

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL  
COUNCIL**

Distr.  
LIMITED  
E/ESCWA/C.1/2021/3(Part I)  
21 December 2020  
ENGLISH  
ORIGINAL: ARABIC

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

Statistical Committee  
Fourteenth session  
Online, 10-11 February 2021

Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda

**Activities implemented in the field of statistics****Follow-up on recommendations made by the Statistical Committee  
at its thirteenth session and previous recommendations****Summary**

At its thirteenth session held in Beirut on 29 and 30 January 2019, the Statistical Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) issued recommendations to member States and to the ESCWA secretariat. The present document sets out measures taken by the secretariat to implement the recommendations issued to it at that session and also outlines the secretariat's efforts to implement previous recommendations made by the Statistical Committee.

The Statistical Committee is invited to take note of the present document and comment thereon. It is also invited to review measures taken by member States to follow up on recommendations issued to them, as set out in paragraph 4 of the present document.

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## **Introduction**

1. At its thirteenth session held in Beirut on 29 and 30 January 2019, the Statistical Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) issued recommendations to member States and to the ESCWA secretariat.
2. The present document sets out measures taken by the secretariat between January 2019 and January 2021 to implement the recommendations issued to it, and outlines efforts by the secretariat to implement recommendations made before that period.
3. The present document also sets out recommendations to member States so as to enable representatives to review measures taken by their countries to implement those recommendations, or to provide written or oral summaries.

### **I. Recommendations to member States**

4. At its thirteenth session, the Statistical Committee issued the following recommendations to ESCWA member States:

(a) Welcome activities implemented as follow-up to recommendations made by the Statistical Committee at its twelfth session and activities implemented under the ESCWA work programme in the field of statistics, take note of the proposed programme plan for 2020 as set out in document [E/ESCWA/C.1/2019/7](#), and benefit from ESCWA services in agreed future activities;

(b) Take note of progress in implementing the Arab Regional Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data, which was adopted by the ESCWA Statistical Committee at its twelfth session (Beirut, 4-5 April 2017);

(c) Make national presentations on progress in implementing Statistical Committee recommendations;

(d) Integrate the priorities and needs of national statistical offices in technical cooperation frameworks that the ESCWA secretariat is developing with member States, so as to ensure that those frameworks constitute a comprehensive reference for technical cooperation projects;

(e) Continue updating and developing national statistical systems, benefit from technology in producing, collecting and using information and data, and focus on geospatial technologies and new technologies in censuses and surveys, while taking into account that the success of such processes relies on the availability of technical and financial support, especially in evaluating the infrastructure and readiness of statistical offices;

(f) Refer to the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework developed by the United Nations Expert Group on the Integration of Statistical and Geospatial Information to improve the quality of official statistics and population censuses, and to develop a statistical geospatial framework for each country that takes into account its circumstances and specificities;

(g) Shift towards using administrative registers as a key source of official statistics, and adapt them to serve such statistics;

(h) Adopt the System of National Accounts 2008 (2008 SNA) as a conceptual and regulatory framework for collecting various types of economic statistics, so as to ensure integration and consistency among them;

(i) Use all available economic statistics from various sources under a practical framework that allows for comparisons to highlight and tackle gaps, and employ supply and use tables given that they are the most appropriate framework to achieve that end;

(j) Develop statistical business registers and related classifications in the collection of trade and business statistics, while focusing on strengthening national partnerships in that field in line with country-specific partnership networks;

(k) Develop statistics on the environment and natural resources, and use appropriate statistical frameworks and geospatial information that assist in calculating sustainable development indicators related to the environment;

(l) Adopt draft metadata for indicators on demographic and social statistics in Arab countries, as agreed at the first meeting of the Technical Advisory Group on Demographic and Social Statistics (17-18 October 2016), submit comments on the draft by 15 February 2019, and continue providing data related to those indicators and to the proposed sustainable development indicators;

(m) Welcome the proposal to organize a high-level meeting attended by heads of national statistical offices and decision makers in the Arab region, so as to strengthen dialogue between data producers and users;

(n) Welcome a joint initiative between the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the ESCWA secretariat on forming a regional working group to coordinate labour statistics between Arab countries.

