Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Eightieth session
Bangkok, 22–26 April 2024
Item 4 (j) of the provisional agenda
Review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific and issues pertinent to the subsidiary structure of the Commission: statistics

Report of the Governing Council of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific on its nineteenth session

Summary

The present document contains the report of the Governing Council of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific on its nineteenth session, which was held in Kuala Lumpur on 13 and 14 December 2023.

During the session, the Governing Council reviewed the performance of the Institute in 2023 and the proposed work programme and financial plan for 2024. The Governing Council also discussed the formulation of the strategic plan of the Institute for 2025–2029.

The Governing Council expressed appreciation to the Institute for restarting in-person training courses in collaboration with agencies in the region, for developing training materials and for promoting e-learning courses.

The Governing Council endorsed the proposed work programme and financial plan of the Institute. Regarding the formulation of the next strategic plan, the Institute proposed that a Friends of the Chair group – comprising all members of the Governing Council, as well as one member each from the Central Asia subregion and the Pacific subregion – be established to provide inputs and overall guidance to the drafting of the strategic plan.

The Governing Council endorsed the proposal of the Institute on the establishment of a Friends of the Chair group.

I. Matters brought to the attention of the Commission

1. The Governing Council of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific expressed its appreciation to the Institute for the actions and activities it had undertaken to implement the recommendations made during the eighteenth session. It noted with appreciation the resumption of in-person training courses, as well as the implementation of online training courses. Several members of the Governing Council also noted the strong demand for
training on data and statistical literacy and communication; engagement activities for data users, including policymakers; and leadership training for middle managers. The Governing Council requested that the Institute continue its efforts aimed at providing online courses and training in other languages with a view to reaching a wider audience.

2. The Governing Council reviewed the performance of the Institute and expressed appreciation for its work in developing new training courses. It requested that the Institute collaborate with members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in conducting national e-learning courses, utilizing existing e-learning courses, on the basis of individual requests. The Governing Council also requested that the Institute incorporate knowledge-sharing sessions into its courses. It recommended making e-learning courses more accessible to staff members of the broader national statistical system. The Governing Council commended the Institute for its active involvement, jointly with some Asia-Pacific countries, in the Global Network of Institutions for Statistical Training, a network of international, regional and national statistical offices and training institutions working together to build sustainable statistical capacities worldwide through the efficient, effective and harmonized delivery of training.

3. The Governing Council thanked ESCAP members for completing the training needs survey and requested that they complete future surveys to enable the Institute to develop training to meet their needs. It also requested that ESCAP members assist in the formulation of the strategic plan for 2025–2029.

4. The Governing Council acknowledged the contributions of ESCAP members and associate members and statistical development partners in the Institute’s achievement of the work programme in 2023. It also acknowledged the countries that were willing to provide financial and in-kind contributions, including by hosting regional, subregional and national courses and providing relevant expertise. The Governing Council reiterated the need for the Institute to update its courses on a continuous basis and to continue to hire staff with expertise in current and emerging trends in official statistics.

5. The Governing Council reviewed the progress made in the implementation of the strategic plan for 2020–2024 and in the preparation of the strategic plan for 2025–2029. The Institute proposed that a Friends of the Chair group – comprising all members of the Governing Council, as well as one member each from the Central Asia subregion and the Pacific subregion – be established to provide inputs and overall guidance to the drafting of the strategic plan for 2025–2029. The Governing Council endorsed the proposal of the Institute on the establishment of a Friends of the Chair group and requested that a workplan for the group be developed by the secretariat and shared with the group as soon as possible. It also requested that the role of the national training institutes be considered in the new strategic plan and that due focus be given to emerging topics.

