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Activities implemented in the field of statistics

Activities under the programme of work

Summary

The present document sets out the activities undertaken by the secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) under subprogramme 5 on statistics for evidence-based policymaking, since the thirteenth session of the Statistical Committee. Those activities include issuing publications, reports and technical material in the field of statistical system management, economic statistics and national accounts, demographic and social statistics, and gender statistics. The present document also outlines statistical activities financed by the United Nations Development Account and those funded from extrabudgetary sources.

The Statistical Committee is invited to take note of achievements in those areas and comment thereon.

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Introduction

1. The present document sets out the activities undertaken by the secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) under subprogramme 5 on statistics for evidence-based policymaking, since the thirteenth session of the Statistical Committee. Those activities include issuing publications, reports and technical material in the field of statistical system management, economic statistics and national accounts, demographic and social statistics, and gender statistics. The present document also outlines statistical activities financed by the United Nations Development Account (UNDA) and those funded from extrabudgetary sources.

I. Statistical system management

2. The secretariat focused on updating institutional structures for data in member States in response to the accelerating data revolution, on integrating data from official and non-traditional sources, and on the use of modern technologies, such as geospatial information technology, in the production and dissemination of official statistics, especially population censuses, surveys, and sustainable development indicators. In this regard, ESCWA participated in a number of regional initiatives and conferences, including a regional workshop on updating official statistics (Doha, 4-5 November 2019), and the seventh session of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (Algiers, 17-19 February 2020). In 2020, ESCWA sent a questionnaire to national statistical offices regarding the institutional framework, resources and administration, and the availability and use of all kinds of data (administrative, big and geospatial) in the production of sustainable development indicators. The results were presented at regional workshops to urge countries to make use of technology, and to integrate data sources into official statistics and sustainable development indicators. ESCWA is in the process of publishing two studies on the role of big data in sustainable development indicators, and the role of geospatial information in monitoring and reporting on related sustainable development indicators.

Publications, reports and technical materials

1. Guide to the generic law on official statistics

3. ESCWA and the League of Arab States prepared a guide to the generic law on official statistics for Arab countries in line with the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, which were adopted by the Statistical Commission in 1994 and in a 2014 General Assembly resolution, pursuant to the 2004 Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics. The guide reviews the status of laws on official statistics in the Arab region, and the main components of the generic law on official statistics. The guide provides guidance to countries and explanatory notes on developing statistical legislation to support the modernization of statistical systems in Arab countries. It also provides some examples and good practices in Arab countries. The guide was prepared based on documents entitled “Generic Law on Official Statistics for Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia” and “Guidance on Modernizing Statistical Legislation” of the Economic Commission for Europe (2018). It was translated and localized for the Arab region, with the participation of countries and the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics.

2. Online statistical information system

4. The ESCWA online statistical information system was launched in 2016, and consists of a data management system that functions as an institutional data repository and a tool for amendments and calculations, linking data chains and analysis. It also includes a data portal: (<https://data.unescwa.org>), which acts as a user interface. The system currently offers 100,000 data series consisting of 1,000,000 data points. Spreadsheets and dashboards can be browsed by general users, and registered users can create and share their own dashboards. The system enables the creation of dashboards from spreadsheets, charts and text elements. These dashboards are updated in real time as the data warehouse is updated. The advantage of the system is that the data is consistent across different outputs. ESCWA has transformed all statistical publications into

online publications using this system. The publications will see further improvements as the system technology is updated. ESCWA has created country-specific dashboards for United Nations country teams comprising 10 countries. These panels are used as the main data source for the joint country assessments that these teams conduct.

II. Economic statistics and national accounts

5. Over the period 2019-2020, ESCWA informed member States about planned updates to the economic statistics system, in line with the priority development areas that they had identified. Work was also undertaken to propose broader measures of progress under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to meet the growing demand for enhanced responsiveness and inclusiveness of the economic statistics system. ESCWA focused on input and output tables, the informal economy, regional accounts, and income distribution in national accounts; e-commerce and the exchange of detailed foreign trade data, addressing disparities and disseminating data using modern methods in line with digitization and globalization; statistics on climate change and disasters, and energy and water accounts under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In general, ESCWA sought to provide guidance in Arabic and to use new data sources.

A. Publications, reports and technical material

6. The [ESCWA data portal](#) includes the various economic and environmental ESCWA statistical groups that have been transformed into databases published on the portal. Users can choose key economic indicators, including databases, dashboards and country profiles, download data sets, and use their preferred technology for reporting, data analysis and dashboards.

1. Methodology guide for applying supply and use tables in selected Arab countries (Forthcoming)

7. ESCWA conducted a study in Arabic on “Regional guidelines for Arab countries on supply and use”; organized regional and subregional training workshops; dispatched several technical assistance missions to member States; and organized twinning projects between two groups of countries. ESCWA also collaborated with several Arab statistical offices to test various supply and use applications, such as ERETES in Jordan and HedyPlan-SUT-Equalizer in Qatar. Despite progress by some national statistical offices in Arab countries in developing tables and using them in GDP estimates, many challenges remain in addressing data gaps, developing evaluation methods, and using technology to improve policymaking. ESCWA therefore prepared this guide to provide an overview of recent developments, in addition to a case study of Morocco and the State of Palestine and their respective applications, to guide Arab national statistical offices in better assessing macroeconomic groups and providing useful tools for monitoring the SDGs.