## II. Recommendations to the ESCWA secretariat

5. At its thirteenth sessions, the Statistical Committee issued several recommendations to the ESCWA secretariat. The following table sets out the recommendations as presented in the report of the thirteenth session of the Statistical Committee, and their respective implementation measures. Under item 4 of the provisional agenda on activities implemented in the field of statistics, the Statistical Committee will consider documents providing further details of the measures summarized in the following table.

Recommendation	Implementation measures
<p>(a) Continue following up with member States on unimplemented Statistical Committee recommendations, in line with a follow-up mechanism prepared by the secretariat that contains periodic updates on statistical offices' plans and programmes;</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ESCWA secretariat assessed the recommendations that had not been implemented in previous sessions, and concluded that those recommendations had been carried over to the recommendations of the thirteenth session;</li> <li>• Priorities for statistical work are discussed in technical advisory group meetings held each year with representatives of national statistical offices in specific areas;</li> <li>• A document entitled "Regional priorities for the coming years in the field of statistics" will be presented under item 6 of the provisional agenda for the current session of the Statistical Committee.</li> </ul>

Recommendation	Implementation measures
<p>(b) Rely on assessments of needs and gaps to provide support to countries according to the development level of their statistical systems and apparatuses;</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Updating the web page on censuses in the Arab region;</li> <li>• Assessing and monitoring the availability of national data on the United Nations global platform for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in January and August of each year;</li> <li>• Conducting an assessment of Arab national reporting platforms for the SDGs (<a href="#">E/ESCWA/CL4.SIT/2020/TP.6</a>);</li> <li>• Updating the Arab register of censuses and surveys;</li> <li>• Updating the Arab register of tools for collecting disability data.</li> </ul>
<p>(c) Work on integrating member States' proposals in the vision and strategic directions for ESCWA work in the field of statistics for the period 2020-2025, in line with the mandate of ESCWA and available resources;</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The recommendation to member States issued at the sixth ESCWA special session held in Amman on 21 and 22 December 2019, on welcoming the development of the SDG Monitor presented by the secretariat as an interactive practical tool for measuring progress in implementing the SDGs in the Arab region, and disseminating it at the national level, is being implemented;</li> <li>• Member States' priorities are regularly discussed at meetings of the Technical Advisory Group on Demographic and Social Statistics and of the Technical Advisory Group on Economic Statistics, at meetings of the inter-agency expert groups on gender and disability statistics, and at meetings of the Task Force on Population and Housing Censuses for Arab Countries. The secretariat has incorporated the results of these discussions into a document entitled "Regional priorities for the coming years in the field of statistics", which is presented to the Statistical Committee at its current session under item 6 of the provisional agenda;</li> <li>• Specific examples of member States' proposals implemented by ESCWA include the following: projects on transport statistics, and pilot projects on the use of big data. The Committee will review the results of these projects under item 8 of the provisional agenda.</li> </ul>

Recommendation	Implementation measures
<p>(d) Continue capacity-building efforts to monitor the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under the Arab Regional Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data, and develop tools that assist member States to monitor SDG implementation at the national level;</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing the Arab SDG Gateway <a href="http://arabsdggateway.unescwa.org">http://arabsdggateway.unescwa.org</a>, and the Arab SDG Monitor and related tools <a href="http://arabsdgmmonitor.unescwa.org">http://arabsdgmmonitor.unescwa.org</a>;</li> <li>• Providing technical support to Arab countries to develop national reporting platforms for the SDGs under the ESCWA programme to improve the production and dissemination of SDG data to leave no one behind (see document E/ESCWA/C.1/2021/4 presented to the Committee at its current session under item 5 of the provisional agenda). Support is provided by conducting an audit of national data, building capacity and providing training to ensure the sustainability of these platforms;</li> <li>• Updating the SDG metadata platform in Arabic and English: <a href="http://www.unescwa.org/ehandbook-sdg-framework-metadata">www.unescwa.org/ehandbook-sdg-framework-metadata</a>;</li> <li>• Holding two regional workshops on the use of Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX) in reporting on SDG indicators under the Development Account Programme on Statistics and Data;</li> <li>• Developing a regional framework for gender statistics and linking it to SDG indicators through the publication of the Arab Gender Gap Report 2020: Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals (E/ESCWA/SD/2019/4);</li> <li>• Developing the “ESCWA Disability Framework: 115 indicators to bridge the gap between policy and statistics”, which is the first framework in the world that links disability-related indicators under the following 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;</li> <li>• In view of the new requirements of the 2030 Agenda, the Arab model questionnaire to measure violence against women and its implementation tools (second edition) was issued as an independent model that can be used in national surveys on violence against women.</li> </ul>
<p>(e) Provide technical support to member States to develop statistical infrastructure, especially through the transfer of expertise between statistical offices in the region, focusing on the following issues:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ESCWA is collaborating with the United Nations Statistics Division in New York to complete and translate the United Nations Handbook of Statistical Organization;</li> </ul>

