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**REVIEW OF STATISTICAL WORK CARRIED OUT SINCE THE
SIXTH SESSION OF THE STATISTICAL COMMITTEE**

Follow-up on the recommendations of the sixth session of the Statistical Committee

Summary

This document has been prepared for discussion by the seventh session of the Statistical Committee to present the review of statistical work that has been carried out since the sixth session (Beirut, 6-8 October 2004) and, in particular, to follow up on the recommendations made during that session. This document provides an overview of the action taken by member countries and by ESCWA in line with the last recommendations of the Committee.

Introduction

1. The report on the sixth session of the Statistical Committee (Beirut, 6-8 October 2004), which includes a set of recommendations, is contained in E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/IG.1/6. Those recommendations deal with a number of issues, including the preparation of a national strategy for the development of statistics; statistical needs for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); the current situation and requirements of the International Comparison Programme (ICP); the System of National Accounts (SNA) and sectoral statistics; information society indicators in the countries of Western Asia; and other procedural and organizational matters.

2. The table below contains the recommendations and follow-up actions that were undertaken by ESCWA, detailing the progress made in implementing those recommendations.

FOLLOW-UP ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SIXTH SESSION OF THE STATISTICAL COMMITTEE

Recommendation	Follow-up action
<p>(a) Call on ESCWA member countries to seek to strengthen human and material capacities in official central statistical offices and statistical units in ministries and directorates in view of the positive impact of so doing on the quality of the statistical data necessary for the formulation of economic and social policies;</p>	<p>The General Data Dissemination System (GDDS) and the Special Data Dissemination System (SDDS) of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were established in order to produce quality statistical data. A total of nine ESCWA members are currently participating in GDDS, namely: Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. Additionally, Egypt and Palestine have subscribed to SDDS. Moreover, ESCWA invited its members to adopt the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics for the operation of their statistical systems. As a result, Palestine issued a formal statement adopting those Principles.</p> <p>In the area of building the national capacities of member countries, ESCWA provided Qatar with technical assistance in preparing its national MDG report. In cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), ESCWA is set to implement a project aimed at increasing awareness of MDGs in Arab countries, and at building their statistical capacities for the preparation of MDG-related indicators and policies.</p> <p>Equally, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), ESCWA organized two regional training workshops on DevInfo, which were held in Cairo, 4-8 December 2005 and 18-22 September 2006. Moreover, ESCWA organized the Expert Group Meeting on International Migration Statistics (Cairo, 14-16 November 2005), which aimed at supporting statistical capacities in the collection of data for the measurement of international migration in line with United Nations recommendations.</p>

Recommendation	Follow-up action
	<p>The ESCWA Statistical Information System (ESIS) currently holds more than 850 indicators in 11 sectors, namely: national accounts; transport; information and communication technology (ICT); population and development; gender; water; energy; environment; agriculture; science and technology; and industry, private sector and production. ESCWA installed ESIS clients at the Gulf Organization of Industrial Consulting (GOIC) and the Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates, which involved undertaking special capacity-building training for groups from their technical and statistics departments aimed at collecting and organizing their own sets of indicators, while simultaneously connecting to the ESIS repository of indicators. In order to meet increasing demands, ESCWA is currently developing the ESIS client as a tailored package to meet the specific requirements of member countries and national organizations.</p> <p>ESCWA developed two additional applications that are available online, namely: the merchandize trade module, which contains values of detailed commodities trade statistics by Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HCDS); and the Social Statistical Information System (SISS), which is based on a set of 27 indicators that were adopted by member countries to monitor different aspects of social development. SISS facilitates the storage and organization of indicators; and provides indicators on population, labour force, vital statistics and MDG indicators categorized by sex and age group.</p> <p>Additionally, ESCWA conducted the Workshop on Disability Statistics in the ESCWA Region (Beirut, 21-23 March 2005) in collaboration with the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The Workshop focused on the introduction of international standards, guidelines and methods in collecting disability statistics in the region.</p> <p>Moreover, a total budget of more than \$800,000 from the Iraq Trust Fund (ITF/UNDG) was approved for the project on Development of National Gender Statistics In Iraq. That project aims to raise awareness on the importance of gender statistics in policy formulation and programme monitoring; and to improve national capacities in terms of producing, analysing and disseminating quality gender statistics.</p> <p>Furthermore, ESCWA and the International Labour Organization (ILO) implemented a joint project to develop a labour market database in the Arab region. A total of six member countries have participated in this project, namely, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Oman, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.</p> <p>Countries of the region have increased their use and dissemination of international classifications in trade and industry statistics. In particular, 10 ESCWA members implemented the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC Rev.3), including three countries that provided input to the Arabic version of the revision. All ESCWA members adopted HCDS in the compilation and dissemination of their merchandize trade statistics.</p>

