

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA**

Statistical Committee  
Fourth session  
Beirut, 3-5 April 2001

**REPORT ON THE  
FOURTH SESSION OF THE STATISTICAL COMMITTEE**

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## I. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

### A. DATE, VENUE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE SESSION

1. The fourth session of the Statistical Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) was organized by the Commission and held from 3 to 5 April 2001 at the permanent headquarters of ESCWA in Beirut.

2. The purpose of the session was: (a) to review the programme of the Statistics Division of ESCWA for the biennium 2002-2003; (b) to develop, coordinate and support cooperation between the countries of the region and the Statistics Division of ESCWA in various statistics programmes and activities; (c) to review the status of the 1993 System of National Accounts (SNA) in the countries of the region; (d) to review implementation of the project to develop, in the Arab countries, national statistics disaggregated by gender; (e) to consider, as part of the Arab world's implementation of and follow-up to United Nations world conferences, some activities of special importance, including technical cooperation in the field of statistics and social indicators, surveys and statistics on employment, unemployment, civil registration and vital statistics.

### B. PARTICIPANTS

3. The heads of 12 Arab central statistical organizations, members of the Committee or their representatives took part in the session, together with observers representing 17 Arab, regional and international organizations and a number of research centres and universities in Lebanon.

### C. OPENING OF THE SESSION

4. Ms. Mervat Tallawy, Executive Secretary of ESCWA, opened the session with a statement in which she welcomed the participants and referred to a number of important issues. Mr. Abdoraboh Gradah, Chairman of the Central Statistics Organization, speaking in his capacity as Chairman of the bureau of the previous session, paid tribute to the efforts exerted by Mr. Labeeb Abdunnur since becoming Chief of the Statistics Division of ESCWA and until his recent retirement. He wished the current Chief of the Statistics Division, Mr. Hussein Sayed, every success.

### D. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

5. The members of the Statistical Committee unanimously elected the following officers for the fourth session:

Chairman:	Mr. Abdullah Al Othaiem	General Director of the Central Department of Statistics, Saudi Arabia
Vice-Chairman:	Mr. Ibrahim Ali	Director of the Central Bureau of Statistics, Syrian Arab Republic
	Mr. Ali Bin Mahboob	Director General of Social Statistics, Oman
The Rapporteur:	Mr. Adnan Shihab Hamad	The head of central statistics office in Iraq

### E. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

6. The Committee adopted the amended agenda as contained in document E/ESCWA/STAT/2001/IG.1/L.1.

## II. DISCUSSION

### A. FOLLOW-UP ACTION ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE STATISTICAL COMMITTEE AT ITS THIRD SESSION (Agenda item 4)

7. The Committee discussed agenda item 4, presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/2001/IG.1/3, "Follow up action on the recommendations made by the Statistical Committee at its third session".

8. The Committee took the following actions:

(a) It thanked ESCWA for its efforts in following up implementation of the relevant recommendations;

(b) It reaffirmed its determination to implement such recommendations made by the third session as have not yet been implemented.

### B. WORK ACCOMPLISHED BY THE STATISTICAL COMMITTEE BETWEEN ITS THIRD AND FOURTH SESSIONS (Agenda item 5)

9. The Committee discussed agenda item 5 presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/2001/IG.1/4, "Work accomplished by the Statistical Committee between its third and fourth sessions".

10. The Committee took the following actions:

(a) It affirmed that the relevant international concepts and definitions must be employed and the statistical methodologies applied by ESCWA countries in all their statistical operations must be standardized;

(b) It acknowledged that ESCWA participation in the regular meetings of international and regional organizations was beneficial and assisted in coordinating statistical work programmes;

(c) It affirmed the need to extend ESCWA programmes of expert group meetings, seminars and workshops in order to include, as far as possible, the other, non-ESCWA member Arab countries; and to continue to coordinate such programmes with the League of Arab States, the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics, the Cairo Demographic Center, the Arab Planning Institute and the Statistical Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries, in order to achieve the greatest possible benefit at the lowest possible cost;

(d) It urged ESCWA and the countries of the region to keep abreast of and employ the latest developments when exchanging information and using the Internet, and to encourage the use of modern technologies for communication between central statistics offices;

(e) It thanked the ESCWA Statistics Division for its accomplishments and efforts since the third session.

