

International Comparison Program

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Western Asia

Regional Status Report



7th Regional Coordinators Meeting
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Regional Status Report - Western Asia Region
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The 2011 Round of the International Comparison Program is progressing determinedly in Western Asia (WA) Region. The WA Regional Office adhered to the global timetable, and met the deadlines set by the World Bank in an adequate and timely manner.

The Regional Coordinating Office at ESCWA is supervising ten countries taking part in the program from Western Asia, as well as two African countries, Egypt and Sudan, which are performing a dual participation in the project under both Africa and Western Asia regions.

1. Household Consumption Survey

The Household Consumption (HHC) Survey was conducted by all twelve participating countries. The WA Regional Office was assiduous about the quality of the submitted price data and performed extra rounds of intra and inter-country validation to ensure the validity and therefore the reliability of the submitted data sets.

The intra country validation was conducted through the “Validate and Average Module” while the inter country validation was performed using the Quaranta and Dikhanov diagnostics tables. Furthermore, a new Intra-Country diagnostic tool created by the WA Regional Office was introduced during the 5th ICP Workshop: The Temporal Analysis Table compares item prices between quarters for the same country and monitors the variation percentage from one quarter to the other. The Variations are highlighted using various color themes referring to different levels of variation. This table facilitates the price data validation process as it puts in perspective many price influences such as seasonality.

Ten out of twelve countries committed to the ICP work plan and conducted the price collection during the year of 2011. However, and due to unsurpassable circumstances, Saudi Arabia collected data from both 2011 (quarter 3 and 4) and 2012 years (quarter 1 and 2) while Bahrain is conducting all its HHC price data collection during 2012. The data collected during the year of 2012 will thus undergo a back-casting process to align the prices with the original collection period in 2011 using CPI . The countries were provided with clear guidelines for validating the importance matrices and were asked to review them accordingly. The importance matrices were afterwards submitted to the Regional Office which in turn forwarded them to the Global Office.

It should be noted that annual average prices files for 10 countries in addition to two semi-annual average price files were submitted by the Regional Office to the Global Office in early July adhering to the global timetable.

2. Special Surveys

The Special Surveys were conducted by all twelve participating countries. Guidance and training necessary to the successful implementation of the surveys were provided to the participating countries through special training missions, workshops and day to day follow up on the work progress. Furthermore, all the documents relative to the surveys were made available to the participants in Arabic including the survey questionnaires. The received questionnaires were then translated back to English by the Regional Office, before being finally submitted to the World Bank.

2.1. Machinery and Equipment Survey

The Regional Office translated the Machinery and Equipment catalogue to make it easier for price collectors to identify the required items and thus facilitating the data collection process.

A special session was dedicated to the Machinery and Equipment survey during the Fifth Regional Workshop organized by ESCWA in the Dead Sea – Jordan, during the month of March. The session featured a World Bank consultant and explained the proper approach to tackle the collection of the Machinery and Equipment data, using examples extracted from submitted country files.

All twelve countries collected and submitted the Machinery and Equipment survey to the Regional Office. The received data files were validated by the Regional Office which in turn submitted them to the World Bank.

The Machinery and Equipment data will undergo another validation round during the upcoming regional workshops since countries such as Egypt, Sudan and Kuwait affected considerable changes to their data to improve its quality according to the guidance provided during the previous workshop.

2.2. Construction Survey

So far ten countries submitted the construction survey data to the Regional Office. The remaining two countries, Bahrain and Oman promised to submit their data as soon as possible. The delay in the data collection for this survey was a direct consequence of the delay of the construction companies that were appointed by the National Statistical Offices to implement the survey on their behalf.

The data will be validated by the Regional Office upon its reception and will be subsequently submitted to the World Bank after being reviewed and corrected.

2.3. Housing Survey

The Housing - Rentals survey was collected and submitted to the Regional Office by all twelve participating countries. The files of both Qatar and UAE however still require some minor adjustments which the national teams have already been made aware of. The data was reviewed and validated and in some cases copied into new files to stay in line with the correct questionnaire format. Some files also required translation from Arabic.

As for the Volume of housing survey, nine out of twelve files were submitted so far.

The data will be validated by the Regional Office upon its reception and will be subsequently submitted to the World Bank after being reviewed and corrected.

2.4. Compensation of Government Employees Survey

Nine out of twelve countries submitted this survey so far; the other three countries reported having accomplished the collection procedure but their data sets are still undergoing validation. A major problem during the data collection for this survey was the confidentiality of governments regarding such information.

Moreover, Egypt and Qatar faced some software problem that they were able to overcome with the help of the Regional and Global Offices.

2.5. Government Expenditures Survey

All twelve countries reported having accomplished the collection of required data for this survey. However, only ten submitted their data sets to the Regional Office.

Some countries found difficulty in collecting the required data for this survey, what caused delay in the delivery of these questionnaires. However, the Regional Office collaborated with the national statistical offices and devised together alternative ways to extract and calculate the needed figures.

