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

Statistical Committee  
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Item 4 (c) of the provisional agenda

**REVIEW OF STATISTICAL WORK CARRIED OUT SINCE THE SEVENTH  
SESSION OF THE STATISTICAL COMMITTEE**

**OUTCOME OF THE TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION OF ESCWA  
IN THE FIELD OF STATISTICS**

**Summary**

This report presents the outcome of the twenty-fifth session of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), held in Sana'a from 26 to 29 May 2008, in the field of statistics. The report contains a brief review of statistics-related documents presented to the Commission at its twenty-fifth session, the main topics of discussion, and the statistics-related resolutions adopted by the Commission.

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## INTRODUCTION

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held its twenty-fifth session in Sana'a, from 26 to 29 May 2008, pursuant to its resolutions 158 (XIV) of 5 April 1987 on holding the sessions of the Commission on a biennial basis, and 196 (XVII) of 13 May 1994 on the frequency of sessions of the Commission.

2. Two discussion sessions were held under the agenda item "Policy issues in the ESCWA region". The first session dealt with financing for development in the region, and the second addressed regional cooperation for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The report of the ESCWA Executive Secretary on the activities of the Commission was presented, as were reports on management issues relating to the work of the Commission. Representation of National Statistical Offices (NSOs) at this session was limited. At the end of its session, the Commission adopted a number of recommendations that had been made at the senior officials meetings, as well as a set of resolutions on issues calling for action by or to be brought to the attention of the Economic and Social Council. This report contains the outcome of the twenty-fifth session of ESCWA in the field of statistics, in addition to a brief review of statistics-related documents presented to the Commission, the main topics of discussion and the relevant resolutions adopted by the Commission.

### I. BRIEF REVIEW OF STATISTICS-RELATED DOCUMENTS PRESENTED TO THE COMMISSION AT ITS TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION

3. Two statistics-related documents were presented at the twenty-fifth session of the Commission. The first dealt with strengthening the role of national statistical systems, while the second was on programme performance in the Statistics Division, within the context of the report on ESCWA programme performance. In addition, a report, entitled *The Millennium Development Goals in the Arab Region 2007: A Youth Lens*, was launched; the Statistics Division assisted in drafting the second chapter of the report, which focused on progress made towards achieving the MDGs.

4. The document on strengthening the role of national statistical systems in applying the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics<sup>1</sup> also presented pursuant to the recommendations made by the Statistical Committee at its seventh session (7-9 November 2006). The document highlighted the importance of applying the Fundamental Principles, which were issued by the United Nations in 1994, and of implementing the Declaration on Professional Ethics that was issued by the International Statistical Institute in 1985, in order to develop statistical systems that are consistent with international trends and that elicit confidence at the national, regional and international levels. Moreover, the document explained that the professional independence of NSOs constitutes the cornerstone of such principles. The document also examined the current situation with respect to the independence of NSOs in the ESCWA region, stressing the need for further legislative measures and regulations in order to guarantee said independence. Participants responded favourably to the issues raised in the document, particularly that of independence of NSOs.

5. The programme performance report for the biennium 2006-2007<sup>2</sup> was presented at the session. The chapter on subprogramme 6, entitled "Comparable statistics for improved planning and decision-making", deals with the production and use of harmonized and comparable social and economic statistics, including gender-disaggregated statistics, in order to allow for evidence-based decision-making. The report noted the main achievements made and lessons learned under the subprogramme. By way of example, progress was made in the field of trade statistics by means of the implementation of the Harmonized Commodity

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<sup>1</sup> ESCWA, Report of the Executive Secretary on the Activities of the Commission: Follow-up to the implementation of resolutions adopted by the Commission at its twenty-fourth session, Strengthening the role of national statistical systems in implementing the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics issued by the United Nations, E/ESCWA/25/5(Part II)/Supp.2.

<sup>2</sup> ESCWA, Report of the Executive Secretary on the Activities of the Commission: Programme performance report for the biennium 2006-2007, E/ESCWA/25/5(Part I).

