



**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL  
COUNCIL**

Distr.  
GENERAL  
E/ESCWA/C.1/20/7/Add.7  
11 April 1999  
ENGLISH  
ORIGINAL: ARABIC

**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia**

Technical Committee  
Eleventh session  
Beirut, 25-26 May 1999

Item 6 (d) of the provisional agenda

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION  
FOR WESTERN ASIA  
6 JUL 1999  
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**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY  
ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION**

**SUMMARIES OF REPORTS OF SESSIONS  
OF THE COMMISSION'S SUBSIDIARY BODIES**

Report on  
the third session of the Statistical Committee

**I. ORGANIZATION OF WORK**

**A. Date, venue and objectives of the session**

1. The third session of the Statistical Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) was organized by the Commission and held from 16 to 18 March 1999 at the permanent headquarters of ESCWA in Beirut.
2. The purpose of the session was (a) to examine ways of achieving greater coordination of and support for cooperation between the countries of the region and the Statistics Division in statistical activities and programmes; (b) to review the programme of the Statistics Division of ESCWA for the biennium 2000-2001; (c) to examine the status of the 1993 System of National Accounts in the countries of the region; (d) to examine the participation of the ESCWA members in the International Comparison Programme; (e) to present a number of activities of especial importance, such as technical cooperation in the field of statistics, the Regional Household Survey Project, the impact of the United Nations global conferences on social statistics, general system for the publication of statistical data and the strategy of the 2000 Round of Population and Housing Censuses.

**B. Participants**

3. Participation in the session included 11 heads of central statistical organizations members of the Committee, or their representatives, as well as supervisors from 20 Arab, regional and international organizations.

**C. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work**

4. The Committee adopted the agenda contained in document E/ESCWA/STAT/1999/IG.1/L.1.

## II. DISCUSSION

### A. Follow-up action on the recommendations of the Statistical Committee of ESCWA at its second session (Agenda item 4)

5. The Committee discussed agenda item 4, presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/1999/IG.1/11, "Follow-up action on the recommendations of the second session of the Statistical Committee of ESCWA".

6. The Committee took the following action:

(a) It emphasized the importance of providing advisory services in the field of sampling to the countries of the region and requested ESCWA to make available an expert on sampling, if only from time to time, in accordance with countries' requests;

(b) It requested members to provide ESCWA with the names and curricula vitae of experts in their respective territories in the field of statistical sampling, to be included in an ESCWA reference list of experts;

(c) It requested ESCWA to send a questionnaire to the Central Statistical Organizations to enable them to furnish an inventory of the experience available in them in the various specialized statistical fields;

(d) It expressed its thanks and appreciation for the efforts of ESCWA in following up and implementing the recommendations adopted by the Committee at its second session.

### B. Work accomplished by the Statistical Committee of ESCWA between its second and third sessions (Agenda item 5)

7. The Committee discussed agenda item 5, presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/1999/IG.1/6, "Work accomplished by the Statistical Committee of ESCWA between its second and third sessions". In this connection, the representative of Palestine expressed his regret at the inability of Palestinian candidates to take part in some of the statistical meetings and workshops organized by ESCWA, for reasons that were beyond their control.

8. The Committee took the following action:

It thanked the Statistics Division of ESCWA for its efforts and achievements during the period between the second and third sessions of the Statistical Committee of ESCWA;

### C. The General Data Dissemination System (Agenda item 6)

9. The Committee discussed agenda item 6, presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/1999/IG.1/14, "The General Data Dissemination System", prepared by the International Monetary Fund.

10. The Committee took the following action:

(a) It encouraged the adoption of the General Data Dissemination System;

(b) It requested the ESCWA members to link this General System to the basic principles of official statistics established by both the United Nations Statistical Commission and the Statistical Committee of ESCWA;

(c) It requested the International Monetary Fund to offer technical and financial support for the holding of sessions for the local adaptation of the System and principles referred to in subparagraph (b) of this paragraph in coordination with the Statistics Division of ESCWA;

(d) It requested the International Monetary Fund to have everything relating to this System translated into Arabic and furnished to the ESCWA members.