2.6. Private Education

The private education questionnaire was collected by all twelve countries but was submitted to the Regional Office by only ten. The remaining two countries, Kuwait and Oman, promised to submit their data as soon as possible. The delay in the data collection for this survey was caused by the concerned entities that are cooperating with the National Statistical Offices to provide them with the required data.

All the survey questionnaires submitted to the Regional Office were in Arabic and were translated and transposed unto English questionnaire formats.

2.7. Water Tariff

The Water Tariff questionnaire was distributed to the participating countries during the 5th Regional workshop, and so far five of them submitted the questionnaire to the regional office. The rest of the countries claim having collected the required data but are still reviewing and validating their data.

3. National Accounts Activities

Many sessions have been dedicated to the National Accounts Activities during the previous regional workshops especially the 4th and the 5th. However, the Regional Office sensed that the data quality of the regional National Accounts files could be improved, especially when it comes to the most important questionnaire, the MORES.

Therefore, the Regional Office, in collaboration with the World Bank, held a special workshop in July 2012 dedicated solely to the National Accounts activities to train ICP National Accounts experts from nine participating countries, and to explain the crucial role of the national accounts data and the MORES questionnaire in the establishment of the weights that are required by the ICP to compute the Purchasing Power Parities. For that reason, the bigger part of the meeting was dedicated to the thorough explanation of the MORES questionnaire and the correct method to complete it, step by step. The GDP Exhaustiveness and the Quality Assurance questionnaires were also tackled but were given less weight since less problems were discovered in the received data.

3.1. The MORES Questionnaire

After the special National Accounts workshop, the Regional Office received the updated MORES files from 9 out of twelve countries. The rest are still working on their files and will submit them as soon as possible. However, all the countries provided data for all 155 basic headings for the latest year available. The next step, which is the preliminary 2011 data, is under preparation and should be delivered during the 6th regional workshop. Saudi Arabia and Oman will deliver the final 2011 MORES data in January 2013 while the rest of the countries should deliver their final 2011 versions during the month of April 2013.

3.2. The GDP Exhaustiveness Questionnaire

As mentioned earlier, less problems were faced during the compilation of the data required for this survey and thus only two countries presented their updated files after the special National Accounts workshop.

3.3 The Quality Assurance Questionnaire

No major problems were faced during the compilation of the data required for this survey, and only one country presented an updated version of its data after the special national accounts workshop.

4. Overall Risk Assessment

The progress made so far on the 2011 Round of the International Comparison program promises yet another success story for Western Asia region.

All twelve countries taking part in the 2011 Round will participate at full GDP level.

The data compilation is progressing according to the global work plan. The Western Asia Regional Office is working hard to meet all the data submission deadlines set by the Global Office.

As mentioned in paragraph 1, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain had problems adhering to the global work plan and performing the price data collection during the reference year of 2011. While Saudi Arabia performed its HHC price data collection during both 2011 and 2012, Bahrain was compelled to perform the totality of its price collection during the year of 2012. However, after the data collected in 2012 is back-casted using CPI indicators, this gap in the collection period would be resolved.

Regarding the other price surveys, the participating countries in Western Asia region faced some challenges during the implementation of these special surveys. Some of them appointed uncooperative construction companies which caused the delay in constructions data submission. In Housing Rentals survey, not all dwelling types were covered by some countries and some others found some differences between the required types of dwellings and the types available in their countries; another obstacle was faced during Rentals data compilation was the incapability to report the required weights in the total rental stock.

One other challenge was the lack of updated records concerning the Volume of Housing survey, most of the participating countries had census with old records. The Regional Office asked those countries to adjust the available old data to be consistent with the actuality of housing in 2011.

National teams faced lack of required data in both the Government Compensations and Expenditures surveys. Thus, they tried to provide data as much as it is allowed. In addition, the 'Compensation' software featured some errors while performing data entry process. Consequently, the Regional Office provided the required assistance and guidance to the countries and tried to find the correspondent solutions with the technical assistance of the Global Offices.

Regarding the remaining special surveys: some participating teams were late in submitting their 'Private Education' data because of some uncooperative concerned parties which did not offer the needed assistance in time. For the water Tariff survey, some countries don't have data concerning the water and wastewater charges via the most common pipe type.

It was noted that some national teams had some lack of expertise , especially in the field of National Accounts, thus the Regional Office conducted several training missions and workshops to train the national staff and to familiarize them with the objectives of the National Accounts activities.

Western Asia faced many other complications and obstacles but was able to adhere to all the requirements of the program through well coordinated collaborations with the participating countries and the Global Office.

More practical/illustrative instructions for the participating countries on how to conduct each survey and developing an upgraded software would both be the WA Regional Office recommendations for upcoming ICP rounds.

5. Upcoming Regional Activities

The ICP Regional Office for Western Asia region is planning to organize its 6th Regional Workshop during the month of November 2012.

The meeting will mainly tackle the validation of the Household Consumption data for the fourth quarter of 2011 and the annual average price data, as well as the validation of several special surveys data including the Construction, Machinery and Equipment, housing and others.