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REPORT

THE STATISTICAL COMMITTEE ON ITS SIXTH SESSION BEIRUT, 6-8 OCTOBER 2004

Summary

The Statistical Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held its sixth session at United Nations House in Beirut from 6 to 8 October 2004.

The agenda for the session covered a number of priority topics, including the preparation of a national strategy for the development of statistics, statistical needs for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the current situation and requirements of the International Comparison Programme (ICP), the System of National Accounts (SNA) and sectoral statistics, in addition to information society indicators in the countries of Western Asia.

The agenda also included items relating to follow-up on implementation of the recommendations of the fifth session of the Statistical Committee, consideration of progress made in implementing statistics-related activities in the period between the fifth and sixth sessions of the Statistical Committee, a review of the proposed strategic framework for the ESCWA programme of work for the biennium 2006-2007 in the field of statistics and the outcome of the self-evaluation of the project on "Strengthening Statistical Capacity in the ESCWA Region."

The present report includes a brief review with regard to each agenda item of the measures recommended by the Committee for adoption.

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Introduction

1. The Statistical Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held its sixth session pursuant to resolution 179 (XVI) of 2 September 1992, which was adopted by United Nations Economic and Social Council resolution 1993/2 dated 2 February 1993 on the establishment of a statistical committee within ESCWA and pursuant to the recommendations made by the Statistical Committee at its fifth session, held in Beirut from 1 to 3 October 2002, which were approved at the twenty-second ESCWA session, held in Beirut from 14 to 17 April 2003.
2. The present report, which outlines the main measures proposed with regard to each agenda item, was adopted by the Committee at its closing session on 8 October 2004.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STATISTICAL COMMITTEE AT ITS SIXTH SESSION

3. At the conclusion of its sixth session, the Statistical Committee adopted the following recommendations:
 - (a) Call on ESCWA member countries to seek to strengthen human and material capacities in official central statistical offices and statistical units in ministries and directorates in view of the positive impact of so doing on the quality of the statistical data necessary for the formulation of economic and social policies;
 - (b) Call on member countries to benefit from the financial resources of the United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD) including, for example, the Census Fund, the Statistical Capacity-Building Programme, and others, by presenting specific, studied projects;
 - (c) Call on member countries to communicate with one another through ESCWA in order to develop national capacities;
 - (d) Call on member countries to consult the Statistical Organization Handbook: The Operation and Organization of a Statistical Agency in the administration of national statistical activities and development of statistical norms;
 - (e) Call on member countries to develop their statistical tools through the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) in their statistical operations and establish organizational units as required;
 - (f) Call on member countries to submit proposals with regard to modifications to the internal organization of the Statistical Committee and enhancement of its performance to the Chairman of the Committee prior to the end of 2004;
 - (g) Call on member countries to provide ESCWA with detailed periodical statistical data in various fields, in accordance with international classifications, sustainable development indicators and MDGs, for the purpose of preparing statistical bulletins and analytical studies that accurately reflect the actual situation with regard to development trends in the region;
 - (h) Call on member countries to seek to exchange expertise and experts in various statistical fields in view of the substantial positive impact of so doing on raising the level and reducing the implementation costs of statistical activities;
 - (i) Call on ESCWA to provide international consultancy services in the field of sampling in order to contribute to minimizing the difficulties encountered by member countries in this regard;
 - (j) Call on ESCWA to increase communications and field visits to member countries at the highest level with the objective of supporting critical statistics projects in member countries;

(k) Call on ESCWA, UNSD and the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics (AITRS) to cooperate and participate in the organization of workshops and other activities of joint concern;

(l) Call on ESCWA to form a regional task force concerned with coordinating the efforts of the countries of the region with regard to population and housing censuses, with the objective of unifying national censuses;

(m) Call on ESCWA to prepare periodical and non-periodical statistical bulletins and undertake specialized analytical studies in the sphere of social, economic and sectoral statistics;

(n) A national workshop should be convened in Egypt by ESCWA in cooperation with UNSD, should the necessary financial resources be available, in support of the population and housing census to be conducted in 2006. The objective of the workshop is the exchange of experiences and knowledge between the member countries;

(o) Five-year and annual statistical plans should be adopted and linked to general national plans in order to make available the financial resources and achieve palpable progress and development in the field of statistics;

(p) The importance of the representation and participation of national statistical offices in United Nations international and regional conferences and meetings on statistics should be emphasized;

(q) The importance for national statistical offices of constant communication in national censuses in order to follow up on various census issues related to the analysis and utilization of data and their communication to planners and policymakers should be affirmed;

(r) Emphasis should be placed on the fact that national statistical offices are the official data source at the national level, the point of reference for international organizations and the national coordinating authority for all statistical activities;

(s) The importance of coordination with and obtaining the assent of the official statistical authorities in the country concerned when conducting surveys and censuses in all statistical spheres should be emphasized;

(t) In view of the dearth of water resources in the majority of ESCWA countries, the importance of conducting water surveys for the purpose of preparing water accounts for each country should be emphasized;

(u) The submission by the representative of Palestine of a working document on functional illiteracy should be welcomed.