Description and Coding System and the Standard International Trade Classification, Revision 3; training for the implementation of Revision 4 of the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities, along with Revision 2 of the Central Product Classification and the 1993 System of National Accounts. ESCWA efforts increased member countries' capacity to collect environment- and water-related data and indicators.

6. The report also noted that activities undertaken by ESCWA, including translation into Arabic of the manual on indicators for policy management and development of a database on health-related indicators using national health data, contributed to improvements in MDG monitoring and development of gender-disaggregated statistics.

7. The Commission established the Regional Task Force on Population and Housing Censuses. In order to bring census operations into line with the United Nations Statistics Division's initiative on the 2010 round of the World Population and Housing Census Programme—for which ESCWA serves as the coordinating agency—the Task Force includes directors of census operations. In addition, the Commission has launched a virtual library, so as to facilitate knowledge and information sharing among users, as well as to provide them with effective tools for obtaining information on five thematic areas as they relate to the ESCWA region, namely, population and housing censuses, MDGs, gender issues, health and national statistical systems.<sup>3</sup>

8. The survey conducted to assess statistical needs and to define priority areas in member countries was particularly useful. The Statistical Committee recommended that such surveys be conducted regularly and that periodic reports on them be submitted to the Commission. The survey had demonstrated that there was a need to bolster member countries' statistical expertise in conducting specialized surveys and in processing and publishing sound and accurate data in a timely manner.

9. Furthermore, ESCWA launched *The Millennium Development Goals in the Arab Region 2007: A Youth Lens*,<sup>4</sup> which was prepared by United Nations agencies in the region and the League of Arab States, in coordination with ESCWA. The Statistics Division assisted in drafting the second chapter of the report, which dealt with progress made in achieving the Millennium Development Goals; the Division compiled the data requested and calculated regional and subregional indicators in accordance with relevant standards.

## II. RELEVANT TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

10. The importance of member countries' provision of data was discussed at the session, and the Executive Secretary stressed the need for member countries to cooperate in that regard, so as to enable ESCWA to assess social and economic conditions in the region accurately. He also highlighted the ongoing role of the Commission in reinforcing member country representation at the global level, and in submitting reports on its activities to member countries. In addition, he affirmed that the Commission was conducting analytical studies, in accordance with international standards, thereby making a significant contribution to development in member countries.

11. Participants also discussed the adoption of statistics submitted to the Commission by member countries as a reference for use by international organizations. Coordination between the Commission and international organizations was needed in order to adopt those statistics, which would, in turn, reduce the burden of completing questionnaires on countries and contribute to consistency in the data to which international organizations have access.

12. During discussion of the ESCWA strategic framework proposed for the biennium 2010-2011, a request was made to add a third indicator of achievement pertaining to expected accomplishment (b) under

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<sup>3</sup> The virtual library can be accessed through the ESCWA Statistics Division homepage: <http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/main.asp?division=sd>.

<sup>4</sup> ESCWA, *The Millennium Development Goals in the Arab Region 2007: A Youth Lens*, E/ESCWA/EAD/2007/3.

subprogramme 5 on statistics for evidence-based policymaking. The indicator stating “increase in the percentage of statistical experts who apply the knowledge and skills gained through ESCWA training at the national level” was included in the revised version of the proposed strategic framework for the biennium 2010-2011.<sup>5</sup>

### **III. STATISTICS-RELATED RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED BY THE COMMISSION AT ITS TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION**

13. The Commission adopted the following statistics-related resolutions at its twenty-fifth session: 283 (XXV) on ESCWA member country compliance with international standards for enhancing national statistical systems, 286 (XXV) on gender statistics for equality and empowerment of women and 287 (XXV) on strengthening statistical capacities for evidence-based policymaking. The full text of the resolutions is included in the annex to this report.

