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Programme questions: evaluation

Triennial review of recommendations from the thematic evaluation of the regional commissions

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with the decision taken by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its twenty-second session to review the implementation of Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) recommendations three years after the Committee had decided to endorse them (A/37/38 (Supp), para. 362). The present triennial review determined the extent to which the four recommendations endorsed by the Committee, out of the five emanating from the OIOS thematic evaluation of the regional commissions, were implemented.

In the recommendations, OIOS addressed various aspects of the relevance and effectiveness of the regional commissions in statistical work carried out in support of measuring the achievement and the implementation of the agreed development goals. The triennial review determined that all four recommendations were fully implemented by all regional commissions. The full outcome of the implementation of the four recommendations thus far could not be assessed, as some recommendations were too recently implemented to measure results. At the same time, some evidence of concrete positive outcomes was noted.

In recommendation 1, OIOS addressed the need for the regional commissions to develop and implement a strategy to enhance the capacity of Member States to disseminate and use statistics. All regional commissions developed and operationalized capacity development strategies that helped them provide more deliberate technical assistance based on the regional priority areas. However, the focus on capacity development for dissemination was less evident in some regional strategies; in some cases, there was also limited evidence of technical assistance activities that addressed new and advanced data dissemination methods.

* The dates for the substantive session are tentative.

** E/AC.51/2020/1.



In recommendation 3, OIOS addressed the need for regional commissions to develop region-specific tools, guidelines, frameworks and templates, taking into consideration the guidelines prepared by the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century in order to support the strengthening of national statistical plans and national strategies for the development of statistics. The regional commissions developed region-specific tools, models and guidelines, taking into consideration the guidelines prepared by the Partnership. In many cases, they were used by Member States to assess their current statistical capabilities and to further develop their national statistical plans in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

In recommendation 4, OIOS addressed the need for regional commissions to strengthen their internal coordination with regard to the production and dissemination of sectoral data. All regional commissions strengthened internal coordination, especially through central data management and monitoring systems, which ensured effective collaboration when updating databases within regional commissions. At the same time, the exchange of information on regional activities was less systematic, as some of the working groups and mechanisms were not fully operational.

In recommendation 5, OIOS addressed the need to strengthen coordination between the regional commissions to share expertise and experience on common thematic priorities and statistical areas. There was increased collaboration between the regional commissions, especially owing to the implementation of the Development Account Programme on Statistics and Data, the regular meetings between the statistics divisions of the regional commissions and the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat and regular interactions during international forums. As a result, the regional commissions shared best practices, produced common papers, developed frameworks, participated in joint events and working groups and enhanced their coordination in support of Member States. While progress was made, the collaboration between the regional commissions remained uneven, with the Economic Commission for Africa collaborating the least with other regional commissions.

I. Introduction

1. At its fifty-seventh session, in 2017, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), prepared by the Inspection and Evaluation Division, on the thematic evaluation of the regional commissions (E/AC.51/2017/8).

2. The Committee expressed appreciation for the evaluation report and for the work of the five regional commissions¹ in providing statistical support to the Member States in their respective regions, in particular in the context of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It recognized that multiple actors and partners were involved in providing statistical support to Member States and noted that it was important to enhance synergies and cooperation in that regard between the regional commissions and with other entities in the United Nations system. The Committee expressed agreement on the importance of having statistics and open and accessible data as an essential component of promoting sustainable development and the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the importance of the regional commissions in enhancing Member State statistical capacity. In its report, the Committee recommended that the General Assembly endorse the recommendations contained in paragraphs 53 and 55 to 57 of the OIOS report, and it recommended that the General Assembly take note of the recommendation contained in paragraph 54 (A/72/16, paras. 205–216).

3. The present report was issued pursuant to a triennial review of the recommendations and served to examine the status of implementation of the four recommendations endorsed by the Committee. The review also provided an assessment of whether, and to what extent, the implementation of the recommendations contributed to programme changes.

4. The methodology for the triennial review included:

(a) Review and analysis of progress reports on the status of recommendations, which were monitored through the OIOS Inspection and Evaluation Division recommendation database;

(b) Analysis of relevant information, documents and reports obtained from regional commissions on various topics related to the recommendations;

(c) Interviews with a purposive sample of key regional commission staff.

5. The present report incorporates comments received from the regional commissions during the drafting process. A final draft was shared with the regional commissions for their comments, which are contained in the annex. The OIOS Inspection and Evaluation Division expresses its appreciation to the regional commissions for the cooperation extended in the preparation of the present report.

II. Results

6. The OIOS Inspection and Evaluation Division made five recommendations to regional commissions: (a) to develop and implement a strategy to enhance the capacity of Member States to disseminate and use statistics; (b) to develop and implement a strategy to enhance regional commission capacities in support of key statistics, in particular environmental and gender statistics and new statistical areas

¹ Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

relating to the Sustainable Development Goals; (c) to develop region-specific tools, guidelines, frameworks and templates, taking into consideration the guidelines prepared by the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century, in order to support the strengthening of national statistical plans and national strategies for the development of statistics; (d) to strengthen their internal coordination with regard to the production and dissemination of sectoral data; and (e) to strengthen coordination between the regional commissions to share expertise and experience on common thematic priorities. As noted above, recommendations 1, 3, 4 and 5 were endorsed by the Committee and are reported on in the present report.

7. In its review, OIOS determined that all four recommendations were implemented by all five regional commissions. There is some evidence of concrete positive outcomes resulting from the implemented recommendations. The implementation status of each of the four recommendations is described below.