II. DISCUSSION TOPICS

A. GENERAL DISCUSSION (Agenda item 5)

4. The Statistical Committee incorporated a general discussion as an item on the agenda of its sixth session in order to permit member countries to express their views on various topics relevant to statistical activity and mention the most recent statistical developments in their countries that may be of interest to participants.

B. IMPROVING STATISTICS AND NATIONAL CAPACITY-BUILDING (Agenda item 6)

5. The Statistical Committee considered this agenda item with reference to document E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/IG.1/3, which covered a number of topics related to statistics and national capacity-

building in ESCWA member countries including the preparation of a national strategy for the development of statistics, statistical needs for the implementation of MDGs, and the situation and requirements of ICP, SNA and sectoral statistics. Following discussion of all chapters of the entire document, the Committee proposed the following measures:

(a) With regard to drafting a strategy for national statistical development:

The Paris 21 Consortium (Partnership for Statistics) should be called on to assist ESCWA member countries in the preparation of national statistical strategies prior to the end of 2006 and seek to provide the necessary funding whenever possible;

(b) With regard to statistical needs for the implementation of MDGs:

(i) Member countries of ESCWA should take the following measures:

- a. Consider the production of MDG indicators as one of the tasks of national statistical offices in member countries;
- b. Prepare and disseminate national reports prior to January 2005 on progress made with regard to the achievement of MDGs;
- c. Provide ESCWA, UNSD and the other specialized agencies with MDG indicators on an annual basis to enable them to develop and update their databases;
- d. Support the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses and related Surveys and the UNSD initiative to establish a trust fund;

(ii) The Commission should take the following measures:

- a. Establish a joint regional technical task force among United Nations agencies seeking to coordinate efforts in the context of the United Nations Millennium Declaration;
- b. Strengthen partnership between ESCWA member countries and UNSD with regard to support for and development of activities related to population censuses, as part of the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses and related Surveys;
- c. Prepare studies and statistical reports that highlight prevalent social problems, including poverty, unemployment and the empowerment of women, in accordance with the outcomes of United Nations international conferences;
- d. Support the efforts of member countries to implement components of the Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics.

(c) With regard to ICP, the Committee proposed the following measures:

(i) Member countries of ESCWA should take the following measures:

- a. Develop the institutional status of ICP by establishing sections within prices statistics units and departments;
- b. Apply international statistical systems, criteria and classifications, including the 1993 SNA, comprehensively and issue comparable statistics utilizing these criteria for the purposes of ICP;
- c. Convince countries participating in ICP that they are not mere partners but the main stakeholders in the programme and the direct beneficiaries of its results and, therefore,

have a duty to implement the programme on specific dates in conformity with the global timeframe;

- d. Strive to provide the necessary financial and human resources, whether from the general budget or external grants, in order to implement national, regional and international statistical programmes and, primarily, ICP;
- (ii) The Commission should take the following measures:
 - a. Provide technical assistance with the objective of accomplishing work in member countries on time;
 - b. Submit an integrated quarterly report to ICP Executive Council on the progress of work in member countries;
- (d) With regard to ICP, the Committee proposed the following measures:
- (i) Member countries of ESCWA should take the following measures:
 - a. Join the General Data Dissemination System and the Special Data Dissemination Standard of the International Monetary Fund;
 - b. Implement field surveys on various economic and social activities in response to the need to build national accounts in accordance with SNA 1993;
 - c. Strengthen internal cooperation with ministries and central banks in the preparation of national accounts estimates and records for various activities including the balance of payments, Classification of the Functions of Government (COFOG) and the Government Finance Statistics Manual 2001 (GFSM 2001);
 - (ii) The Commission should take the following measures:
 - a. Prepare an evaluative study on the extent of the application by member countries of SNA 1993;
 - b. Hold capacity-building workshops and expert group meetings for member countries on national accounts;
- (e) With regard to sectoral statistics, the Committee proposed the following measures:
- (i) Member countries of ESCWA should take the following measures:
 - a. Provide ESCWA with periodic, detailed data on the water, energy, environment, agriculture, industry and technology sectors, in conformity with international classifications;
 - b. Provide ESCWA with the available indicators on sustainable development;
 - c. Strengthen national capacities with regard to sectoral statistics and invigorate coordination between central statistical offices and the ministries concerned;
 - d. Increase interest in the quality and availability of international trade in services statistics, classified by partner country and sector;
 - e. Adopt the harmonized trade system for the issuance of international trade in goods statistics, although statistics should include quantities as well as values;

