

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

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Item 4 (e) of the provisional agenda

Activities implemented in the field of statistics**Activities of the Technical Advisory Group on Economic Statistics****Note by the ESCWA secretariat**

The secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) transmits to the Statistical Committee the report of third meeting of the Technical Advisory Group on Economic Statistics (TAGES) entitled “High-level seminar on the future of economic statistics for the Arab region”. The meeting was held in Riyadh on 21 and 22 January 2020, and hosted by the General Authority for Statistics in collaboration with the United Nations Statistics Division.

The meeting was attended by 10 representatives of member States and a number of experts and representatives of international and regional organizations. They discussed regional priorities and challenges facing the conceptual modernization of the economic statistics system in view of emerging global policies and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They also exchanged information on existing initiatives at the regional and international levels related to new data sources, and on successful applications and statistical infrastructure modernization, and reviewed examples from Australia, Canada, Saudi Arabia and Latin America. Participants also reviewed economic statistics governance processes at the regional level, and made recommendations on making them more participatory and efficient.

The outcomes of the third TAGES meeting were submitted to the United Nations Statistical Commission at its fifty-first session, which was held in New York in March 2020. The Statistical Committee is invited to take note of the meeting’s report with a view to endorsing its recommendations.

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Introduction

1. The Friends of the Chair Group on Economic Statistics was established at the fiftieth session of the United Nations Statistical Commission, held in New York from 5 to 8 March 2019. At that session, the Statistical Commission requested holding regional meetings to discuss planned updates to the economic statistics system, by considering priority development areas and gaps, including integrating broader progress indicators under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Statistical Commission also requested that the Friends of the Chair group consider the status of economic statistics governance, and whether the statistical infrastructure supporting the economic statistics system was sufficient to meet the growing demand for a responsive and comprehensive economic statistics system. Moreover, the Group was requested to submit a report to the United Nations Statistical Commission at its fifty-first session. In this context, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in collaboration with the United Nations Statistics Division, organized a high-level seminar on the future of economic statistics for the Arab region, hosted by the General Authority for Statistics of Saudi Arabia (GA-Stat), which was held in Riyadh on 21 and 22 January 2020. A month before the seminar, ESCWA sent an online survey to member States on the future of economic statistics for the Arab region. The survey responses are set out in annex II to the present report.

I. Recommendations

2. The high-level seminar on the future of economic statistics in the Arab region concluded with a set of recommendations following presentations and break-out groups on the following issues: regional policy priorities; institutional modernization and transformation of national statistical systems; and the role of regional and international agencies and donors.

A. Recommendations on regional policy priorities

3. TAGES recommended focusing on the following regional priorities, bearing in mind development disparities in the Arab region, and that regional policy priorities should be aligned with emerging global policies to keep pace with the 2030 Agenda:

(a) The informal economy in national accounts as an exhaustive measure of GDP;

(b) Economic well-being and inequality, with a focus on regional/subnational accounts, human capital, disaggregation and distributional analysis of macroeconomic indicators (income, expenditures, employment, assets, access to services);

(c) Socio-demographic change, with a focus on migration, displacement and young people;

(d) 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;

(e) Sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), climate change and disaster statistics, and Energy and Water Accounts under the System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA).

4. For each of the regional priorities selected from the global priorities, issues should be addressed with a focus on the importance of legal support, provision of human and financial resources, technical assistance, and building confidence in an integrated statistical system so that it can play a fundamental and rapid role in meeting the demands of data users outside the traditional scope of economic statistics in relation to global policies and in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

B. Recommendations to countries to support the implementation of the economic statistics system

(a) Unify concepts, definitions and classifications used in economic statistics at the national level, and standardize coding and classification guides in administrative records, to achieve integration across the national statistical system and comparability over time and between countries;

(b) Update statistical operations with modern technology to make better use of administrative data, integrated registers, new data sources, big data, microdata linking, geo-coding, and open data platforms for data sharing;

(c) Develop IT infrastructure of national statistical offices to guarantee data confidentiality;

(d) Advance experimentation and testing of new economic statistics by developing incubator teams consisting of members from across the national statistical system;