Recommendation 1

Capacity development strategy for dissemination and use of statistics

8. Recommendation 1 reads as follows:

The regional commissions should develop and implement a strategy to enhance the capacity of Member States to disseminate and use statistics at the national level, including guidelines and recommendations, taking into account the regional context. Related activities could include:

(a) Promoting the participation of staff from technical ministries or members of other substantive committees in relevant working groups and task forces of the statistical bodies, including through cross-sectoral capacity-building activities that bring together producers and users of statistics;

(b) Organizing technology workshops that address new and advanced data dissemination methods.

Indicator of achievement: Strategy to enhance the capacity of Member States in relation to the dissemination and use of statistics is developed.

Economic Commission for Africa

9. In responding to the OIOS recommendation, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) embedded in several documents its strategy for enhancing the capacity of member States to disseminate and use statistics at the national level, including several guidelines and recommendations. The multi-year comprehensive programme of support to statistics in Africa from 2018 to 2021 was intended to support the African Statistical System in the collection, compilation, dissemination and use of statistics.² The theory of change articulated in the strategy contained specific support for the dissemination and use of statistics. In addition, the logical framework of identified priority actions presented in the 2017 ECA publication entitled *Geospatial Information for Sustainable Development in Africa: Action Plan on Global Geospatial Information Management 2016–2030* identified specific goals and funding for ECA to support the dissemination and use of geospatial data in Africa. The “2020 Africa Programme on Population and Housing Censuses Decade (2015–2024)”, the *Africa Programme for Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Costed Strategic Plan 2017–2021* and the African Programme on Gender Statistics 2017–2021 contained strategies or held discussions on the dissemination and use of national statistics. Last, in its 2019 guidelines for

² ECA, African Centre for Statistics, *A Comprehensive Programme of Support to Statistics in Africa from 2018 to 2021* (Addis Ababa, 2018).

developing an integrated user engagement strategy for national statistical systems, ECA outlined steps and tactics for establishing and implementing a robust user engagement strategy for national strategies for the development of statistics that included dissemination.

10. In putting the strategy into practice, ECA assisted Burundi, Cameroon and Ethiopia in developing their own national statistics dissemination strategies (user strategies). In addition, ECA conducted workshops to enhance the capacity of several countries upon request. Topics included the production and use of gender statistics, the development of action plans on managing geospatial information and the framework for the development of environmental statistics (including the use of environmental statistics for advocacy). In line with subparagraph (a) of the recommendation, the workshops included staff from national technical ministries and statistical bodies. On subparagraph (b) of the recommendation, while there was no evidence of technology workshops that addressed new and advanced data dissemination methods, there were examples of ECA providing support to member countries in developing geospatial data systems and training statistical staff on their use. According to the staff interviewed, while there were a number of examples of ECA receiving positive feedback on ECA statistical workshops, the results were not yet evident, as countries had yet to share their actions or implementation plans.

11. ECA has implemented this recommendation.

Economic Commission for Europe

12. To implement the recommendation, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) sectoral committee on statistics, the Conference of European Statisticians, adopted a strategy for capacity development in June 2018 (ECE/CES/2018/10). The strategy provided a broad outline within which priorities were set by the member States. It applied to 17 member States, as required by the regular programme of technical cooperation,³ which was the source of funding used to carry out the strategy. The priority areas for statistical capacity development included the use of data sources, such as population and housing censuses, economic statistics and geospatial information management; the dissemination and communication of statistics and building relations with users; and the use of new data sources, including “big data”.

13. Examples of capacity development pursuant to the strategy included sector reviews on statistical information technology in Armenia and Georgia in November and December 2019, and workshops that resulted in recommendations to enhance the dissemination of statistics. The dissemination and use of official statistics were also covered by the annual ECE workshops on statistical dissemination and communication, during which countries presented solutions and discussed emerging issues in the relevant areas. In line with subparagraph (a) of the recommendation, ECE staff reported that representatives from agencies other than the national statistical offices regularly participated in expert meetings, working groups and task forces; for example, the ECE Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators included statistics experts but also experts from ministries of environment. In line with subparagraph (b) of the recommendation, in terms of technology workshops, ECE organized an online training webinar for staff of national statistical offices in October 2019. The webinar focused on the ECE Generic Statistical Information Model, an advanced tool to manage information flows. Since the strategy

³ The regular programme of technical cooperation was established by the General Assembly in its resolution 58(I) in 1946 to support developing countries, least developed countries, countries in economies in transition and countries emerging from conflict in their capacity development efforts.

was adopted only recently, ECE was unable to provide evidence on the immediate impact of the activities.

14. ECE has implemented this recommendation.

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

15. In line with the recommendation, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) followed and built upon the Statistical Conference of the Americas Strategic Plan (LC/L.4070/Rev.1, 2015), which predated the OIOS report, for its capacity development work. The strategic plan set out the values, mission, vision, strategy and specific goals for a period of 10 years, between 2015 and 2025. One of the goals of the strategy was to promote greater effectiveness and efficiency in the processes of production and dissemination of statistics. The strategy was implemented through the ECLAC programme of work, which stated that the objective of the subprogramme on statistics was to improve the production, dissemination and use of statistics for evidence-based decision-making in the region. At the same time, the programme of work prioritized capacity-building for the production of statistics. According to staff interviewed, the emphasis on the production of statistics came from the requests for technical assistance by countries, which had tended to focus on such topics as the quality of sources of information and the estimation of indicators. Topics related to the production of statistics were also supported by extrabudgetary projects.