6. The Governing Council reviewed and endorsed the work programme and financial plan for 2024 of the Institute. It noted the various suggestions made by countries with regard to course topics, including big data and agricultural statistics. It also invited the Institute, with the support of the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat and the ESCAP Statistics Division, to strengthen its partnerships with the recently established regional hub on big data and data science for Asia and the Pacific in Indonesia and the global centre on specific topics related to big data and data science in China, in support of the United Nations Global Platform.
7. The Governing Council decided to hold its twentieth session in Bangkok during the second week of December 2024, in conjunction with the ninth session of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics.

8. The Governing Council welcomed the report of the subgroup on gender statistics training. It thanked the subgroup for its continued efforts to build capacity in the region on gender statistics and expressed its support for the activities planned for 2024.

II. Proceedings

A. Matters arising from the eighteenth session of the Governing Council (agenda item 2)

9. The Governing Council had before it a document on matters arising from the eighteenth session of the Governing Council. It noted with satisfaction the action taken and the status of the matters as reported by the Institute.

10. The representative of Japan noted that many face-to-face courses had been conducted by the Institute in 2023, illustrating the great demand for such training courses on various topics. He appreciated the efforts of the Institute to provide face-to-face courses. In addition, the representative expressed his appreciation to ESCAP members and associate members and to international and regional organizations for providing in-kind contributions and financial resources in support of the Institute’s training courses.

11. The representative of Maldives explained the challenges faced by the national statistical office, which include a lack of political support resulting in limited financial support. She requested that the Institute play a pivotal role in increasing interest in and understanding of official statistics in political circles by conducting statistical literacy and data assurance training courses for politicians.

12. The representative of Thailand stressed the importance of having access to online training courses in Thai. She expressed her appreciation to the Institute for conducting a training course on the Disaster-related Statistics Framework jointly with the national statistical office of Thailand and the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation of Thailand in 2023. The course was translated into Thai, making it accessible to statistical offices throughout the country. The representative noted that that was a good approach to making the courses more accessible. The secretariat thanked the Government of Thailand for its collaboration on the 2023 training course on the Disaster-related Statistics Framework. The secretariat informed the Governing Council of several courses that had been translated into other languages and noted that the support of national statistical offices is imperative for the translation of courses.

13. The representative of Tajikistan expressed his appreciation to the Institute for the training courses that had been conducted in Russian for Central Asian countries and requested that a statistical literacy course also be conducted in Russian.

14. The representative of China informed the Governing Council of the collaboration between the national statistical office of China and the Institute, in which the national statistical office translated training content provided by the Institute into Chinese. He requested that the Institute continue such collaborations. He also highlighted that many government statisticians from
China had participated in and successfully completed several of the Institute’s online learning courses. He noted that the e-learning courses on labour accounts and statistical business registers were going to be translated into Chinese and requested the Institute’s assistance with technical issues related to the translation of training content. The secretariat noted with appreciation the Institute’s collaboration with China.

15. The representative of India requested that the Institute provide additional online training courses, subject to resource availability and the maturity of statistical methodologies, on topics such as artificial intelligence; machine learning; statistical literacy for policymakers and other non-statisticians; and ocean accounts. He also requested that training courses be offered on the blue economy, environmental accounting and ocean accounting in order to cultivate a better understanding of those topics and enable users to distinguish them from one another. The secretariat informed the Governing Council that the Institute’s online training course on big data was relevant to artificial intelligence and machine learning and that statistical literacy training for non-statisticians was a topic of great interest. The secretariat noted that ocean accounts were included in several environmental statistical courses conducted by the Institute and would continue to be included in future courses. The secretariat also informed the Governing Council that the development of the statistical methodology on ocean accounting was ongoing. Once the methodology and relevant manuals had been completed, the Institute would develop specific training courses on that topic.

16. The representative of Indonesia requested that the Institute conduct a face-to-face training course on remote sensing to support the work of undertaking the agricultural census.

17. The representative of Malaysia requested that the Institute organize a training course on the modernization of agricultural statistics.