### C. SUMMARY OF WORKSHOP AND MEETING REPORTS (Agenda item 6)

11. The Committee discussed agenda item 6, presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/2001/IG.1/7, entitled "Summary of workshop and meeting reports". It then took the following actions:

## 1. *In the economic field*

12. With reference to the report of the Workshop on Implementation of the 1993 System of National Accounts, it recommended that, whenever possible, Workshop recommendations should be adopted, and reaffirmed the following:

(a) ESCWA is urged to convene additional regional seminars, workshops and meetings of experts on national accounts, and to appeal to Arab, regional and international organizations and funds to provide the necessary funding;

(b) Countries members of the Committee must give special attention to the conducting of surveys which will serve the purposes of national accounts, and include such surveys in their priorities;

(c) Those responsible for foreign trade statistics must coordinate with central banks in order to ensure that data is as homogeneous as possible.

13. With reference to the report of the Workshop on Industrial Statistics, it recommended that the Workshop recommendations should be implemented, and reaffirmed the following:

(a) Industrial and construction surveys must be carried out at short intervals and in accordance with international standards;

(b) Personnel working in the fields of industrial and construction statistics must be given ongoing training;

(c) Both ESCWA and the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDMO) are urged to design and prepare special periodic questionnaires for industrial and construction installations in order to secure the data necessary to upgrade and develop their respective databases.

14. With respect to the Workshop on the Links between the Balance of Payments and the 1993 System of National Accounts, the Committee recommended that, whenever possible, Workshop recommendations should be implemented, and reaffirmed the following:

(a) In countries which do not organize cross-border customs statements, it is important to carry out surveys by sampling at border points, in order to be able to complete estimates of foreign trade statistics. With respect to smuggled goods, it may be possible to carry out studies in cooperation with the parties involved, in order to estimate the volume of such goods;

(b) Arab and international organizations and funds must be urged to provide further material and technical support for joint Arab statistical work and, in particular, with relation to the convening in coordination and cooperation with ESCWA of national and regional workshops designed to increase the competencies of persons working in the fields of balance of payments statistics and national accounts in the countries of the region. Those organizations and funds must also be urged to finance programmes which are requested in accordance with the work procedures involved;

(c) The central banks of the countries of the region are urged to implement in the greatest possible detail forthwith the fifth edition of the balance of payments manual, in view of its great statistical importance and in order to serve the purposes of the rest of the world account in the 1993 SNA.

## 2. *In the social and demographic fields*

15. With respect to the Regional Workshop on Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems in the ESCWA Member States, the Committee recommended that, whenever possible, Workshop recommendations should be implemented, and emphasized the following:

(a) Action must be taken with a view to forming a regional committee for civil registration and vital statistics in the ESCWA region, with responsibility for facilitating the exchange of expertise and information in these fields. Action should also be taken towards establishing an information and expertise network for the region, with ESCWA assuming the role of the secretariat of such a committee and, as such, convene its first meeting and propose the agenda;

(b) It was recommended that each country should decide what is covered by the concept of civil registry or civil registration, with a clarification that it is intended to cover registration of birth, death, marriage and divorce;

(c) The relevant agencies in ESCWA member countries are urged to convene similar workshops at national and local level and initiate periodic public awareness programmes, using the United Nations Handbook on Education, Information and Communication and other relevant publications;

(d) The Cairo Declaration on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, which was adopted by the Workshop, should be implemented.

16. With reference to the Second Regional Workshop on Gender Statistics in the Arab Countries, it was recommended that, whenever possible, Workshop recommendations should be implemented, with the emphasis on the following:

(a) A regional task force should be formed in order to develop gender statistics in the region; an advisory committee concerned with gender affairs at national level should also be established and include high-level producers and users of statistics in order to assist in decision-making;

(b) A regular regional bulletin on gender statistics should be published every three to five years in order to deal with specific development issues;

(c) A gender statistics web site should be established on the Internet.

17. With respect to the Workshop on the Economically Active Population: Employment, Unemployment and Underemployment, the Committee advised that, whenever possible, the recommendations of the Workshop should be implemented, and emphasized the following:

(a) Member countries are urged to cooperate with ESCWA and the International Labour Organization (ILO) in formulating a proposal for a regional interpretation of the international recommendations concerning statistics of the economically active population, employment, unemployment and underemployment;

(b) Both ESCWA and ILO are urged to organize workshops on the analysis of manpower survey data and, in particular, the use of labour market indicators in national reports which are submitted to policy formulators;

(c) Both ESCWA and ILO are urged to hold regional workshops in order to follow up the exchange of information and expertise between member countries.