D. Oral summary of the report of the United Nations Statistical Commission on its thirtieth session  
(Agenda item 7 (a)); and

Some guiding principles for good practices in technical cooperation for statistics  
(Agenda item 7 (b))

11. After hearing an oral summary given by the chief of the Statistics Division of ESCWA on the thirtieth session of the United Nations Statistical Commission, which was held in New York from 1 to 5 March 1999 (agenda item 7 (a)), the Committee discussed agenda item 7 (b), presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/1999/IG.1/12, "Some guiding principles for good practices in technical cooperation for statistics".

12. The Committee took the following action:

(a) It took note of the work of the thirtieth session of the United Nations Statistical Commission;

(b) It agreed to the study of the document "Some guiding principles for good practices in technical cooperation for statistics" by the central statistical organizations of the countries of the region and their sending their comments to ESCWA within three months from the date of the current session of the Statistical Committee in order to enable ESCWA to forward them to the United Nations Statistical Commission, to be taken into account by the Commission when reviewing the guiding principles.

E. Work programme of the Statistics Division of ESCWA for the biennium 2000-2001  
(Agenda item 8)

13. The Committee discussed agenda item 8, presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/1999/IG.1/7, "Work programme of the ESCWA Statistics Division for the biennium 2000-2001".

14. The Committee took the following action:

(a) It approved the proposed programme and called for an examination of the possibility of advancing the date the expert group meeting on the links between the balance of payments and the 1993 System of National Accounts to 2000 rather than 2001;

(b) It called upon ESCWA to devote greater attention to the problems facing statistical work as a whole in the region;

(c) It requested that ESCWA should increase its role in coordination and the exchange of experience and information among the statistical organizations in the region;

(d) It commended ESCWA on the efforts made through the work programme of the Statistics Division to serve the countries of the region;

(e) It emphasized the importance of continued training in the field of statistics and of furthering that training through cooperation between ESCWA and the Arab, regional and international organizations and institutions concerned.

F. Technical cooperation in statistics

(Agenda item 9)

15. The Committee discussed agenda item 9, presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/1999/IG.1/3, "Technical cooperation in statistics".

16. The Committee took the following action:

(a) It thanked ESCWA for its technical cooperation efforts in connection with advisory services provided on household surveys, data processing, national accounts and economic statistics;

(b) It called for the continuation and further development of that cooperation.

G. Report on the activities of the Regional Household Survey Project in the ESCWA countries

(Agenda item 10)

17. The Committee discussed agenda item 10, presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/1999/IG.1/15, "Report on the activities of the Regional Household Survey Project in the ESCWA countries".

18. The Committee took the following action:

(a) It expressed its thanks and appreciation for the technical efforts and advisory services provided by the Regional Household Survey Project and requested that those efforts continue;

(b) It requested members to take into consideration the data requirements of the 1993 System of National Accounts when carrying out household surveys;

(c) It requested ESCWA to provide advisory services in the field of household surveys, particularly in a manner that serves the needs of the 1993 System of National Accounts;

(d) It thanked ESCWA for preparing a regional project on geographical information systems (GIS) and taking charge of its implementation.

H. Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Evaluation of the Initial Stages of the Implementation of the 1993 System of National Accounts (SNA) in the ESCWA Region

(Agenda item 11)

19. The Committee discussed agenda item 11, presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/1999/IG.1/16, "Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Evaluation of the Initial Stages of the Implementation of the 1993 System of National Accounts (SNA) in the ESCWA Region".

20. The Committee took the following action:

(a) It examined the recommendations contained in the report and stressed the need for their follow-up and for providing software, manuals and classifications when they are issued;

(b) It expressed appreciation for the offer, expressed by the representative of the International Monetary Fund, of support by the Fund in that field, especially with regard to the balance of payments and price deflators;

(c) It called for additional local and regional courses, symposia and training workshops on national accounts and related subjects.

I. Report on the implementation of the International Comparison Programme (ICP) in the ESCWA region  
(Agenda item 12)

21. The Committee discussed agenda item 12, presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/1999/IG.1/9, "Report on the implementation of ICP in the ESCWA region".

22. The Committee took the following action:

It requested ESCWA to continue work on the International Comparison Programme in cooperation with the World Bank.

J. Purchasing power parities: comparison of price and volume levels of economic aggregates for the ESCWA region, 1995  
(Agenda item 13)

23. The Committee discussed agenda item 13, presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/1999/IG.1/10, "Purchasing power parities: comparison of price and volume levels of economic aggregates for the ESCWA region, 1995".