18. The representative of the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat highlighted the collaboration between the Institute, the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, the ESCAP Statistics Division and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research in the context of the Global Network of Institutions for Statistical Training. The Global Network is aimed at providing guidance for national statistical systems – comprising national statistical offices and other producers of official statistics – on capacity-building, knowledge-sharing and good practices. The representative informed the Governing Council about the various activities and initiatives of the Global Network, as well as future developments. He also expressed deep appreciation to the Institute for leading the Global Network’s task team on the online gateway and e-learning community of practice.

19. The representative of Georgia expressed his satisfaction with the Institute’s training courses and reaffirmed the commitment of his Government to the work of the Institute. He expressed his hope that the Institute’s good work would continue and noted that the national statistical office of Georgia had expressed an interest in collaborating with the Institute in conducting future training courses.
B. Report of the Director of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific on the activities and financial status of the Institute (agenda item 3)

20. The Governing Council had before it the report of the Director of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific on the activities and financial status of the Institute. In her report, the Director highlighted the key results and accomplishments of the Institute in 2023 and summarized the Institute’s financial and administrative status. She presented the results of the 2023 training needs survey. She also explained that the Institute’s workplan had been prepared on the basis of a number of factors, such as the training needs survey and requests made by countries, both during the session of the Governing Council or through other communication channels. The secretariat urged all national statistical offices to respond to the training needs survey, which would aid the secretariat in developing an inclusive workplan that accurately addressed the statistical training needs of the entire Asia-Pacific region.

21. The representative of Malaysia congratulated the Institute on the number of courses completed in 2023, using multiple methods of delivery. He echoed the secretariat’s request that all national statistical offices respond to the training needs survey. He confirmed the continued in-kind contributions and financial support of his Government to the Institute and reaffirmed the availability of the training institute of the Department of Statistics of Malaysia to collaborate with the Institute in capacity-building activities. He expressed an interest in training courses on big data.

22. The representative of the Philippines suggested that leadership training courses be conducted for middle managers. He noted that while middle managers had the technical capacity, they often lacked in soft skills that were necessary to become senior managers. He also suggested that the Institute work with national statistical offices in conducting national e-learning courses based on existing content. Such nationally tailored courses would allow the Institute to reach a wider audience, including statisticians working in local offices.

23. The representative of Thailand commended the Institute on the work done in 2023, highlighting that it had surpassed its key performance indicators. She informed the Governing Council that the national statistical office of Thailand would be conducting a population and housing census in 2025 using a hybrid method of data collection, including the use of structured big data, in order to access hard-to-reach populations. She expressed her appreciation for the results of the 2023 training needs survey, which revealed that training on big data was a high priority for ESCAP members. As a result, the representative requested that the Institute conduct a course on big data, including a segment on the use of remote sensing, and proposed that the Institute collaborate with the newly established big data hub in Indonesia on the delivery of both e-learning and face-to-face training courses on that topic.

24. The representative of Japan applauded the Institute’s management of both face-to-face and online learning courses while also responding to emerging needs within the region, including Sustainable Development Goal-related issues and the Institute’s proactiveness in conducting an annual training needs survey. He stated that despite the economic hardship faced by countries after the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, Governments were making efforts to maintain their contributions for the Institute’s activities. Therefore, the Institute must focus on results and be responsive to the demands and training needs of ESCAP members. He requested that the Institute continue...
to acquire staff with expertise in the current and emerging trends in official statistics.

25. The representative of Viet Nam requested that the Institute expand its target audience to government officials at the local level using the online training modality. She noted the high demand in Viet Nam for training courses on statistical literacy and communication. The Institute reaffirmed its commitment to continue delivering training courses on statistical literacy.

26. The representative of India appreciated the range of training courses delivered by the Institute. He said that the Institute needed to continue to conduct both face-to-face and online learning courses, while emphasizing the need for statistical literacy training courses targeting data users who were non-statisticians, such as data users in academia and the media. In addition, he noted that it was necessary to provide communication training, including on communicating data and findings.