2. Status of transport statistics in the Arab region ([E/ESCWA/CL4.SIT/2020/WP.1](#))

8. The paper provides an analysis of responses from Arab national statistical offices to a questionnaire on transport data covering the period 2005-2018. The paper documents the findings, highlights the strengths and weaknesses of selected transport data in member States, and provides analysis to ensure that data meet regional and international standards. The paper concludes with a set of recommendations addressed to national statistical offices and the ESCWA secretariat on the way forward. The analysis addresses the following criteria: mechanisms for producing and disseminating transport data; sources and agencies involved in the production of transport data; availability and completeness of transport data for the period 2005-2018; greater compatibility between terminology in use and the glossaries on transport data of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and of ESCWA; and the availability data sources and metadata.

3. *Complementary Data Sources for Road Transport Statistics: Use of Machine Learning in Providing Additional Insights into Road Crashes (Forthcoming)*

9. ESCWA implemented a pilot project on the use of alternative sources of data on road accidents. A technical paper was prepared based on the results of a questionnaire on transport data, including road safety, which ESCWA circulated in April 2019 to Arab national statistical offices. The purpose of the paper was to investigate whether the data provided by national statistical offices could be combined with other data sources, including big data, to gain a better understanding of the causes of road accidents and offer solutions to improve data collection and analysis. As member States' data could not be accessed, open data from the United Kingdom on road accidents was used, and street data from open street maps were added as an alternative source of data to present as a model of what information technology and analysis tools could achieve. The paper demonstrates the need for greater efforts to achieve more reliable results and greater consistency between machine learning and official statistics. The exercise highlighted the potential benefits of using machine learning algorithms to understand road accidents, including improved predictability.

B. Meetings and capacity-building activities

1. *High-level seminar on the future of economic statistics in the Arab region*

10. ESCWA held the seminar in Riyadh on 21 and 22 January 2020, in collaboration with the United Nations Statistics Division. The seminar was hosted by the General Authority for Statistics, and was a special session of the Technical Advisory Group on Economic Statistics. In addition to members of the Technical Advisory Group, the seminar brought together a number of senior statisticians and economists, representatives of United Nations and other international and regional organizations, and independent experts.

2. *Meetings of the Joint Islamic Finance Task Team*

11. As a follow-up to a 2017 initiative by ESCWA and the United Nations Statistics Division to review the account of Islamic finance in national accounts, a joint task team was formed to update both the system of national accounts and the balance of payments, including the concepts of Islamic banks such as banking, Islamic windows and insurance. It was agreed that countries would head the Joint Islamic Finance Task Team. Morocco and the State of Palestine were chosen to chair the team with the support of the team's secretariat, comprising the United Nations Statistical Commission and ESCWA. Between March 2020 and December 2020, a series of meetings were held to select representatives from various countries where Islamic financial accounts are common, and from regional and international organizations concerned with national accounts, the external sector and the macroeconomy. ESCWA and the United Nations Statistics Division held several preparatory meetings with the Task Team in November 2020 to agree on key conceptual issues related to Islamic finance and national accounts, categorized in six topics. Six subgroups were formed, each responsible over the period 7-19 January 2021 for addressing one of the conceptual issues and preparing guidance notes for review by the Task Team, and for producing a comprehensive format to be submitted to the Task Team's secretariat for approval.

3. *Workshop on supply and use tables*

12. ESCWA held a workshop on supply and use tables in Amman from 12 to 14 November 2019, attended by representatives of national statistical offices from Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, the State of Palestine and Qatar, and representatives of the Middle East Regional Technical Assistance Centre (METAC) of the International Monetary Fund. The workshop aimed at improving the coverage of GDP statistics for all economic activities, enhancing consistency between all economic statistics, providing estimates of informal activities, and reviewing the economic, analytical and political benefits of these tables and expected results.

4. *National workshop on supply and use tables*

13. ESCWA held an online national workshop on supply and use tables for the National Bureau of Statistics of the Sudan, from 30 November to 3 December 2020. The workshop aimed at improving the coverage of GDP statistics for all economic activities, strengthening consistency between all economic statistics, and providing estimates of informal activities.

5. *Regional workshop on developing transport statistics and transport-related sustainable development indicators in Arab countries*

14. The regional workshop, held in Beirut from 16 to 18 September 2019, aimed to enhance the capacity of staff members of national statistical offices in Arab countries to identify statistical gaps and to collect, classify and analyse transport data. The workshop also sought to strengthen collaboration with regional and national partners to ensure consistency and alignment of methodologies for data collection and dissemination with those in place regionally and internationally, so as to improve SDG monitoring, create a regional transport database, identify countries' future needs in providing capacity-building programmes, increasing efficiency, and exchange successful experiences.

