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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

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Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda

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

**FOLLOW-UP ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STATISTICAL
COMMITTEE AT ITS SEVENTH SESSION**

Summary

This document reviews the statistical work carried out since the seventh session of the Statistical Committee (Beirut, 7-9 November 2006) and, in particular, the follow-up on the recommendations made during that session. The document gives an overview of the action taken by ESCWA member countries and by the secretariat in line with those recommendations.

The Committee is invited to review the follow-up actions that have been undertaken; evaluate the outcomes of those actions on the statistical work of the national statistical offices in the region; discuss the lessons learnt, with particular focus on activities where the actions undertaken have had limited impact.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The seventh session of the Statistical Committee was held in Beirut from 7 to 9 November 2006. The report of that session, which includes a set of recommendations, is contained in the document E/ESCWA/SCU/2006/IG.1/12 and is provided as a background document for the attention of the Statistical Committee.

2. Those recommendations deal with a number of issues, including as follows: (a) supporting capacity-building activities and mobilizing additional resources; (b) encouraging the participation of member countries in the General Data Dissemination System (GDDS) and the Special Data Dissemination Standards (SDDS) of the International Monetary Fund (IMF); (c) enhancing the cooperation of ESCWA with other regional and international organizations in providing relevant services; (d) assisting in the activities of the Task Force on the 2010 Population and Housing Censuses; (e) establishing a regional working group for the heads of national statistical offices (NSOs) in the region; and (f) monitoring the progress made, in addition to other procedural and organizational matters.

II. FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

3. The table set forth below contains the recommendations of the seventh session, the follow-up actions that were undertaken by ESCWA and member countries with a view to their implementation, and the progress made since the last session of the Committee.

FOLLOW-UP ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SEVENTH SESSION OF THE STATISTICAL COMMITTEE

Recommendations	Follow-up actions
<p>(a) Activate the work of the Office of the Statistical Committee through regular dialogue and meetings called for by the President of the Office, and to work on coordinating positions before attending international meetings, in particular, meetings of the United Nations Statistical Commission, as well as coordinating the preparation of periodic meetings between ESCWA member countries;</p>	<p>ESCWA coordinated with member countries through continuous consultation through side meetings, telephone and electronic mail. In addition, consultations took place in the preparation for and during the meeting of the first regional Working Group for Heads of NSOs meeting held in Cairo, in September 2007 (see point (i) below) and the forty-ninth Statistical Commission (New York, 26-29 February 2008), during which a meeting was also organized with the Director of the United Nations Statistics Division at United Nations Headquarters in order to discuss priority areas of work for the region, financial resources for statistical programmes and the organization of side events for the next session of the Statistical Commission. ESCWA continued its role of coordinator on behalf of the President of the Office owing to the change in the Head of the Central Bureau of Statistics in the Syrian Arab Republic.</p> <p>Fruitful dialogue among members of the Committee resulted in the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The establishment of a technical working group on measuring and fostering the progress of societies in the Arab region ▪ The preparation of a background paper, entitled “Measuring and Fostering Progress in the Arab Societies: Towards an Integration of the Arab Region in the Global Initiative for Measuring Progress”, which was presented to the second OECD World Forum on Statistics, Knowledge and Policy (Istanbul, Turkey, 27-30 June 2007) ▪ The participation of all NSOs in the forty-ninth Statistical Commission (New York, 26-29 February 2008), with a common stand in identifying regional priority areas and mobilizing additional resources for the ESCWA region