14. The Commission adopted resolution 283 (XXV) on ESCWA member country compliance with international standards for enhancing national statistical systems, in accordance with the recommendation made by the Statistical Committee at its seventh session. The resolution emphasizes the importance of autonomous statistical work and adherence by statisticians to relevant professional ethics, as well as the need to build professional national statistical systems oriented towards the needs of users. It calls upon member countries to take all measures necessary in order to produce high-quality official statistics that can be used in international comparisons, and to activate statistical institutions. It also requests the secretariat to hold training workshops on international concepts, classifications and standards, and to support member countries in adopting and undertaking to apply the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

15. Resolution 286 (XXV) on gender statistics for equality and empowerment of women is in line with General Assembly resolutions on the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and on the role of women in development, as well as with the United Nations Millennium Declaration, in which Member States resolved, inter alia, to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. The resolution calls upon member countries to adopt the set of indicators in the Arab Gender Issues and Indicators Framework, to supply gender-disaggregated data and to implement training programmes to mainstream gender issues and statistics into their statistical systems.

16. Resolution 287 (XXV) on strengthening statistical capacities for evidence-based policymaking refers to the importance of implementing the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and reaffirms the need to improve institutional statistical frameworks and to strengthen the independence of NSOs. The resolution calls upon member countries to produce MDG indicators and, in particular, indicators related to poverty, education and health; to adopt the Common Set of Core Information and Communications Technology Indicators; and to implement the 1993 System of National Accounts and its revisions.

17. The resolution requests the secretariat to conduct periodic NSO capacity-building needs assessments and to submit reports on progress made, as well as to assist member countries in carrying out multi-purpose family surveys and improving their administrative records at the national level. Furthermore, the resolution encourages member countries to exchange experiences regarding best practices in developing statistical systems, and requests the secretariat to facilitate such information exchange and to mobilize resources in support of various activities, including those of the Task Force on Population and Housing Censuses. Lastly, the resolution commends the support given by Oman to the Task Force in the past.

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<sup>5</sup> ESCWA, Management issues: Proposed strategic framework for the biennium 2010-2011, E/ESCWA/25/6/ (Part III)/Rev.1.

#### **IV. SUGGESTED TOPICS OF DISCUSSION**

18. The Statistical Committee may discuss the following topics:

(a) Provisions of resolution 283 (XXV) on ESCWA member country compliance with international standards for strengthening national statistical systems, for NSOs: the extent to which current structures are in compliance with international standards regarding national statistical systems; action needed in order to implement the resolution; and the role of ESCWA in facilitating its implementation;

(b) Provisions of resolution 286 (XXV) on gender statistics for equality and empowerment of women: the extent to which the current statistical system is able to provide indicators and mainstream gender equality issues and statistics; the extent to which gender-disaggregated data can be provided in planned and completed surveys; and action needed in order to build capacity in that field, along with the role of ESCWA in that regard.

Annex

**STATISTICS-RELATED RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED BY THE COMMISSION  
AT ITS TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION**

**283 (XXV). ESCWA member country compliance with international standards  
for enhancing national statistical systems**

*The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia,*

*Guided* by the 1985 Declaration on Professional Ethics of the International Statistical Institute which stresses the importance of adherence by statisticians to the relevant ethics and best practices,

*Committed* to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics that were issued by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 1994 with a view to enhancing public trust in official statistics and national statistical systems and establishing statistical systems that are consistent with international concepts, classifications and standards,

*Affirming* the importance of the Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics and the recommendations that were made at the three Arab statistical forums that were held in Amman in 2003, Muscat in 2005 and Sana'a in November 2007, which called for the statistical profession to be developed and the capacities of statistical systems to be enhanced within general State administration, as an important tool in identifying, monitoring and evaluating the social and economic situation,

*Affirming also* the Amman Declaration of Statistics, issued by the First Arab Statistical Conference, that was held in Amman in November 2007, which emphasized the importance of autonomous statistical work and adherence by statisticians to the relevant ethics and best practice, and asserted the importance of building professional national statistical systems oriented towards the needs of users,

