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Report of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia on the main achievements of statistical development in the region

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2015/216 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). In the report, ESCWA describes the main achievements of statistical development in the region over the past five years and focuses on challenges and opportunities related to an increased demand for data emanating from the post-2015 development agenda. ESCWA focuses particular attention on: (a) the development of the national statistical capacity of the Arab States; (b) the implementation of best practices and leading methods and techniques in official statistics; (c) the provision of comprehensive and coherent data on Arab States with national statistical offices as regional reference points; and (d) the coordination and building of partnerships for statistical development in the Arab region.

The Statistical Commission is invited to take note of the report in its discussions on the potential for supporting the region in the transfer of knowledge and expertise in respect of the priority areas outlined in the report and to solicit the interest of funding agencies of the United Nations system in supporting resource mobilization in the region.

* E/CN.3/2016/1.



Report of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia on the main achievements of statistical development in the region

I. Introduction

1. The statistical community of the Western Asia region aims at adapting official statistics to the policy needs emanating from the rapidly changing socioeconomic situation of the Arab countries. It faces situations that are distinct to the region, requiring specific approaches to the selection of data sources and to the production of official statistics.

2. There are significant differences in statistical development between countries, as well as in individual statistical subject matter areas for each country, making it necessary therefore for agencies of the United Nations system and other international organizations to analyse actual needs when undertaking technical cooperation activities. Standard training programmes are not effective, and national data producers require advice on specific training issues with regard to conducting surveys and statistical activities.

3. Most of the national staff use Arabic since it is the main language of the region. In this regard, delays in the translation of international standards, handbooks and methodological guides into Arabic result in delays in implementing the standards. Moreover, the translation services of the United Nations and other international organizations should use standardized Arabic terminology, which is being developed, in the form of thematic glossaries, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and in consultation with the national statistical offices of the region.

4. Several countries in the region are affected by internal and/or external conflicts and by occupation, all of which create obstacles to carrying out development activities, including with regard to official statistics. Even in a situation of conflict, it is of the utmost importance to maintain statistical data and to preserve the history of the data since such information is essential to reconstruction efforts once the conflict has been resolved. In addition, specific types of statistics are necessary in situations of conflict, such as on the economic repercussions of the conflict, the situation of households and the negative impact on social well-being.

5. In supporting statistical development in the region, international, regional and national organizations face challenges related to the issue of resources. The region is considered to be wealthy and it is therefore outside the focus of donor support. However, the perception of its wealth does not take into account the reality of a major part of the region. A lack of resources causes delays in the conduct of activities such as the development of statistics on food security, agriculture and rural development and results in less frequent or irregular surveys on various subjects.

II. Strength, weakness, opportunity and threat analysis

6. In order to prompt discussion on the challenges faced by the statistical community of the region, a strength, weakness, opportunity and threat analysis was prepared in consultation with national statistical offices (see box below).

Strength, weakness, opportunity and threat analysis

Strengths

- Recognition of the importance of official statistics by policymakers in the region
- Promotion of statistical literacy
- Progress in the assessments of national statistical systems by GCC-Stat, PARIS21, AfDB, ESCWA and ECA
- Advances in the use of modern technology in data collection; advances in linking statistics with geospatial information
- Growing use of smart applications in data dissemination
- Completion of the charter of the statistical work in the GCC region
- Successful completion of the 2011 round of ICP lays the foundation for further harmonization and capacity development in economic statistics

Opportunities

- Commitment to the formulation of national strategies for the development of statistics
- Potential for South-South cooperation, learning from experiences of advanced statistical entities
- Specialized agencies (WHO, UNFPA) lead a regional programme on civil registration and vital statistics with active involvement of ESCWA
- GCC countries are accelerating the use of administrative data sources for statistical purposes
- GCC-Stat is advancing the development of statistical methodologies through guidelines, methodologies and questionnaires