24. The Committee took the following action:

(a) It commended the efforts made in this regard;

(b) It requested ESCWA to send the document to the statistical organizations for study and for their comments, to be taken into consideration when the document is issued in its final form.

K. Report on the Expert Group Meeting on the Implications of the United Nations Global Conferences on Social Statistics  
(Agenda item 14)

25. The Committee discussed agenda item 14, presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/1999/IG.1/5, "Report on the Expert group meeting on the implications of the United Nations global conferences on social statistics".

26. The Committee took the following action:

(a) It examined the results and recommendations contained in the report and stressed the need for the related follow-up;

(b) It requested ESCWA to keep the statistical organizations abreast of all new developments, particularly as regards manuals, definitions and measuring methods.

L. Report of the Workshop on Strategies for the 2000 Round of Population and Housing Censuses in the ESCWA Member Countries  
(Agenda item 15)

27. The Committee discussed agenda item 15, presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/1999/IG.1/8, "Report of the Workshop on Strategies for the 2000 Round of Population and Housing Censuses in the ESCWA Member States".

28. The Committee took the following action:

(a) It examined the recommendations contained in the report and stressed the need for the related follow-up;

(b) It requested ESCWA to provide the statistical organizations with any new manuals and software and keep them informed of any new recommendations and principles in this area;

(c) It emphasized that statistical organizations should exchange experience and printed materials relating to this field.

M. Report on the Training Workshop on Industrial Statistics and their Link to the 1993 System of National Accounts  
(Agenda item 16)

29. The Committee discussed agenda item 16, presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/1999/IG.1/13, "Report of the training workshop on industrial statistics and their link to the United Nations System of National Accounts".

30. The Committee took the following action:

(a) It examined the recommendations of the training workshop and emphasized the importance of the related follow-up;

(b) It commended the cooperation between ESCWA and the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDMO), especially with regard to training courses on industrial statistics and the publication of the Bulletin of Industrial Statistics for the Arab Countries, and called for the continuation of that cooperation.

N. Report on the Project "Development of National Gender Statistics Programmes in the Arab Countries" (RAB/96/007)  
(Agenda item 17)

31. The Committee discussed agenda item 17, presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/1999/IG.1/4, "Report on the project 'Development of National Gender Statistics Programmes in the Arab Countries' (RAB/96/007)".

32. The Committee took the following action:

(a) It commended the efforts made in connection with this project and called on countries to exchange experience and information in this area;

(b) It requested ESCWA to continue work on the project;

(c) It invited those countries which had not yet joined the project to do so;

(d) It requested the statistical organizations to take steps to create units concerned with gender statistics and to continue work on the preparation of those statistics so as to cover all issues relating to men and women.

O. Report on the Workshop on Environmental Statistics,  
Indicators and Accounting  
(Agenda item 18)

33. The Committee discussed agenda item 18, presented in document E/ESCWA/STAT/1999/IG.1/17, "Report on the Workshop on Environmental Statistics, Indicators and Accounting".

34. The Committee took the following action:

(a) It commended the efforts made and the existing coordination between the Statistics Division of ESCWA and the United Nations Statistics Division;

(b) It requested the statistical organizations to take steps to create environmental statistics units and to continue work in them in such a way as to cover environmental statistics, indicators and accounting;

(c) It requested ESCWA to take steps to hold workshops, symposia and expert group meetings on environmental statistics, owing to their extreme importance;

(d) It emphasized the importance of the subject and called for efforts to define the concepts, definitions and nature of environmental statistics and the related indicators, based on the existing manuals on the subject and efforts to translate them into Arabic;

(e) It called on statistical organizations to exchange experience and information in the field of environmental statistics.

P. Other matters  
(Agenda item 19)

35. The Committee heard the representative of the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), who spoke on the development of agricultural statistics; it also heard views concerning the activation of the role of the Bureau of the third session of the Statistical Committee of ESCWA and a proposal concerning a declaration to be issued by the current session on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Commission.

36. The Committee took the following action:

(a) It urged the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and ESCWA to coordinate and take steps to develop agricultural statistics on the basis of existing possibilities;

(b) It expressed the wish that ESCWA should consult with the Bureau regarding the preparation and organization of the fourth session of the Statistical Committee of ESCWA;

(c) It approved the issuance of a declaration on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Commission (see annex).