Recommendation	Follow-up action
	<p>National statistical offices in the ESCWA region adopted the basic list of information society indicators issued by the Roundtable on Information Society Indicators and Profiles in Western Asia (Beirut, 4-5 October 2004). This list, together with the other lists developed regionally and by specialized international organizations, was considered for harmonization during the WSIS Thematic Meeting on Measuring the Information Society (Geneva, 7-9 February 2005). The outcome of the Meeting was a consolidated list of 42 core ICT indicators that was subsequently recognized during the thirty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission (New York, 1-4 March 2005). All States Members of the United Nations have been encouraged to consider collecting these indicators.</p> <p>Additionally, a regional technical task force was established comprising representatives of national statistical offices, whose terms of reference include identifying statistical indicators necessary to measure progress in building the information society; seeking to unify definitions; and identifying the data necessary for the calculation of those indicators. The task force participated effectively in WSIS and the Statistical Commission meetings, during which issues related to measuring the information society were raised. Within that context, the support of member countries was instrumental in gaining the approval of the 2010 Round on Population and Housing Censuses to include new ICT topics in the United Nations Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses Revision 2.</p>
<p>(b) Call on member countries to benefit from the financial resources of the United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD), including, for example, the Census Fund, the Statistical Capacity-Building Programme and others, by presenting specific, studied projects;</p>	<p>Egypt, Jordan, Oman and Palestine participate regularly in the meetings of the 2010 Round, which are organized by UNSD. Moreover, these ESCWA members contributed to the United Nations Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses Revision 2.</p>
<p>(c) Call on member countries to communicate with one another through ESCWA in order to develop national capacities;</p>	<p>By organizing various workshops and expert group meetings in priority areas to the region, ESCWA continues to play a pivotal role in providing a forum for member countries aimed at developing national capacities, and at exchanging best practices and experiences. Additionally, ESCWA increased interaction through e-networking between officials from national statistical offices and such regional/international organizations as the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). This resulted in improving the availability and the quality of comparable trade data.</p>