6. *Preparatory meeting for the regional workshop on the exchange of experiences on the collection and dissemination of road and railway transport statistics: statistics on the volume of road traffic*

15. The preparatory meeting for the regional workshop was held online to exchange experiences in collecting and disseminating road and rail transport statistics: road traffic volume statistics (vehicle-kilometre), on 29 September 2020. A number of representatives of national statistical offices in member States participated in the meeting, as did representatives of other relevant bodies and ministries. The meeting aimed to finalize the agenda of the regional workshop, distribute roles and responsibilities in preparing the guidelines, set the chapters to be included in national working papers, agree on the working methods for drafting the guidelines with the possibility of establishing a follow-up working group, appoint focal points to produce the guidelines' chapters, and submit the recommendations and outcomes of the preparatory meeting to participants in the regional workshop for use in preparing national papers and the regional guidelines.

7. *Regional workshop on the exchange of experiences on the collection and dissemination of road and railway transport statistics: statistics on the volume of road traffic*

16. The regional workshop was held online from 8 to 10 December 2020, and aimed to define and rationalize the methodologies adopted by member States in producing statistics on the volume of road traffic, while ensuring that those methodologies complied with international standards and methodologies. Several representatives of national statistical offices, ministries and relevant bodies, regional and international organizations and experts participated in the workshop. The workshop included working papers and national presentations on country experiences, a discussion of challenges related to traffic data, and a preliminary draft of the regional guidelines on road traffic volume statistics (vehicle-kilometre), which ESCWA is preparing.

III. Demographic and social statistics

17. Over the period 2019-2020, the activities of the ESCWA secretariat related to demographic and social statistics focused on developing the statistical capacity of member States to bridge the data gap for demographic and social indicators, including relevant SDG indicators, through traditional and non-traditional data sources. The ESCWA secretariat continued supporting the development of statistical capacity for population and housing censuses and related statistical surveys. The secretariat, in collaboration with relevant international and regional organizations, proposed and discussed a regional strategy on civil registration and vital statistics for Arab countries to assess the current status of civil registration and vital statistics, and develop an action plan in that regard.

A. Publications, reports and technical material

1. *Arab Society: Demographic and Social Trends, Issues No. 14 and 15*
(E/ESCWA/CL4.SIT/2020/1) (E/ESCWA/SD/2019/5)

18. Issue 14 of Arab Society: Demographic and Social Trends provides an overview of population dynamics, household composition, family composition, housing conditions, health, education, work, poverty, inequality and culture. The data were mainly drawn from national statistical agencies in ESCWA member States, and were supplemented with publicly available data published by international bodies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Health Organization, the International Labour Organization, the World Bank, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In addition to the topics mentioned in issue 14, issue 15 contains an additional chapter on the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. *Evaluating reports on age and gender in recent censuses in ESCWA member States*
(E/ESCWA/SD/2019/TP.7)

19. The paper examines the quality of data related to age and gender collected in recent censuses in the Arab region, to show the pattern of these data, determine their consistency, and identify weaknesses that could undermine their statistical value for Governments and development planning. The paper deals with reliability of census data, which aims to enhance confidence in population-based estimates for current and future measures of demographic change; and contribute to the optimal use of resources and enable more effective planning. Although the paper does not address the comprehensive coverage of censuses, it analyses inconsistencies and gaps that may help explain information gaps in censuses.

3. *Study of mortality and the completeness of death reports among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon*
(E/ESCWA/SD/2019/TP.6)

20. The report reviews the circumstances of death and the completeness of death reports among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, and compares population subgroups by gender, area of residence (camps versus gatherings), and residency status. In general, the report shows that the death rate for men is higher than for women; however, the likelihood of reporting female deaths is much lower. Death reporting is more efficient in gatherings than in camps; the social and economic drivers of these disparities require further examination in the future. There are also differences in the number of deaths reported according to residency status (residents versus non-residents). Lastly, Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon have a lower mortality rate and a greater degree of death reporting, compared with Palestinian refugees residing in other countries.

B. Meetings and capacity-building activities

1. *Workshop on measuring poverty in Arab countries*

21. ESCWA and the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics, in collaboration with the Tunisian National Institute of Statistics, held a workshop on poverty measurement in Arab countries in Tunis from 23 to 25 July 2019. Participants discussed the SDGs and poverty measurement; disaggregating poverty data by population subgroups and small geographic regions; progress in measuring inequality, perceived discrimination and other indicators of subjective wellbeing using household surveys; regional and national experiences in measuring monetary and multidimensional poverty; and using a subset of expenditures to measure and track poverty over time.

2. *Expert group meeting on evaluating census data in Arab countries*

22. ESCWA, in collaboration with the High Commission for Planning of Morocco and the Regional Office of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for Arab States, held an expert meeting on evaluating census data in Arab countries, in Rabat on 30 September 2019. Participants reviewed and discussed the evaluation of data from population censuses in some Arab countries in terms of methodologies, and the evaluation of reporting age and gender in population census in some Arab countries.

3. *Third meeting of the Technical Advisory Group on Demographic and Social Statistics for Arab Countries*

23. ESCWA held the third meeting of the Technical Advisory Group on Demographic and Social Statistics for Arab Countries online from 13 to 16 July 2020. At its first meeting, the Group focused on ensuring that all Arab countries could present a list of key demographic and social indicators for the SDGs. At the second meeting, participants discussed additions to the list of key indicators that were compatible with SDG indicators, and a strategy to address data gaps within the Arab region. At the third meeting, participants focused on data availability for the list of key indicators, and discussed closing data gaps in all areas.