Recommendation	Implementation measures
<p>(i) Developing new statistical strategies that take into account disparities in capacity between statistical offices, and supporting transformations in official statistics towards new data sources and types according to the requirements of measuring progress towards the SDGs;</p> <p>(ii) Applying alternative statistical collection methods in conflict-affected countries, so as to provide the minimum amount of data required for decision-making;</p> <p>(iii) Developing supply and use tables and sub-accounts in the System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA), especially water and energy accounts, to ensure integration in the collection of periodic national accounts and related SDG indicators;</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ESCWA prepared a draft national statistics law for Arab countries;</li> <li>• ESCWA organized several regional workshops on integrating big data and geospatial information to collect SDG indicators in Arab countries, and a regional workshop on measuring SDG indicators using population and housing censuses and civil registration data in Arab countries;</li> <li>• ESCWA developed new methods for collecting price data through the use of big data, especially web scraping, and conducted training sessions for a number of member States on this new approach;</li> <li>• ESCWA held several regional meetings, including one on the use of technology in population and housing censuses and on planning for the 2020 round in Arab countries; an expert group meeting on the evaluation of census data in Arab countries; an online workshop on enhancing geospatial capacity in population and housing censuses for Arab countries; a regional workshop on the use of census data for development planning and scientific research in Arab countries; and a regional workshop on measuring and monitoring poverty in the era of big data;</li> <li>• ESCWA issued a study on assessing the quality of age and gender data for population censuses in some Arab countries, a study on deaths and completeness of death reports among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, a guide on small-area estimates using household survey data: a model application of poverty maps in the State of Palestine using expenditure surveys and population census data, a study on the use of big data to compile SDG indicators in the Arab region, and a technical paper on integrating geospatial information and statistical information to support SDG indicators;</li> <li>• In the third quarter of 2019, ESCWA provided Arabic training materials to the e-learning platform of the United Nations Statistics Division on: the System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA), in-depth training on energy accounting, and other training on water accounts;</li> </ul>

Recommendation	Implementation measures
<p>(iv) Supporting the establishment and development of statistical and geospatial information for the 2020 Round of Censuses and in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ESCWA translated the new Arabic version of the International Recommendations for Energy Statistics (IRES);</li> <li>• The expert group meeting on the theme “Resource efficiency in the Arab region: monitoring progress of SDG 12 and building back better from COVID-19” was held on 7 and 8 October 2020. The first day of the meeting was devoted to the applications of supply and use tables in the calculation of specific indicators in SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production;</li> <li>• ESCWA participated in preparing a regional study on the use of geographical information in the 2020 census round;</li> <li>• ESCWA organized a regional workshop on the use of geographical information in the 2020 round of censuses;</li> <li>• ESCWA prepared a study on the use of geospatial information in calculating SDG indicators;</li> <li>• ESCWA organized a regional workshop in October 2020 on the use of geospatial information in calculating SDG indicators;</li> <li>• ESCWA strengthened collaboration with the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) and UN-GGIM for Arab States on integrating statistics and geospatial information, including 2020 population censuses.</li> </ul>
<p>(f) Shift towards 2008 SNA and its required statistics, taking into account regional shortfalls and needs that can be assessed through questionnaires and evaluations; and use all available data from various sources, including surveys, administrative registers and statistical business registers, before conducting new economic surveys;</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducting field visits to Arab countries to provide technical assistance by evaluating methods, data sources and procedures used in compliance with the 2008 SNA, while ensuring data quality;</li> <li>• Providing technical assistance to several Arab countries to facilitate the annual production of supply and use tables, in accordance with 2008 SNA recommendations. In this context, workshops were organized for a group of countries that had prepared these tables and countries that had started preparing them, so as to facilitate the exchange of experiences between them;</li> </ul>