16. At the same time, while topics on the use of statistics (mostly, use and analysis of household data) were included in some seminars and workshops, data dissemination did not receive the same attention and was addressed in a limited manner through a few technical assistance activities. Some interventions focused on leveraging technology for the use of data, such as a seminar on the future of economic statistics in 2019, which included a topic addressing new technological infrastructure, methods and services required to meet the changing needs of users. The Statistical and Geospatial Framework for the Americas project provided statistical data on population, disaggregated by sex and household. In response to subparagraph (a) of the recommendation, ECLAC reported that all statistical events at the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development⁴ benefited from the participation of several ministries and other public institutions. Examples included workshops on geospatial information and on constructing relevant climate change and disaster indicators. In line with subparagraph (b) of the recommendation, ECLAC held a workshop in 2019 on the dissemination and use of new technologies, including the regional workshop on the implementation of the statistical data and metadata exchange standard for the dissemination and exchange of Sustainable Development Goal indicators.

17. ECLAC has implemented this recommendation.

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

18. In response to the recommendation, the Committee on Statistics of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) endorsed a collective vision and framework for action on advancing official statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (E/ESCAP/CST (5)/1/Rev.1) in 2017. It constituted the ESCAP strategy to enhance the national capacity of member States for the dissemination and use of statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The strategy recognized the greater urgency of initiatives to strengthen capacity for producing and disseminating basic underlying statistics of appropriate quality. Further, the collective vision and framework for action was used as the basis

⁴ Further information is available at: <https://foroalc2030.cepal.org/2019/en>.

for a regional declaration on navigating policy with data to leave no one behind (ESCAP/CST/2018/7), which was adopted by the ESCAP Committee on Statistics at its sixth session, in October 2018 and was welcomed by the Commission at its seventy-fifth session in May 2019 (see ESCAP/75/36, para. 223). In the declaration, the Committee committed to the dissemination and use of statistics at the national level, in line with globally agreed guidelines and recommendations, such as the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. ESCAP reported that as a result, the regional capacity development programmes of the Committee on Statistics, which had previously operated as separate programmes, now jointly reported progress in their implementation against the objectives of the collective vision.

19. In line with subparagraph (a) of the recommendation, ESCAP promoted capacity development through the ESCAP Committee on Statistics, with technical ministries participating in its high-level segment. In addition, the Disaster-related Statistics Framework commissioned by ESCAP established an expert group comprising experts from national disaster management agencies and national statistical offices. ESCAP also organized cross-sectoral capacity-building activities related to ocean accounting. In line with subparagraph (b) of the recommendation, ESCAP (co-)organized workshops on new and advanced data dissemination methods, such as on metadata sharing and exchange, data disaggregation, the collection and use of international migration data and communicating gender data.

20. ESCAP has implemented this recommendation.

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

21. In response to the recommendation, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) built upon the overall regional strategy for 2016–2020, which was agreed on at the eleventh session of the Statistical Committee (see E/ESCWA/SD/2015/IG.1/4(Part I)). The strategy briefly discussed the importance of disseminating reliable statistics and the use of data. In follow-up to the recommendation and to operationalize the strategy, ESCWA developed guidance to member States on the dissemination and use of statistics in the sectors of population statistics and census (2017) and on the use of short-term statistics (2016), which also formed the basis for ESCWA activities in support of member States, including on capacity development.

22. The strategy guided the response and led to multiple workshops that were held on the use and dissemination of data. Examples included several workshops delivered on the use of existing data for monitoring gender equality and women's empowerment; improving disability statistics; the use of census data for the development and planning of scientific research; the use and dissemination of short-term economic statistics; and the use of Islamic finance in national accounts. ESCWA also established technical advisory groups on demographic and social statistics and on economic statistics, which were aimed at improving the use and dissemination of statistics. In line with subparagraph (a) of the recommendation, ESCWA indicated that it had invited staff from technical ministries to relevant workshops and expert group meetings on statistics. For example, a meeting on technical assistance on energy statistics in Lebanon, co-led by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and ESCWA, included participants from ministries of energy and water, and ministries of environment. For a workshop on poverty measurement in Arab countries, participants included representatives of ministries of labour and social development, planning agencies and academia. Regarding subparagraph (b) of the recommendation, a session on technology for statistics that focused on opportunities and implications was held at the thirteenth session of the Statistical Committee (see [E/ESCWA/C.1/2019/8/Report](#), paras. 28–39), during which previous ESCWA work

on using technology to produce and disseminate statistics was presented to member States.

23. ESCWA has implemented this recommendation.

24. Overall, all regional commissions had in place some sort of capacity development strategy with some degree of emphasis on the use and dissemination of statistics in support of Member States. At the same time, the emphasis on capacity development for dissemination was not strong for ECLAC. No evidence was found of ECA organizing technology workshops that addressed new and advanced data dissemination methods. This recommendation has been implemented by all regional commissions.

Recommendation 3

Support to member countries for integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into national statistical plans

25. Recommendation 3 reads as follows:

The regional commissions should develop region-specific tools, guidelines, frameworks and templates, taking into consideration the guidelines prepared by the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century, in order to strengthen their support to member countries in developing and refining their national statistical plans and national strategies for the development of statistics with a view to ensuring that they incorporate the Goals, priorities and needs of the 2030 Agenda.

Indicator of achievement: Increased number of interventions are delivered on integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into national statistical plans.

Economic Commission for Africa

26. In line with the OIOS recommendation, ECA developed region-specific tools and strategies, and delivered support to member countries on implementing national strategies for the development of statistics. ECA developed statistical development indicators⁵ as a measuring tool for tracking and reporting mechanisms established for achieving national development plans and the Sustainable Development Goals. In April 2017, ECA presented the tool at an event organized by the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century, at which it was recognized as a contribution to the global statistical knowledge on measuring statistical development. In 2019, ECA piloted the tool in Angola to assess the health of the country's national statistical system. In addition, ECA published a comprehensive manual to guide implementation of the tool. As of January 2020, ECA indicated that reports on statistical development indicators had been submitted by Botswana, Cabo Verde, the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Libya, Namibia, the Niger, Sierra Leone and Tunisia.