27. The representative of Bangladesh pledged his Government’s continued cooperation with the Institute. He also highlighted that the national statistical office of Bangladesh needed training courses on agricultural statistics, water accounts and quarterly national accounts compilation.

28. The representative of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic appreciated the role of the Institute in building the technical and management capacity of national statistical offices. She noted the value of the training needs survey in communicating country needs and indicated that the language barrier was the main reason preventing many national statistical office staff members from benefiting from the Institute’s training courses. In that regard, she requested that country courses be conducted in Lao and expressed an interest in training courses on data visualization, statistical literacy, and data communication and dissemination.

29. The representative of Maldives proposed that the Institute facilitate knowledge-sharing between national statistical offices to forge collaborative partnerships in the region. The secretariat agreed that collaboration among national statistical offices would be highly beneficial and requested that all representatives take full advantage of the opportunity to network during the annual meetings of the Institute. The secretariat also noted that countries were invited to share their knowledge and experiences during face-to-face and online training courses.

30. The representative of Tonga noted that small national statistical offices often lacked resources, which had an impact on their level of participation in the Institute’s training courses and on their ability to fully apply the knowledge and skills acquired from them. The secretariat acknowledged the difficulties faced by small organizations in the Pacific, especially as there was no statistical training institute in the subregion. The secretariat suggested that it might be beneficial to hold additional country-focused courses – building upon the positive experience gained during the gender statistics training course that had been conducted recently in Tonga by the Institute and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) – as a means of ensuring that the training would benefit both the national statistical office and the national statistical system.

31. The representative of the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat noted the high demand from ESCAP members for training on data literacy and advocacy for policymakers. She spoke about the proposal to draft implementation guidelines for the
Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics that target policymakers, in
addition to the guidelines for national statistical offices, and noted that that
work presented an opportunity to develop related e-learning courses. She
informed the Governing Council of the decision taken by the Statistical
Commission in March 2023 to welcome the proposal of Indonesia to become
a regional hub on big data and data science for Asia and the Pacific and to
support the proposal of China to become a global centre on specific topics
related to big data and data science. She suggested that the Institute seek to
collaborate with the two centres on relevant training courses on big data.

C. Work programme and financial plan for 2024 (agenda item 4)

32. The Governing Council had before it the work programme and financial
plan for 2024 of the Institute.

33. The Director of the Institute presented the proposed work programme
and financial plan for 2024. She noted that the implementation would rely
heavily on collaboration with partners and requested that national statistical
offices continue to support the Institute’s activities through financial and
in-kind contributions. The Director expressed a willingness to engage closely
with national statistical offices to organize country courses and to build upon
partnerships and collaborations with all organizations.

34. The representative of Malaysia supported the proposed work
programme and financial plan for 2024 and pledged her Government’s
continued support. She highlighted that her Government would offer in-kind
contributions in the form of resource persons who could provide support for
training courses on several subjects, including data science and national
accounts. She suggested that the Institute consider engaging retired
government statisticians as resource persons for training courses.

35. The representative of Thailand stated the work programme and
financial plan for 2024 reflected the results of the annual training needs survey.
She noted that there was a sizeable gap in funding that would need to be filled
by other organizations. She expressed an interest in the participation of
countries in knowledge-sharing on Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange and
on conducting a housing and population census. The secretariat informed the
Governing Council that the ESCAP Statistics Division hosted the Asia-Pacific Stats Cafe series, during which countries had actively engaged in
knowledge-sharing. The secretariat noted that knowledge-sharing sessions
should be incorporated in all future training courses conducted by the Institute.

36. The representative of Japan expressed support for the Institute’s work
programme and financial plan for 2024 and pledged the support of his
Government for its successful implementation. He echoed the concerns
expressed by others regarding the cost of the Institute’s activities and the
sizeable funding gap that would need to be filled by other organizations. He
expressed hope that all ESCAP members and associate members, as well as
relevant organizations, would be able to enhance their contributions to the
Institute.