At the conclusion of the meeting, those present agreed to the sending of a cablegram of thanks to the Prime Minister of Lebanon for sponsoring the third session of the Statistical Committee of ESCWA.

Annex

**DECLARATION ISSUED BY THE STATISTICAL COMMITTEE OF THE  
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA  
AT ITS THIRD SESSION, HELD IN BEIRUT, ON THE OCCASION  
OF THE TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE COMMISSION**

We the representatives of central statistical organizations, meeting in Beirut from 16 to 18 March 1999 in the third session of the Statistical Committee of ESCWA,

*On the occasion* of the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), which since its establishment has contributed significant development efforts in various areas of the social and economic life of its member States, including the advancement of statistical work and information systems at both the national and regional levels and contributions to international dialogue and development in that area, with constant support from the member States,

*On the occasion* of the passing of the twentieth century and the ushering in of the twenty-first century and in connection with the preparations for the beginning of the third millennium,

*Considering* the implications for statistical work arising from the United Nations global conferences and relating to policies and programmes of action aimed at shaping the social and economic features of the twenty-first century,

*In view* of the rapid development that has taken place worldwide in the area of technology and information, increasing several fold the capacity for appropriate, rapid decision-making to cope with the heavy and ever-increasing burdens that weigh on the ministries, institutions and individuals responsible for designing policies and finding solutions, thus adding to the responsibility of central statistical organizations and other bodies concerned with the preparation and supply of accurate, detailed data on the various sectors of economic, social and environmental activity in order to turn to account and put to use those scientific techniques for the analysis, preparation and publication of official data required at every level with a view to the acquisition of a suitable capacity for taking decisions aimed at the adoption of solidly founded social and economic policies that serve to bring about the desired well-being for society, the family and the individual within the context of sustainable development in the new age upon which we are about to enter and which is rightly considered the age of information, of mammoth societies and coalitions and of globalization of trade and knowledge in which one cannot lag behind or remain aloof, but must rather work with it in order to draw from it the elements of growth and cultural prosperity,

Declare the following:

1. Official data and statistics are fundamental and indispensable, offering Governments, researchers and the general public information and indicators on economic, demographic, social and environmental conditions, for which reason it is incumbent on agencies and statistical organizations concerned with official statistics to undertake to gather all statistical data whose practical utility has been confirmed and provide such data with impartiality to all data users including ordinary citizens, thus fulfilling their right to information.
2. In order to maintain confidence in official statistics, it is essential that statistical organizations should, in accordance with precise technical considerations that include both scientific principles and the rules and practices of the profession, define the methods and procedures for collecting, preparing, storing and presenting statistical data.



3. To facilitate the use and proper interpretation of statistical data, statistical organizations must document information with regard to data sources and the methods, concepts, definitions and classifications used.
4. In an effort to increase the accuracy of data, make them available more rapidly and ensure the completeness of their coverage, statistical organizations must, without delay, adopt and apply technological developments in the field of information and intensify the use of computer technology of all types at all stages of statistical work.
5. To achieve the goal of complete coverage of all economic, social and environmental phenomena, it is essential that official statistical organizations should obtain statistical data from all available sources, two of which rank highest: first, statistical field surveys (both comprehensive and sample types), carried out in accordance with carefully studied work plans; and the second, administrative data derived from records, documents and studies prepared by the various administrative organs, provided that quality, timing, costs and inconvenience to respondents are taken into account.
6. Absolute confidentiality must be maintained in the handling of data concerning persons (both natural and artificial) on whom data are collected, the use of such data being confined to purely statistical purposes.
7. All laws, procedures and arrangements which serve as a basis for the work of statistical systems must be published, not only to satisfy the principle of transparency, but also to contribute to increased statistical awareness.
8. Coordination between statistical agencies and organizations within countries is essential to consistency and efficiency within the statistical system.
9. Statistical organizations must adopt international standards and recommendations relating to statistical concepts, methods, classifications and definitions for the preparation of statistical data so as to make them susceptible of international comparison and uniform interpretation.
10. The establishment of bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the field of statistics should be encouraged with a view to the development of official statistics systems in the region.

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