27. ECA also developed the *Strategy for Harmonization of Statistics in Africa 2017–2026*, in partnership with the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank and the African Capacity-Building Foundation. In the strategy document, the Partnership was frequently referred to as a key partner and source of guidance on national strategies for the development of statistics. One of the objectives of the strategy was to reform and strengthen national statistical systems through strategic planning for the national strategies for the development of statistics of individual member States, in line with regional economic community strategies and national needs. In that regard, ECA worked jointly with the African Development

⁵ Available at: www.uneca.org/acs/statdi.

Bank, the Partnership and the Economic and Statistical Observatory for Sub-Saharan Africa, an international institution concerned with statistics in sub-Saharan Africa, to conduct evaluations of the implementation of national strategies for the development of statistics in Benin, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Gabon, Guinea, Mali and the Sudan.

28. ECA has implemented this recommendation.

Economic Commission for Europe

29. In response to the recommendation, ECE developed assessment tools, guidance materials, platforms and models. It carried out global assessments, which were aligned with the Partnership. The assessments provided a basis for the development of national strategies and plans for the development of statistics. Between 2017 and 2019, global assessments of the national statistical systems of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Uzbekistan were carried out. According to ECE, the assessment in Uzbekistan was a major input to the specifications of a new project funded by the World Bank to support the development of its national statistical system. The assessment in Georgia led to a new *National Strategy for the Development of Official Statistics of Georgia 2020–2023*, which was launched in December 2019.

30. At the same time, the ECE strategy for statistical capacity included a maturity model that countries could use as a template for assessing their capabilities in specific statistical areas and in identifying capacity-building priorities. The model was applied during a national workshop in Armenia in December 2019 to assess the level of maturity of the national statistical office in the implementation of the ECE Generic Statistical Business Process Model. The application revealed a need to prioritize the management of information and applications. ECE also developed the *Road Map on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals*, which provided guidance to countries on how to set up a statistical system for the Goals. A generic national reporting platform for the Goals was developed in line with ECE guidelines and had been fully implemented by Armenia, Poland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.⁶

31. ECE has implemented this recommendation.

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

32. To implement the recommendation, in 2017, ECLAC launched an online platform⁷ for the integration of survey data provided by 25 countries on their national capacities in order to calculate each of the 232 Sustainable Development Goal global indicators. The information from the survey data was used in mainstreaming, acceleration and policy support missions in Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and the Dominican Republic. In addition, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and the Dominican Republic used the survey data for more in-depth analysis and carried out Sustainable Development Goal statistical capacity assessments of their own, based on the information. According to the staff interviewed, while ECLAC supported the integration of the Goals into the national development plans of member States through the work of the Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Economic and Social Planning, in recent years and in the area of statistics, ECLAC had not undertaken the provision of technical assistance to countries in the drafting of their national plans for the development of statistics, as the Partnership had expertise in supporting the

⁶ Available at: <https://statswiki.unece.org/display/SFSDG/Summary+of+Progress+in+UNECE+countries>.

⁷ Available at: <https://sdgstatsurvey.cepal.org/>.

drafting process. Therefore, ECLAC referred national statistical offices in the region to the Partnership for such needs.

33. Other relevant ECLAC support was its work on a generic law on official statistics for Latin America (LC/CEA.10/4)⁸ which was adopted by the Statistical Conference of the Americas at its tenth session in 2019. Its purpose was to provide a regional model for Latin American countries that were interested in formulating or reformulating the legal basis for the functioning of their national statistical systems and the production of official statistics. The task was undertaken jointly by experts from the national statistical offices, the Inter-American Development Bank and ECLAC, which also acted as technical secretariat for the process. The national statistical offices benefited significantly from their engagement in the process; for example, El Salvador and Paraguay participated in the discussions for drafting the document and used that experience to enhance their proposals for updated national statistical laws.

34. ECLAC has implemented this recommendation.

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

35. In response to the recommendation, ESCAP worked with the Partnership and utilized its tools and guidelines in supporting the integration of statistical requirements in the Goals into the national strategies for the development of statistics, through different trainings and tools. Between 2017 and 2019, in cooperation with the Partnership, the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (a subsidiary body of ESCAP)⁹ implemented three trainings on the national strategies for the development of statistics and on the statistical leadership training for heads of national statistical offices. In addition, in 2019, it organized a data visualization training session to strengthen the capacity of and modernize the national statistical systems in the region. ESCAP support also included technical assistance for the strengthening of statistical training capacity in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Maldives and Nepal and assisting the development of a harmonized national statistical classification of economic activities and the use of civil registration data for vital statistics in Bhutan.

36. ESCAP conducted screenings of national statistical systems as part of the monitoring of its regional capacity development programme on economic statistics. According to ESCAP, the results of the most recent screening, in 2017,¹⁰ were used by countries and development partners for statistics development planning and fundraising. ESCAP also conducted more in-depth reviews of national statistical systems, which were tailored to the specific needs of the requesting country; the review had been completed in Maldives and was ongoing in Sri Lanka. As part of the implementation of the regional strategy to improve population and social statistics in Asia and the Pacific, a second instrument, the "Every policy is connected" tool, was developed. The tool supported policy-data integration for implementation of the Goals. It was also applied in four countries: Samoa, Armenia, Philippines and Viet Nam. In the same vein, ESCAP developed a tool focused on strategic planning for the implementation of environment statistics. ESCAP reported that multiple member countries had applied the diagnostic tool to guide their planning for environment statistics development.