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<p>(d) Call on member countries to consult the <i>Handbook of Statistical Organization, Third Edition: The Operation and Organization of a Statistical Agency</i> (2003) in administrating national statistical activities and developing statistical norms;</p>	<p>ESCWA made the electronic copy of the <i>Handbook</i> freely available at: http://www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/scu/main.asp. Additionally, it distributed hard copies of the <i>Handbook</i> in Arabic to ESCWA member countries.</p>
<p>(e) Call on member countries to develop their statistical tools through the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) in their statistical operations and establish organizational units as required;</p>	<p>More ESCWA members are currently using GIS in census operations, including Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and the Syrian Arab Republic.</p> <p>In Egypt, the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) set up the Geographic Information System Centre aimed at establishing digital infrastructure maps at a scale of 1:5000 for all governorates in the country; providing the required maps and GIS for censuses, surveys and researches conducted by CAPMAS; establishing statistical GIS to link up the data of the different censuses and statistics to the administrative division maps; building regional geographical information databases in all the branches of the Centre, thereby assisting policymakers; and providing assistance to research and academic institutions, and technical consultations to governmental bodies and private sector with regard to building GIS units.</p> <p>The Department of Statistics (DOS) of Jordan established two Divisions: namely, the GIS Division in 1998, which is affiliated to the Directorate of Information Technology; and the Electronic Mapping Division, which is affiliated to the Directorate of Household Surveys. GIS activities were distributed among these two Divisions according to field of specializations. Specifically, the tasks of the GIS Division include designing and constructing a statistical spatial database and a statistical GIS site within the main DOS site; linking statistical data to maps; and coordinating and cooperating with the ministries and institutions using GIS.</p> <p>In Palestine, the Cartography and GIS Department (CAGD) was established in 1994 as one of the three departments in the General Directorate for Census, and upgraded in 2006 to include the production of maps needed for office and fieldwork, including the "Statistical Atlas of Palestine"; preparation of a guide for the inhabited and destroyed areas of Palestine; establishment of a regional geographic database; and preparation of various maps that depict the distribution, concentration and main characteristics of the Palestinian population in the world.</p> <p>Equally, the Syrian Arab Republic established a special GIS unit that is equipped with the latest technical software and hardware, and that is responsible for the administrative areas of the country and for censuses. In addition to undertaking extensive mapping by governorates, organizations and topographies, the unit is currently testing maps in DevInfo.</p>

Recommendation	Follow-up action
(f) Call on member countries to submit proposals with regard to modifications to the internal organization of the Statistical Committee and enhancement of its performance to the Chairman of the Committee prior to the end of 2004;	ESCWA invited member countries to submit proposals regarding the modifications of the internal organization of the Statistical Committee. Moreover, ESCWA provided member countries with information on all the other terms of references of the Statistical Committee. No change in the present system has been recommended.
(g) Call on member countries to provide ESCWA with detailed periodical statistical data in various fields, in accordance with international classifications, sustainable development indicators and MDGs, for the purpose of preparing statistical bulletins and analytical studies that accurately reflect the actual situation with regard to development trends in the region;	<p>Member countries have been very cooperative in terms of providing ESCWA with periodical publications and statistics in various fields, and in responding within a suitable timeframe to questionnaires submitted for completion by national statistical offices. These timely responses to questionnaires on national accounts, social indicators, environment, trade and vital statistics facilitated the prompt distribution of various ESCWA publications.</p> <p>Moreover, ESCWA developed a well-structured homepage, which is available at: http://www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/scu/main.asp, aimed at providing links to classifications and methodologies in order to assist member countries in terms of preparing and producing national statistics in line with international classifications and recommendations.</p>
(h) Call on member countries to seek to exchange expertise and experts in various statistical fields in view of the substantial positive impact of so doing on raising the level and reducing the implementation costs of statistical activities;	In coordination with ESCWA, experts from member countries continued to share their experiences with other members. During 2005-2006, advisory services were conducted by experts in the region in the areas of ICP, sample surveys and census operations.
(i) Call on ESCWA to provide international consultancy services in the field of sampling in order to contribute to minimizing the difficulties encountered by member countries in this regard;	<p>ESCWA made available upon request by member countries a regional consultant in the field of sampling. This proved very useful owing to the proximity of the consultant in the region, knowledge of Arabic, and an ability to serve the countries to overcome any difficulties encountered during the preparation and implementation periods.</p> <p>Additionally, ESCWA posted a vacancy announcement on its homepage for an Interregional Advisor on Population and Housing Censuses, whose tasks will include providing short-term technical advisory services for the planning of a coordinated and harmonized 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses; harmonizing standards and methods; and planning and managing population and housing censuses and related national surveys using internationally agreed standards and methods.</p>