- f. Update and develop the data and statistics issued by member countries on the transport sector;
- (ii) The Commission should take the following measures:
- a. Contribute to building the national capacities necessary for the development of sectoral statistics;
 - b. Strengthen the partnership between ESCWA member countries, UNSD and other international organizations concerned with support and development of activities related to energy statistics, international classifications and environmental accounting;
 - c. Develop statistical capacities in the field of external trade in goods through the application of the agreed international classifications and strengthening the capacities of member countries with regard to the calculation of international trade indices (import and export).
- (f) With regard to information society indicators, the Committee proposed the following measures:

Member countries of ESCWA should take the following measures:

- a. National statistical offices should adopt the basic list of information society indicators issued by the Roundtable on Information Society Indicators and Profiles in Western Asia, held on 4 and 5 October 2004, provided that government statistical offices are the principal source for the collation, processing and production of these indicators;
- b. A regional technical task force should be established including representatives of national statistical offices that is concerned with identifying the statistical indicators necessary to measure progress in building the information society, seeking to unify definitions and identifying the data necessary for the calculation of those indicators.

C. REVIEW OF STATISTICAL WORK CARRIED OUT SINCE THE FIFTH SESSION
OF THE STATISTICAL COMMITTEE
(Agenda item 7)

6. The Statistical Committee considered this agenda item with reference to document E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/IG.1/4, in three parts. In the first part, issued in document E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/IG.1/4 (Part I), the Committee reviewed activities conducted pursuant to the recommendations of the Statistical Committee at its fifth session. In the second part, issued in document E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/IG.1/4 (Part II), the Committee reviewed progress made in various statistics-related activities between the fifth and sixth sessions of the Statistical Committee. In the third part, issued in document E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/IG.1/4 (Part III), the Committee reviewed the outcome of the self-evaluation of the programme aimed at strengthening statistical capabilities in the ESCWA region. The representatives of member countries affirmed that the services provided in the context of this project were of considerable benefit.

D. PROPOSED STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR THE ESCWA PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR
THE BIENNIUM 2006-2007 IN THE FIELD OF STATISTICS
(Agenda item 8)

7. The Statistical Committee considered this agenda item with reference to document E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/IG.1/5, which reviews subprogramme 6, on comparable statistics for improved planning and decision-making, included in document A/59/6 (Prog.18), which contains the proposed strategic framework for the ESCWA programme of work for the biennium 2006-2007. The Committee studied the subprogramme on statistics and a number of participants expressed the desire to implement it through specific activities that would respond to the priorities and needs of member countries.

E. TIME AND VENUE OF THE SEVENTH SESSION OF THE STATISTICAL COMMITTEE
(Agenda item 9)

8. The Statistical Committee will hold its seventh session in Beirut during the last quarter of 2006 under the chairmanship of the Syrian Arab Republic following that of Bahrain.

F. OTHER BUSINESS
(Agenda item 10)

9. The Statistical Committee did not discuss any topic under this agenda item.

**III. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE STATISTICAL COMMITTEE
ON ITS SIXTH MEETING**
(Agenda item 11)

10. During the closing session held on 8 October 2004, the Statistical Committee adopted the draft report on its sixth meeting presented in document E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/IG.1/L.6.

IV. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. DATE AND VENUE OF THE SESSION

11. The Statistical Committee held its sixth session at United Nations House, Beirut from 6 to 8 October 2004.

B. OPENING

12. Deputy Minister of Planning in the United Arab Emirates which chaired the fifth session of the Statistical Committee, Mr. Abdel Latif Mohammed bin Hamad welcomed participants, invited Ms. Mervat Tallawy, Executive Secretary of ESCWA to make her statement and wished every success to the session.

