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Demographic and Social Statistics at the
Economic Commission for Africa

By the

United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

A. INTRODUCTION

1. In view of their fundamental importance for policy formulation, monitoring and evaluation, demographic and social statistics are compiled and disseminated by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) on a regular basis.
2. As the Commission does not produce a yearbook of demographic and social statistics on the countries of the region, a sizeable part of the data compiled is disseminated through the *African Statistical Yearbook* and the *African Socio-economic Indicators*, which constitute two of its major statistical publications. It should be noted however that, although they provide important demographic and social indicators on ECA Member States, these two publications are not as specific and comprehensive as the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook*.
3. The 2002 editions of the *African Statistical Yearbook* and the *African Socio-economic Indicators* are currently in the reproduction process and are due for December 2003.

B. Demographic statistics

i) Data collection

4. The main sources of data are the National Statistical Offices through their publications or web sites. The *World Population Prospects*, and the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* (along with the CD-ROM issues) also constitute valuable sources of data, among others.

ii) Data coverage

5. The following demographic variables and indicators are compiled and disseminated for the 53 member States of ECA:

Variables:

Age
Sex
Marital status
Population size
Population distribution
Population at different age groups
Economically active population
Economically inactive population

Indicators:

Crude birth rate (CBR)
Crude death rate (CDR)
Total fertility rate (TFR)
Gross reproduction rate (GRR)

Life expectancy at birth
Average annual population growth rate
Urban and rural percentages

6. In order to achieve better coverage, the rates should also be computed for specific age and sex groups. Moreover, it is desirable to include other variables such as maternal death, nuptiality, contraception and family planning.

iii) Data dissemination

7. The Economic Commission for Africa has compiled a distribution list, which serves as a basis for disseminating the data. Specific requests are also handled from time to time. Moreover, the Commission is contemplating the possibility of establishing a web site for its statistical databases and publications in the near future.

8. In view of the increasing number of requests for data received from ECA member States and partner organizations, it is presumed that the Commission has substantially met its objectives. However, a user needs assessment survey should be conducted to determine precisely how far ECA has gone in meeting the data requirements of the public.

iv) Suggestions for improvement

9. As it is well known, demographic data are highly error prone in most countries or areas. This is due mainly to the perception of standard demographic terms, concepts and definitions in the system of registering such events as well as in the computation methods.

10. Hence, there is room for improvement starting from having specialized personnel in the field; all the way to conducting training workshops and other means of knowledge and experience sharing opportunities for the statisticians in the member states and in ECA.

11. There is need also to continue developing a reliable Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) database in ECA. This had a good start a couple of years ago, owing to the active involvement of a group of interns from the Ecole nationale supérieure de statistique et d'économie appliquée (ENSEA) of Cote d'Ivoire.

C. Social Statistics

i) Data sources and coverage

12. The data collected relate to education, health, economically active population and crude activity rate.

13. As regards the data sources and the types of statistical variables and indicators compiled, these are as follows:

(a) Education statistics: teaching staff, enrolment of students; by level of education and sex; enrolment ratios by level and sex; illiteracy rate by sex. The sources for such data are mainly national publications, UNESCO publications and other relevant sources.

(b) Health statistics: personnel available such as the number of medical doctors, dentists, nurses, pharmacists; number of hospitals, hospital beds, health centres etc. The sources for these data are national publications, WHO and UNICEF publications.

(c) Economically active population and crude activity rate: number of economically active population by sex and sector of activity; number of active population by sex and sector activity expressed as a percentage of the respective population (crude activity rate). The main data sources are national publications, ILO and other United Nations publications (such as the *World Population Prospects*).

14. In general, the data available are incomplete and outdated. This may be attributed, to some extent, to the lack of appropriate mechanisms for data sharing between ECA and its Member States.

ii) Data dissemination

15. As already indicated, the demographic and social statistics compiled by ECA are disseminated through the *African Statistical Yearbook* and the *African Socio-Economic Indicators*.

iii) Suggestions for improvement

16. Some improvement in the data could be achieved through enhanced access to the Internet. However, several African countries do not yet have such facilities.

D. Conclusion

17. Much emphasis is laid on poverty reduction in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is expected therefore that the New Strategic Framework for Statistical Development that is being formulated by ECA for the African region will accord high priority to sustainable development indicators, with due attention to demographic and social statistics.