(e) Enhance the capacity of those working in new statistical areas;

(f) Update legislation to reflect statistics on new developments to ensure better use of data, and request the private sector and multinationals to cooperate on data sharing while ensuring confidentiality;

(g) Develop quality assurance frameworks for different data sources, including administrative data and big data;

(h) Prioritize the updating of the system of economic statistics in line with country needs with support from Government, and adopt national statistical strategies and implementation mechanisms that address those new statistical areas;

(i) Strengthen 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 the relevance of statistics and the best use of available data;

(j) Establish a network of experts in economic statistics, economists and academics;

(k) Cooperate with academic bodies to update curriculums and ensure the graduation of students specializing in modern technologies;

(l) Strengthen communication and outreach by statistical offices;

(m) Invite countries to participate in the task force and committees concerned with updating economic statistics, and activate mechanisms for reviewing guidelines.

C. Recommendations to regional and international agencies and donors to support the implementation of the economic statistics system at the national level

(a) Request the United Nations Statistics Division and the global statistical community to update guidelines and methodologies related to the global and digital economy, natural capital, wellbeing, human capital and international classifications;

(b) Provide guidelines and standards in Arabic;

(c) Provide guidelines on best practices for using administrative records and alternative data sources;

- (d) Adapt the system of governance at the global, regional and national levels to become more participatory in reviewing guidelines and methodologies related to new developments in economic statistics;
- (e) Develop partnerships and initiatives for innovative data solutions and mutual country support through multi-country partnerships, and establish a regional mechanism to share knowledge and best practices on new technology systems and methodologies in line with circumstances of the region;
- (f) Collaborate in experimentation and testing of economic statistics based on agreed priorities in economic statistics;
- (g) Build the capacity of statistical offices in the Arab region to keep pace with new developments in economic statistics and to use new data sources, with the participation of academics and research centres;
- (h) Build the capacity of countries in crisis to rebuild the national statistical system using alternative data sources by providing training, technical assistance and infrastructure development;
- (i) Request 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) and other regional organizations to collaborate and coordinate their support in training and capacity-building to modernize the economic statistical system;
- (j) Invite the Islamic Development Bank to collaborate with ESCWA on developing a multi-year project to build the capacity of Arab countries in new economic statistics, such as accounting for global value chains.

II. TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

A. First session

5. The first session entitled “A responsive and relevant system of economic statistics” identified what makes the economic statistics system responsive and relevant to emerging global and regional policy priorities, such as digitalization, globalization, economic wellbeing, inequality, sustainability, climate change, social and demographic change, urbanization, technological development and the informal sector. The session addressed how national, regional and global statistical systems contributed to Arab and global policy priorities in the context of the 2030 Agenda.
6. The President of GA-Stat opened the session by indicating the Saudi Vision 2030 aimed at further opening Saudi society and economy, strengthening regional development and housing, improving government services, and urging financial prudence. He said that the Vision recognized the statistical needs and commitment to modernizing communication on statistical development. He noted the measurement challenges to compile regional accounts, to produce more accurate and timely statistics and more granular data, and to measure inequality and distributional analysis. He highlighted the importance of Census 2020 as a basis for all future work in GA-Stat, and its importance in linking Saudi society to the labour market. He added that the main problem was the high number of surveys conducted, and the need to collaborate with ministries to establish registers.
7. The representative of Saudi Arabia stressed that it was vital for statistical units producing administrative records in various government agencies to adopt the approved statistical definitions and classifications, and to disseminate data with appropriate periodicity so that statistical agencies can benefit from them. The representative of Omani said that the bulk of economic statistics came from the private sector, not from Government, so it was important to partner with the private sector because it controls the markets. The representative of Moroccan noted his country’s statistical experience in the informal economy and in knowledge exchange with other Arab countries in that area, and the need for more guidance on digitization.

The President of GA-Stat responded that all data should be collected from the private sector, not only to serve Government but society as well.