*Guided* by the General Data Dissemination System that was issued by the International Monetary Fund with the aim of enabling member countries to measure economic and social developments in an objective and transparent manner,

*Guided also* by the initiatives undertaken by several countries in the region with a view to increasing the autonomy of the statistical system:

1. *Requests* member countries to take the following measures:

(a) Take all the measures necessary in order to produce high quality official statistics that can be used in international comparisons, by applying international concepts, classifications and standards and activating statistical institutions;

(b) Adopt the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and take action to apply them, ensure the credibility, impartiality and autonomy of statistical institutions and enhance the credibility of statistics at the national, regional and international levels;

(c) Complete the design and implementation of national strategies for statistical development, in accordance with the general orientations issued by Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS 21);

(d) Empower the statistical machinery to publish data in a timely fashion by adhering to the conditions of the General Data Dissemination System that was issued by the International Monetary Fund;

(e) Enhance the position of the national statistical machinery within the national institutional structure and strengthen the structural factors that are connected to the legislative framework and regulatory arrangements in accordance with the Handbook of Statistical Organization that was issued by the United Nations in 2004;

2. *Requests* the secretariat to take the following measures:

(a) Hold training workshops on international concepts, classifications and standards;

(b) Support member countries in adopting and undertaking to apply the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics;

(c) Support member countries in designing and implementing national strategies for statistical development by providing technical assistance, issuing and translating pertinent guidelines, holding workshops and contributing to the organization of Arab statistical forums;

(d) Encourage member countries to participate in and adhere to the General Data Dissemination System and the Special Data Dissemination Standard of the International Monetary Fund;

3. *Requests* the Executive Secretary to follow up on the above recommendations and submit a report thereon to the twenty-sixth session of the Commission.

## **286 (XXV). Gender statistics for equality and empowerment of women**

*The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia,*

*Recalling* the United Nations Millennium Declaration,<sup>6</sup> in which Member States resolved, inter alia, to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate sustainable development, and the 2005 World Summit Outcome,<sup>7</sup> which reaffirmed the need to promote gender equality and eliminate pervasive gender discrimination by taking all the necessary resolute actions,

*Reiterating* General Assembly resolutions 62/218 of 12 February 2008 and 60/230 of 23 December 2005 on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,

*Referring to* General Assembly resolution 62/206 of 10 March 2008 on Women in Development, which stresses the importance of collecting and exchanging all relevant information needed on the role of women in development, as well as the need to develop statistics disaggregated by age and sex,

*Recognizing* the need to improve the situation of women in rural areas and address the lack of timely, reliable, sex-disaggregated data and, in particular, statistics concerning women's unpaid work, for use in informing policy and programme decisions, as highlighted in General Assembly resolution 62/136 of 12 February 2008,

1. *Calls upon* member countries to adopt the set of indicators in the Arab Gender Issues and Indicators Framework as a common set of indicators, and produce the statistics related to those indicators for use in the monitoring and evaluation of strategic policies and work plans in areas related to gender;

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<sup>6</sup> General Assembly resolution 55/2.

<sup>7</sup> General Assembly resolution 60/1.

2. *Also Calls upon* member countries also to develop a mechanism for the collection, dissemination and analysis of gender-sensitive indicators and sex-disaggregated data by rural, urban and age information for the formulation of gender-related and gender-sensitive policies and programmes;

3. *Encourages* member countries to formulate and implement training programmes to mainstream gender issues and statistics into their statistical systems, with a view to sensitizing data producers and users to the issue of gender equality and women's empowerment;

4. *Calls upon* the secretariat to provide technical support to member countries in the form of advisory services and workshops, and assist member countries in integrating a gender perspective into national strategies for the development of statistics and national statistical system plans of action;

5. *Requests* the secretariat to work with member countries in developing a detailed gender database to act as a gender mainstreaming observatory in all sectors;

6. *Calls upon* the secretariat to mainstream gender statistics, as appropriate, into its programmes and outputs;

7. *Requests* the Executive Secretary to report to the twenty-sixth session of the Commission on the implementation of this resolution.

