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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

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Item 7 of the provisional agenda

**REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE THIRTY-NINTH SESSION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS STATISTICAL COMMISSION**

Summary

This report draws on the document of the thirty-ninth session of the Statistical Commission (New York, 26-29 February 2008). It highlights the implications of its recommendations and decisions on the work of the secretariat for the upcoming 2010-2011 proposed work programme, and its impact on the work of the national statistical offices (NSOs) in the region. The report of the Statistical Commission, which includes a set of recommendations, is hereby submitted as a background document.

The Statistical Committee is invited to discuss the following: (a) to review the regional implications highlighted in the document, and advise the secretariat on other potential areas of interest that need to be given priority in the ESCWA programme of work for the coming years; (b) to analyse the impacts of the decisions taken during the Statistical Committee session on the national programmes of work; and (c) to identify the areas where greater efforts are needed in terms of methodological improvements, technical assistance and support from the donor community.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The secretariat has reviewed the report of the thirty-ninth session of the Statistical Commission (New York, 26-29 February 2008),¹ and is hereby submitting it for consideration in order to highlight the regional implication for the work of both the secretariat and NSOs. These implications will serve, among others, as an input to the proposed activities for the 2010-2011 work programme (item 10 of provisional agenda).
2. Within that context, the secretariat continues to monitor systematically the socio-economic trends in the region in order to highlight priority areas of central concern to ESCWA member countries on issues related to the global development agenda. Moreover, the secretariat continues to strive to relate regional situations and consequences of the political instability to a global context, and to reinforce the regional dimension in its proposed work programme for the biennium 2010-2011.
3. At its thirty-ninth session, the Statistical Commission adopted and brought to the attention of the Economic and Social Council a series of decisions on various areas of economic and social statistics, in addition to horizontal issues in official statistics, and approved its multi-year programme of work for 2008-2011.²
4. The decision adopted during the session focused on eleven statistical areas, namely: employment; education; the International Comparison Programme (ICP); national accounts; integrated economic statistics; tourism; distributive trade; industrial statistics; international merchandise trade; human development; and development indicators.
5. Furthermore, the decisions covered the collection and dissemination of statistics by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), the common open standards for the exchange and sharing of data and metadata, and regional statistical development in Africa.
6. Information was given in the following areas of statistics: health; population and housing censuses; business survey frameworks; international trade in services; price indexes; science and technology; informal sector; agriculture; environment and environmental accounting; coordination and integration of statistical programmes; principles governing international statistical activities. Information was also given on the follow up to policy decisions by the Economic and Social Council.
7. In the light of available resources and ESCWA's priorities, as well as the timetable of the multi-year programme of work of the Statistical Committee, the secretariat concentrated on the implications in areas that are relevant to the Western Asia regional context, as set forth in the summary below.
8. In synthesis, the implications relate to three main areas, namely: (a) social statistics, including development indicators; (b) economic statistics, including natural resources and environment; and (c) cross-cutting issues in socio-economic statistics, including, among others, issues of quality, exchange of data and metadata, and data dissemination.

II. REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE THIRTY-NINTH SESSION OF THE STATISTICAL COMMISSION

9. At its thirty-ninth session, the Statistical Commission continued its efforts aimed at promoting actions required to make statistical data produced nationally comparable with international data by developing such conceptual and methodological standards as the adoption in principle of the first volume of the updated System of National Accounts, the adoption of the International Recommendation for Distributive Trade Statistics 2008, and the adoption of part I of the document on International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics 2008.

¹ E/2008/24-E/CN.3/2008/34.

² E/CN.3/2008/34.

10. These efforts have been accompanied by sustaining initiatives aimed at improving specific quality dimensions of the statistical information, namely, the accessibility, transparency and exchangeability of data and metadata at the international level.

11. Equally, the Commission reviewed current activities in employment, ICP, human development, education, integrated economic statistics and international merchandise trade, thereby providing guidance for work in those areas during the coming years.

12. The importance of a full implementation by all stakeholders, including international organizations, as set forth in the Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/6 on strengthening statistical capacity, has been highlighted on many occasions, particularly during the lengthy debate on development indicators.

13. The considerations above serve, among others, as an input to the proposed ESCWA activities for the 2010-2011 work programme under item 10 of the provisional agenda, which is further characterized by the fact that the ESCWA region continues to be plagued by instability and war.

14. Consequently, ESCWA is committed to giving special emphasis to the statistical framework of countries emerging from conflict and the governance of recovery, pursuant to ESCWA resolution 241 (XXII). The situation in the region requires flexibility in terms of responding rapidly to emerging issues, in particular those broadly related to capacity-building in conflict and post-conflict situations in many statistically key areas. Moreover, ESCWA is required to participate actively as the regional focal point for Western Asia in global initiatives, particularly those related to ICP and the implementation of the updated System of National Accounts (SNA), as well as those in the field of development indicators.

15. The implications for ESCWA and NSOs of the decisions taken by the Statistical Commission at its thirty-ninth session are set forth in the table below.

SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS BY MAJOR STATISTICS AREA

Major areas	Summary of implications for ESCWA and NSOs
1. Social statistics	<p style="text-align: center;">Employment statistics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need for better coordination at national and global level in order to improve quality and coherence of labour statistics, and raise the importance of methodological developments, with work to be driven by existing expert and working groups with broader country representation, including developing countries - The donor community needs to support international technical assistance in order to enhance the capacities of developing countries aimed at producing high-quality labour statistics, with technical assistance coordinated and implemented within existing technical cooperation programmes <p style="text-align: center;">Development indicators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognition of the efforts by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group (IAEG) on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in terms of implementing some of the recommendations contained in Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/6 and of increasing the number of Member States in its deliberations - Request for the submission of an updated report to the Commission at its next session following the serious concerns expressed by several Member States related to the quality of measurement of the indicators

Major areas	Summary of implications for ESCWA and NSOs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reaffirmation of Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/6 on statistical capacity-building and reiteration of the importance it attaches to full implementation - IAEG requested to give greater consideration to improving national capacities aimed at producing indicators and developing recommendations on ways to improve statistical capacity-building in countries - IAEG and all bodies involved requested to increase efforts to improve further the indicators of all MDGs through methodological and technical refinements - IAEG requested to report on in-depth analyses of data availability and, to the extent possible, on data discrepancies between national and international datasets on MDG indicators - Recognition of the urgent need to assist countries in monitoring all internationally-agreed development goals, including MDGs; to call on all partners, including the regional commissions, the United Nations and all international agencies, to assist countries in their statistical development, while respecting fully national requests and priorities; and to facilitate the increase in financial support
2. Economic statistics	<p style="text-align: center;">National Accounts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adoption, in principle, of Volume 1 of the updated SNA as the international standard for national accounts statistics - Request to the Intersecretariat Working Group to take appropriate measures in order to ensure that Volume 2 of the updated SNA is duly completed and submitted for adoption to the Commission at its fortieth session - Submission by the Intersecretariat Working Group to the Commission at its fortieth session of a strategy aimed at implementing the updated SNA in the context of development cooperation, while taking into account the inputs of the Conference on International Outreach and Coordination in National Accounts for Sustainable Growth and Development - Recognition that the detailed strategy must reflect the need for regional and subregional coordination, given the different levels of statistical development - Full support in creating an international high-level group on national accounts <p style="text-align: center;">The International Comparison Programme (ICP)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Successful completion of the 2005 Round and appreciation of the work by, among others, the regional coordinators, participating countries and various programme partners who provided technical and funding support - Strong endorsement of the continuation of the Programme, with a target year of 2011 for the next round - Encouragement to regional coordinating offices in order to maintain their coordination roles for the next round

Major areas	Summary of implications for ESCWA and NSOs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Endorsement of the establishment of an interim executive board, with a subcommittee to handle such operational matters as are deemed critical to the next round, including the hiring of the next global manager, fund-raising strategy, organizing feedback from users, addressing lessons learned from the 2005 Round and undertaking pilot studies for conducting methodological studies - Request to the World Bank to prepare a strategic paper, including a plan to extend the Programme coverage, clarification of data access and data-sharing policies, proposals to engage key stakeholders and senior-user communities of participating countries in order to generate support and ensure higher priority for participation in the Programme; and proposals to build sustained technical cooperation in price statistics and national accounts, and on how to integrate ICP into national statistical programmes <p style="text-align: center;">Distributive trade and industrial statistics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adoption of the International Recommendation for Distributive Trade Statistics 2008, and agreement on implementing the recommendations contained therein, including organizing regional training workshops and collecting national practices on distributive trade statistics - Adoption of Part I of the document on International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics 2008, which contains the recommendations for statistical units, characteristics of statistical units, data items and their definitions and data items for international reporting as the international recommendations for industrial statistics - Endorsement of Part II of the document on industrial statistics, which contains guidance on performance indicators, data sources and data compilation methods, data collection strategy, data quality and metadata and dissemination of industrial statistics - Agreement on the proposal to implement the recommendations on industrial statistics through regional capacity-building workshops in cooperation with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), and to develop a knowledge-based platform on basic economic statistics <p style="text-align: center;">Environmental-economic accounting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report on the revision of the Handbook of National Accounting: Integrated Environmental-Economic Accounting 2003 - Discussion on the implementation strategy for the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting for Water - Report on the progress of phase II of the Global Assessment of Environment Statistics and Environmental-Economic Accounting

Major areas	Summary of implications for ESCWA and NSOs
3. Activities not classified by field	<p style="text-align: center;">Common open standards for the exchange and sharing of data and metadata</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognition and support of Statistical Data and Metadata exchange (SDMX) as the preferred standard for the exchange and sharing of data and metadata, and encouraging further implementation by national and international statistical organizations - Need to involve further the national and international agencies in SDMX by enabling opportunities for collaboration with the sponsoring organizations, thereby influencing decision-making and its governance to address their needs, especially in the area of developing cross-domain concepts - Importance of capacity-building and outreach by organizing relevant seminars and workshops and by preparing handbooks and manuals, and implementing guidance through training and technical assistance - Fostering development of freely available tools and software to benefit statistical systems in interchanges of data and metadata <p style="text-align: center;">Collection and dissemination of statistics by UNSD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Update on current practices of UNSD with respect to data collection and dissemination activities - Encourage UNSD to continue initiatives aimed at reducing the reporting burden on countries, including through joint data-collection agreements; making data available free of charge so as to facilitate its dissemination and use; and encouraging the exchange of experiences among countries with respect to dissemination policies and practices - Reconfirmation of the mandate of UNSD to act as facilitator in addressing national concerns with respect to duplicate data requests by international organizations - Further initiatives to facilitate and harmonize data exchanges through the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities - Further development by UNSD of the data portal, UNdata, and to speed up its implementation in order to develop its full potential by bringing together sectoral global, regional and national databases

III. ACTION REQUIRED

16. The Statistical Committee is invited to discuss the following:

(a) To review the regional implications highlighted in the document and advise the secretariat on other potential areas of interest for the Western Asia region, as discussed during the Statistical Committee session, that need to be given priority in the ESCWA programme of work for the coming years;

(b) To analyse the impacts of the decisions taken during the Statistical Committee session on the national programmes of work;

(c) To identify the areas where greater efforts are needed in terms of methodological improvements, technical assistance and support from the donor community.