Recommendation	Implementation measures
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ESCWA, in collaboration with the Arab Statistical Initiative, which is supervised by the Arab Monetary Fund, organized a workshop addressing key challenges in providing various statistics considered as basic sources for preparing national accounts, in particular financial statistics.</li> </ul>
(g) Develop business and trade statistics and statistical business registers and related economic classifications, and link administrative registers to statistical business registers;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing a platform on foreign trade data for the Arab region in both Arabic and English at level six of the Harmonized System, with the ability to search and download unlimited data according to commodity name or code, and to generate graphs and display tools on trade by commodity groups and regional trade agreements;</li> <li>• After preparing a study on statistical business registers and the Arabic version of a related glossary of the terms, in collaboration with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, ESCWA is preparing a broader study on the principles of statistical business registers and statistical units for 2020.</li> </ul>
(h) Prepare a manual to benefit from international principles on big data and related ethical standards, develop a comprehensive platform for existing initiatives on big data, and assess statistical offices' readiness to use it;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparing two working papers on the role of big data in producing SDG indicators.</li> </ul>
(i) Follow up on priority issues agreed at the second meeting of the Technical Advisory Group on Economic Statistics (Beirut, 27-28 August 2018) that inform the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including Islamic financing;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Working Group on Islamic Finance, led by ESCWA, made recommendations on the classification of Islamic financial instruments and of Islamic financial institutions, and on methods for calculating the outputs of Islamic financial services. These recommendations were endorsed by the Working Group and the Advisory Expert Group on National Accounts. After the United Nations Statistical Commission, at its fifty-first session held in 2020, requested that SNA be updated, and after the International Monetary Fund (IMF) recommended updating the sixth edition of the Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual and developing guidelines on the statistical treatment of Islamic finance in external sector statistics, the United Nations Statistics Division and IMF agreed to form a joint working group comprising members</li> </ul>