18. The Committee reviewed the work of the Regional Meeting on Social Indicators within the Framework of the Implementation and Follow-up of Major United Nations Conferences and Summits in the Arab Countries and advised that Meeting recommendations should be implemented. It stressed the following:

(a) Efforts should be exerted to make available the data which is required within the framework of joint national evaluation indicators in order to monitor national development trends in the Arab countries; measure the progress achieved by ESCWA in implementing the decisions and recommendations of international conferences; and adopt the framework as part of the integrated statistical system at national level;

(b) ESCWA is urged to establish a social indicators web site on the Internet and train producers and users of such indicators in ways of preparing them and determining related policies;

(c) National statistics systems must be supported and their role in carrying out their responsibilities at all levels strengthened. National sources must be used when producing indicators, and cooperation sought from data users and the relevant civil society institutions.

D. SUMMARY OF THE REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS STATISTICAL COMMISSION  
ON ITS THIRTY-FIRST AND THIRTY-SECOND SESSIONS  
(Agenda item 7)

19. The Committee considered agenda item 7, presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/2001/IG.1/5, "Summary of the report of the United Nations Statistical Commission on its thirty-first and thirty-second sessions".

20. The Committee took the following actions:

(a) It was briefed on and took note of both reports;

(b) It stressed the importance of attendance by the chief of the ESCWA Statistics Division at the regular annual meetings of the United Nations Statistical Commission.

E. PROGRAMME OF WORK OF THE STATISTICS DIVISION OF ESCWA FOR THE BIENNIUM 2002-2003  
(Agenda item 8)

21. The Committee considered agenda item 8, presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/2001/IG.1/6, "Work programme of the Statistics Division of ESCWA for the biennium 2002-2003".

22. The Committee took the following actions:

(a) It approved the work programme of the ESCWA Statistics Division for the biennium 2002-2003, while taking into consideration, to the extent possible, the views expressed by participants concerning the timing and content of some activities. It stressed the need for the programme to be referred to the Committee before adoption;

(b) The Committee further stressed the need for greater attention to be given to training in statistics and to the comprehensive study in the region of statistics-related problems. To this end, ESCWA and international, regional and Arab funds and organizations with common interests should cooperate;

(c) It recommended that greater attention be given to the translation into Arabic of international statistical manuals;

(d) It also recommended that the Statistical Committee set up specialized statistical working groups with a view to studying statistical methodology and procedures for specific areas in coordination with ESCWA. Such working groups would submit their reports to the ESCWA Statistical Committee.

F. TECHNICAL COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF STATISTICS  
(Agenda item 9)

23. The Committee considered agenda item 9 presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/2001/IG.1/8, "Technical cooperation in the field of statistics".

24. The Committee took the following actions:

(a) It recommended increased cooperation in the area of advisory services and that it should be continued in the areas of national accounts, socio-economic statistics, population censuses and statistical applications which are based on the use of information technology (IT), namely, the Internet;

(b) The Committee stressed the importance of taking action to establish bases for early coordination with countries in order to ascertain their technical assistance requirements;

(c) The Committee called for greater cooperation between the Arab Labour Organization and ESCWA in the field of labour statistics and labour market indicators in developing a manpower database and convening workshops in particular;

(d) It urged Arab, regional and international development and financing institutions to increase financial and technical assistance and support for Arab statistical systems, institutions and research and training centres with a view to strengthening their efforts in various relevant fields, including institutional support, training, research, seminars and the acquisition of the equipment needed to develop working procedures;

(e) The Committee recommended that the national expertise of central statistical offices be drawn upon to provide advisory services in the countries of the region;

(f) The Committee thanked ESCWA for the excellent and useful advisory services provided in the field of statistics.

#### G. PROJECT TO DEVELOP STATISTICAL WORK IN THE ESCWA REGION (Agenda item 10)

25. The Committee considered agenda item 10, which was presented in the form of a document entitled "The project to develop statistical work in the ESCWA region".

26. The Committee took the following actions:

(a) It thanked the United Nations Statistics Division and the ESCWA Statistics Division for their contributions to this project and all that it represents in terms of support for statistical work and for its development in the region;

(b) The Committee called on central statistical offices to submit by mid-April 2001 their comments on statistical matters in the order of their priorities for inclusion in the above-mentioned project.

#### H. REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS 1993 SYSTEM OF NATIONAL ACCOUNTS IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE REGION (Agenda item 11)

27. The Committee considered agenda item 11, presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/2001/IG.1/9, "Report on the implementation of the United Nations 1993 System of National Accounts in the countries of the region".