4. *Consultative meeting on a strategy of civil registration and vital statistics for Arab countries*

24. ESCWA held an online consultative meeting on a strategy for civil registration and vital statistics for Arab countries on 9 July 2020, aimed at discussing the status of civil registration and vital statistics in the Arab region, an assessment strategy and a future action plan in that regard.

5. *Online workshop on enhancing geospatial capacity in population and housing censuses for Arab countries*

25. ESCWA, in collaboration with the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics and the UNFPA Regional Office for Arab States, held an online workshop on enhancing geospatial capacity in population and housing censuses for Arab countries, from 20 to 23 July 2020. The workshop included presentations and discussions on developing information technology, and the importance of using information technology and geographic information systems in population censuses to enhance countries' knowledge and operational capacity regarding geospatial information systems and tools for the 2020 census round.

6. *Online consultative workshop on preparations for conducting a population and housing census in Morocco in 2024*

26. The ESCWA Statistics Division, in collaboration with the High Commission for Planning of Morocco and the UNFPA country office in Morocco, held an online consultative workshop, from 15 to 17 December 2020, on preparations for conducting a population and housing census in Morocco in 2024. The workshop set out an action plan on conducting censuses for the High Planning Commission by making use of the experiences of countries that conducted a population and housing census using modern technology, including using tablets and geographic information systems at all stages of the census; addressing technical and logistical difficulties and problems encountered by countries that used electronic boards in the various stages of the census, and the measures taken to tackle them and lessons learned; identifying the infrastructure needed to conduct the census; and determining training needs for all teams participating in the process.

IV. Gender statistics

27. Over the period 2019-2020, the ESCWA secretariat focused on building member States' capacity in the field of gender statistics, and developing an integrated set of technical materials and tools.

A. Publications, reports and technical material

1. *The Arab Gender Gap Report 2020: Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals*
(E/ESCWA/SD/2019/4)

28. The Arab Gender Gap Report reviews the status of gender equality in 22 Arab countries, through gender indicators linked to the SDGs and other gender-related indicators. The report covered information on policies and laws at the country level, including ensuring that data was analysed from a gender perspective. The report reveals that, despite many countries' significant progress towards achieving gender equality in the areas of education, health and access to basic services, more steps are needed for girls and women to achieve full equality and fully realize their rights. The report presents over 200 quantitative and qualitative regional priority indicators on gender equality to accelerate progress. The list of indicators constitutes a basis for preparing a crucial framework of Arab gender indicators that should be monitored at the national and regional levels.

2. *Arab Gender Lens 2019 Pocketbook: A Statistical Portrait of the Western Asia Region*
(E/ESCWA/SD/2019/TP.1)

29. The ESCWA Statistics Division issued the Arab Gender Lens 2019 Pocketbook, which provides a statistical portrait of the status of gender equality in 18 Arab countries by providing basic indicators about population, disability, education, health, empowerment and work, so as to understand the status of women and girls in comparison with men and boys; to provide data to policymakers, civil society and the world; and to raise awareness on gender issues. Data were collected from national sources and from United Nations databases when national data were not available, and were presented through tables and graphs.

3. *Data portal and platform for gender statistics*

30. ESCWA launched a data portal on gender statistics, which includes 137 indicators distributed across 10 themes and 92,655 reports. The portal is a comprehensive source of gender statistics and information on various dimensions of gender (in)equality. The main purpose of the portal is to build a comprehensive view of gender-related statistics, by highlighting disparities and inequality between the sexes. It will also be used as a reliable source in formulating and monitoring policies for the benefit of women and men, and will facilitate decision-making towards equality. The database contains consistent and comparable national data collected at the regional level from various household surveys by national statistical offices in the Arab region. The gender statistics portal will be regularly updated.

B. Meetings and capacity-building activities

1. *Meeting on strengthening the implementation of prevalence surveys on violence against women in the Arab region*

31. ESCWA, in partnership with UN-Women and the World Health Organization, organized a meeting to strengthen the implementation of prevalence survey on violence against women in the Arab region, which was held in Egypt from 15 to 17 October 2019. At the meeting, relevant partners in the Arab region discussed developing methods and strategies for measuring violence against women, in line with internationally agreed methodological and ethical standards. The meeting aimed to build the knowledge of national statistical offices, women's machineries and relevant stakeholders in the Arab region on measuring violence against women, in line with internationally agreed methodological and ethical standards; strengthen the links between global, regional and national efforts to improve data on violence against women and operationalize programmes and policies; identify challenges in measuring violence against women in the Arab region; and share good practices and lessons learned regarding questionnaires on violence against women among participants.

2. *National workshops and an e-learning platform for gender statistics*

32. The ESCWA secretariat launched an e-learning platform for gender statistics (<https://elearning.unescwa.org>) in March 2018, and more than 13,000 trainees have used it according to the latest statistics in 2020. The platform is one of the tools of the Gender Statistical Programme in Arabic, which aims to increase knowledge and build the capacity of all stakeholders to produce high-quality gender statistics and use them in monitoring progress. ESCWA organized four national training workshops in Egypt, in partnership with the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics. The first workshop was held from 18 to 21 March 2019 and attended by 22 participants; the second workshop was held from 4 to 11 February 2020 and was attended by 12 trainees from the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics; the third workshop was held from 9 to 12 March 2020 in partnership with the National Council for Women and in coordination with the UNFPA, and was attended by 23 trainees; and the fourth workshop was held from 15 to 18 November 2020 and was attended by 15 participants.