Recommendations	Follow-up actions
<p>(b) Request that ESCWA, in the context of its support for capacity-building of national statistical offices, organize a training course on the writing of draft resolutions for experts from the statistical offices, funded from extrabudgetary resources;</p>	<p>ESCWA successfully organized the regional Workshop on Resolution Writing (Cairo, 4 September 2007) aimed at meeting the expressed needs of NSOs in improving national capacities with regards to drafting resolutions as a means of improving national statistical systems and the overall quality of statistics.</p> <p>The Workshop, which was funded from extrabudgetary resources, was delivered by two resource experts and was attended by eight directors/chiefs of NSOs in the region and a representative of the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics. More details on the event are available at: www.escwa.un.org/information/meetings.asp?division=sd&condition=old. The Workshop enhanced the capacity of NSOs in terms of drafting resolutions and increased knowledge of processes surrounding United Nations resolutions. In addition, the Workshop provided the opportunity for NSOs and ESCWA to delineate the content of a draft resolution on statistical independence that constituted the basis for ESCWA resolution 283(XXV), which was adopted at the twenty-fifth ministerial session (Sana'a, 26-29 May 2008).</p>
<p>(c) Request that ESCWA ask donors to provide additional resources to support statistical activity in the ESCWA member countries, and to urge the member countries to respond to the financial requirements of the increased services that ESCWA provides upon the request of those countries;</p>	<p>ESCWA has been proactive in requesting potential donors to identify additional resources in order to support the increasing requests in the region in the field of statistics.</p> <p>The Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRI) and the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) provided financial support for the Fourth Regional Workshop on DevInfo (Beirut, 7-10 July 2008), which was organized by ESCWA.</p> <p>In collaboration with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and thanks to funds provided by the PARIS21 consortium, ESCWA is undertaking the translation into Arabic of the OECD Glossary of Statistical Terms (see point (k) below).</p> <p>The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has contributed financially to the Inter-Agency and Expert Group Meeting on Gender and MDGs (Cairo, 10-11 September 2007). The outcome of the Meeting was the preparation of the booklet, entitled "Gender in the Millennium Development Goals: Information Guide for Arab Millennium Development Goals Reports", which was issued on the occasion of the twelfth Regional Coordination Mechanism Meeting (Beirut, 13-14 September 2008).</p> <p>Financial support has been generously provided to ESCWA by the World Bank, the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD) in support of the activities undertaken for eleven countries within the context of the 2005 Round of the International Comparison Programme (ICP) for which ESCWA has played the role of regional coordinator for Western Asia.</p> <p>At the moment, contacts between PARIS21, the World Bank and ESCWA are in course in the area of the implementation of the Accelerated Data Program, launched as a follow-up to the recommendations of the Marrakech Action Plan for statistics, to undertake urgent improvements in monitoring the Millennium Development Goals, by improving data collection and survey programs in the ESCWA region.</p>

Recommendations	Follow-up actions
	<p>Starting from January 2007, the recruitment by ESCWA of a regional advisor in national accounts and economic statistics has allowed a substantial improvement in ESCWA's capacity to respond to the increasing requests from member countries in various areas, including national accounts, consumer and producer prices, business and household surveys.</p> <p>Additional funds were made available from the ESCWA Regional Program of Technical Cooperation to organize eight regional and national training activities, including fellowships, upon the request of member countries and in the areas of national accounts, trade in services, sample design, population projections, measuring progress of societies, social development indicators, training for heads of NSOs (further information can be found under item 4 (b) of the provisional agenda).</p> <p>Moreover, ESCWA secured funds from the Development Account 6th tranche for different projects piloted in selected countries and in such specific statistical areas as external trade, environment and the estimation of the informal sector (further information can be found under item 4 (b) of the provisional agenda).</p> <p>Given limited financial resources, most NSOs in the Gulf subregion have been requested to participate in the meetings, seminars, conferences and trainings organized by the ESCWA Statistics Division on their own accounts. They have responded positively to the increased financial requirements associated with the attendance of and participation in those events.</p>
<p>(d) Encourage member countries to participate in the General Data Dissemination System (GDDS) and the Special Data Dissemination Standards (SDDS) and to request ESCWA to organize a training course in this field in partnership with the International Monetary Fund;</p>	<p>ESCWA has urged member countries to participate in GDDS and SDDS in order to produce quality statistical data. Eleven members are currently participating in GDDS, namely: Jordan (2000), Kuwait (2000), Lebanon (2003), Oman (2002), Palestine (2006), Qatar (2005), Saudi Arabia (2008), Syrian Arab Republic (2007), Sudan (2003), United Arab Emirates (2008) and Yemen (2001). Three additional member countries have subscribed since the seventh session, namely, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Arab Emirates. Iraq is working towards completing formal GDDS participation. Egypt subscribed to SDDS in 2005, and Jordan is actively working towards SDDS subscription.</p> <p>Moreover, references to GDDS and SDDS were made in the Data Quality Workshop (Amman, 22 October 2007), which was organized jointly by the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics (AITRS) and ESCWA, with the participation of the IMF's Middle East Technical Assistance Center (METAC) and the Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT). Additionally, in 2009, a specific training course on those issues could be included in the activities of the Statistics Division of ESCWA subsequent to an agreement with the IMF on the scope and content of the training.</p>
<p>(e) Stress the need to limit the coordination on statistics between ESCWA and the member countries to the national statistical offices;</p>	<p>The Statistics Division of ESCWA maintains the coordination on statistics to NSOs and advocates this practice through its meetings with other producers of statistics. All communications, including requests for data and general statistical information under the form of questionnaires, invitations to workshops, training activities, seminars and conferences, have been made with the statistical offices of the member countries.</p>