8. Mr. Ivo Havinga of the United Nations Statistics Division presented background information on the Friends of the Chair Group, global policy priorities, and the modernization of the economic statistics system in four areas (macroeconomic statistics, business and trade statistics, price statistics, and household statistics) to meet and manage global trends for sustainable development. He said that to achieve the 2030 Agenda, various reforms were required within statistical agencies, including statistical, institutional and transformational reforms. He also indicated the need for the statistical system to be more flexible and responsive, and suggested steps to implement those changes within constraints, especially documentation to improve the decision-making process and identify priorities, networking to increase collaboration and coordination, challenging the system to be more innovative, and engaging the system to harness expertise.

9. Ms. Wafa Aboul Hosn of ESCWA summarized regional policy priorities and follow-up of TAGES recommendations, which were consistent with recommendations issued by the ESCWA Statistical Committee at its thirteenth session and the global policy priorities of the Friends of the Chair group, thus allowing the work to be directed in the region according to priorities. She said that in the light of the proposed statistical update to achieve the 2030 Agenda, the broader measures in the conceptual framework for economic statistics required expanding the scope of core accounts to include human and natural capital. She also presented the results of the survey on the implementation of changes to the System of National Accounts 2008 (2008 SNA) in Arab countries, the low implementation rate in most countries, data gaps in SDGs 8 and 9, and the challenges and opportunities related to the application of broader measures. She reassured member States that ESCWA would continue supporting national statistical offices.

10. Mr. Areef Suleiman of the Islamic Development Bank presented the data needs for sustainable development. He introduced the Bank's operational model and services, emphasizing the benefits of data and statistics and the role of the data revolution in the context of corporate and multilateral development institutions. He also listed the regional priorities of projects undertaken with the Bank for Asia and Africa, adding that the seminar would provide insights for priorities for the Arab region.

11. Mr. Moctar El-Hacene of ESCWA made a presentation, from the point of view of data users with regard to developing economic policies, on economic data needs for regional economic policies; and on developing models and improving policies, specifically the Social Accounting Matrix (a comprehensive framework for data across the economic system) by generating the necessary statistical data to build the matrix. He gave an example of ESCWA support to Saudi Arabia regarding the Social Accountability Matrix.

12. Mr. Peter van de Ven, Head of National Accounts at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), made an online presentation. He said that it was time to expand the SNA framework to take into account sustainability and wellbeing, as policy issues had become more multidimensional and did not just relate to maximizing economic growth, but also to integrating climate change and ageing. The presentation included examples of OECD work in this area, such as using the "How's Life"¹ and the SDG indicator dashboard. Regarding policy requirements to put 'people at the centre', broader measures were developed for the economic wellbeing of households,² the distributional aspects, and the empirical outcomes of unpaid household activities.

13. Three groups discussed in break-out sessions the following three questions: (a) Do national statistical offices receive from users of economic statistics requests related to global policy topics and what are the regional priorities? (b) What are the new policy requirements and the implications of new statistics and accounts in the Arab region? (c) Is there policy and user demand for integrated and broader measures for

¹ www.oecd.org/statistics/how-s-life-23089679.htm.

² www.oecd.org/sdd/na/household-dashboard.htm.

progress in the Arab region, which are not generally classified as economic statistics? The summary of the sessions indicated that agencies received requests related to global policy topics from users, but facing challenges in meeting policy needs required legal support, human and material resources, technical support, trust building, an integrated statistical system, and statistical units. Top priorities included informal sector activities, e-commerce, equality issues, subnational accounts, and climate change issues. The GA-Stat group stated that it worked in collaboration with all counterparts concerned with Vision 2030 programmes, most of which were compatible with the SDGs. The representative of the authority also provided an example of close cooperation with the Meteorological Authority regarding issuing climate change indicators and making use of available data.

B. Second session

14. The second session was chaired by Mr. Havinga. It addressed the institutional transformation, new methods, services and roles: how to develop an appropriate and responsive system of economic statistics.