V. Disability statistics

33. In 2016, ESCWA launched the Disability Statistics Programme. Over the period 2019-2020, the ESCWA secretariat focused on building capacity in member States in the field of disability statistics, and developing an integrated set of technical materials and tools.

A. Publications, reports and technical material

1. *ESCWA disability framework: 115 indicators to bridge the gap between policy and statistics* ([E/ESCWA/SD/2019/TP.3](#))

34. ESCWA launched the first global framework linking disability-related indicators under three main development frameworks: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Declaration of Human Rights. The ESCWA disability framework includes 115 indicators to bridge the gap between policies and statistics, and represents a major step towards bridging the gap between policies, statistics and monitoring progress. The framework is a key tool to guide efforts at the national, regional and global levels, to harmonize the production of consistent and comparable data, and to report on the status of persons with disabilities in relation to critical development goals that cover disability issues. The framework will provide, through improved disability statistics, a clearer picture when comparing persons with disabilities to others. The framework will also help data producers provide valuable and better quality information for policymakers to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

2. *Arab Disability Database*

35. A large database of disability statistics has been created, including 48 indicators distributed over three themes: eight indicators on education, 31 on employment, and 9 on the population, all covering 315,553 data points. The Arab Disability Database is a comprehensive source of knowledge on disability statistics and of information on various aspects of (in)equality between persons with disabilities and persons without disabilities. The database's main purpose is to build a comprehensive view of statistics relating to persons with disabilities, by highlighting the inequalities between them and persons without disabilities. The database contains consistent and comparable national data for the region, collected from various household surveys conducted by national statistical offices in the Arab region. The database will be updated regularly as new data becomes available.

B. Meetings and capacity-building activities

1. *Regional consultative meeting on disability statistics*

36. The ESCWA Statistics Division held a virtual regional meeting on disability statistics on 29 September 2020 to develop an action plan to coordinate priorities at the national and regional levels, and to improve the alignment of activities, including data collection, exchange of good practices and capacity-building. The meeting was attended by 36 national experts from 14 ESCWA member States, namely Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The meeting concluded with recommendations on strengthening the consistency of disability statistics.

VI. Projects funded by the United Nations Development Account and from extrabudgetary resources

A. ESCWA Programme on Statistics and Data

37. The Programme on Statistics and Data is a comprehensive programme funded by the tenth tranche of the United Nations Development Account, which aims to build statistical capacity to support the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. The following is a review of the activities implemented since the twelfth session of the Statistical Committee under three of the programme's pillars.

1. *Pillar 1: Means of implementation (administrative issues related to official statistics and the statistical information infrastructure)*

(a) *Generic law on official statistics for Arab countries*

38. ESCWA, in partnership with Bahrain, Iraq and the State of Palestine, drafted the Generic Law on Official Statistics for Arab Countries based on the document "Generic Law on Official Statistics for Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia", which was translated and adapted to the requirements of the Arab region. The importance of this law lies in that it defines the legal framework for the preparation, production, dissemination and development of official statistics. ESCWA developed the draft generic law on official statistics for Arab countries to direct countries to develop their laws according to the latest updates, and to keep abreast of developments in statistical work, as some national official statistics laws in the Arab region were enacted over two decades ago. The generic law will be published soon.

(b) *Arab SDG Monitor and related tools*

39. [The Arab SDG Gateway](#) and [the Arab SDG Monitor](#), and their related tools, were developed as part of technical support activities to help countries develop national platforms for monitoring the SDGs, implemented within the framework of the ESCWA programme to improve the production and dissemination of SDG data, to leave no one behind (document E/ESCWA/C.1/2021/L.5) Support activities include auditing national data, building capacity and providing training to ensure the sustainability of these platforms, as well as assessing and monitoring the availability of national data in the global SDG platform.

(c) *Arab National Reporting Platforms for the Sustainable Development Goals: Assessment (E/ESCWA/CL4.SIT/2020/TP.6)*

40. ESCWA published an assessment of Arab national monitoring platforms for the SDGs in ESCWA member States, in line with the seven main principles for designing and implementing national data platforms.

(d) *Arab Register of Censuses and Surveys*

41. To facilitate regional cooperation and integration, ESCWA prepared the Arab Register of Censuses and Surveys covering all Arab countries. The online publication integrates information and provides insight into the types of surveys and censuses conducted in the region and their periodicity. The online registry will be updated annually upon receiving new information and comments from Arab national statistical offices. The registry will facilitate bridging gaps in data chains by developing data sources (surveys and administrative records) and good national practices.

2. *Pillar 2: Environmental statistics*

42. ESCWA organized an online expert group meeting on “[Resource efficiency in the Arab region: monitoring progress on SDG 12 and building back better from COVID-19](#)” on 7 and 8 October 2020, in collaboration with the ESCWA Sustainable Development Policies Division, the League of Arab States and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

43. Under the environmental statistics pillar, three important guides and electronic educational materials on environment and energy statistics and accounts were translated into Arabic, namely: the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics – New Arabic Version, in partnership with the Central Bureau of Statistics; the new Arabic version of the International Recommendations for Energy Statistics; e-learning materials – detailed online training on energy accounting (SEEA-Energy); e-learning material for the e-learning course on Compiling Climate Change Indicators: An Accounting Approach, in partnership with the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific, to be held from 6 January to 12 February 2021; and a study on calculating indicator 12.2.2 on local use of materials through supply and use tables and technical support in Oman.