⁸ Available at <https://cea.cepal.org/10/en/documents/proposal-generic-law-official-statistics-latin-america>.

⁹ In April 1995, the Institute was accorded the status of a subsidiary body with the establishment of a Governing Council that reviews the operations and endorses the annual and long-term programmes of work of the Institute.

¹⁰ Available at: <http://communities.unescap.org/asia-pacific-economic-statistics/country-overview-statistical-capacity-2017>.

37. ESCAP has implemented this recommendation.

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

38. In line with the recommendation, ESCWA developed a strategy focusing on statistical areas related to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ([E/ESCWA/SD/2017/IG.1/4\(Part I\)](#) and [E/ESCWA/SD/2017/IG.1/4\(Part II\)](#)), which was discussed and endorsed by the Statistical Committee of ESCWA at its twelfth session (see [E/ESCWA/SD/2017/IG.1/7/Report](#), para. 26). One of the strategic areas of focus of the strategy was the innovation and modernization of national statistical systems. In that regard, in cooperation with the Partnership, ESCWA had completed assessments of national statistical systems in Egypt and Jordan, which aided the formulation of national strategies for the development of statistics. ESCWA also reported that, in Jordan, assessments were shared with the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, the United Nations country team office and the Department of Statistics. ESCWA had also produced a three-year plan for the Syrian Arab Republic, based on the national statistics assessment conducted. ESCWA was also preparing for assessments in Bahrain, Libya and Yemen.

39. Further, under the Development Account Programme on Statistics and Data, ESCWA held regional and subregional workshops on integrating the Goals into national statistical plans. In responding to the ESCWA survey, member States indicated that the workshops had helped them improve the production and availability of specific indicators, such as those related to disability and human settlements. In the same vein, ESCWA undertook regional assessments of data availability for Goal indicators in 2017 and 2018. The annual assessment for 2019 was in progress. According to staff interviewed, it was important that the assessment be conducted, as only 40 per cent of data related to the Goals was available for the Arab region.

40. ESCWA has implemented this recommendation.

41. Overall, the regional commissions had assisted and supported the further development and refining of national statistical plans and national strategies to ensure they incorporated the goals, priorities and needs of the 2030 Agenda. This recommendation has been implemented by all regional commissions.

Recommendation 4

Strengthen internal coordination for production and dissemination of sectoral data

42. Recommendation 4 reads as follows:

The regional commissions should strengthen their internal coordination with regard to the production and dissemination of sectoral data by establishing, among other measures:

- (a) A clear plan for and the regular exchange of information on regional activities in statistics;
- (b) A clear commission-wide biennial plan for data collection aimed at identifying common data sources to avoid duplication;
- (c) Central data management and monitoring to ensure effective collaboration when updating databases within regional commissions.

Indicator of achievement: Plans or protocols for internal coordination are developed.

Economic Commission for Africa

43. In line with the recommendation, ECA developed a central data management system and created protocols and procedures for statistical management. The central data management of African statistics at ECA was housed on the ECA statistics web portal¹¹ and maintained by the ECA African Centre for Statistics. The collating and submitting of data to the portal was guided by the data management protocol and the standard operating procedures, which provided a set of step-by-step directions for statistical data management at ECA. The procedures were first created in 2017 and were updated annually; their purpose was to achieve efficiency and to ensure the quality of outputs and the uniformity of data management actions. According to ECA staff interviewed, they helped to avoid miscommunication and failures to comply with data management activities. The procedures defined data collection, validation and dissemination steps and aligned the responsibilities of the Centre, subregional offices and substantive divisions to carry out operations. According to the procedures, the principal coordination mechanism on statistics within ECA would be a data working group, comprising the focal point of the Centre as chair and the data focal points from substantive divisions and from subregional offices; however, the working group was yet to be established. OIOS suggested that the working group be established as soon as possible. In addition, the procedures provided guidance on ECA divisional coordination and collaboration with regard to statistical data generated during statistical support missions. Evidence of the implementation of the guidance was provided by way of the reports on the ECA statistical support missions to Eritrea, Seychelles and the Sudan.

44. ECA has implemented this recommendation.

Economic Commission for Europe

45. In line with the recommendation, ECE maintained a central database and had a related working group. The Statistical Division at ECE maintained a central database and web interface for all statistical data, which included data on economic, social and demographic statistics (provided by the Statistical Division), transport (provided by the Transport Division) and timber (provided by the Forestry and Timber Section). The Statistical Division collected data through joint questionnaires with Eurostat, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, or directly from the databases of other international organizations (such as Eurostat and OECD). ECE stated that there was no duplication in data collection, as each division focused on different exclusive subject areas. ECE did not have a biennial data collection plan since it had a well-established automated system, which was also reinforced by regular meetings of the Database Coordination Group. Staff interviewed reported that the Database Coordination Group did not have traditional meetings but structured the work around an issue log, in which progress was reviewed, while new issues were added, closed or reprioritized as necessary. The Statistical, Sustainable Transport, and Forests, Land and Housing Divisions participated in the Database Coordination Group. In addition, during the June 2019 directors meeting, the terms of reference of the four nexus areas were adopted. For each nexus, a cross-divisional team was created to strengthen synergies among ECE subprogrammes and identify opportunities for new activities. One of the four nexuses was on measuring and monitoring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

46. ECE has implemented this recommendation.

¹¹ Available at: <https://ecastats.uneca.org/data/>.

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

47. In responding to the OIOS recommendation, ECLAC continued to rely on its central statistics database,¹² which was developed in 2014. In addition, it developed some new protocols and operationalized interdivisional working groups. According to ECLAC, data collection was mostly undertaken by each ECLAC division and was coordinated through the steering committee of the statistics database and through other initiatives for the preparation of statistical information. The ECLAC Statistics Division also created an internal protocol on how to access and use the ECLAC Household Survey Data Bank, which was distributed to all divisions in 2018. The guidelines and protocols were in full use across ECLAC.