Recommendations	Follow-up actions
	<p>Moreover, ESCWA resolution 283(XXV), which was approved at the twenty-fifth ministerial session, requests member countries to “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”.</p>
<p>(f) Request that ESCWA, in cooperation with the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics, and depending on the financial resources available in 2007, hold a number of specialist seminars for the directors of the national statistical offices for the purpose of regional exchange of experience and to increase knowledge on the management and organization of statistical work, based on the following priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Building the institutional structure of official statistics; (ii) Quality of data; (iii) Training; (iv) Secondary data sources (administrative records); (v) Using information technology in statistics (such as data collection, data processing, development of databases, and technologies used in collecting and processing data); <p>With the provision that seminars that cannot be held in 2007 be included in the ESCWA work programme for the biennium 2008-2009;</p>	<p>Three out of the five recommended workshops/seminars were organized during the reported period as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In cooperation with AITRS, ESCWA organized a seminar for heads of NSOs on the Statistical Systems in the Arab Countries: the Present Situation, Structures and Statistical Legislation (Damascus, 21 August 2008). The Seminar was attended by 18 heads/directors of 15 Arab NSOs and by representatives from AITRS, ESCWA and the League of Arab States (LAS). The results of two studies, entitled “Organization of NSOs in the Arab countries” and “Status of legislation for Arab statistical work”, were presented and discussed during the Meeting. 2. AITRS and ESCWA jointly organized the Data Quality Workshop (Amman, 22 October 2007), which was attended by the heads of 15 NSOs in the Arab region. Two experts from METAC and EUROSTAT provided lectures on, respectively, “The IMF’s data quality programme” and “Quality assurance activities in the European Statistical System”. 3. In cooperation with AITRS and other regional organizations, ESCWA has been active in promoting other initiatives linking information and communications technology (ICT) and statistics through interdivisional synergies between the ICT and Statistics Divisions within ESCWA. In particular, ESCWA, AITRS, ITU Arab Regional Office, the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology of Jordan collaborated to organize the Capacity-building Workshop on Information Society Measurements: Core Indicators, Statistics and Data Collection (Amman, 10-12 December 2006). This point is analysed in greater detail under item 4 (b) of the provisional agenda. <p>The seminars under points (f) 3) and 4) will be included in the 2009 activities of the Statistics Division of ESCWA subsequent to an agreement with AITRS on their scope and specific content.</p>
<p>(g) Request that ESCWA continue the activities of the Regional Task Force on the 2010 Population and Housing Censuses in the ESCWA region and aim to mobilize the required extrabudgetary financial resources and translate into Arabic Revision 2 of “Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses”;</p>	<p>The third meeting of the Regional Task Force on the 2010 Population and Housing Censuses (Beirut, 10 November 2006) addressed such issues as the use of disability-related questions in censuses, and the theory and operational aspects of post-enumeration surveys.</p>