Weaknesses

- Variations in data produced by national statistical offices and international organizations
- National data sources are not always fully exploited and coordinated across various government offices; not all data are published
- Several countries need to address issues of governance, laws and legislation related to statistics and the implementation of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics
- National strategies for the development of statistics do not exist or are not up to date in several countries
- Measurement of governance, security and civil rights is not sufficiently covered by official statistics in the Arab region
- Slow development in agriculture and rural development statistics
- Lack of reliable statistics on refugees and displaced persons; lack of data on migrant populations
- Use of administrative registers and records is less advanced in many countries of the region — in particular with regard to statistical business registers and civil registration and vital statistics
- Lack of financial support provided to national statistical offices of ESCWA member States affects their participation in global statistical working groups

Threats

- Significant diversity in statistical development among Arab countries and among statistical subject matter areas
- In many instances data are not utilized for policymaking
- Arab countries are not sufficiently present in groups leading global statistical development
- Many countries face the problem of insufficient resources for the development of their official statistics
- Moderate resources for statistical capacity development are available to United Nations offices and agencies working in the region

- Strengthening regional partnerships for statistical capacity development: ESCWA, GCC-Stat, AITRS, LAS, ECA, SESRIC, IDB
- Developing partnerships with ISI and IAOS (bringing in more statisticians from the Arab region)
- Developing relationships with donors: World Bank, DFID, JICA
- “Internal” opportunities for the translation of standards and guidelines into Arabic within the region
- Potential for following up on cooperation with the European Union after MEDSTAT
- Donors focus on other regions, and the Arab region’s need for support remains largely unmet
- Countries facing conflict develop official statistics under hardship conditions

Abbreviations: AfDB, African Development Bank; AITRS, Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics; DFID, Department for International Development, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; ECA, Economic Commission for Africa; ESCWA, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia; GCC, Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf; GCC-Stat, Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf; ICP, International Comparison Programme; IDB, Islamic Development Bank; IAOS, International Association for Official Statistics; ISI, International Statistical Institute; JICA, Japan International Cooperation Agency; LAS, League of Arab States; MEDSTAT, European Union multi-country programme in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy; PARIS21, Partnership in Statistics in the Twenty-first Century; SESRIC, Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (Organization for Islamic Cooperation); UNFPA, United Nations Population Fund; WHO, World Health Organization.

III. Achievements

7. The region has made progress since its previous report to the Statistical Commission (E/CN.3/2011/20). However, in taking into account that progress, it is important to note differences in the level of development experienced by the different national statistical systems of the region and that what may appear to be an achievement in one part of the region, may continue to be a challenge in another.

8. There has been improved cooperation and coordination in statistical capacity development with other regional organizations and offices working in the area of statistics. In particular, close cooperation has been forged between the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics, the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, the Leagues of Arab States and its specialized organizations, the regional offices of bodies and organizations of the United Nations system (e.g., United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), World Health Organization (WHO)) and a number of sectoral regional organizations.

9. The 2011 round of the International Comparison Programme (ICP) serves as an example of the potential for cooperation on the harmonization of statistics in the region, as well as for linking data collection on international needs with the statistical capacity development of countries of the region. Future plans include the harmonization of consumer price indices and linking data collection for the indices and ICP. Such plans aim not only at harmonization but also at decreasing the cost of conducting price surveys.

10. In responding to calls for better linkages between policymaking and official statistics, a regional framework for effective use of statistics in policymaking has been developed. The framework has facilitated a continuing open dialogue between policymakers and statisticians in the pilot countries of the project.

11. There has been an incremental reliance by agencies of the United Nations system, such as ESCWA, on national data sources. Moreover, ESCWA has increased its use of microdata sets (household surveys) for specific analytical purposes and supports the conduct of pilot surveys on harmonized statistical data at the national level (e.g., pilot surveys on energy consumption in the transport sector).

12. Thanks to cooperation with the European Union on the European Union multi-country programme in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy, MEDSTAT, progress has been achieved in several statistical areas in the past five years, including in sectoral statistics, statistics on international migration, transport statistics and energy statistics.

13. In response to the actual needs of countries in conflict, surveys were implemented in Iraq and Palestine on displaced populations, with regard to their social, demographic and economic characteristics, as well as on displacement damages and the respective needs of displaced families.

14. ESCWA and other organizations in the region have completed development projects in statistics in such fields as development indicators, environment statistics, energy statistics and gender statistics. A project is currently under way to address short-term economic indicators.