48. In 2017, ECLAC also established an internal interdivisional coordination group on measuring the Sustainable Development Goals, with a focal point representing each division. The interdivisional coordination group developed a survey on institutional data sources for measuring the Goals at the regional and subregional levels and evaluating measuring standards. The group mapped the data collected by different divisions and their proposals for indicators that could be complementary to the global Goals indicator framework. Interviews with staff confirmed that, as a regional priority, indicators were established by the Statistical Coordination Group for the 2030 Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean, established under the Statistical Conference of the Americas, together with ECLAC in its capacity as technical secretariat.¹³ The interdivisional coordination group will be likely discontinued. However, a larger interdivisional working group on data collection will resume meeting to support the process of redesigning and updating the statistics database.

49. ECLAC also added that certain issues of data consistency with other divisions had been discussed and resolved bilaterally and on an as needed basis. For example, in 2019, a partnership was established among the Statistics, Natural Resources and Sustainable Development Divisions under the coordination of the Executive Secretary's office in order to provide the necessary regional environmental indicators to statistically substantiate the position document for the thirty-eighth session of the Commission, to be held in 2020.

50. ECLAC has implemented this recommendation.

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

51. In line with the OIOS recommendation, ESCAP developed a central database and some new protocols and used different mechanisms for sharing information internally. While ESCAP did not collect primary data, it complied with the Sustainable Development Goals data flows protocol – adopted by the Statistical Commission at its fiftieth session – according to which ESCAP was required to use existing processes for data collection plans related to the Goals to avoid data duplication. ESCAP collected data from the global Sustainable Development Goals database, which was populated by global custodians of data on the Goals. In addition, the ESCAP statistical database was centrally managed by the Statistics Division and updated in collaboration and with the engagement of other divisions and the other regional commissions, specialized agencies and global Goals data custodians.

52. Regular updates on Statistics Division activities were presented bimonthly to the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission, which was attended by the directors of all ESCAP divisions. According to staff interviews, senior management meetings

¹² Available at <https://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/Portada.html>.

¹³ See report of the Statistical Coordination Group (LC/CE.17/3).

were also used as a vehicle for programme planning purposes and for sharing and coordinating activities. In addition, and to further ensure cooperation, the scope of the Research and Publications Committee was expanded to include other categories of work, in particular technical assistance and capacity-building activities, and was renamed the Editorial Board. According to its terms of reference, the Editorial Board held formal meetings once every month and served as a mechanism for the use of data and statistics for analysis in ESCAP publications. To round everything out and fully close the recommendation, in December 2019, ESCAP issued a quality assurance framework with the goal of strengthening internal coordination on the production and dissemination of sectoral data. The framework was endorsed by the senior management team in January 2020.

53. ESCAP has implemented this recommendation.

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

54. ESCWA established a data portal, created a biennium plan and operationalized working groups in line with the OIOS recommendation. The data portal had specific data sets that included Goal indicators, demographic and social statistics, economic statistics, environment and energy statistics, and gender statistics. The Executive Secretary of ESCWA instructed all subprogrammes to use the data portal. ESCWA reported that all data production and dissemination was coordinated through the statistics subprogramme to achieve consistency.

55. In 2017, the ESCWA Statistics Division developed a biennial plan for data collection with the ultimate goal of achieving central data management and monitoring of different statistics. Subsequently, in 2018, ESCWA issued recommended practices in covering data needs relating to the Goals for ESCWA studies that further stressed coordination with the Statistics Division in order to achieve data consistency. In the same vein, in 2019, ESCWA developed a chart of data flows to visualize how coordination was systematically addressed for data collection and dissemination among divisions, as well as with regional commissions and specialized agencies. Staff interviewed confirmed that regular exchanges occurred bilaterally between subprogrammes. During the period 2018–2019, there were multiple coordination activities between the Statistics Division and other ESCWA divisions, including 17 joint meetings, workshops and services; 4 joint projects within ESCWA divisions; and 13 joint advisory and technical cooperation missions.

56. ESCWA has implemented this recommendation.

57. While most regional commissions had interdivisional working groups or other mechanisms for data coordination, a few had not yet been fully operationalized and/or institutionalized. Their continued formalization is encouraged. This recommendation was implemented by all regional commissions.

Recommendation 5

Collaboration and sharing among regional commissions

58. Recommendation 5 reads as follows:

Coordination between the regional commissions should be further strengthened to share expertise and experience on common thematic priorities, including the possibility of periodic sharing of information and more joint activities, where feasible.

Indicator of achievement: At least one annual collaboration and sharing initiative is organized between regional commissions per year.

All regional commissions

59. During the review period and in response to the recommendation, regional commissions enhanced their collaboration with each other mostly on the basis of: (a) the implementation of the Development Account Programme on Statistics and Data; (b) regular meetings between the statistics divisions of the regional commissions and the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat; and (c) regular interactions during international forums. The Development Account Programme on Statistics and Data was implemented from 2016 to 2019 and was extended for another year until 2020, highlighting results and successful collaboration between all implementing entities. It included all regional commissions and other United Nations entities, such as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Component 5 on poverty and inequality statistics required collaboration among regional commissions in several areas. The component was co-led by ECLAC and ESCWA, with the participation of ECE and ESCAP, as well as UN-Habitat. Some of the joint activities undertaken included: the preparation of a publication entitled *Non-monetary Indicators to Monitor SDG Targets 1.2 and 1.4: Standards, Availability, Comparability and Quality*, which was coordinated by ECLAC, with inputs from ECE, ESCAP, ESCWA and UN-Habitat; the organization of a regional workshop on poverty measurement in Arab countries (organized by ESCWA); and the organization of expert meetings on poverty measurement organized by ECE (2018, 2019).