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(j) Call on ESCWA to increase communications and field visits to member countries at the highest level with the objective of supporting critical statistics projects in member countries;	<p>ESCWA increased its services to ESCWA member countries and kept pace with the increasing requests for advisory service made by members. Specifically, ESCWA provided assistance in the following areas: 1993 SNA to Kuwait and the Syrian Arab Republic; price statistics to the United Arab Emirates; international trade statistics to Egypt, Kuwait, Oman, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen; labour statistics to Syrian Arab Republic; surveys on the needs of the labour market to Oman; and industry and ICT statistics to Qatar and GOIC.</p> <p>Moreover, technical assistance was provided on ICP to participating countries through extensive telephone and email communications and through missions by staff members and international consultants to Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.</p>
(k) Call on ESCWA, UNSD and the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics (AITRS) to cooperate and participate in the organization of workshops and other activities of joint concern;	<p>ESCWA continued to collaborate with UNSD in all its activities, and has invited AITRS to all its meetings. Moreover, in order to give the highest exposure to international expertise, ESCWA conducted its activities with a high participation from other United Nations entities and international and regional organizations in the field of statistics, including as follows: the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE); United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); International Labour Organization (ILO); Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRTCIC); International Organization for Migration (IOM); United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD); Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND); the World Bank; Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat); European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT); Department of City Planning of New York City; and Statistics Sweden.</p> <p>Additionally, ESCWA participated in the Arab Societal Workshop on MDGs towards 2015: Achievements and Aspirations (Cairo, 28-29 June 2005), which was organized by the League of Arab States; and distributed to member countries the document that emanated from the Workshop on the follow-up to MDGs.</p>
(l) Call on ESCWA to form a regional task force concerned with coordinating the efforts of the countries of the region with regard to population and housing censuses, with the objective of unifying national censuses;	<p>ESCWA formed the Task Force on Population and Housing Censuses, which set its terms of reference at its first meeting (Cairo, 12-13 November 2005) and which in turn established four working groups to review the emerging issues in population and housing censuses. At the Second Meeting of the Task Force on Population and Housing Censuses (Abu Dhabi, 20-21 May 2006), the Task Force considered detailed proposals for updating and revising the current set of principles and recommendations governing population and housing censuses. A fund was set up within ESCWA, with a preliminary contribution from Oman of \$50,000, in order to support activities to the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses.</p>

Recommendation	Follow-up action
<p>(m) Call on ESCWA to prepare periodical and non-periodical statistical bulletins and undertake specialized analytical studies in the sphere of social, economic and sectoral statistics;</p>	<p>ESCWA included periodical and non-periodical statistical bulletins in its programme of work for 2006-2007 and, moreover, undertook various specialized analytical studies in the sphere of social, economic and sectoral statistics. The periodical publications include, among others, <i>Statistical Abstract of the ESCWA Region</i>; <i>National Accounts Studies of the ESCWA Region</i>; and <i>External Trade</i> bulletins; and recurrent publications include the <i>Vital Statistics in the ESCWA Region</i> and the <i>Compendium of Social Statistics and Indicators</i>. The issue of the <i>Compendium</i> in 2005 focused on youth and addressed the three priority areas of the World Programme, namely, education, employment and health.</p> <p>Additionally, ESCWA played a leading role and coordinated activities with major United Nations agencies operating in the region in terms of drafting in Arabic and English the executive summary of "The Millennium Development Goals in the Arab region 2005", and of publishing that report. ESCWA also produced a non-recurrent pamphlet, entitled "Arab women in public life and decision-making".</p>
<p>(n) A national workshop should be convened in Egypt by ESCWA in cooperation with UNSD, should the necessary financial resources be available, in support of the population and housing census to be conducted in 2006. The objective of the workshop is the exchange of experiences and knowledge between the member countries;</p>	<p>ESCWA convened the National Workshop on 2006 Population and Housing Censuses (Cairo, 18-20 April 2005) in collaboration with UNSD, ILO and UNFPA. The Workshop brought together participants from the national statistical office in Egypt, Government ministries and departments, as well as representatives from the private sector and the media to review the methodology in planning and conducting the 2006 census in Egypt.</p>
<p>(o) Five-year and annual statistical plans should be adopted and linked to general national plans in order to make available the financial resources and achieve palpable progress and development in the field of statistics;</p>	<p>ESCWA invited member countries to cooperate with the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (Paris 21), and with the World Bank in preparing National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) aimed at providing data and indicators for measuring progress towards the achievement of MDGs. Within that context, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen have prepared their NSDS, and Oman and Palestine are in the process of preparing their strategies; while Jordan and Lebanon are currently conducting negotiations with the World Bank with respect to the preparation of such strategies.</p> <p>Moreover, ESCWA requested Paris 21 to provide support to all member countries in the preparation of their national strategies in 2006, and is collaborating with the Partnership to hold a joint meeting for Arab countries in 2007.</p> <p>Equally, ESCWA cooperated with the Planning Council of Qatar in organizing the Second Symposium on Statistics for Development: A Dialogue Between Users and Producers (Doha, 16-19 May 2005), which resulted in an agreement on a set of recommendations regarding implementation of the five-year statistical plan.</p>

