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**Technical cooperation and statistical capacity development
in the Arab region**

Summary

This document provides an overview of advisory services, workshops, fellowships and capacity-building projects in the field of statistics projected for the biennium 2018-2019. It also proposes ways to strengthen regional cooperation on statistical matters, particularly in the context of monitoring and reporting on implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Participants to the twelfth session of the Statistical Committee are invited to take note of the technical cooperation and capacity-building activities undertaken, and provide guidance on new projects and regional priorities in the area of statistics.

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Introduction

1. Subprogramme 5, on statistics for evidence-based policymaking, of the programme of work of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) is implemented by the Statistics Division. It focuses on providing support for national statistical systems in the Arab region. Technical cooperation and capacity-building are thus a priority and make up 60 per cent of the Division's activities, data collection, production and dissemination 30 per cent; and regional coordination and partnerships building 10 per cent.

2. Technical cooperation and capacity-building activities consist of advisory services rendered to member States upon their request, workshops, fellowships, and projects funded through the United Nations Development Account (DA), the Regular Programme for Technical Cooperation (RPTC) or extrabudgetary sources. They are carried out in coordination with the Thematic Working Group on SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) Data, which was established by the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Arab States, and in cooperation with regional and country offices of other United Nations entities.

I. ADVISORY SERVICES

3. During the biennium 2014-2015, about a quarter of all advisory services provided by ESCWA (24 out of 99) were in the area of statistics. Ten member States, namely Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, the State of Palestine, the Sudan and the United Arab Emirates, benefited from such services. They were rendered by professional staff from the Division and external contractors, upon availability of resources. However, due to funding and staff shortages, some requests could not be met, especially in the fields of gender and social statistics.

II. WORKSHOPS

4. The following regional capacity-building workshops are planned to be held in the biennium 2018-2019.

Workshops	Partners
Social and demographic statistics	
<p>Theme: Implementation of Arab population and housing censuses (2020 census round).</p> <p>Objective: To summarize lessons learned from the 2010 round of population and housing censuses, with a view to accelerating and streamlining the preparation and implementation of the 2020 round.</p>	<p>World Health Organization (WHO)</p> <p>United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)</p> <p>Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics (AITRS)</p>
Gender statistics and disability statistics	
<p>Theme: Adapting national gender statistics programmes to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and improving disability statistics.</p> <p>Objective: To build member States' capacity in gender statistics and disability statistics for monitoring and reporting on SDG implementation.</p>	<p>United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)</p> <p>UN-Women</p> <p>Washington Group</p>
Economic statistics	
<p>Theme: National accounts and infrastructure and SDG-related economic indicators.</p> <p>Objective: To improve the exhaustiveness of gross domestic product (GDP) by including the informal</p>	<p>UNSD</p> <p>International Monetary Fund (IMF)</p> <p>AITRS</p> <p>Other United Nations regional commissions</p>

Workshops	Partners
sector and using business registers to cover small and medium enterprises.	
<p>Theme: Supply and use tables (SUTs). Objective: To strengthen national expertise in constructing simplified SUTs, with a view to improving GDP estimates and economic statistics in support of evidence-based policymaking.</p>	<p>UNSD IMF AITRS Other United Nations regional commissions</p>
<p>Theme: Islamic banking and national accounts. Objective: To build capacity in the treatment of transactions in national accounts.</p>	<p>UNSD IMF</p>
<p>Theme: Computation of 2018 and 2019 purchasing power parities (PPPs). Objective: To produce PPP estimates for 2018 and 2019, based on the experience gained in computing 2017 PPP.</p>	<p>World Bank</p>
<p>Theme: Statistics of international trade in services (SITS). Objective: To build capacity in collecting and compiling such statistics, including applying international recommendations on balance of payments (version 6), compiling foreign affiliates statistics, and using the SITS manual (version 2010).</p>	<p>UNSD World Trade Organization Arab Monetary Fund United Nations Conference on Trade and Development</p>
SDG indicators	
<p>Theme: Water, energy and food nexus. Objective: To discuss Goals on water, energy and food.</p>	<p>UNSD UNEP UN-Water Sustainable Energy for All World Bank</p>
<p>Theme: Meeting of the Arab Working Group on Environment and Sustainable Development Indicators. Objective: To raise awareness among national statistical offices and other institutions involved in planning for development and reporting on SDGs of the pressing need for a tailored monitoring and reporting system on sustainable development in the Arab region.</p>	<p>League of Arab States United Nations Environment Programme</p>
Additional workshops (subject to available funding)	
<p>Development of statistical business registers to modernize statistical systems and implement the 2008 System of National Accounts (SNA).</p>	<p>IMF AITRS</p>
<p>Follow up on the Development Account project on Strengthening the statistical capacity of ESCWA member countries in producing and disseminating short-term economic indicators for sustainable growth.</p>	<p>UNSD</p>