3. *Pillar 3: Social and demographic statistics*

(a) *Violence against Women Toolkit, second revision*

44. In view of the new requirements of the 2030 Agenda, the Statistical Policy and Coordination Unit of the ESCWA Statistics Division prepared an Arabic version of a questionnaire on measuring violence against women and its implementation tools (second revision) as an independent model that can be used in national surveys on violence against women. The Arab model is the result of discussions that took place at two meetings: [the fifth meeting of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics](#), held in Amman on 15 and 16 October 2018; and a [meeting on strengthening the implementation of prevalence surveys on violence against women in the Arab region](#), held in Cairo from 15 to 17 October 2019. The model includes a sample questionnaire to measure violence against women and its implementation tools, such as an instruction manual for completing questions, a researcher’s guide for conducting interviews, a coordinator’s guide – a workshop for training field researchers, and an analysis plan to extract a set of United Nations indicators on violence against women.

(b) *Expert group meeting on multidimensional poverty in Arab countries*

45. ESCWA, in collaboration with the League of Arab States, the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, the UNICEF Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa in Amman, and the Jordanian Ministry of Social Development, organized an expert group meeting on multidimensional poverty in Arab countries, which was held in Amman on 18 and 19 December 2019. The meeting reviewed the findings of the revised Multidimensional Poverty Index Handbook and different scenarios for sensitivity analysis, and provided an opportunity to consult with regional experts and stakeholders on revising the Multidimensional Poverty Index Handbook for the Arab region and the next Arab Multidimensional Poverty Report.

(c) *Regional workshop on the use of census data for development planning and scientific research in Arab countries*

46. ESCWA, in collaboration with the High Commission for Planning in Morocco and the UNFPA Regional Office for Arab States, organized a regional workshop on the use of census data for development planning and scientific research in Arab countries, which was held in Rabat from 1 to 3 October 2019. The workshop included presentations and discussions on publishing population and housing census data in Arab countries and using them in various fields, including decision-making, population projections and their uses in identifying needs and building sectoral plans, preparing immigration policies, and monitoring the numbers and characteristics of refugees, urban planning, and poverty measurement. Participants also discussed the role of censuses and how to use their outputs in the 2030 Agenda, and various relevant global, regional and national experiences.

(d) *Regional workshop on integrating big data and geospatial information to compile SDG indicators in Arab countries*

47. The ESCWA Statistics, Information Society and Technology Cluster, in collaboration with the United Nations Statistics Division, UNEP, UN-Habitat, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, and the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics, organized an online regional workshop on integrating big data and geospatial information to compile SDG indicators in Arab countries, which was held from 13 to 15 October 2020. The workshop included presentations and discussions on the use of non-traditional data sources to compile SDG indicators, the use of geospatial information in compiling urban indicators for the SDGs and public transport, and the use of geospatial information in compiling environmental indicators for the SDGs, disaster risk management, water, land and agriculture; the use of big data to measure SDG indicators; and the use of administrative records for SDG indicators. The workshop also covered the experiences of some Arab countries, and the integration of data sources in compiling SDG indicators based on the results of a questionnaire sent to Arab statistical offices and analysed by ESCWA.

(e) *A short guide for small area estimation in household surveys: Illustration to poverty mapping in Palestine with expenditure survey and census data (E/ESCWA/SD/2019/TP.4)*

48. The report focuses on the issue of disaggregating statistical data, which is referred to in the literature on the problem of estimating small geographical areas. The report also describes key methods for classifying estimates, and explains the processes related to them through their application in mapping poverty in the State of Palestine based on data collected from a recent consumption survey and the national population census.

(f) *Regional workshop on measuring SDG indicators from population and housing censuses and civil registration data in Arab countries*

49. The ESCWA Statistics, Information Society and Technology Cluster, in collaboration with the United Nations Statistics Division and the UNFPA Regional Office for Arab States, organized an online regional workshop on measuring SDG indicators from population and housing censuses and civil registration data in Arab countries, which was held from 17 to 19 November 2020. Participants reviewed methods for measuring SDG indicators, including the role of geospatial information, using data from population and housing censuses and civil registration data; discussed challenges related to using data from population and housing census data and civil registration data in data measurement, and analytical strategies to address those challenges; reviewed the advantages of using data from population and housing census and civil registration data in detailing SDG indicators disaggregated by age, gender, disability status, and geographic location, and necessary precautions that must be taken into account; and discussed topics that could be added to tools for collecting population and housing census data to maximize the number of SDG indicators that can be monitored.

(g) *Regional workshop on poverty measurement and monitoring in the era of big data*

50. ESCWA held an online regional workshop on poverty measurement and monitoring in the era of big data on 22 and 23 December 2020. The workshop provided guidance to national statistical offices on new methodologies for measuring and monitoring the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda; identified the opportunities, challenges and limitations of using big data in the official measurement of poverty in low- and middle-income countries; reviewed the ability of frequent surveys to monitor poverty over small time periods and areas, especially targeting vulnerable groups such as refugees; and identified future research needs in statistical methodologies and highlighted the use of new data sources in measuring living conditions and poverty indicators.