15. The member countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (Gulf Cooperation Council) would like to bring to the attention of the Statistical Commission the following achievements specific to their subregion:

- Progress in promoting statistical literacy in various segments of society through social media
- Increased use of smart applications for the dissemination of statistical data
- Adoption, in the near future, of a charter of the statistical work for the Gulf Cooperation Council subregion
- Growing use of administrative data sources and progress towards the use of big data
- Linking of newly collected statistics, when applicable, with spatial information
- Implementation of statistical work through specific strategies for five-year periods

IV. Challenges in laying the building blocks of the regional and national statistical systems

16. While there was visible progress made in institutional set-ups for official statistics in several countries of the region, a lot remains to be done in the areas of governance and institutional development. The regional statistical system exists in an intuitive way only, and it is necessary to achieve better coordination between

regional actors. Assessments of national statistical systems show that data are often available within a country but are not disseminated to common data sets across various offices and ministries. Data collected by national statistical offices, central banks, ministries and specialized government agencies are often treated in isolation. Bringing the wealth of data together would facilitate the expanded use of such data, improving its quality and extending the output of national official statistics. There is great potential for the compilation of more comprehensive official statistics from available data, but this requires better coordination among various national players.

17. At the regional level, there are a number of statistical committees with independent work programmes that aim to serve almost the same set of countries. ESCWA and other organizations have a role in improving that coordination. However, such coordination should reflect the needs of national statistical systems and should therefore include dialogue with national statistical offices. The ultimate goal should be to create a functional and well-coordinated regional statistical system that provides a platform for sharing responsibilities in statistical data, including the sharing of data and the publishing of consistent data about the region. An assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the regional statistical system needs to be conducted in the near future.

18. The role of national statistical offices in the Arab region, in particular their leading and coordinating function within national statistical systems, needs to be strengthened. This requires a supportive legislative and institutional environment. Full implementation of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics has yet to be achieved, in particular with respect to transparency in releasing statistical data to all users.

19. The situation with regard to formulating and updating national strategies for the development of statistics differs from country to country (see para. 15 above, on the achievements of the member countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council). In many countries, national strategies for the development of statistics should be updated not only with respect to the time elapsed since they were formulated but also in the light of the increasing demand for statistics brought about by the post-2015 development agenda. In creating such strategies, policy relevance should be addressed in line with the ESCWA framework for effective use of statistics in policymaking. In a number of countries in the region, the strategies should also address issues related to statistics during times of conflict, including: (a) ways to preserve the continuity of official statistics during such times; and (b) ways to identify specific statistics for measuring the impact of conflict (e.g., on households, on the economy and on the environment).

20. The growing demand for statistical data also implies a need for addressing issues related to sources of data. In General Assembly resolution 70/1, entitled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", the Assembly calls for defining a regional set of sustainable development indicators. The set should be policy relevant and address policy issues specific to Arab countries, while being of a sufficiently small scale to allow for Arab countries to be able to report the data. At the second session of the Arab High-level Forum on Sustainable Development, it was recommended that such a set should consist of about 30 multi-purpose indicators, in order to support the capacity of national statistical systems in reporting comparable data.

21. Experience worldwide shows that, as a first step towards exploring the potential of big data in the Arab region, data needs for the increased demand for official statistics must be met, including stepping up the utilization of new sources of data, such as administrative registers and records, the register data of the private sector and data from civil society. The utilization of register data as a source for statistical surveys is not as advanced as in some other regions, which makes the transfer of knowledge and experience in this area essential.

22. The region should prepare for the 2020 round of population and housing censuses on the basis of the lessons learned from the 2010 round and should aim for an improved level of harmonization. Experience shows that data collected through the censuses can now be utilized more extensively. In addition, the current tendency is to use modern data collection methods that are supported by technology, such as mobile devices, the automated capture of geospatial characteristics and the linking of data acquired through enumeration with data obtained from registers.

23. In the light of trends in technological advancements in official statistics, some areas of official statistics (such as environment statistics and transport statistics) would benefit from automatic registration systems. Their utilization in the region is limited. The utilization of technology in data collection (mostly tablets at present) is growing in the Arab region, and this opens up possibilities for addressing issues related to quality (e.g., quality checks at the time of data collection).

24. The region should also increase its participation in the work of the Committee of Experts Initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management. In this respect, there is a need for commitment and allocation of resources at the regional and national levels.

25. Significant progress has been achieved in better coordinating, and rationalizing the process of statistical capacity development. However, further progress is needed. In particular, attention should be turned to national statistical systems, including national statistical offices and key government offices and ministries in each country. It is equally important to coordinate efforts in resources mobilization. Such efforts should take into account the needs of the region rather than those of individual organizations. Currently, such efforts are rather improvised, owing to the lack of a resources mobilization strategy at the regional level. There is also a lack of evidence on the actual impact of current technical assistance in creating actual statistical capacity in the countries of the region.

26. In the light of changes in economic conditions, social movements and other policy aspects having an impact on the region, Western Asia needs to be a participant in the data revolution. Regional players need to address the question of how to better disseminate statistics on sustainable development in the region to users. This necessitates harmonizing the data dissemination approaches of the regional and national statistical agencies. The official statistics of the region need to be made publicly available, and ESCWA should serve as an example and a leader in such efforts.

V. Addressing the specific subject matter issues of official statistics

27. The development of statistics should occur in keeping with the foundational issues of official statistics and should be pursued within the context of all areas of statistics, including:

(a) Managerial and strategic issues relating to official statistics (e.g., transformative agenda for and/or modernization of official statistics, institutional building, technology, geospatial information, and national strategies for the development of statistics);

(b) Demographic and social statistics (e.g., poverty statistics including multidimensional poverty; civil registration and vital statistics; and social justice and vulnerable groups, including women, youth and the elderly);

(c) Economic statistics (e.g., business registers; national accounts; statistics on trade in services; and price statistics, including the harmonization of price indices, and data collection with regard to ICP and consumer price indices);

(d) Environment statistics (e.g., System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, environment statistics focused on water);

(e) Development indicators and cross-cutting areas of statistics (e.g., regional set of sustainable development indicators, national indicators related to policy priorities).

28. There are also areas of statistics that are not sufficiently covered in the region by official statistics, in particular statistics on governance, security, well-being and human rights. Such statistics may be available from academic and research institutions or be developed in collaboration with them. However, there is a risk that numerous advocacy groups may fill the gap by publicizing data that do not always meet the requirements of quality, representativeness and impartiality. A particular risk is the possibility of a bias towards such groups having an impact on the agendas and interests of donors. Issues of governance, human rights and security in the Arab region are in the focus of the media and the general public, and official statistics must therefore serve to provide the right data and evidence.

VI. Creating a broad partnership for cooperation in statistical development in Western Asia and in the Arab region

29. As mentioned earlier in the present report, owing to the scarcity of resources for regional statistical development, it is necessary to fill the gaps through the creation of a broad partnership with organizations at various levels. The paragraphs below provide an outline of the partnership and its expected benefits.

30. The current membership of ESCWA includes 18 of 22 Arab countries. ESCWA has therefore established a close partnership with Arab regional organizations. Joint efforts on statistical capacity development are undertaken together with the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics. Cooperation is also being strengthened with the League of the Arab States (and its specialized agencies in committees, such as the League's Technical Committee on Statistics, the Pan Arab Family Survey, the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization and the

Arab Labour Organization. ESCWA jointly organizes subregional capacity development workshops and seminars with organizations for the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf and the Gulf Organization for Industrial Consulting. Arab regional partners also include the Regional Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency, including with regard to the development of statistics on energy and the conduct of pilot surveys, and the Arab Monetary Fund-Arab Statistics Initiative.

31. Numerous agencies of the United Nations system maintain offices covering slightly different groups of Arab countries and countries in Western Asia. Close partnerships have been established with UNFPA on capacity development in population statistics, with the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean in the field of civil registration and vital statistics and with the regional office of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on a regional action plan for agriculture statistics and statistics on rural development. There is also a proposal for accelerated support to be provided to the development of labour statistics with the regional office of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Beirut and under the methodological supervision of ILO headquarters.

32. The membership of the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) includes all Arab countries. Since the establishment of the OIC Statistical Commission, ESCWA has strengthened its partnership with the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries, in particular with regard to launching discussions on topics of strategic importance for Islamic countries. The region also works closely with the Islamic Development Bank on resources mobilization for statistical capacity development and pilot surveys (e.g., energy consumption in the transport sector).

33. The Western Asia region naturally extends to Arab countries in North Africa. This highlights the importance of interregional cooperation with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). The cooperation covers the coordination of work programmes, joint assessments of national statistical systems and joint data collection. In addition, ESCWA cooperates with the African Development Bank, particularly with regard to data collection, capacity development and the harmonization of price statistics.

34. European-Mediterranean cooperation programmes, such as MEDSTAT, have proved to be successful. It is therefore desirable to pursue the foundations laid by MEDSTAT after the programme is completed and to pursue cooperation with Eurostat and leading statistical offices of the European region. The transfer of knowledge from the European region is also pursued through cooperation with the European Environment Agency.

35. The global partners for the Western Asia region include the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat. Currently, ESCWA and the Division coordinate the implementation of a wide range of global statistical initiatives in the region, including global geospatial information management. The World Bank is also an important partner, in particular with regard to supporting the regional component of ICP and the harmonization of price statistics in the Arab region. The region also coordinates with the United Nations Development Programme through discussions on the quality of data for inclusion in the *Human Development Report*. The Arabic version of the annual report is prepared by the ESCWA Conference Services Section.

VII. Short presentation of the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf

36. The Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf was created two and a half years ago. The present report therefore serves to provide the Statistical Commission with basic information about the Centre.

37. The Centre was constituted by the Heads of State of the six countries comprising the Gulf Cooperation Council, namely, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The creation of the Centre marked the high level of determination aimed at strengthening cooperation, coordination and harmonization in the field of statistics, in order to improve the production and dissemination of timely and high-quality data and statistical information to decision makers and policymakers, researchers and planners, as well as regional and international organizations, the private sector and the general public. It also highlighted the recognition that the availability of high-quality data and statistical information was an important element in supporting Gulf Cooperation Council Governments in their policies to diversify the economy and enhance economic unity within the region, including through a common market, a customs union (achieved in 2003) and a monetary union.

A. Strategic objectives and pillars of the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf

38. Under the leadership and coordination of the Centre, the statistical cooperation of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries is aimed at reaching the following nine strategic objectives in order to provide a framework for their own statistical development:

- (a) Build and strengthen the statistical and institutional capacity of member countries, to meet the statistical requirements at the international, regional and national levels;
- (b) Promote and improve the quality and quantity of statistical products on a sustainable basis;
- (c) Project the Gulf Cooperation Council subregion as a unified economic and social agglomeration;
- (d) Develop, expand and market statistical dissemination;
- (e) Establish joint work programmes between the national statistics centres in member countries and the Centre;
- (f) Unify the national strategies for the development of statistics in Gulf Cooperation Council countries in accordance with best international practices;
- (g) Build the culture of statistics and raise awareness about statistics, and strengthen the actual and correct use of data and information in decision-making and policy formulation in Gulf Cooperation Council countries;
- (h) Ensure that the Gulf Cooperation Council subregion has an effective presence in international statistical development;
- (i) Ensure the long-term organizational sustainability of the Centre.

39. The Centre leads statistical development in the Gulf Cooperation Council subregion together with member countries and other stakeholders according to the five strategic pillars set out in the table below.

Statistical development in the Gulf Cooperation Council subregion, according to strategic pillar

<i>Strategic pillars</i>	<i>Main activities</i>
Assembly, analysis and dissemination of data and metadata	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assemble, analyse and regularly disseminate data and statistical information (demographic, social, economic, environmental, etc.) of interest to decision makers and policymakers, researchers, planners, organizations, the general public • Compile and publish Gulf Cooperation Council aggregates • Adopt data dissemination policies and procedures and disseminate them through the web portal as well as through regular publications
Development, harmonization and coordination of statistical work, use of the latest standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the quality and quantity of statistical products in a sustainable manner • Harmonize and standardize statistical work across member countries • Use the latest standards, definitions, concepts, classifications and systems • Strengthen cooperation at the international, regional and national levels
Capacity development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide technical assistance to member countries • Organize training workshops and training courses, within countries and at the regional level • Organize study visits for member countries to benefit from best practices
Cross-cutting institutional issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harmonize national statistical strategies in member countries • Raise statistical awareness and strengthen relationships with data users • Achieve an effective presence in international and regional statistical development • Ensure the sustainability of the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf

<i>Strategic pillars</i>	<i>Main activities</i>
Support programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the efficient and effective operation of the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, including by increasing efficiency with regard to human and financial resources and information and communication technologies

40. For the period 2015-2020, the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf will lead and coordinate efforts to improve statistical work across the Gulf Cooperation Council subregion with a focus on the activities set out in the following major statistical domains:

(a) National accounts: compiling quarterly and annual national accounts in current and constant price terms, by 2017; implementing the System of National Accounts 2008 and recommended classifications (e.g., International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC) Rev. 4, etc.); ensuring that the supply-use framework becomes central to annual national accounts compilation by 2018; and developing national balance sheets jointly with national central banks;

(b) Monetary, financial and balance of payments statistics: assembling and disseminating these statistics and encouraging cooperation between the national statistics centres and national central banks to improve linkages between their statistics, national accounts and macroeconomic statistics in general; the activity will be carried out jointly with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), which will lead efforts to conduct a coordinated Gulf Cooperation Council foreign direct investment survey;

(c) Price indices and short-term statistics: compiling these statistics in accordance with the latest standards and producing harmonized consumer price indices for the region by 2020;

(d) Foreign trade statistics: harmonizing and compiling the intra-trade and extra-trade statistics of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries through collaboration between national statistics centres and customs administrations and in accordance with the recommendations contained in the publication entitled *International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Concepts and Definitions 2010*;

(e) Labour statistics: conducting an annual harmonized labour force survey until 2018 — at which point it will be conducted on a quarterly basis — using the concepts and definitions set in the resolution concerning statistics of work, employment and labour underutilization adopted by the nineteenth International Conference of Labour Statisticians, held in 2013;

(f) Energy and environment statistics: harmonizing and compiling these statistics across countries, using the latest standards such as the International Recommendations for Energy Statistics, the Energy Statistics Manual and the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics;

(g) Tourism statistics: harmonizing and compiling these statistics across the region while using the latest standards;

(h) Development, progress and sustainability indicators: ensuring a continuous production of harmonized indicators to monitor the Sustainable Development Goals as well as meet the specific needs of member countries;

(i) Enhanced use of administrative data sources for statistical purposes: strengthening the ongoing work in member countries and building on the achievements, with the major objective of carrying out a register-based population and housing census in 2020; in addition, developing up-to-date business registers in accordance with the latest classifications.

B. Achievements by the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf and the way forward

41. Although actual operations started only about two and a half years ago, the Centre has already established a dedicated data web portal for the regular compilation and dissemination of statistics and has issued 36 statistical reports and bulletins. Work is ongoing to implement an advance release calendar.

42. In terms of support provided towards the development and harmonization of statistical production in member countries, the Centre has produced 25 guidelines, methodologies and questionnaires, which have been discussed and adopted through the work of standing committees and working groups. Furthermore, 20 workshops and training sessions have been held for the benefit of over 450 staff from the Gulf Cooperation Council statistical system and in collaboration with major partners, including the Statistics Division, ESCWA, the International Labour Organization, UNCTAD, the International Monetary Fund and Eurostat. In addition, member countries have benefited from over 25 technical assistance missions (total duration of over 200 expert/days).

43. As it gradually reaches its full operating mode, the Centre plans to issue annually around 30 statistical reports and bulletins, organize about 15 workshops and training sessions and offer technical assistance to member countries (over 300 expert/days). Moreover, it will continue to support the harmonized production of statistics in the Gulf Cooperation Council subregion according to the objectives stated above. In addition, it will seek to strengthen coordination and promote further joint work with regional and international partners, in order to ensure harmonization of the delivery of support to member countries while reducing the burden on the national statistical systems.

VIII. Action by the Statistical Commission

44. The Commission is invited to comment on the:

- Statistical work undertaken in the Arab region and in the Arab countries of the Gulf
- Potential for interregional cooperation and support to the region
- Challenges, including for statistics, in conflict situations and crises.