37. The representative of Maldives requested guidelines to support her
country’s upcoming census. The representative of Bangladesh highlighted that
his country had recently conducted a national census, during which data had
been collected using information and communications technology and
computer-assisted personal interview tools. He offered to share with Maldives
the experience gained by the national statistical office of Bangladesh.
D. Topics to formulate the strategic plan for 2025–2029 (agenda item 5)

38. The Governing Council had before it a document from the Director of the Institute on the formulation of the strategic plan for 2025–2029 for discussion. It was invited to provide comments and guidance related to the formulation of the strategic plan, including the establishment of a Friends of the Chair group to provide overall guidance in the drafting of the strategic plan.

39. The representative of Japan expressed support for the general direction of the formulation of the strategic plan for 2025–2029. He noted that the plan should be more ambitious, given that it covered the period leading up to 2030 and given also the role of the Institute in supporting member States in measuring the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He also noted the importance of maximizing cooperation with ESCAP members and associate members, as well as relevant organizations, to secure and utilize the necessary resources to assist in meeting the targets contained in the 2030 Agenda. In order for the strategic plan to reflect the needs of member States, a thorough review was necessary. In that regard, he requested that the Institute draft a detailed workplan with points for discussion and that the secretariat share it with the Governing Council as soon as possible.

40. The representative of Malaysia supported the direction of the formulation of the strategic plan for 2025–2029 and recommended that the Friends of the Chair group represent the entire Asia-Pacific region. She suggested that the training needs survey could inform the drafting of the strategic plan. She noted that the survey should provide an opportunity for ESCAP members to indicate the type of contributions they would be able to provide so that that information could be reflected in the strategic plan.

41. The representative of Uzbekistan informed the Governing Council that many officials from his country’s national statistical office had attended the Institute’s training courses and that they had found the courses to be relevant to their work and greatly beneficial in increasing their capacities. He urged the Institute to study the needs of the Central Asia subregion ahead of the drafting of the strategic plan for 2025–2029.

42. The representative of China agreed on the importance of conducting a training needs survey for the formulation of the strategic plan for 2025–2029 and requested that the Institute consider various and emerging training topics, such as climate change, the digital economy and measures beyond gross domestic product (GDP), as well as practical statistical techniques, such as machine learning. He noted the effectiveness of face-to-face training for knowledge-sharing between countries and offered to collaborate with the Institute on future training courses.

43. The representative of Tajikistan informed the Governing Council that a national statistical office education centre that provided capacity-building for specialists had been established in Tajikistan. He requested that the Institute provide assistance with training on data processing and analysis and offered support in the form of translation assistance.

44. The representative of the Philippines stated that, in order for the Institute to reach a wider audience, the role of the national statistical office training institutes as a multiplier needed to be reflected in the strategic plan for 2025–2029.

45. The representative of Fiji requested that at least one Pacific country be represented in the Friends of the Chair group.
46. The representative of the Pacific Community offered to share recent assessment survey results with the Institute so that they could be taken into consideration in the formulation of the strategic plan for 2025–2029. He stressed that each country had a different institutional framework, unique needs, different staff capacities and varied data availability. As a result, those issues would need to be taken into consideration when drafting the strategic plan.

47. The representative of India requested that training courses on non-GDP metrics, data integration, statistical literacy for policymakers and analytics domain be reflected in the strategic plan for 2025–2029.

48. The representative of Thailand supported the direction of the formulation of the Institute’s strategic plan for 2025–2029 and emphasized the customization of training courses to better fit the needs of countries.

49. The representative of Viet Nam requested that statistical literacy be highlighted in the strategic plan for 2025–2029 as doing so would increase the value of statistics to data users.

50. The representative of the ESCAP Statistics Division mentioned the increased challenges experienced by national statistical offices, in particular with regard to the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Regarding the strategic plan for 2025–2029, she noted that it would be necessary to tap into the resources of training institutes and big data hubs across the region and to utilize various training modalities.