(h) *Study on the use of big data in compiling SDG indicators in the Arab region: challenges and opportunities*

51. The technical paper focuses on how non-traditional information sources, particularly those provided by the big data revolution, can help official statisticians fill data gaps. The paper reviews existing projects that use big data sources for official statistics, discusses the pros and cons of using those sources, and analyses concrete examples of using remote sensing information to gain insight on poverty rates, economic activity and prices. The paper concludes that big data can help gather information on a number of focus areas, including mobility, transport, tourism, prices, corruption and crime, energy consumption, population density, land use, welfare, and the labour market. Despite the ethical, legal and technical challenges that big data represents for statisticians, it improves timing, accuracy and access to detail; increases classification capacity; and bridges official data gaps for many SDG indicators.

(i) *Technical paper on integrating geospatial information and statistical information to support SDG indicators*

52. The paper provides information on integrating geospatial information and statistical information to support SDG indicators and experiences, sets out best practices from other parts of the world, and provides a framework that defines the pillars of the geospatial statistical information infrastructure. The paper also outlines some policy principles for effective collaboration between national statistical offices and planning authorities, and those concerned with geospatial information to develop data infrastructure and related systems.

B. Project on national statistical systems – standardizing Arabic terminology

1. United Nations Handbook of Statistical Organization

53. ESCWA is collaborating with the United Nations Statistics Division to complete and translate the United Nations Directory Handbook of Statistical Organization, to develop and update official statistics. The prerequisite for completing this task is the availability of a strong legal and institutional framework for statistical systems, to guarantee their independence, integrity and accountability, and to ensure statistical quality and data security.

2. Statistics glossaries

54. ESCWA is updating and developing statistical glossaries, in collaboration with countries, and uploading them on the ESCWA platform in both Arabic and English. A total of 20 glossaries have been developed, containing over 16,000 terms and definitions. All final glossaries are submitted in collaboration with 16 teams consisting of 48 experts from Arab national statistical offices (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, the State of Palestine, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates,) for approval by the ESCWA Statistical Committee, so as to ensure consistency at the regional and global levels (especially regarding the use of standard Arabic terms for official statistics in United Nations documents and publications). Arab national statistical offices are expected to benefit from these glossaries, share them with relevant ministries, and contribute to harmonizing Arabic terms at the national level and uploading them to official websites for public use. The glossaries will be living documents and ESCWA will endeavour, in collaboration with its member States, to improve and expand them in a timely manner.

3. *E-handbook on SDG Framework and Metadata*

55. The E-handbook on SDG Framework and Metadata has been updated in both Arabic and English. All metadata have been added and translated into Arabic, including background information on indicators.

C. International Comparison Programme

56. ESCWA, as the regional executive agency for the extra-budgetary funded International Comparison Programme (ICP), conducts a number of innovative activities that it has developed, which have made the Arab region a pioneer in the ICP field, especially as ESCWA has transformed ICP from a separate programme of work into an integrated programme for price statistics. Purchasing power parities are calculated annually, thus surpassing the global ICP cycles. Since the thirteenth session of the Statistical Committee, a number of regional meetings, training courses and national capacity-building activities have been held, in addition to publishing publications, reports and technical materials.

1. *Meetings and capacity-building activities*

(a) *Regional meeting on developing PPPs under the ICP framework Western Asia*

57. ESCWA held a regional meeting to process price data and develop PPPs under the ICP framework, from 1 to 7 April 2019 in Istanbul, Turkey. The meeting was attended by representatives from the following countries: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the Sudan. The meeting reviewed and validated household and non-household consumption price data for 2017, address gaps to ensure accurate PPP results, and update the regional list of household consumption items for 2020 to harmonize the regional household consumption index with national consumer price indices.

(b) *Sub-regional meeting on computing HCPI results for non-GCC member States*

58. ESCWA organized a subregional meeting on computing HCPI results for non-GCC member States, held on 9 and 10 April 2019 in Istanbul, Turkey, and attended by representatives from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and the Sudan. The meeting presented the preliminary results of HCPI at the national and subregional levels, and compared inflation between HCPI and national indices. This activity contributed to building national capacity in calculating price indices and increasing integration between national comparison programmes and the Consumer Price Index.

(c) *National workshop on reviewing and validating household and non-household consumption price data for the United Arab Emirates*

59. ESCWA held a national workshop for the United Arab Emirates at the Dubai Statistics Centre from 19 to 23 May 2019, to address and correct inconsistencies in household and non-household consumption price data for 2017.

(d) *Regional meeting on calculating purchasing power parities and developing price statistics in the Arab region*

60. ESCWA held a regional meeting on calculating purchasing power parities and developing price statistics in the Arab region from 24 to 27 September 2019 in Istanbul, Turkey. The meeting was attended by national coordinators from 11 Arab countries, namely Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, and the United Arab Emirates. The meeting presented the preliminary results of ICP for the period 2011-2017, and reviewed the final revision of price and expenditure data before calculating the final results.