Recommendations	Follow-up actions
	<p>The fourth meeting of the Regional Task Force on the 2010 Population and Housing Censuses (Cairo, 5-6 September 2007) dealt with the status of the translation into Arabic of the "Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses", microdata tabulation and dissemination, outsourcing in censuses, the definition of urban and rural areas, and the establishment of a working team to prepare an ESCWA guide on population and housing censuses. Additionally, the Meeting considered the experiences of Egypt and Jordan in planning their last censuses, and addressed the methodology of the United States in conducting community surveys. Among the final recommendations, the chairperson was asked to identify ways for funding future activities of the Task Force.</p> <p>A fifth meeting of the Task Force, which was originally planned to be held in Doha in May 2007, was postponed owing to a concomitant statistical meeting in Oman.</p> <p>Further information is presented under item 7 of the provisional agenda.</p> <p>The translation into Arabic of the Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses has been completed, and the draft is under review before finalization.</p>
<p>(h) Request that ESCWA, in cooperation with the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics, and depending on the availability of financial resources, conduct a study on supporting the role and status of statistical offices in overall State management and ways of implementing the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics to be presented to the twenty-fifth ESCWA ministerial session after its approval by the Statistical Committee Office;</p>	<p>ESCWA conducted a study on supporting the role and status of statistical offices, which was finalized in the report, entitled "Strengthening the role of national statistical systems in applying the fundamental principles of official statistics issued by the United Nations". The report was submitted to the twenty-fifth ministerial session (Sana'a, 26-29 May 2008) and is contained in the document E/ESCWA/25/5(Part II)/Supp.2.</p> <p>The document highlights the importance of applying the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics that were issued by the United Nations in 1994, and of implementing the Declaration on Professional Ethics for Statisticians that was issued by the International Statistical Institute in 1985, as one of the conditions necessary for developing statistical systems that are consistent with international trends and that enjoy the confidence of the public. The report illustrates the link between the ten Fundamental Principles and their interdependency and, specifically, explains that the professional independence of statistical offices constitutes the cornerstone of such principles. The report recommends that measures need to be taken at the national level in order to establish appropriate conditions for applying the Fundamental Principles, thereby strengthening the confidence of the public in the official statistical system at the national, regional and international levels.</p> <p>The report forms the basis of ESCWA resolution 283 (XXV), which was adopted at the twenty-fifth ESCWA ministerial session (Sana'a, 26-29 May 2008); and both the report and the resolution are hereby presented as background documents for the attention of the Statistical Committee.</p>