Workshops	Partners
Designing economic surveys taking into account existing administrative sources for the implementation of the 2008 SNA (partly funded through RPTC).	IMF AITRS
Civil registration and vital statistics (a pilot project on Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon is funded from extrabudgetary resources).	UNFPA
Use of technology in population and housing censuses, and on the 2020 round of censuses (partly funded through the regular budget and RPTC).	UNFPA
Capacity development in disability statistics.	Washington Group UNSD
Follow-up on the implementation of e-learning tools and a toolkit on gender statistics.	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

III. FELLOWSHIPS

5. Exchanges of expertise among staff from national statistical offices through fellowships contribute significantly to progress in implementing new official statistics techniques. Such exchanges can also serve to increase exposure of staff from Arab countries to statistical offices and systems in other parts of the world.

6. ESCWA provides funding of study tours and participation in expert groups, seminars and workshops for staff from national statistical offices of member States through RPTC, the United Nations Development Account and extrabudgetary funds. During the biennium 2014-2015, ESCWA sponsored several study tours: for two statistics officials from Jordan to participate in the workshop on quarterly national accounts (Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, 23-26 February 2014); and four statistics officials from Egypt, Oman, the State of Palestine and Tunisia to participate in workshops on short-term economic indicators (Geneva, 8-10 December 2015; and Denmark, 13-15 September 2016).

IV. PROJECTS

7. The theme of the tenth tranche of the DA is “strengthening statistics and data, evidence-based policies and accountability” to respond to the data challenges of the 2030 Agenda. ESCWA is engaged, along with nine other United Nations entities, in a programme for statistics and data within the tenth tranche. The programme responds to targets 17.18 and 17.19 of the SDGs on enhancing capacity-building support to developing countries to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable disaggregated data; and on building on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement GDP.

8. ESCWA is also engaged in the RPTC-funded project on initiating implementation of SNA 2008 in the region in 2018 and 2019. The goal is to improve the quality of statistics with a view to implementing the SNA 2008, particularly in terms of comparability of data.

9. ESCWA was successful in mobilizing resources for a project on supporting civil registration and vital statistics systems for Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon. The main donor is the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, and partners include the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, WHO, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and Statistics Norway. The three main objectives of the project are:

- (a) To evaluate the vital registration systems for Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon;
- (b) To support coordination of efforts among national authorities and international agencies, with a view to improving responsiveness of these systems to the refugees' needs;
- (c) To enhance the capacity of Jordan and Lebanon to produce accurate, timely vital statistics that include refugee populations and are disaggregated by nationality and other policy-relevant variables.

V. STRENGTHENING THE STATISTICAL TECHNICAL COOPERATION NETWORK

10. The Regional Coordination Mechanism for Arab States has established a Thematic Working Group on SDG Data, co-chaired by UNFPA and ESCWA. The work programme includes:

- (a) Inventory of activities related to SDG data of participating agencies;
- (b) List of indicators that identifies custodian agencies, data availability and sources;
- (c) Gaps analysis and remedy seeking;
- (d) Data sharing mechanism, possibly including a centralized SDG database;
- (e) Advocacy at the national level.

11. The Thematic Working Group considers it important to cooperate with regional statistical agencies such as AITRS, GCC-Stat, the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) and AMF, which are not part of the Regional Coordination Mechanism but play an important role in statistics. These organizations shall be invited to the sessions of the ESCWA Statistical Committee, which could provide a platform for dialogue on regional priorities in terms of statistics and thus contribute to improved coordination of technical cooperation activities.

VI. CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD

12. Changes in the political and security dynamics in the region, conflicts and crises have thwarted development achievements. New needs and priorities have emerged, requiring new interventions. Technical cooperation has also been affected by conflict, and overcoming the difficulties will require innovative, cost-effective measures.

13. According to feedback from member States, there is a need for more activities at the national level, advisory missions should be strengthened and increased in the area of social and demographic statistics, and ESCWA should forge more alliances with academic institutions to strengthen the fellowship programme. Partnerships with other United Nations organizations should also be deepened.

14. In this context, members of the Statistical Committee are invited:

- (a) To review the technical cooperation and capacity development activities undertaken by ESCWA;
- (b) To consider the new projects to be launched;
- (c) To provide guidance on priorities in the area of statistical technical cooperation and capacity development.