28. The Committee took the following actions:

(a) It affirmed the importance of building the human capacity which is required for the implementation of the 1993 SNA by holding national and regional training sessions and meetings of experts;

(b) The Committee recommended that every possible benefit be derived from the data available from surveys which were conducted for other purposes but which meet SNA needs;

(c) It called on member countries which had prepared accounts or lists using the new 1993 SNA to begin publishing them, while maintaining the chronological order of the 1968 system.



I. REPORT ON THE PROJECT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL GENDER  
STATISTICS PROGRAMMES IN THE ARAB COUNTRIES  
(Agenda item 12)

29. The Committee considered agenda item 12 presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/2001/IG.1/10, "Report on the project on the development of national gender statistics programmes in the Arab countries".

30. The Committee took the following actions:

(a) It affirmed the importance of national capacity-building and the exchange of expertise and information in the field of gender statistics;

(b) It called for special attention to be paid to the study of new issues in the field of gender statistics which had not been previously discussed, including, *inter alia*, employment, unemployment, women's unremunerated work, the use of time, participation and empowerment;

(c) The Committee asked ESCWA to prepare an instruction manual on the use of data and the extrapolation of indicators therefrom;

(d) It paid tribute to the work accomplished and the efforts exerted in this project and requested ESCWA to continue working on it and to seek the necessary funding.

J. THE USE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN SUPPORT OF STATISTICAL WORK AND  
THE ACTIVITIES OF THE ESCWA STATISTICS DIVISION  
(Agenda item 13)

31. The Committee considered agenda item 13, presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/2001/IG.1/11, "The use of information technology in support of statistical work and the activities of the ESCWA Statistics Division".

32. The Committee took the following actions:

(a) It urged the statistical offices of ESCWA countries to expedite the adoption of new developments in IT, study their impact on statistical work and draw up the plans necessary to benefit on the widest scale possible from such technology, while taking action to provide the requisite national resources. This was in affirmation of the Declaration issued by the Statistical Committee at its third session (March 1999);

(b) It requested ESCWA to explore and identify the steps necessary to build the ESCWA Statistical Information System (ESIS) for the purpose of providing precise information to users as promptly as possible and consolidating the links between the national statistical offices and bureaus;

(c) The Committee also urged ESCWA and national statistical offices to exchange information electronically and to identify the best ways of dealing with any constraints in this field. A list of the web sites of central statistical offices which were already available on the Internet should also be drawn up.

K. REPORT ON THE STATE OF SECTORAL STATISTICS IN THE ESCWA MEMBER STATES  
(ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY, WATER, TRANSPORT, ETC.)  
(Agenda item 14)

33. The Committee considered agenda item 14, presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/2001/IG.1/12, "Report on the state of sectoral statistics in the ESCWA member States (environment, energy, water, transport, etc.)".

34. The Committee took the following actions:

(a) It recommended that international concepts and manuals be used for the preparation and dissemination of sectoral statistics in the countries of the region and the experience drawn upon of specialized international agencies, including, *inter alia*, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United

Nations (FAO), Industrial Development Organization, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and World Energy Council;

(b) It also recommended that the countries of the region should form specialized sectoral statistics committees and working groups which would meet on a regular basis;

(c) The Committee recommended that central statistical offices in the countries of the region should supply ESCWA with the information available to them that is necessary for sectoral databases or follow up that issue with the relevant authorities in their own countries, taking into account the specific circumstances of the organization and its work in each country;

(d) It reaffirmed the need to establish suitable units or frameworks for environmental statistics and indicators.

L. COORDINATION REGARDING QUESTIONNAIRES WHICH STATISTICAL ORGANIZATIONS ARE  
REQUIRED TO COMPLETE IN ORDER TO PROVIDE DATA AND INDICATORS  
(Agenda item 15)

35. The Committee considered agenda item 15. Mr. Abdoraboh Gradah, head of the Central Statistical Organization in Yemen, presented a report on the harmonization of the questionnaires which statistical organizations are required to complete in order to provide data and indicators.

36. The committee took the following action:

It called on ESCWA to coordinate with the committee that was formed by the standing technical statistics committee of the League of Arab States at its twenty-fifth meeting with respect to studying the feasibility of designing a questionnaire which would provide the minimum level of shared information needed by international and Arab organizations.

M. THE ARAB FAMILY HEALTH PROJECT  
(Agenda item 16)

37. The Committee considered agenda item 16 presented in the document entitled "Report on Arab family health project".

38. The Committee took the following action:

It reaffirmed the importance of this project and the need to use it to provide the requisite data and indicators for all the countries of the region, in accordance with their needs and their priorities, while taking into consideration the conditions and specificities of each country.