13. Ms. Mervat Tallawy made a statement in which she welcomed participants and pointed to the importance of the reciprocal relationship between statistics and development. She emphasized that the development priorities of the region could only be realized if measurements techniques were used to assess the current status and progress towards achieving the desired goals. She spoke of the progress made with regard to the achievement of the MDGs five years after the United Nations Millennium Declaration and called on ESCWA member countries to prepare national reports and present them to national and international public opinion. She also emphasized the necessity of strengthening partnership between ESCWA member countries and UNSD with regard to the support and development of activities related to population censuses, as part of the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses and related Surveys and cited the significance of the establishment of the trust fund for this objective, adherence to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the need to invigorate the application of SNA 1993. The Executive Secretary concluded her statement by wishing every success to the session.

14. Mr. Paul Cheung, Chief of UNSD, made a statement in which he affirmed the need to consolidate cooperation between all the authorities concerned in order to improve statistics, thanked participants and invited them to attend the Statistical Commission Session to be held in March 2005.

C. ATTENDANCE

15. Representatives of the 13 ESCWA member countries participated in the session. Also in attendance were representatives of the United Nations organizations and specialized agencies, representatives of official international organizations and their subsidiary bodies, and other non-governmental organizations. The list of participants is attached as annex I to this report.

D. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

16. Rule 18 of the Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of ESCWA stipulates that the member countries shall assume the chairmanship of the sessions of the subsidiary bodies of the Commission on a rotating basis, in the Arabic alphabetical order employed by the United Nations.* Pursuant to this rule, Mr. Raed Mohamed Shams, representative of Bahrain, assumed chairmanship of the session. Participants unanimously elected Mr. Yusuf Falah Ismail, representative of Palestine and Mr. Abdullah Al-Othaim, representative of Saudi Arabia, Vice-Chairmen and Mr. Abdel Hakim al Obeid, representative of Yemen, Rapporteur.

E. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

17. During the course of its first meeting, the Statistical Committee adopted the agenda for its sixth session as amended in document E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/IG.1/1 as follows:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda.
4. Organization of work.
5. General discussion.
6. Promotion of statistics and building national capacities.
7. Review of achievements in the sphere of statistics since the fifth session of the Statistical Committee:
 - (a) Follow-up on implementation of the recommendations of the fifth session of the Statistical Committee in ESCWA;
 - (b) Progress made in implementing statistics-related activities in the period between the fifth and sixth sessions;
 - (c) Outcome of the self-evaluation of the project on "Strengthening Statistical Capacity in the ESCWA Region".
8. Proposed strategic framework for the ESCWA programme of work for the biennium 2006-2007 in the field of statistics.
9. Time and venue of the seventh session of the Statistical Committee.
10. Adoption of the report of the Statistical Committee on its sixth session.

18. During the same meeting, the Committee agreed on the proposed organization of work submitted in document E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/IG.1/2.

F. DOCUMENTS

19. The list of documents presented to the Statistical Committee at its sixth session is attached as annex II to this report.

* The list of ESCWA member countries in Arabic alphabetical order is as follows: Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen.

Annex I

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

A. ESCWA MEMBER COUNTRIES

Jordan

Mr. Muhammad Abdulmajid Salih Arabiyat
Assistant Director General
Department of Statistics

Mr. Abdelhakim Moussa Shibli
Division Chief, Statistics and Samples
Policies and Studies Directorate
Ministry of Planning and International
Cooperation

United Arab Emirates

Mr. Abdul Latif Muhammad bin Hammad
Ministry of Planning

Mr. Ahmad Sayyid Muhammad al-Hashimi
Assistant Undersecretary, Ministry of Planning
For Planning and Statistical Affairs

Bahrain

Mr. Raed Mohamed Shams
Director
Directorate of Statistics
Central Informatics Organization

Syrian Arab Republic

Mr. Hussayn Muhammad al-Hasan
Assistant Director, Economic Affairs Bureau
Central Bureau of Statistics
Office of Prime Minister

Iraq

Mr. Mehdi Muhsin Ismail Al-Alak
President
Central Organization for Statistics and
Information Technology
Ministry of Planning

Oman

Mr. Ali Mahboob Hasan Al Raisi
Director General of Social Statistics and Census
2003
Ministry of National Economy

Palestine

Mr. Yousef Falah Ismail Ismail
Director General of Statistical Coordination
Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics

Qatar

Mr. Hassan Mohamed Al-Emadi
Director, Directorate of Statistics
Planning Council

Kuwait

Mr. Abdul-Rahman Khalil Al-Mansury
Assistant Under-Secretary for Statistics and
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Statistics and Information Sector
Ministry of Planning

Mr. Muhammad Hasan al-Kandari
Accountant
Statistics and Census Sector
Ministry of Planning