15. Participants discussed how the economic statistics system could be more responsive and appropriate to the requirements of new policies through institutional transformation, infrastructure, modern technology, and methods and services required to meet the changing needs of policymakers and economists. The discussion focused on whether existing frameworks integrated new data sources and methods, and provided microdata to meet the needs of policymakers in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

16. Michael Smedes of the Australian Bureau of Statistics made a presentation on 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 also presented various factors that were changing on the economic statistics scene, such as data revolution, new metrics, cost of statistics and emerging demands. He gave examples of economic data obtained from transactional scanner data for calculating price indices, supply and use tables, inputs and outputs, and cross-border credit card payments as a data source for balance of payments and salary data. He said that the structure of the Global Working Group on Big Data platform was different. Some new statistical products had been introduced to accounts, such as SEEA, income distribution, tourism and health accounts, and work accounts and their four components (jobs, people, volume and payments). The presentation concluded with the new roles of national statistical offices, stating that data were a service and an asset, and must be accessible, secure and private.

17. Mr. Omar Hakouz of ESCWA made a presentation on modernization within integrated economic statistics in the Arab region. He focused on the requirements for establishing a modern and integrated system, including SNA, as a basic reference in addition to statistical business registers, modifying the data collection methodology, applying frameworks to ensure data quality, using supply and use tables to estimate GDP, and organizing an advanced release calendar, linking between statistical business registers and administrative records, and coordinating between users and data producers. He said that further work was required to ensure consistency and linkages among SNA, balance of payments, government finance statistics, monetary statistics, sectoral statistics, and financial statistics. Moreover, he presented a methodology for implementing structural surveys with its various components was presented, and an estimate of the informal sector.

18. Mr. Issam Alsammak of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) presented the experience of Canada on new data sources and methods, such as scanner data for the Consumer Price Index (CPI), the digital economy, crowdsourcing, wastewater analysis, and supply and use tables balancing. He discussed the digital economy and its implications for production, private asset usage, and data. He gave the example of measuring the impact of Airbnb on the Canadian market along with the steps taken by StatCan to overcome challenges. He also presented the IMF tool for balancing supply and use tables.

19. Mr. Majed Skaini of ESCWA presented 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 analysing and

understanding Syrian refugees and host communities' behaviours in Lebanon, yellow pages for data on business activities, locations and contacts, web scraping to collect data from multiple sources and to keep track of any changes, and scanner data that can be used for several purposes such as PPPs, detailed average prices and advanced economic analysis.

20. Mr. Ahmed Al Farid of GCC-Stat presented GCC data services related to data sharing, exchange and linking. He gave an overview of the project entitled "Integrated End to End Statistical Solution (MRSA)" that electronically connects GCC-Stat to GCC national statistical centres, aimed at establishing a high-quality updated central database for national statistics at the subregional level, where data are compiled, exchanged, processed and disseminated electronically and safely.

21. Mr. Giovanni Savio from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) made an online presentation on implemented initiatives regarding the use of new data sources and methods in the Latin America and the Caribbean region, the use of remote sensing to conduct a spatial classification of GDP, poverty and other sustainable development goals, and the use of web scraping tool and Google Trends to obtain 10 to 15 per cent of GDP.

22. The representative of Oman said that his country's statistical agency had stopped using surveys to collect prices. A working group had developed ways to automatically collect prices from outlets, but that had been achieved after several years of work and testing. The director of the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics emphasized that automatic collection raised questions about whether there was a problem in obtaining representative samples in both urban and rural areas, and whether data collection was sustainable and data was reliable.

23. The representative of GA-Stat discussed the priorities of institutional transformation in Saudi Arabia. He listed the strategy that included customer support and building strategic partnerships, statistical production with the latest international standards, statistical culture and knowledge, technology use and capacity-building. He also shared the workplan and the time frame to achieve the strategic transformation.

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

C. Third session

25. Mr. Heidi Saidi, Director of the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics, chaired the third session. The session reviewed current coordination and governance mechanisms to update international statistical standards, and the region's role within these mechanisms in setting and implementing standards on economic statistics, so as to improve the mechanisms and make them more efficient, effective, responsive and appropriate.