E. Dates and venue of the twentieth session of the Governing Council (agenda item 6)

51. The Governing Council agreed to hold its twentieth session in Bangkok during the second week of December 2024, in conjunction with the ninth session of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics.

F. Other matters (agenda item 7)

52. The representative of UN-Women made a presentation on the activities of the subgroup on gender statistics training in 2023 and its workplan for 2024. The Governing Council welcomed the report. It thanked the subgroup for its continued efforts to build capacity in the region on gender statistics and expressed its support for the activities planned by the subgroup for 2024.

53. No other matters were raised by the Governing Council.

G. Adoption of the report of the Governing Council on its nineteenth session (agenda item 8)

54. On 14 December 2023, the Governing Council discussed section I of the present report.

55. The recommendations and decisions of the Governing Council at its nineteenth session were adopted.

56. It was agreed that, as the secretariat of the Governing Council, the Institute would prepare the full report of the Governing Council on its nineteenth session for transmittal to ESCAP at its eightieth session.
III. Organization

A. Opening, duration and organization of the session

57. The nineteenth session of the Governing Council of the Institute was held in Kuala Lumpur on 13 and 14 December 2023.

58. The representative of Malaysia, Chair of the eighteenth session of the Governing Council, officially opened the nineteenth session.

B. Attendance

59. The session was attended by representatives of the host Government, Japan, and all members of the Governing Council: Bangladesh, China, India, Malaysia, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Thailand and Viet Nam.

60. Representatives of the following ESCAP members attended the session as observers: Azerbaijan, Fiji, Georgia, Indonesia, Kiribati, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Maldives, Nauru, Nepal, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Tonga and Uzbekistan.

61. A representative of Hong Kong, China, an associate member of ESCAP, also attended the session as an observer.

62. Representatives of ESCAP attended the session.

63. Representatives of the following United Nations bodies, specialized agencies and funds attended as observers: Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat and UN-Women.

64. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations attended as observers: Asian Development Bank and Pacific Community.

C. Election of officers

65. The Governing Council elected the following officers by acclamation:

   Chair: Mr. Mohd Uzir Mahidin (Malaysia)
   Vice-Chair: Mr. Noriaki Sato (Japan)

D. Agenda

66. The Governing Council adopted the following agenda:

1. Opening of the session:
   (a) Opening addresses;
   (b) Election of officers;
   (c) Adoption of the agenda.


4. Work programme and financial plan for 2024.

5. Topics to formulate the strategic plan for 2025–2029.

6. Dates and venue of the twentieth session of the Governing Council.

7. Other matters.

8. Adoption of the report of the Governing Council on its nineteenth session.
Annex I

Financial statement of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific for the year ended 31 December 2023
(United States dollars)

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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Contributions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interest income</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total income</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Less: Expenditure</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Net income over expenditure</strong></td>
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<td>Fund balance as at 1 January 2023</td>
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<td><strong>Fund balance as at 31 December 2023</strong></td>
<td><strong>6 694 585</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex II

Financial statement of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific for the year ended 31 December 2023, by project component (United States dollars)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Joint contributions – capacity-development project</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Contributions</td>
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<td>Interest income</td>
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<td><strong>Total income</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Less: Expenditure</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fund balance as at 31 December 2023</strong></td>
<td>6 694 585</td>
</tr>
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Annex III

Cash contributions to the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific for the institutional support account received for the years ended 31 December 2022 and 31 December 2023 (United States dollars)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country/area</th>
<th>Year ended 31 December 2022</th>
<th>Year ended 31 December 2023</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Azerbaijan</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Brunei Darussalam</td>
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<td>Cambodia</td>
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<td>China</td>
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<td>Iran (Islamic Republic of)</td>
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<td>Malaysia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
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<td>15 000</td>
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<tr>
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