Stat
15:30 16:30	Group discussion in break-out session The institutional transformation, new methods, services and roles – the how of a relevant and responsive system of economic statistics.
	Report back from Groups of the break out session and Round Table Discussion

Wednesday, 22 January

09.00 – 10.00	**Wrap-up of Day 1**
10.00 – 11.30	**Session 3 - A governance structure that ensures a responsive and relevant system of economic statistics** Reflection on the present coordination and governance mechanisms to update the international statistical standards, and the role of the region within these mechanisms for

	standard setting and implementation for economic statistics. How can these mechanisms be improved to make them more efficient, effective, responsive and relevant?
	Chair of the Session: AITRS
	Inventory of current governance arrangements for economic statistics standards Michael Smedes, Australian Bureau of Statistics
	Standards setting and implementation at the regional level Wafa Aboul Hosn, ESCWA
	Standards setting and implementation at the regional level IMF
11:30 12.30	**Coffee/Tea Break**
12:30-13:30	Group discussions in break-out sessions A governance structure that ensures a responsive and relevant system of economic statistics Report back from Groups of the break out session and Round Table Discussion
13:30-14:30	**Lunch**
14:30-15:30	**Session 4 Rebuilding Economic Statistics in post-conflict countries**
	Chair of the Session: Palestine
	Yemen Iraq Libya
	Plenary discussion
15:30-16:30	**Session 5 Conclusions and recommendations**
	Presentation of recommendations of the Seminar Ivo Havinga, Assistant Director UNSD and ESCWA
	Plenary discussions
	Closing remarks General Statistical Authority, Saudi Arabia ESCWA United Nations Statistics Division Islamic Development Bank

Annex 2. List of Participants

High Level Seminar on the Future of Economic Statistics for the Arab region

21-22 January 2020

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

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Annex III
Results of [On-Line ESCWA survey on Future of Economic Statistics English Arabic](#) 20 Jan 2020

1- The Friends of the Chair Group identified several priority areas for the update of the system of economic statistics. These included: digitization, globalization, economic well-being, economic inequalities, sustainability, climate change, intangible assets, household production, human capital and the informal sector.
It was acknowledged that most of these priority areas are currently being addressed through global initiatives.
In addition to the above, are there gaps / issues that have a global reach that need to be addressed?

6 responses said that this list was comprehensive
1 non response
5 respondents suggested the following

The treatments and methods used to estimate economic activity in post-conflict regions
Updating the national accounting system to SNA 2008, and taking into consideration advanced research and development of environmental indicators
We suggest adding the subject of data sources for foreign investment statistics.
Regional statistics / social inequality / competitiveness
Competitiveness, value chain statistics

2- NSOs are also being required to undertake significant institutional transformation including increasing use of new data sources, improving timeliness, addressing accuracy issues, introducing new data linking methods and processes, undertaking more granular analysis on the social and environmental impact of economic activity, and taking on new roles as data custodians for the use of administrative and big data.
There are several global initiatives (such as UNECE work on Data Sharing, the Eurostat work on Global Registers, High Level group on Modernization) currently underway supporting NSOs in their transformation?
Is there a need for additional global initiatives that could support NSOs in their transformation?

2 respondents believe these initiatives are sufficient
1 non response
9 respondents believe more initiatives are needed, 8 of which suggested the following

Training statisticians in various fields and moving from the paper-based data collection stage to the electronic stage
Modernization and digitization of the phases of data production and strengthening capacities to assist countries in developing statistical laws
We propose an initiative to evaluate the impact of national strategies for statistical development on the institutional transformation of statistics agencies within countries after the implementation period ends and before starting the preparation for the next strategy, while also increasing activate participation in the mentioned initiatives to achieve the maximum benefit that can be used in developing economic statistics.

Issuing the Statistical Law / forming the National Statistics Council to organize and coordinate the statistical work
There is a need to improve the linkage process and build capacity in the field of administrative records
TOSDD work on Official support for development
Yes, there a need for additional initiatives that could support NSOs in their transformation and in their effort to build their capacity
(1) Street Pulse Initiative, and (2) Data Gaps Initiatives in Emerging Countries

3- The system of economic statistics (involving numerous institutions, committees and other governance arrangements) has developed somewhat organically over time, guided by common principles aiming to deliver a complete and coherent set of data on the economy. Does the governance structure supporting the key macroeconomic accounting frameworks (SNA, BOP, GFS, SEEA) need to be re-examined? If so, can you provide suggestions as to how the governance structure could be made more efficient and effective?