Recommendations	Follow-up actions
<p>(i) Request that ESCWA establish a regional working group composed of statistical office directors in the ESCWA member countries to meet in years during which the Statistical Committee does not convene in order to discuss the latest statistical developments and to consult the secretariat on its work programme and related activities;</p>	<p>ESCWA established a regional working group of the Statistical Committee, whose first meeting (Cairo, 3 September 2007) aimed at discussing the latest regional and global statistical developments and activities, and at consulting the secretariat on its work programme and related activities. The meeting discussed the regional implications of the outcomes of the thirty-eighth session of the United Nations Statistical Commission, and the following regional and global initiatives in statistics: (a) the Third Arab Statistical Forum (Sana'a, 17-19 April 2007); (b) the Second World Forum on Measuring and Fostering Progress of Societies (Istanbul, 27-30 June 2007); and (c) collaboration and future activities with PARIS21.</p> <p>Additionally, the regional working group reviewed the statistical work of ESCWA that had been undertaken since the seventh session of Statistical Committee; the work progress and planned activities of other regional partners; and the debate on the independence of NSOs in the ESCWA region, including an introduction on drafting resolutions. The meeting was attended by 14 delegates from member countries, four representatives of regional/international organizations and four ESCWA members of staff. More details of the event are available at: www.escwa.un.org/information/meetings.asp?division=sd&condition=old.</p>
<p>(j) Request that ESCWA conduct periodic needs assessments on capacity-building of the national statistical offices in the ESCWA region to monitor progress made;</p>	<p>ESCWA has established a mechanism to conduct, every two years, needs assessments on capacity-building of NSOs in the ESCWA region in order to monitor progress made and identify areas where technical assistance and greater efforts are needed. Following the needs assessment in 2006, which formed the baseline and was presented to the seventh session of the Statistical Committee, a second needs assessment was undertaken in 2008, whose results are hereby presented to the attention of the Statistical Committee in its current session under item 6 (a) of the provisional agenda.</p>
<p>(k) Request that ESCWA amend the draft work programme for the biennium 2008-2009 in the field of statistics as follows:</p> <p>(i) Not to consider a priority at the current time the formation of a regional network in the field of statistics (see article (iii) of paragraph (e) under sub-programme 1) and the training activity on the compilation of road-safety data (see article (iii) of paragraph (e) under sub-programme 2);</p> <p>(ii) To include the development of an e-glossary of statistical terms (see article (ii) of paragraph (e) under sub-programme 2) within the development of a sub-page for statistics on the internet;</p>	<p>The activities cited under (k) (i) were removed from the draft work programme in statistics for the biennium 2008-2009.</p> <p>Concerning the activity cited under (k) (ii), ESCWA, in collaboration with OECD, has already initiated the work on translating into Arabic the OECD Glossary of Statistical Terms. PARIS21 has provided funds for undertaking the translation which ESCWA will be responsible for finalizing. The Glossary will be accessible through the ESCWA Statistics Division website and will contain a comprehensive set of definitions of key terminologies, concepts and commonly-used acronyms. The definitions in the OECD Glossary are primarily drawn from existing international statistical guidelines and recommendations that have been prepared over the past two or three decades by international organizations, including UNSD, ILO, OECD, EUROSTAT and IMF, working with national statistical offices and other agencies responsible for the initial compilation and dissemination of statistical data. Based on the agreement between ESCWA and OECD, ESCWA is keen to invite member countries to participate in the working group that is revising the Arabic version of the Glossary. Regional and international agencies will also be invited to collaborate in the initiative.</p>

Recommendations	Follow-up actions
<p>(iii) To hold an additional number of specialist seminars for directors of national statistical offices aimed at regional exchange of experience and to build knowledge on statistical training, secondary data sources (administrative records) and the use of information technology for statistics;</p> <p>(iv) To hold additional training workshops on population and housing censuses under the programme of the Regional Task Force on Population and Housing Censuses.</p>	<p>The activities under point (k) (iii) have been addressed above, under point (f).</p> <p>Concerning (k) (iv), ESCWA organized, in collaboration with the Planning Council in Qatar and the United Nations Population Division, the Regional Workshop on Demographic Projections (Doha, 20-24 May 2007). Representatives from NSOs were directly involved in preparing population data, which focused on innovative approaches in projection methodology, including the use of related statistical applications. Case studies were presented on fertility, mortality and migration assumptions for population forecasting, with a focus on the interpretation of demographic trends and its likely impact on future national demographic scenarios.</p>

III. ACTION REQUIRED

4. The Statistical Committee is invited to:

- (a) Review the follow-up actions that have been undertaken;
- (b) Evaluate the outcomes of those actions on the statistical work of the national statistical offices in the region;
- (c) Discuss the lessons learnt, with particular focus on activities where the actions undertaken have had limited or insufficient effects on the regional statistical work.