



## **Report**

### **Third meeting of the Technical Advisory Group on Demographic and Social Statistics for Arab Countries Virtual, 13-16 July 2020**

#### **Summary**

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held the third meeting of the Technical Advisory Group on Demographic and Social Statistics for Arab Countries virtually from 13 to 16 July 2020.

At its first meeting, the Technical Advisory Group focused on ensuring that all countries in the region had the capacity to deliver a core list of population and social indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At the second meeting, participants discussed additions to the core indicator list that corresponded to SDG indicators, and a strategy to address data gaps within the Arab region. At the third meeting, participants focused on the data availability of the core indicator list, and discussed bridging data gaps in each thematic area.

## Contents

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
Introduction .....	1	3
<i>Chapter</i>		
<b>I. Outcomes and recommendations</b> .....	2	3
<b>II. Topics for discussion</b> .....	3-11	4
<b>III. Organization of work</b> .....	12-14	5
A. Participants.....	12	5
B. Opening.....	13-14	5
<i>Annex.</i> List of participants.....		6

## **Introduction**

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held the third meeting of the Technical Advisory Group on Demographic and Social Statistics for Arab Countries through Webex, from 13 to 16 July 2020. A total of 48 participants from 14 ESCWA member States, six United Nations agencies and the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC-Stat) attended the meeting.

### **I. Outcomes and recommendations**

2. Participants agreed on a set of outcomes and recommendations. They issued recommendations on expected activities of national statistical offices, partner organizations and ESCWA.

#### *Recommendation to national statistical offices*

- Provide data to ESCWA in line with agreed indicators;
- Facilitate cooperation between national statistical offices and data producers at the national level to collect data;
- Provide ESCWA with an application programming interface (API) to access its databases, so as to access the data required to measure availability and evaluate indicators;
- Add questions related to the issue of COVID-19 in ongoing surveys especially in labour force surveys, to assess its impact on populations.

#### *Recommendation to international and regional organizations*

Strengthen cooperation between United Nations organizations, regional organizations participating in the Technical Advisory Group and ESCWA to support the work of the Technical Advisory Group, and to build the statistical capacity of Technical Advisory Group and national statistical offices in the region.

#### *Recommendations to ESCWA*

- Resend the spreadsheets used to assess the availability of demographic and social indicators, for review and updating;
- Provide a copy of the Point Proposal for Formulating the Regional Strategy for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics for the period 2020-2025 for review and comments, and offer the opportunity to cooperate and formulate a project on the topic;
- Establish a new mechanism for the exchange of statistical data collected periodically by ESCWA from countries and national statistical offices, by developing an electronic platform that includes definitions and metadata;
- Enhance cooperation and coordination between ESCWA, specialized agencies, and international and regional organizations working in the field of demographic and social statistics regarding the design of questionnaires sent to countries on their work programmes, with a view to uniting efforts and reducing duplication in these activities;
- Cooperate and coordinate with international and regional organizations to formulate a project to develop statistical capabilities in Arab countries in conflict and in countries with unfavorable conditions for implementing official statistical activities;
- Coordinate with GCC-Stat regarding the exchange of required forms and the approval of the mechanism for sending those forms to Gulf Cooperation Council countries with a copy to GCC-Stat;

- Organize a workshop and advisory missions on assessing data that can be obtained from administrative records as opposed to statistical survey data so as to fill data gaps;
- Complete data series for unavailable years by calculating estimates based on statistical models (whenever possible), in coordination with national statistical agencies;
- Organize a training workshop for calculating nutrition/food security indicators from specialized surveys and administrative records;
- Organize training courses and workshops on measuring and collecting indicators and disaggregations that are not available or adequately defined, such as crime indicators, urban and rural indicators, and migration and asylum statistics;
- Update the list of liaison officers between statistical offices and ESCWA who have been nominated by heads of the statistical offices to communicate with them directly regarding updating demographic and social data and statistics.

## **II. Topics for discussion**

3. Mr. Marwan Khawaja, Chief of the Demographic and Social Statistics Section of the ESCWA Statistics Division opened the meeting and presented the plan of the sessions for the next four days.

4. The first session of the meeting included a presentation moderated by Mr. Ismael Lubbad, ESCWA Statistician. The presentation focused on the strategy for filling data gaps in the Arab region, the steps taken to fill those gaps, and the actions suggested by ESCWA to fill those gaps.

5. At the second session, moderated by Mr. Lubbad, the gaps in population data were reviewed. The ensuing discussion included:

- (a) Challenges faced by countries in identifying urban, rural and camp areas;
- (b) The overlap and duplication of data between countries and how to address them;
- (c) Challenges faced by countries in identifying classifications/disaggregation;
- (d) Establishing an online platform for countries to share data and facilitate communication between countries, and providing training to use it;
- (e) Assisting countries facing challenges, such as Yemen.

6. The election of the chair of the Technical Advisory Group was held at the start of the second day, under the supervision of Mr. Khawaja. After the vote, the representative of Yemen was appointed Chair, and the representatives of Bahrain and Morocco as Vice-Chairs.

7. At the third session and fourth sessions, Mr. Lubbad presented data gaps concerning household composition, housing conditions, and health indicators. In the ensuing discussion, countries requested ESCWA to return the spreadsheets that were used to assess the availability of demographic and social indicators for countries to review and update. Countries also stressed the importance of taking data from national statistical offices.

8. Mr. Tareq Alkebsi of Yemen opened the fifth session on the third day, which covered presentations by Mr. Lubbad on data gaps in labour and poverty statistics. Participants discussed the need for a new strategy to collect data with less time and resources, the importance of having the same definition of an indicator between countries, and the issue of using estimations to bridge data gaps. They also discussed the impact of conflict and COVID-19 on data collection was also discussed, and the need for new strategies for poverty data collection.

9. Mr. Alkebsi moderated the sixth session on data gaps in education indicators. Mr. Lubbad noted difficulties faced by ESCWA in collecting education data from some countries. In the ensuing discussion, participants addressed the importance of statistical offices in coordinating with national systems such as ministries, having focal points for certain statistical thematic areas, and sharing data between organizations.

10. The fourth day began with a discussion on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on national statistical offices in the Arab region. The topics discussed included delays in censuses, problems with registers, and new survey methods. Participants acknowledged that surveys were being conducted using phone calls, emails and electronics platforms, and that the pandemic had led to an accumulation of unprocessed data and delays in collecting data.

11. Mr. Alkebsi opened the final session and gave the floor to Mr. Khawaja who asked participants for their views on the role of organizations in relation to demographic and social indicators. Ms. Hala Youssef, Population Data and Policy Adviser at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) gave a presentation on the analysis of demographic data and on progress in the population and development agenda. The meeting concluded with a discussion of the recommendations, presented by Ms. Maha Sabt of Bahrain.

### **III. Organization of work**

#### **A. Participants**

12. The third meeting of the Technical Advisory Group on Demographic and Social Statistics was attended by participants with practical and applied experience in demographic and social statistics, in their capacity as representatives of 14 ESCWA member States and their respective national statistical offices. The meeting was also attended by five representatives from GCC-STAT, and representatives from the United Nations Population Fund, the World Health Organization, UNESCO, UN-Habitat, and the International Labour Organization. The list of participants is set out in the annex to the present report.

#### **B. Opening**

13. In his opening statement, Mr. Khawaja welcomed participants and commended efforts in the field of statistics. He reviewed the meeting's goals, recalling the terms of reference of the Technical Advisory Group and its work objectives. He said that one of the motivations for holding the current meeting was the challenges faced by ESCWA in providing data for demographic and social indicators, especially time series data, and noted that significant disparities existed between countries in that regard. He added that participants' recommendations would be presented to the heads of national statistical offices for adoption at the thirteenth session of the ESCWA Statistical Committee.

Annex\*

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