- (e) *Regional meeting to prepare for the 2020 cycle of the International Comparison Programme and to develop price surveys*

61. ESCWA held a regional meeting to prepare for the 2020 ICP cycle and to develop price surveys, from 30 September to 2 October 2019 in Istanbul, Turkey. The meeting was attended by national coordinators from 11 Arab countries, namely; Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan and the United Arab Emirates. The meeting worked on developing regional regulations for household and non-household consumption surveys for the 2020 ICP cycle, which was subsequently postponed to 2021. This activity contributed to increasing integration between ICP and national statistical work programmes.

- (f) *Regional meeting to validate national accounts data and address inconsistencies for the period 2011-2017 under the International Comparison Programme*

62. ESCWA held a regional meeting to validate national accounts data and address inconsistencies for 2011 to 2017 Under ICP, in Amman from 4 to 6 December 2019. The meeting was attended by national accounts experts from 11 Arab countries, namely Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, the State of Palestine, Qatar, And Saudi Arabia, the Sudan; and the United Arab Emirates. The meeting reviewed and addressed the remaining inconsistencies in the annual spending data for the period 2011-2017 before calculating the final ICP results.

- (g) *Joint capacity-building workshop on collecting price data for ICP and the Consumer Price Index in countries with dual ICP participation in both Africa and West Asia*

63. ESCWA held a joint capacity-building workshop on collecting price data for ICP and the Consumer Price Index in countries with dual ICP participation in both Africa and West Asia, from 18 to 23 December 2019 in Istanbul, Turkey. The meeting was attended by representatives from Egypt, Morocco, the Sudan and Tunisia. As a result of these Arab countries' dual ICP participation in both Africa and West Asia, there are some inconsistencies between the price data set from these countries for both regions. ESCWA therefore prepared a joint workshop with the African Bank to work on unifying prices between the two regions after addressing inconsistencies with representatives of the countries.

- (h) *Capacity-building activities for implementing online price scraping tools and introducing technology in developing a methodology for compiling price statistics under the ICP*

64. ESCWA implemented these activities in a number of Arab countries, including Bahrain from 8 to 12 January 2020, and in Kuwait from 11 to 13 February 2020. ESCWA also implemented this initiative electronically for both Lebanon and Qatar after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This activity aims to include technology in price statistics activities, especially at the data collection stage.

- (i) *Regional meeting to launch the 2020 ICP cycle in Western Asia and to process and validate household and non-household consumption price data for 2018*

65. ESCWA held a regional meeting to launch the 2020 ICP cycle in Western Asia and to process and validate household and non-household consumption price data for 2018, in Amman from 28 to 30 January 2020. The meeting was attended by national accounts experts from 11 Arab countries, namely Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan and the United Arab Emirates. The meeting reviewed price data for 2018 and launched the 2020 ICP cycle, which was then postponed to 2021.

- (j) *Intensive training workshop on building national capacity in the field of price statistics and ICP and their integration with the Consumer Price Index*

66. ESCWA held an intensive training workshop on building national capacity in the field of price statistics and ICP and their integration with the Consumer Price Index, in Amman from 2 to 6 February 2020. It was

attended by representatives from 11 Arab countries, namely Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates. The workshop aimed to expand the national work base in the field of price statistics in general, and ICP in particular. The workshop included practical sessions where participants applied their training through rapid exercises and attempts to enter and validate price data on a special programme.

- (k) *National capacity-building workshop on entering and validating household consumption price data for Lebanon*

67. ESCWA held a national capacity-building workshop on entering and validating household consumption price data for Lebanon under ICP, in Beirut on 11 and 12 November 2020. The workshop aimed to train national team to enter and validate ICP household consumption price data using a special programme, so as to prepare the team for the 2021 cycle. It also aimed to build capacity in entering and validating data and addressing inconsistencies in household consumption price data for ICP and the Consumer Price Index.

2. *Publications, reports and technical material*

- (a) *ICP training material and integration with the Consumer Price Index*

68. ESCWA developed training material to build the capacity of member States in the field of price statistics, especially ICP and its integration with the Consumer Price Index. The material was used in an intensive training course to build national capacity in the field of price statistics, which was held from 2 to 6 February 2020. ESCWA made these materials available to the national statistical offices of the countries that participated in the training course.

- (b) *Purchasing power parities and the real size of Arab economies: a comprehensive regional report covering PPP results for 2011 to 2019*

69. In December 2020, ESCWA published a comprehensive report covering ICP results for the period 2011-2019. The report presents PPPs, and indicators of price levels, income levels, and total per capita spending in the Arab region for the period 2011-2017 from a global perspective and for the period 2011-2019 from a regional perspective. The report also provides reliable comparisons of the real size of the Arab economy with the real size of the global economy, and comparisons of the real sizes of Arab economies among themselves and with the economies of other countries globally. It also provides an overview of major changes in spatial comparisons over time and tracks key economic indicators over the years. Moreover, the report also presents the multiple uses and benefits of PPPs, particularly their role in tracking progress in achieving eight of the SDGs.

- (c) *Database and electronic converter*

70. ESCWA developed a [comprehensive and detailed database](#) on the PPP results and related economic indicators for a complete time series extending from 2011 to 2019. It also developed an [electronic tool](#) that enables conversion on the basis of PPPs and immediate comparison with exchange rates.