1 respondent said no need
1 non respondent
9 responded suggested they needed to be re-examined, 8 of which suggested the following

Raising awareness on the importance of governance in reducing corruption, achieving justice, competitiveness, transparency, and confidence-building
Study, update and activate the Laws governing Statistics
Improving the governance of the national statistical system to strengthen the foundations of sustainable development
Directing countries to adopt and issue circulars relating to their commitment to transparency when collecting, preparing and publishing data.
To make the governance structure more efficient and effective, we propose a recommendation for states to form a higher national committee under the supervision of decision makers to work on coordination and cooperation between government agencies and activating the role of the formed committees in order to implement and unify concepts and evidence and apply economic accounting frameworks, given the diversity of agencies responsible for macroeconomic statistics.
Digitization of government structures / signing memoranda of understanding / formation of joint expert committees
Sub national scale and SMEs
(1) Capacity Building of partners and harmonize between all data sources. (2) Improving data exchange infrastructure. (3) Amending the legal framework to be binding for data exchange.

4- Most of the current settings are focused on supporting the production of macro-economic data whereas increasingly users are demanding more granular insights.
Given the increasing availability of disaggregated and microdata and not withstanding challenges related to microdata access, how can the current mechanisms be reinforced or adapted to meet these needs, or are new mechanisms needed?

11 Respondents agreed on the importance of meeting user needs while maintaining data confidentiality, respondents suggested the following

Implementing the program budget and performance in relation to financial statements, and implementing the National Accounts System 2008
Digital systems can be developed to access data more effective for data users
The need to strengthen mechanisms for coordination between different data producers and program the processes of producing the necessary and appropriate data for data user needs
Reminding countries to complete all the recommendations related to the National Accounts System 2008
1.We recommend that the statistical agencies increase the availability of data accessible for general use at the level of units, whether households or establishments, for data users as a regular statistical product . 2. Reinforcement of the current mechanisms, which is to add a number of required raw data variables within the SDDS standard.
Working on coordination between the availability of disaggregated and raw data while respecting the statistical law, and using anonymization techniques
Need to start looking for new innovative tools and use of AI
Current mechanisms could be reinforced through more capacity building, policy tools to be developed for member states.

5- The system of economic statistics is often portrayed as reactive and slow in adjusting. Do you agree? if so, are new institutional arrangements needed to make it more responsive to changes in user and policy needs?
1 non response
11 respondents agree that new arrangements needed,
9 suggest the following

Preparing requirements for the production of GDP at a monthly level and at the governorate level, same would apply to fiscal indicators
Needs training and the production of more comprehensive quick indicators on the economy
Establish a coordinated integrated statistics program focusing on overcoming national problems in preparing macroeconomic accounts
We agree to some extent, but it is related to the available capacities of the national statistical agencies.
We recommend the creation of units within the statistical agencies that are responsible for monitoring all economic changes and developments at the country and global level and describing these changes in a technical and detailed manner in addition to conducting in-depth economic analysis of the economic statistics periodically and making these economic analyses available to users and decision makers in addition to providing short-term indicators for all Economic activities.
Independence and transparency
MOUs between entities, Automated data sharing
More independence and more resources for the Statistical Offices.
Yes, agreed! This can be done through developing the infrastructure that would be able to monitor changes simultaneously in addition to building an integrated system to monitor the movement of economy also simultaneously through building timely/ simultaneously indicators

6- Finally, there is significant innovation and experimentation of new methods and processes that take place outside of the realms of official statistics agencies, for example in academia. Do NSOs and International Organizations need to accelerate its pace of innovation and degree of experimentation?

1 Maybe
1 non respondent
10 responded yes , 8 of which added the following

Communication and exchange of experiences between the statistical agencies and the academic community
Need to increase coordination with these institutions, for example: assisting in preparing methodology material for national accounts - assisting statistical research centers in reviewing economic data.
Yes, innovation and experimentation are two factors that can enhance the quality of data and its relevance to the needs of users
We see encouraging innovation and experimentation through close coordination and cooperation with these academic circles.
Yes / National statistical organizations and international organizations need to accelerate innovation and benefit from academic research, but in line with the principles of official statistics.
National statistical organizations and international organizations must adapt to the new requirements of users, with an accelerated pace of innovation and simplification of access to information, and acceleration of collaborative work with academia.
Yes they do But with extra funding from donors
Yes, We suggest the following: Establishing and providing an international center that is also supported internationally. The inputs of such center must be through innovations and experimentation these innovations as well as organizing a conference to showcase results and experimentation. Also, it must be sustainable and supported by the statistical program in order to institutionalize, organize, sponsor and encourage countries to innovating in addition to providing motivational annual prizes

7- Among regional emerging priorities is the difficulty of maintaining and rebuilding a statistical system during and post wars, occupation, conflicts. If your country had been one, how did or will your office address the process of rebuilding Economic Statistics in the whole reconstruction efforts?

3 countries deemed this question relevant to their country and provide the below responses

The GDP was adjusted for the governorates that were exposed to the ISIS occupation by adjusting the outcome of some activities such as agriculture, manufacturing, building and construction by relying on the number of residents who did not leave those governorates and the percentage of crops produced by those governorates along with other indicators
Focus on important aspects, accessible regions, use new technologies to access/estimate
Palestine has long experience on building own system from the zero and phase all challenges that phased under occupation that can be share it with others.