

**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

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GLOBAL ASSESSMENTS OF NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEMS**Summary**

This document outlines a possible approach to Global Assessment of National Statistical Systems. These voluntary assessments would be undertaken in a mutual agreement of ESCWA and interested member countries, and address the legal framework, organizational setup and subject matter statistical activities of national statistical offices and national statistical systems. Each global assessment is concluded by a set of recommendations mutually agreed by external experts undertaking the assessment and the management of the national statistical office.

Lacking a practical experience in the region, and at ESCWA itself, pilot assessments are to be undertaken in cooperation with Eurostat, Statistical Office of the European Union and with the Statistical Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). Eurostat and UNECE have performed a number of global assessments in South-East Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Pilot assessments are to be undertaken as full scale global assessments, and at the same time to build internal capacity within ESCWA and among national statistical experts to lead future assessment.

References to global assessment reports of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine available on the Internet may help members of the Committee in getting a better picture of the scope and potential outcomes of global assessments.

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Introduction

1. At the Second session of the Statistical Commission of Islamic Countries (Izmir, Turkey, 13-15 May 2012), delegates discussed quality frameworks for statistics. Eurostat, Statistical Offices of the European Union presented their activities including Global Assessments of National Statistical Systems. Some of delegates from ESCWA countries expressed their interest, and asked, whether ESCWA would be able to take a lead in organising a global assessment of their respective national statistical systems. The delegation of Eurostat present at the session, promised to investigate a possibility that Eurostat would provide an expertise, in particular in the pilot stage.
2. On one hand neither ESCWA, neither other regional agencies have a sufficient expertise, and would need assistance of European experts. On the other hand, it is important to calibrate the criteria to needs of countries in the region. In particular the legal and organizational frameworks have to be assessed on the basis of prevailing practices in the region, and not to be compared to European practices.
3. The Global Assessments of National Statistical Systems focus on three main areas:
 - (a) Legal basis, such as general statistical legislation, census legislation and legislation on other statistical areas, data protection and confidentiality laws;
 - (b) Organizational setup of the national statistical system, including programming, monitoring and resource planning;
 - (c) Statistical activities in individual subject matter areas of statistics, including issues of statistical methodologies, such as standards, classifications and quality frameworks.
4. It should be emphasised that the objective of each Global Assessment of a national statistical system is to come up with a set of mutually agreed recommendations aimed at improving and further strengthening the national statistical system. Countries are subject to a Global Assessment only at their request and/on in a mutual agreement with ESCWA. The exercise is not intended to evaluate and or rank statistical systems in member countries.
5. It is recommended to have a public communication of results of the Global Assessment that would be used vis-a-vis other ministries, stakeholders, and even public. However, sensitive and confidential issues tackled during the Global Assessment should be treated confidentially by both ESCWA and member countries representatives.

I. LEGAL BASIS

6. An existence of a statistical law (royal decree, etc.) or a similar kind of a regulatory framework is an important foundational element of a Global Assessment. Considerations during the Global Assessment and recommendations formulated at its conclusion will address a number of legal issues, such as:
 - (a) Statistical law, its scope and its correspondence with international frameworks, such as Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics;
 - (b) Census law and other specific statistics related legislation;
 - (c) Is there in place a Statistical Council, and how is the Council constituted;
 - (d) National statistical programmes, including the National Strategy for Development of Statistics, mechanisms for inter-ministerial consultations and consultation with the users;
 - (e) Legal mandates of the national statistical system;

(f) Professional independence of the national statistical system, its scope, how is this independence guaranteed and protected;

(g) Protection of individual statistical data and of confidentiality of reporting units.

7. Assessment of the legal basis is to be based on the knowledge of external experts, but also on a knowledge of prevailing practices in the ESCWA region. Experts should exercise sensitivity with respect to cultural specifics, in particular naming and form of legal instruments.

II. NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEMS (NATIONAL SYSTEMS OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS)

8. Various forms of national statistical systems (e.g. more or less centralised or fully decentralised) exist around the World. The form is often based on the historical, political and institutional conditions under which national official statistics was developed. In any case the aim of Global Assessments is not to focus only on the central statistics agency (if such agency exists), but on all producers of official statistics forming the national statistical system.

9. Elements to be analysed are:

(a) Principles, including legal principles from the previous section on which the national statistical system is based, governance principles and mandates and responsibilities within the system;

(b) Organizational structure and role of individual agencies and offices – sectoral and regional;

(c) Relationships with the central, regional and local governments;

(d) Programming and coordination of statistical programmes, including internal and external monitoring;

(e) Resources planning, such as staffing, financial and technical resources, including upgrading (training and upgrading of skills, replacement of technological resources, fundraising, etc.);

(f) Access to administrative registers and records and relationship with records keepers;

(g) Liaison with academia and research institutions;

(h) Relationship with the users of official statistics;

(i) Policies for dissemination of official statistics.

10. The aim of assessment is to preserve structural elements, including relationships between stakeholders in the national statistical system, that proved its efficiency, while to recommend improvements, where needed. Such improvements may include for example relations with custodians of administrative records, with users, improved coordination between specific producers of statistics, etc. Recommendations should be realistically achievable with the existing political and legislative environment.

11. In case that the national statistical system is based on the central statistical agency (national statistical office), the structure of such central agency should be analysed in more detail.

III. STATISTICAL ISSUES OF SUBJECT-MATTER NATURE

12. This part of the Global Assessment looks into statistical infrastructure in general, and then into specific statistical areas. With respect to statistical infrastructure, the Global Assessment undertakers will analyse:

- (a) Classifications and statistical standards (both national and international);
- (b) Statistical information systems, including process models, metadata, use of technology, data dissemination infrastructure, etc.;
- (c) Statistical registers (e.g. population register, business registers, etc.) and their relationship to administrative registers and records (linking, data collection, etc.).

13. As for statistical subject-matter areas, the potential structure of the Global Assessment would be organized along the way as statistical areas are structures within the national statistical system. The goal is to analyse and make recommendation of all pertinent technical and methodological issues of importance to the national statistical system. A generic structure may be the following:

- (a) Demographic and social statistics;
- (b) Macroeconomic statistics;
- (c) Business statistics;
- (d) Environment, energy and water statistics;
- (e) Multi-domain statistics.

IV. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

14. Members of the Committee are invited to consider this general proposal for global assessment of national statistical systems, and notably:

- (a) Whether ESCWA should embark on leading voluntary Global Assessments of National Statistical Systems;
- (b) Partnership with experts from other region, notably with Eurostat, Statistical Office of the European Union; Statistical Division of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE); Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT);
- (c) Countries that would be interested in piloting Global Assessments in the ESCWA region.

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