26. Mr. Michael Smedes of the Australian Bureau of Statistics presented the current governance arrangements for economic statistics standards; and discussed the need to improve arrangements to be more flexible and responsive to emerging issues, more connected across different themes, and more efficient in operation and in providing greater value to countries. He said that governance arrangements must be based on guiding principles, the most important of which were accountability, coordination and transparency. He added that governance arrangements should be handled by groups of experts according to their respective

competences, with terms of reference assigned to each group. Important next steps included strengthening collaboration and coordination, and establishing a network of current group heads, including groups operating in the United Nations system, such as OECD and IMF, and requesting that the network solve the measurement problem in a coordinated manner like digital platforms, multinational companies, the informal economy, and create a mechanism to try and test the system and be more innovative.

27. Ms. Aboul Hosn of ESCWA commented on the regional process of setting and implementing standards in economic statistics through several channels, such as participation and sponsorship of country representatives in advisory groups, related working groups and city groups; contributions to research plans from a regional perspective; and liaising with member States and coordinating with regional partners. She added that ESCWA was following up with national statistical offices in the region on the global consultations on standards and methodologies for economic statistics launched by the United Nations Statistics Division. In addition, ESCWA was contributing to and reviewing Arabic content, collecting contributions to address specific issues in the region, monitoring and supporting Arab countries in implementing and allocating standards, and facilitating the exchange of experience and knowledge.

28. Mr. Issam Al Sammak gave an overview of governance in relation to updating IMF standards, such as Consumer Price Index Manual and the Handbook on Residential Property Price Indices, to integrate developments and update material on relevant data sources, collection methods, and calculation methods. He noted the process of updating the Consumer Price Index Manual: Theory and Practice to reflect recent developments in e-commerce, the digital economy and emerging data sources: data scanner and web scraping tools. Official consultations between member States and the United Nations Statistical Commission had continued until 31 October 2019. For the Residential Property Price Indices, public consultations were launched in November 2019, and were open to index compilers and other stakeholders around the world. Moreover, the handbook has been piloted with several countries.

29. The group discussion revolved around the governance structure, which ensures a responsive and relevant system; current coordination and governance mechanisms for updating international statistical standards; and the region's role within these mechanisms in setting standards and implementing them to prepare economic statistics. The following are the main points covered in the discussion:

(a) The importance of effective participation by countries, their geographical representation, and the selection of experienced representatives to contribute to the process of updating international statistical standards (whether through a formal exchange with national statistical offices, or through an online directory for review) before adopting international methodologies and standards, in line with the region's requirements. The group stressed the need for regional organizations to provide assistance;

(b) Language represents an important obstacle in the process of governance, especially since translations are sometimes not completely in line with the manual prepared in English, and the deliberations of expert groups are only conducted in English;

(c) Greater efforts should be made to enable the region to participate more effectively. ESCWA has covered the participation of some countries in some groups and committees, but that is dependent on resources. It was proposed to request the United Nations Statistics Division to expand its knowledge platform to cover the exchange of experiences between Arab countries;

(d) Establishing a group of experts at the level of the Arab region to make observations and make a strong contribution at the international level. For example, in the State of Palestine and Tunisia, there is a committee of statisticians, academics and others to provide advice.

D. Fourth session

30. The fourth session was chaired by the representative of the State of Palestine. It focused on rebuilding economic statistics in post-conflict countries. The chair began by presenting a historical overview of the development of statistics in the State of Palestine since 1994, indicating that the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics was benefiting from recent international expertise. He pointed out that the 2017 establishments census and the development of statistical business registers provided a rich source of economic data in the country.

31. The representative of Iraq made a presentation on the history of the Central Statistical Organization in Iraq, noting difficulties in re-establishing the statistical system after the war and related efforts by the National Accounts Directorate, and the methodologies used for estimating GDP. He said that Iraq would benefit from Palestinian experiences in the electronic census of population and institutions. Technical support had been requested from international organizations regarding supply and use schedules, the informal sector, GDP by governorate, and quarterly GDP. Libya and the Syrian Arab Republic were supposed to participate in this session as countries suffering from conflict, but their representatives were not able to attend. Arab conflict-affected countries had asked ESCWA for assistance in several previous meetings to rebuild their statistical system. The representative of Yemen made a presentation on the repercussions of the war in disrupting statistical activities. He called on organizations and countries to provide support for capacity-building in Yemen, to rebuild the national statistical system by using alternative data sources through training, technical assistance and infrastructure development. The session concluded with a call for organizations and donors to help Yemen and countries in crisis to lay down a roadmap for rebuilding the statistical system.