Recommendation	Implementation measures
	<p>from international organizations concerned with Islamic finance issues and representatives of selected countries, so as to develop a guidance note on the harmonized treatment of Islamic finance in national accounts and external sector statistics;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following up on a recommendation on adding transport statistics to the ESCWA programme of work and providing support to build the statistical capacity of member States in this field, ESCWA took several implementation steps as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Preparing a questionnaire on transport statistics in the Arab region to assess the status of ESCWA member States in terms of collecting transport data and ensuring their quality, completeness, sources, periodicity of dissemination, timeliness and collection methods are aligned with international and regional standards. The questionnaire also assessed the availability of transport data and member States' efforts to provide SDG indicators on transport data;</li> <li>○ Holding a number of regional workshops on building capacity and exchanging experiences in the field of transport data, as follows: a regional workshop on developing transport statistics and SDG indicators on transport in Arab countries, held in Beirut in September 2019; a 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 (vehicle-kilometre), held online in September 2020; and a 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 (vehicle-kilometre), held online in December 2020;</li> <li>○ ESCWA prepared two technical papers. The first dealt with the status of transport statistics in the Arab region (<a href="#">E/ESCWA/CL4.SIT/2020/WP.1</a>). The second paper, which is under publication, includes complementary or alternative sources of data related to road transport statistics, and examines the use of machine learning to provide additional insights into road accidents.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Recommendation	Implementation measures
<p>(j) Continue implementing regional programmes on developing and harmonizing price statistics, as represented in the International Comparison Programme (ICP) and the initiative to harmonize the consumer price index for Arab countries;</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ESCWA succeeded in transforming the International Comparison Programme (ICP) into a regular work programme that calculates purchasing power parities on an annual basis, thus providing key indicators that allow a real comparison of the sizes of countries' economies, income, levels of wellbeing, price levels, individual spending, and other important comparisons for economic analysis and policymaking. Purchasing power parities are also used in monitoring progress towards the SDGs. ESCWA has integrated ICP with national work programmes on computing the Consumer Price Index to ensure an integrated and comprehensive framework and to standardize methodologies for calculating harmonized price indices;</li> <li>• In this context, ESCWA issued a comprehensive and detailed report on purchasing power parities and related economic indicators in an annual series from 2011 to 2019, highlighting the main results for the Arab region. ESCWA has also developed a comprehensive database that provides access to detailed data.</li> </ul>
<p>(k) Continue preparing a strategy and action plan to tackle gaps in data series, taking into account disparities between Arab countries and countries under unfavourable conditions for data production, and build statistical capacity in calculating composite and emerging indicators;</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within the framework of the second phase of the ESCWA programme to improve the production and dissemination of SDG data to leave no one behind in 2021, gaps in data chains will be addressed by developing available data sources, such as surveys and administrative records.</li> </ul>
<p>(l) Continue preparing a guide on metadata for indicators on demographic and social statistics in Arab countries that includes concepts, definitions and mechanisms to calculate indicators, their level of disaggregation and ways to disseminate them; add a list of sustainable development indicators related to demographic and social statistics and align them with the core indicators; identify a set of crime indicators; and add metadata elements such as bodies responsible for producing indicators, when they should be produced, their availability and unit of measurement;</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A metadata guide for indicators has been prepared and approved by Arab countries, and new elements have been added to the metadata, such as entities responsible for producing an indicator, the periodicity of dissemination, its availability, and its unit of measurement. This guide was submitted to the Technical Advisory Committee on Demographic and Social Statistics for Arab Countries.</li> </ul>

Recommendation	Implementation measures
<p>(m) Continue developing statistical methodologies to ensure data quality, and provide processed metadata and ways to analyse and disseminate them using emerging methods;</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparing two working papers on the role of geospatial information and big data in producing SDG indicators;</li> <li>• Publishing a study on the quality of age-related data in censuses of selected Arab countries;</li> <li>• Establishing the ESCWA Data Portal; updating economic, social and environmental databases; establishing new databases, including on gender and disability statistics and ICP-related statistics; and developing dashboards for each category of statistics to enable users to conduct research, use visual imaging tools and create their own dashboards;</li> </ul> <p>Updating statistical glossaries in collaboration with Arab countries, and publishing them on the ESCWA platform in both Arabic and English; and developing 20 glossaries with over 16,000 terms and definitions.</p>
<p>(n) Strengthen partnerships and coordination in the field of statistics between United Nations bodies and specialized agencies and regional and international organizations through existing mechanisms, such as the regional Task Force on SDG Data of the Regional Coordination Mechanism and the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, while focusing on the importance of coordinating various work programmes to avoid duplication.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ESCWA participates in the working group on data and statistics of the Regional Collaborative Platform, which includes the regional offices of United Nations entities and which holds its meetings in collaboration with the regional office of the United Nations Population Fund;</li> <li>• ESCWA participates in the regional task force on Arab geospatial information, which it leads jointly with UN-Habitat. The task force aims to establish a platform for displaying national and subnational data using geospatial technology and other related applications in the field of statistics;</li> <li>• ESCWA works with United Nations regional teams that have established task forces on data and statistics, comprising members from Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Yemen;</li> <li>• ESCWA collaborates with regional institutions outside the United Nations system, including the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics, the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries, the Islamic Development Bank, and the regional and global offices of the World Bank, the IMF and the League of Arab States;</li> </ul>

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Implementation measures</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The statistics directors of the United Nations regional commissions hold weekly coordination meetings on harmonizing methods for presenting data on the SDGs and other topics, and hold meetings every two months with the Director of the United Nations Statistics Division;</li> <li>• ESCWA is an active member of the Committee for the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System, and of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities. It has contributed to two publications of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.</li> </ul>

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