Recommendation	Follow-up action
(p) The importance of the representation and participation of national statistical offices in United Nations international and regional conferences and meetings on statistics should be emphasized;	Upon invitation by UNSD and with coordination by ESCWA, a total of 10 out of 13 national statistical offices in the ESCWA region attended the thirty-sixth and thirty-seventh sessions of the Statistical Commission, which were held in New York, 1-4 March 2005 and 7-10 March 2006, respectively.
(q) The importance for national statistical offices of constant communication in national censuses in order to follow up on various census issues related to the analysis and utilization of data and their communication to planners and policymakers should be affirmed;	The establishment of a regional task force on population and housing censuses, which comprises directors of census operations in member countries, provided the forum for the exchange of best practices in the area of censuses, and shared technical expertise among countries in relevant emerging issues. Additionally, ESCWA is developing an interactive discussion forum for censuses, referred to as "census net", in order to promote the exchange of information on censuses among member countries.
(r) Emphasis should be placed on the fact that national statistical offices are the official data source at the national level, the point of reference for international organizations and the national coordinating authority for all statistical activities;	ESCWA posted the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics on its website and submitted hard copies of the Principles in Arabic to all the national statistical offices. Equally, ESCWA is committed to the Principles Governing International Statistical Activities.
(s) The importance of coordination with and obtaining the assent of the official statistical authorities in the country concerned when conducting surveys and censuses in all statistical spheres should be emphasized;	Many of the rules and regulations governing the work of national statistical offices in member countries include reference to the fact that statistical offices are the primary source for official data. Moreover, ESCWA collects and disseminates data obtained primarily from national statistical offices.
(t) In view of the dearth of water resources in the majority of ESCWA countries, the importance of conducting water surveys for the purpose of preparing water accounts for each country should be emphasized;	<p>ESCWA developed a questionnaire on water resources with the related metadata on methodologies and definitions in Arabic and English. Eight countries responded to that questionnaire. The 24th and subsequent issues of the <i>Statistical Abstract of the ESCWA region</i> include a chapter on water resources. Moreover, as a result of increased coverage and enhanced networking, ESIS on water is available on http://esis.escwa.un.org, with selected time series indicators of particular importance to international conferences and summits.</p> <p>Additionally, ESCWA and a member of the Task Force on Water Statistics collaborated with UNSD, FAO, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Eurostat to harmonize the definitions, methodologies and questionnaires relating to water statistics; and to integrate water accounts within national accounts.</p>
(u) The submission by the representative of Palestine of a working document on functional illiteracy should be welcomed.	ESCWA welcomed the working document on functional illiteracy and distributed it to all member countries.