32. In conclusion, recommendations were made in view of the outcomes of the group discussions and the session, to be summarized and presented to participants. The representative of the United Nations Statistics Division indicated that the seminar focused on regional priorities, and in particular on priority policy issues such as e-commerce in the context of digitization; the informal sector; migration and human capital; the important role of young people; and diversifying the elements of sustainability. The President of GA-Stat concluded with advice to reduce the number of work fields in economic statistics, and to pool resources and provide training opportunities.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. Date and venue

33. ESCWA, in collaboration with the United Nations Statistics Division, organized a high-level seminar on the future of economic statistics for the Arab region, hosted by the General Authority for Statistics of Saudi Arabia. The meeting was held in Riyadh on 21 and 22 January 2020.

B. Opening

34. The seminar organizers, the host country and the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Saudi Arabia, Ms. Nathalie Faustier, delivered welcoming statements. The session was opened by Mr. Konrad Pesendorfer, President of GA-Stat. He highlighted the importance of the economic statistics system in reporting on the structure of the economy, with regard to the following: global trends, in terms of globalization and digitization; the role of each sector, such as energy dependence; and different levels of data needs, such as the need for advanced data, the need for capacity-building, and the need for more detail.

35. Mr. Juraj Riecan, Director of the ESCWA Statistics Division, welcomed participants and thanked the organizers. He stressed the importance of the current high-level session, which provided a cooperative regional response in view of the need for a broader measurement of economic statistics. The aim was to support the development of evidence-based policies and to respond better to the 2030 Agenda, so that macroeconomic indicators were included in the calculations of many SDG indicators. He stressed the need to set priorities at

the regional level, to gradually modernize the economic statistics system, and to combine measures of economic activity and demographic, environmental and social change.

36. Mr. Havinga made a statement on behalf of the United Nations Statistics Division. He referred to the network of new economists that included all United Nations agencies, including regional commissions, to develop ‘new sustainable development economics’, a new trend with a multidimensional approach to economics covering the economy, the environment and society in support of the 2030 Agenda. He said that the United Nations Statistical Commission launched an update to the economic statistics system in March 2019 under the supervision of the Friends of the Chair Group on Economic Statistics, headed by the Chief Statistician at Statistics Canada and with the participation of statistical groups at the global level, to obtain their views on the new requirements for updating the components of the economic statistics system and the methodological frameworks for statistics standards, statistical processes and infrastructure.

37. Mr. Suleman welcomed participants, noting the Islamic Development Bank’s partnership with ESCWA since 1987 and the importance of supporting statistical capacity-building. He stressed the need for consistent, reliable and timely data to align the Bank’s development financing activities with the development aspirations of the member States, by correctly identifying critical priority sectors and formulating intervention strategies on that basis. With the increasing complexity and challenges and the unprecedented growth of data sources, it was necessary to explore ways and means of using different data sources to improve data quality, so that development partners could support and enable member States to provide better statistics in a sustainable manner.

38. Ms. Faustier praised the role of the Human Development Report as a benchmark used over the past 30 years, stressing that human beings were the true wealth of nations, which marked a turning point in the debate on global development. She added that measuring inequality required a comprehensive assessment of inequality that went beyond income and wealth, and took into account inequality in key human development indicators, such as health, education, dignity and human rights, making full use of technology and improving global tools to suit the region's needs, and strengthening existing systems of measurement and analysis.

C. Attendance

39. The seminar was attended by 40 participants: 26 representatives of 12 member States, and 14 representatives of the United Nations and other international and regional organizations and independent experts.

Annex I*

List of participants

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Annex II

Survey results

Results of the online ESCWA survey on the future of economic statistics

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.
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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.