#### **287 (XXV). Strengthening statistical capacities for evidence-based policymaking**

*The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia,*

*Recalling* the 2005 World Summit Outcome,<sup>8</sup> in which the General Assembly reiterates its determination to ensure the timely and full realization of the development goals and objectives agreed at the major United Nations conferences and summits, including those agreed at the Millennium Summit, that are described as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs),

*Referring* to the significance of the impartiality of national statistical offices (NSOs) and of ensuring effective coordination between those offices and other State organs, in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 1994,

*Recalling* Economic and Social Council resolution 2005/50 of 27 July 2005 on the Damascus Declaration, and the role of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including MDGs,

*Also recalling* Economic and Social Council resolution 2005/13 of 22 July 2005 on the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme, which stressed the increasing importance of population and housing censuses in meeting data requirements for follow-up on activities related to the Millennium Summit,

*Reaffirming* the need to improve institutional statistical frameworks in member countries and intensify efforts aimed at strengthening statistical capacity to produce and disseminate timely and reliable indicators on progress towards national and international development goals, including MDGs, as emphasized by the Commission in resolution 276 (XXIV) of 11 May 2006 on the strengthening of statistical capacity in the ESCWA region,

*Reaffirming also* the crucial role of the ESCWA secretariat in facilitating the sharing of knowledge between member countries and supporting those countries in strengthening their national statistical capacities for evidence-based policymaking by means of technical cooperation and capacity-building activities aimed at improving the comprehensiveness, quality and comparability of economic and social statistics,

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<sup>1</sup> General Assembly resolution 60/1.

*Reaffirming further* the need for the secretariat to continue its efforts to mobilize the necessary additional resources in support of member country efforts in that respect,

*Having reviewed* the report of the ESCWA Statistical Committee on its seventh session, which was held in Beirut from 7 to 9 November 2006,<sup>2</sup>

*Welcoming* the recommendation of the Statistical Committee on the setting up of a task force of statisticians that includes NSO directors,

1. *Approves* the recommendation of the Statistical Committee that ESCWA region NSO capacity-building needs should be periodically assessed in order to monitor progress;

2. *Encourages* member countries to produce MDG indicators and, in particular, indicators related to poverty, education and health, using surveys and other relevant sources;

3. *Also encourages* member countries to adopt the Common Set of Core Information and Communications Technology Indicators issued by the Global Partnership on Measuring Information and Communications Technology for Development, and make available the data related to those indicators for use in the drafting, evaluation and review of strategic policies and work plans in areas of priority for the development of an information society in the region;

4. *Stresses* the need to strengthen NSO impartiality in order to produce objective data, and improve coordination mechanisms within the statistical system with a view to improving the production and use of statistical data for evidence-based policymaking;

5. *Encourages* member countries to exchange experience and information for best practice in the development of statistical activities and systems;

6. *Commends* the support given by Oman to the Task Force on Population and Housing Censuses and the activities that it has undertaken for the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses;

7. *Calls upon* member countries to accelerate implementation of the 1993 System of National Accounts and its revisions, in order to enable policymakers to monitor economic changes and improve economic performance;

8. *Requests* the secretariat to:

(a) Assist member countries in building their capacity to unify concepts and definitions and carry out multi-purpose family surveys and improve their administrative records at the national level through holding workshops and providing technical services;

(b) Prepare and submit to the ESCWA Statistical Committee periodic reports on progress made in the development of NSO statistical activities, based on ESCWA region NSO capacity-building needs assessments;

(c) Facilitate, through its official webpage on the Internet and the provision of technical consultancy, the interchange between member countries of experience and knowledge, with a view to promoting best practices in the development of statistical systems and activities;

(d) Increase its efforts to mobilize extrabudgetary resources to support various activities, including those of the Task Force on Population and Housing Censuses, and implement the 2010 Population and Housing Census Programme.

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<sup>2</sup> E/ESCWA/SCU/2006/IG.1/12.