N. THE ACTIVITIES OF THE ESCWA STATISTICAL COMMITTEE AND ITS BUREAU BETWEEN SESSIONS  
(Agenda item 17)

39. The Committee considered agenda item 17 presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/2001/IG.1/13/Rev.1, entitled "The activities of the ESCWA Statistical Committee and its bureau between sessions".

40. The Committee took the following actions:

(a) It called upon the Statistics Division of ESCWA to prepare a draft of bylaws for the work of the Statistical Committee and its bureau, drawing upon the following sources:

- (i) The duties which were specified at the first session of the Committee, held in 1995 in Amman;
- (ii) The paper presented in this session by the representatives of Palestine and Jordan;

(iii) The duties of the Statistical Committee of the United Nations and its bureau;

(b) It also called upon the Division to send that draft to the central statistical offices of member countries for comment within a period of no more than two months, in preparation for the formulation of the draft in its preliminary form;

(c) It called upon the bureau to hold one meeting between the fourth and fifth sessions;

(d) It decided to hold the fifth session of the Statistical Committee of ESCWA during the second half of 2002.

#### O. CONCLUSION

41. The Committee expressed its appreciation to the chairman and members of the bureau of the third session of the ESCWA Statistical Committee for their efforts to activate the work of the Committee during the period between the third and the fourth sessions. The Committee expressed special appreciation for the efforts of Mr. Labeeb Abdunnur, the former chief of the ESCWA Statistics Division, exerted throughout his service, until his retirement at the end of 1999. The Committee took note of the distinguished level of attendance at the session, represented by the participation of representatives of 17 Arab, regional and international organizations. The Committee expressed appreciation for the efforts of the ESCWA Statistics Division in this field and, in particular, the Division's performance of its duties between the two sessions. The Committee also paid tribute to the way in which the meetings of the fourth session had been prepared and organized.

## Annex I

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## C. GOVERNMENTAL AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

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Annex II

**AGENDA**

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work.
4. Follow-up action on the recommendations made by the Statistical Committee at its third session.
5. Work accomplished by the Statistical Committee between its third and fourth sessions.
6. Summary of workshop and meeting reports.
7. Summary of the report of the United Nations Statistical Commission on its thirty-first and thirty-second sessions.
8. Programme of work of the Statistics Division of ESCWA for the biennium 2002-2003.
9. Technical cooperation in the field of statistics.
10. Project to develop statistical work in the ESCWA region.
11. Report on the implementation of the United Nations 1993 System of National Accounts in the countries of the region.
12. Report on the project on the development of national gender statistics programmes in the Arab countries.
13. The use of information technology in support of statistical work and the activities of the ESCWA Statistics Division.
14. Report on the state of sectoral statistics in the ESCWA member States (environment, energy, water, transport, etc.).
15. Coordination regarding questionnaires which statistical organizations are required to complete in order to provide data and indicators.
16. The Arab family health project.
17. The activities of the ESCWA Statistical Committee and its bureau between sessions.
18. Adoption of the report of the Statistical Committee.



Annex III

**LIST OF DOCUMENTS**

Symbol	Title
E/ESCWA/STAT/2001/IG.1/L.1	Provisional agenda
E/ESCWA/STAT/2001/IG.1/L.2	Proposed organization of work
E/ESCWA/STAT/2001/IG.1/3	Follow-up action on the recommendations made by the Statistical Committee at its third session
E/ESCWA/STAT/2001/IG.1/5	Work accomplished by the Statistical Committee between its third and fourth sessions
E/ESCWA/STAT/2001/IG.1/6	Work programme of the Statistics Division of ESCWA for the biennium 2002-2003
E/ESCWA/STAT/2001/IG.1/7	Summary of workshop and meeting reports
E/ESCWA/STAT/2001/IG.1/8	Technical Cooperation in the field of statistics
E/ESCWA/STAT/2001/IG.1/9	Report on the implementation of the United Nations 1993 System of National Accounts in the countries of the region
E/ESCWA/STAT/2001/IG.1/10	Report on the project on the development of national gender statistics programmes in the Arab countries
E/ESCWA/STAT/2001/IG.1/11	The use of information technology in support of statistical work and the activities of the ESCWA Statistics Division
E/ESCWA/STAT/2001/IG.1/12	Report on the state of sectoral statistics in the ESCWA member States
E/ESCWA/STAT/2001/IG.1/13/Rev.1	The activities of the ESCWA Statistical Committee and its bureau between sessions