60. As mentioned in paragraph 59 above, the statistics divisions of the regional commissions and the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs held regular meetings to share information. Between 2018 and 2019, five meetings were held: in June 2018, September 2018, April 2019, September 2019 and December 2019. According to staff interviewed, the meetings were successful in helping regional commissions work towards the overall global statistics goals. The regional commissions and the Department also collaborated to produce a position paper on collaboration and coordination in statistics between regional commissions and the Department, which elaborated on different mechanisms used for working together, sharing information and harmonizing statistical data. In addition, the directors of statistics of the five regional commissions prepared a paper on the role of the statistical divisions of the regional commission in monitoring the Goals for the March 2019 meeting of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities. According to staff interviewed, the paper helped bolster the coordination between regional commissions on Sustainable Development Goal reporting.

61. Similarly, the regional commissions used international statistical forums to share expertise and experience on common thematic priorities. All regional commissions were members of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities and the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System. Both mechanisms were used to consult between regional commissions and with the wider United Nations and global statistical systems. Staff suggested that, in those wider forums, the regional commissions collectively advocated for Member State needs. They also provided platforms to share information about the regional commissions and their current roles in global data reporting and data sharing for the global Goals indicator framework. During the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2018, at a session on implementing the Goals that focused on lessons from the regions, the Executive Secretaries of the five regional commissions presented regional perspectives, shared examples of best practices and experiences, and provided policy recommendations for action at the national, regional and global levels.

62. The regional commissions also worked together to participate in joint events and working groups, and to develop frameworks and written reports. For example, ECE task forces mandated by the Conference of European Statisticians jointly developed both climate change and disaster statistics recommendations, together with ESCAP and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. In 2019, ECLAC joined the ECE Steering Group on Climate Change-related Statistics. In addition, the ESCAP disaster-related statistics framework was jointly developed with ECLAC and ECE. There was also an ongoing collaboration between ECA and ESCAP to adopt ESCAP methodology on tracking progress towards the Goals in the African context. Furthermore, the joint report of ECE, ESCAP and ECLAC on statistics for hazardous events and disasters was presented to the United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2019 and will be followed by similar joint reports to the Statistical Commission in 2020 and 2021. Along the same lines, ECLAC adapted ECE work on a generic law on official statistics for the Latin American and Caribbean context, which was adopted by the Statistical Conference of the Americas.

63. Despite all the progress and the excellent examples of collaboration, staff interviews confirmed that there was room for further improvement, as the collaboration between the regional commissions remained uneven. In addition, while ECA worked with partners in Africa, it did not have a strong relationship with other regional economic commissions in that regard. On the Development Account Programme on Statistics and Data, ECA had limited collaboration with other regional commissions.

64. This recommendation was implemented by all regional commissions.

III. Conclusion

65. The five regional commissions took important steps to implement the four endorsed recommendations, which led to several positive outcomes.

66. All regional commissions developed and operationalized capacity development strategies that helped them provide more deliberate technical assistance based on the regional priority areas. The regional commissions developed region-specific tools, guidelines, frameworks and templates, taking into consideration the guidelines prepared by the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century to ensure that the national statistical plans and national strategies for the development of statistics incorporated the goals, priorities and needs of the 2030 Agenda. In many cases, they were used by Member States to assess their current statistical capabilities and to further develop their national statistical plans in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. All regional commissions strengthened internal coordination, especially through central data management and monitoring, which ensured effective collaboration when updating databases within regional commissions.

67. There was also increased collaboration between the regional commissions, especially due to the implementation of the Development Account Programme on Statistics and Data, the regular meetings between the statistics divisions of the regional commissions and the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and interactions during international forums. As a result, the regional commissions shared best practices, produced common papers, developed frameworks, participated in joint events and working groups, and enhanced their coordination in support of Member States.

68. However, the focus on capacity development for dissemination was less evident in some regional strategies; in some cases, there was limited evidence of technical assistance activities that addressed new and advanced data dissemination methods. For interdivisional collaboration, the exchange of information on regional activities

was less systematic, as some of the working groups and mechanisms were not fully operational. Also, while collaboration between the regional commissions had improved, it remained uneven, and there was an opportunity to strengthen ECA collaboration with other regional commissions.

(*Signed*) Fatoumata **Ndiaye**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services
March 2020

Annex*

Comments received from the regional commissions

Economic Commission of Africa (ECA)

Reference is made to interoffice memo (Ref: OIOS-2020-00412) dated 6 March 2020 on the formal draft report of the Triennial Review of the Implementation of Recommendations on the Thematic Evaluation of the Regional Commissions.

We have reviewed the report and we agree with ECA related findings of the review. ECA will continue to strive to be more relevant and effective in improving the production, dissemination and use of quality and comparable data and statistics in Africa to support evidence-based policymaking, planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We want.

Specifically, on recommendation 5, ECA takes note of the need to strengthen collaboration with other Regional Commissions to share expertise and experiences on common thematic priorities and statistical areas. Towards this end, ECA has identified and will pursue the following areas of collaboration with the other Regional Commissions:

- Training on national experts on probabilistic population projections with UNDESA and ECLAC.
- Joint programme on the measurement and harmonization of poverty statistics with ECLAC.
- Strengthening of civil registration systems in Asia and Africa with ESCAP.
- The United Nations Legal Identity Agenda with ESCAP.
- Global programme on Migration Statistics with all the Regional Commissions.
- Exchange of experiences and best practices on new and emerging methods in statistics with all the Regional Commissions.
- Exchange of experiences and best practices on SDGs progress assessment at regional level with ESCAP.