Lebanon

Ms. Maral Tutelian
General Director, Central Administration for
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Presidency of the Council of Ministers

Mr. Bachir Chaouki Saleh Azzam
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ms. Lara Badre
Specialist in Social Sciences
Central Administration for Statistics
Presidency of the Council of Ministers

Mr. Ziad Adel Abdallah
Specialist in Statistics
Central Administration for Statistics

Mr. Marwan Hour
Technical Consultant
Ministry of Social Affairs

Egypt

Mr. Samy Hassan Fayyadh
First Ministerial Deputy and General Secretary of
the Agency
Central Agency for Public Mobilization and
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Mr. Bakr Abou al-Nasr Ibrahim Soltan
Undersecretary
Central Agency for Public Mobilization and
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Ms. Amira Abdel-Rahim Ali
Third Secretary
Embassy of Egypt in Lebanon

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Abdullah Suliman Al-Othaim
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Mr. Mohammed Zayd al-Dafas
Statistical Consultant
Central Department of Statistics

Yemen

Mr. Abdul Hakim 'Abd Rabbih al-'Ubayd
Central Statistical Organization
Ministry of Planning and Development

B. UNITED NATIONS BODIES AND PROGRAMMES

United Nations Statistics Division

Mr. Paul Cheung
Director

Ms. Sabine Warschburger
Statistics Division

United Nations Development Programme

Mr. Ghaith Fariz
Senior Regional Programme Advisor
Regional Office for Arab States

United Nations Children's Fund

Ms. Abeer Abou Zaki Hasaniyya
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United Nations House
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C. SPECIALIZED UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATIONS

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Regional Office for Arab States
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Ms. Rasha Nabil Tabbara
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Beirut

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Victor Billeh
Director
Beirut Office

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Chair, Communications Statistics Committee
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World Health Organization

Mr. Gabriel Rifka
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Beirut

World Bank

Mr. Yunas Bayru
Deputy Director, International Comparison
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D. GOVERNMENTAL AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

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Mr. Mohamed Abdel Aal Saleh
Senior Economic Expert
Economic Analysis and Industrial Research
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Arab Monetary Fund

Mr. Abdulrahman Ali Al-Busi
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Arab Institute for Statistical Training and
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Director-General
Amman, Jordan

International Center for Agricultural Research in
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Statistical Expert
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Paris21 Consortium

Mr. Gilles Rambaud-Chanoz
Senior Adviser
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Annex II

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Title	Symbol
<u>Session documents</u>	
Agenda (Arabic and English)	E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/IG.1/1
Annotated agenda (Arabic and English)	E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/IG.1/1/Add.1
Proposed organization of work	E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/IG.1/2
Improving statistics and national capacity-building (Arabic and English)	E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/IG.1/3
Improving statistics and national capacity-building – information society indicators in the countries of Western Asia (Arabic and English)	E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/IG.1/3/Add.1
Follow-up on the recommendations of the fifth session of the Statistical Committee (Arabic and English)	E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/IG.1/4(Part I)
Review of statistical work carried out since the fifth session of the Statistical Committee (Arabic and English)	E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/IG.1/4
Progress made in implementing statistics-related activities in the period between the fifth and sixth sessions of the Statistical Committee (Arabic and English)	E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/IG.1/4(Part II)
The outcome of the self-evaluation of the project on strengthening statistical capacity in the ESCWA region (Arabic and English)	E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/IG.1/4(Part III)
Proposed strategic framework for the ESCWA programme of work for the biennium 2006-2007 in the field of statistics (Arabic and English)	E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/IG.1/5
<u>Background documents</u>	
Recommendations of the Roundtable on Information Society Indicators and Profiles in Western Asia submitted to the sixth session of the Statistical Committee (Arabic only)	No symbol
Handbook of statistical organization, third edition – the operation and organization of a statistical agency (Arabic and English)	ST/ESA/STAT/SER.F/88
Report of the expert group meeting on data and indicators to monitor progress made towards MDGs in the ESCWA region, Beirut, 9-13 February 2004 (Arabic and English)	E/ESCWA/SCU/2004/WG.1/3

Title	Symbol
Implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration: Report of the Secretary-General (Arabic and English)	A/59/282
International Household Survey Network – Communiqué	No symbol
Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics (Arabic and English)	No symbol
ILO statistical activities: 2003-2004 (Regional Office for Arab States) (English only)	No symbol
Millennium Development Goals: status 2004 (United Nations Department of Public Information) (English only)	DPI/2363-A
Expected achievement of MDGs in ESCWA countries (English only)	No symbol