Let me take this opportunity to thank Mr. Juan Carlos Pena and his evaluation team for the professionalism and teamwork which they applied to the review process. Thank you.

Economic Commission of Europe (ECE)

We have reviewed the formal draft report and we are pleased to inform you that we agree with this final version.

Since the 2017 Thematic evaluation of the regional commissions, the Statistical Division of the Economic Commission for Europe has strived to improve internal and external collaboration to enhance the capacity of member States to disseminate and use statistics. ECE was pleased to note that many of its achievements have been noted in the evaluation report.

ECE statistical work is strongly anchored in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which calls for a follow-up and review of the achievement of the goals

* In the present annex, the Office of Internal Oversight Services sets out the full text of comments received from the regional commissions. The practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution [64/263](#), following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.

and targets based on evidence, informed by high-quality, accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated data.

Through its work, the subprogramme contributes to the ECE nexuses on measuring and monitoring Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and on the sustainable use of natural resources. One recent achievement is the launch of UNECE Knowledge Hub on Statistics for SDGs in December 2019, in line with Secretary-General report [74/73](#), to help national statistical offices to develop and communicate statistics that enable governments to better formulate and evaluate evidence-driven policies.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the professionalism of the OIOS evaluation team. We are very appreciative of the fruitful discussions and time invested to consider our efforts in support of measuring the implementation of the SDGs.

Economic Commission of Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

ECLAC welcomes this comprehensive report, which recognizes all efforts made by the Commission in the implementation of the recommendations issued as a result of the Thematic Evaluation of the Regional Commissions (Statistics) ([E/AC.51/2017/8](#)).

We are pleased to inform that ECLAC has no additional comments on the report.

ECLAC would like to take this opportunity to thank OIOS for the collaborative approach in this triennial review.

Economic and Social Commission of Asia-Pacific (ESCAP)

We are pleased to receive the above-mentioned OIOS report and inform that ESCAP has no further comments and concurs with its findings.

ESCAP attaches great importance to enabling and empowering national statistical systems to lead the development of and to deliver innovative, trusted and timely products and services in support of development agendas, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Furthermore, we recognise the significant role of quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data in analysis and informed decision-making. In this effort, the OIOS evaluation provided an opportunity to further enhance the relevance and effectiveness of our statistical work, including our internal coordination to produce statistics in different sectoral areas, and our collaboration with other regional commissions to share expertise and experiences on common thematic areas.

ESCAP appreciates the OIOS findings confirming full implementation of all recommendations by the regional commissions and providing some evidence of concrete positive outcomes.

We wish to put on record our appreciation to the OIOS team for the participatory and consultative approach in conducting the review.

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

ESCWA welcomes that all recommendations of the OIOS Thematic Evaluation were closed by the time of the Triennial Review. ESCWA is aware that the long-term nature of the recommendations requires a sustained follow-up, even after the closing of the recommendations. In this regard, ESCWA will pursue the following actions:

Thematic Evaluation Recommendation 1: Capacity Development Strategy for Dissemination and Use of Statistics. ESCWA will continue the implementation

of regional statistical strategies for 2016–2020 and 2020–2025 as outlined in documents: E/ESCWA/SD/2015/IG.1/4 (Part I) & [E/ESCWA/C.1/2019/CRP.2](#). In this respect, ESCWA’s statistical work will be driven by the following recommendations by the ESCWA Statistical Committee:

ESCWA Statistical Committee’s Recommendations 5. (c), (d) (e):

- integrate member States’ proposals in the vision and strategic direction in the field of statistics for 2020–2025;
- continue capacity building efforts to monitor the implementation of the SDGs under the Arab Regional Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data;
- assist member States in developing new statistical strategies supporting transformation in official statistics towards new data sources;
- support member States in applying alternative data collection methods in conflict-affected countries;
- assist member States in developing supply and use tables and sub-accounts in the System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA);
- support the establishment and development of statistical and geospatial information for the 2020 Round of Censuses and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

ESCWA Statistical Committee’s Recommendations 5. (f), (g), (h), (i):

- ensure the thematic focus of the statistical capacity development towards the use of administrative data sources, establishment of business registers, use of big data regional statistical programmes on price statistics and thematic areas defined by the Technical Advisory Group on Economic Statistics and the Technical Advisory Group on Demographic and Social Statistics.

Thematic Evaluation Recommendation 3: Support to Member Countries for integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into National Statistical Plans. ESCWA will continue its engagement and cooperation with the Partnership for Statistics in 21st Century (PARIS21), in particular in updating the guidelines for National Strategies for Development of Statistics with a particular focus on conflict affected countries. ESCWA will intervene on demand / request in member States aimed at formulating and updating national statistical plans incorporating the emerging needs of the SDGs and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Thematic Evaluation Recommendation 4: Strengthen Internal Coordination for Production and Dissemination of Sectoral Data. ESCWA will continue its engagement in the following: a) maintenance and further improvement to the ESCWA Online Statistical Information System (EOSIS) and the related tools; b) implementing the tools in support of regular data collection and exchange; and c) developing annual data collection plans reflecting the regional needs, as well as ESCWA’s internal data needs, and proceeding accordingly.

Thematic Evaluation Recommendation 5: Collaboration and Sharing Among Regional Commissions. ESCWA will continue the following: a) Data sharing with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) with respect to countries with dual membership; b) Cooperation on themes related to demographic and social statistics with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); c) Cooperation on themes related to economic statistics with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP); and d) Cooperation on themes related to statistical infrastructure and modernization of official statistics with the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE).