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Items for discussion and decision: coordination of statistical programmes

Report of the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System on coordination within the United Nations statistical system

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2020/211 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System. In the report, the Committee describes its work in the area of coordination within the United Nations system, in particular its activities in follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolution [2020/5](#), in which the Council, inter alia, requested the Committee to more effectively strengthen coordination of statistical programmes within the United Nations system, guided by and in support of the work of the Statistical Commission. The report contains proposals on how to further improve coordination. The Commission is invited to provide guidance on the content and priorities of the Committee's programme of work. The action to be taken by the Commission is set out in section IV of the report.

* [E/CN.3/2021/1](#).



Report of the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System on coordination within the United Nations statistical system

I. Background

1. The Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System comprises the statistical services of United Nations funds and programmes, United Nations specialized agencies and the United Nations Secretariat, including the regional commissions, the mandates of which include the provision of international official statistics in the context of the principles governing international statistical activities.

2. The Committee was formally established by the Statistical Commission in its decision 45/112 and met officially for the first time on 10 September 2014, in conjunction with the twenty-fourth session of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, held in Rome. Previous reports to the Commission were submitted for its sessions in 2017 ([E/CN.3/2017/29](#)) and 2020 ([E/CN.3/2020/5](#)). The latter report contains a full list of current members in its annex I, the Committee's terms of reference in its annex II and a more detailed history of coordination in the context of the United Nations system in its annex III.

3. The Committee works through task teams and holds two formal sessions per year. Two Co-Chairs lead the Committee's work.¹ The current Co-Chairs are Angela Me, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and Steve MacFeely, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. The Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat serves as secretariat to the Committee. Information on the work of the Committee is available on its public web page, hosted on the Statistics Division website.²

4. The Committee operates in close collaboration with the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, of which all Committee members are also a member and which additionally convenes the international, regional and supranational organizations that are not part of the United Nations system, in order to address broader matters and issues regarding the entire global statistical system (see [E/CN.3/2021/6](#)).

5. The United Nations statistical system, which can be loosely described as the set of all statistical units of the United Nations system, has grown significantly, reflecting the increasing complexity of the development phenomena with which the United Nations is concerned and demonstrating that robust and high-quality statistical information is an indispensable prerequisite for global development.

II. Economic and Social Council resolution 2020/5, on strengthening coordination of the statistical programmes in the United Nations system

6. In its decision 51/104, the Statistical Commission, inter alia, recognized that the role of statistical units in the United Nations system has expanded significantly through the data needs of the Sustainable Development Goals, and reiterated the need for better coordination of the United Nations statistical system in order to strengthen

¹ Until 2020, the Committee was headed by one Chair. Given the increased workload of the Committee and its Chair, the Committee amended its terms of reference at its fall session in 2020 to add a second Co-Chair. At the same session, Steve MacFeely was elected to serve as the second (junior) Co-Chair. Updated terms of reference can be found on the Committee's website at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/unssystem/documents/TOR-final.pdf>.

² See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/unssystem/>.

the voice of the statistical community in dialogue with policymakers, to reduce the data reporting burden and eliminate data discrepancies across the United Nations system, to better integrate United Nations capacity-building efforts at the country level, and to jointly develop methodologies, especially for the Sustainable Development Goal indicators and to modernize the United Nations statistical system. In the same decision, the Commission stressed that investments into an effective coordination mechanism in a highly decentralized system could and should lead to efficiency gains in the long run.

7. On 18 June 2020, the Economic and Social Council adopted resolution [2020/5](#), on strengthening coordination of the statistical programmes in the United Nations system, on the recommendation of the Statistical Commission. In the resolution, the Council, inter alia, requested the Statistics Division, as the secretariat of the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System, to provide adequate support to the coordination function of the Statistical Commission, as well as related activities of the Committee, by considering pursuing a range of activities that could include well-coordinated activities, including a road map and action plan for the United Nations statistical programme with target and performance indicators to monitor the development of United Nations statistical governance towards a strengthened and efficient United Nations statistical system, to be considered by the Statistical Commission. The Council also specifically requested modernized and better-coordinated data collection and capacity development, and improved communication and integration with the geospatial community and with the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, which is the highest-level coordination forum in the United Nations, comprising the leadership of 31 member organizations under the chairmanship of the Secretary-General.³ The Council decided that the cost of all activities arising from the implementation of the resolution should be met from voluntary contributions.

8. In addressing the request from the Commission and the Council, the Committee finalized in 2020 the System-wide Road Map for Innovating United Nations Data and Statistics ([CEB/2020/1/Add.1](#)), which was aimed at improving United Nations data and United Nations coordination in the delivery of statistical assistance to Member States. A copy of the Road Map is available as a background document for the Commission. The Road Map is furthermore aimed at promoting innovation with regard to United Nations data and statistical outputs in relation to the two roles played by United Nations entities in this arena, which are (a) to support the development of national statistical systems, thereby helping countries to produce fit-for-purpose data and statistics; and (b) to provide authoritative regional and global data and statistics to support the international community in responding in a timely fashion to regional and emerging policy needs.

9. The Road Map is presented in the form of three goals: (a) to create new and timely data solutions; (b) to address emerging policy needs; and (c) to provide coordinated and innovative support to Member States. Each of the goals in the Road Map includes a number of targets and details on the actions envisaged to achieve their implementation. The actors best suited to carrying out implementation are identified, a timeline is provided and existing resources that can support each action are suggested. Associated risks and opportunities are also identified.

10. The Road Map was discussed and endorsed by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination during its first regular session of 2020, on 14 May 2020.

³ See www.unsystem.org/content/ceb.

11. Recognizing that data represent a strategic asset for the United Nations system, the Secretary-General and the Executive Committee on 16 April 2020 approved the Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere, which focuses on building the data, digital, technology and innovation capabilities that the United Nations needs to succeed in the twenty-first century. It sets out a vision for a data ecosystem that maximizes the value of United Nations data assets for the Organization and the stakeholders it serves, including high-level objectives, principles, core work streams and concrete system-wide data initiatives. In the Data Strategy, the Secretary-General highlights that improving how the United Nations collects, manages, uses and shares data should be a strategic concern cutting across all pillars of the United Nations system, across programmes and operations and across all levels of its organizations.⁴ The Road Map is also an integral part of the Data Strategy. Consequently, some key objectives of the Road Map, such as the transformation of the statistics portal⁵ to strengthen the position of the United Nations system as a primary provider of global data and statistics, the creation of knowledge management hubs and collaboration on data and statistics, align perfectly with the goals of the Data Strategy.

III. System-wide Road Map for Innovating United Nations Data and Statistics: priorities and work programme of the Committee

12. Within its mandate to coordinate statistics within the United Nations system and in an effort to pursue its goals in a timely fashion, the Committee, during its session held on 9 September 2020, decided to start work on priority areas in the Road Map. The paragraphs below outline the four priorities chosen, the key actors and the first actions taken.

Target 2.1. As a core United Nations system-wide initiative, to transform the data.un.org portal as a single point of reference for United Nations system data in order to strengthen the position of the United Nations system as a primary provider of global data and statistics (lead agency: Statistics Division, supported by: United Nations Children's Fund, International Organization for Migration, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and United Nations Population Fund)

13. The Statistics Division, as the lead agency and host of UNdata, reviewed the arrangements, technical infrastructure and skills required for a holistic and integrated approach to the presentation and dissemination of statistical data and metadata and related data to different user groups. The Commission will have before it the report of the Secretary-General on data and metadata presentation and dissemination (E/CN.3/2021/17), which proposes a way forward for the implementation of the Data Strategy as it concerns statistical data and metadata and related visualizations, including the creation of a global United Nations data hub based on modern interoperability standards and a federated data governance architecture. The points for decision by the Commission in that report include the suggested establishment of an inter-agency and expert mechanism for the full development and implementation of a new United Nations data hub and the regular review and update of its data and metadata, and to approve its proposed terms of reference.

Target 2.2. To promote, within and outside the United Nations system, a culture of data literacy and provide evidence to support United Nations policies and programmes (lead agency: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development,

⁴ See www.un.org/en/content/datastrategy/.

⁵ See <https://data.un.org>.

supported by: United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Development Programme and International Labour Organization)

14. The task team working on data literacy is now working closely with the United Nations System Staff College. A first set of proposals for a modular United Nations System Staff College course on data literacy, designed to target general United Nations staff, has been proposed and discussed. These proposals are now being refined. It is envisaged that the module curricula will be agreed by early 2021. Thereafter work will begin on developing content.

Target 2.3. To embed predictive analytics, including nowcasting and forecasting, into United Nations system data/statistical programmes so as to ensure the provision of timely information in order to address emerging policy issues (lead agency: United Nations Industrial Development Organization, supported by: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations)

15. Work in this area began in February 2020 with the Technical Workshop on Nowcasting in International Organizations, organized by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization.⁶ Since then, an informal network has been established, managed by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and with the participation of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children's Fund and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Priority activities for this network will be the sharing of know-how and lessons learned on the implementation of nowcasting/forecasting methodologies, the dissemination of those estimates and the application of those techniques in the context of sustainable development indicators. The network will also evaluate the inclusion of nowcast estimates in the main Sustainable Development Goals progress reports, as well as the organization of a training course open to all agencies on how nowcasting methodologies could be applied in the context of Sustainable Development Goal indicators.

Target 3.2. To support the design and implementation of a national statistical capacity development programme, under the "One United Nations" brand, through regional coordination (lead agency: Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, supported by: Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, Economic Commission for Africa, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Economic Commission for Europe, International Labour Organization and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations)

16. The task team working on the issue has met to discuss expectations, scope and possible activities. The task team identified the importance of alignment with initiatives with a similar objective, including the implementation of the United Nations development system regional reforms and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group's task team on country-focused data and reporting. The task team discussed piloting an approach in a few countries to test various design and implementation options.

17. In addition to the work on the four priorities described above, the Committee continued its coordination work in the below areas.

⁶ See <https://unctad.org/meeting/ccs-un-technical-workshop-nowcasting-international-organizations>.

Action 1.1.4. Strengthen the link between United Nations statistics and geospatial systems, including establishing a network of United Nations staff that use geospatial information to produce and disseminate United Nations data and statistics, and provide relevant training to United Nations staff

18. The Committee initiated cooperation with the United Nations Geospatial Network, which is a coalition of entities within the United Nations system that engage in geospatial information management activities,⁷ cooperation that has since been broadened to include the larger Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities. A first joint activity will be a workshop on empowering international organizations to improve the integration and interoperability between geospatial applications and statistics, which is planned for early 2021 (see also [E/CN.3/2021/6](#), paras. 15–17).

Target 3.3. To support the design and implementation of a national statistical capacity development programme, under the “One United Nations” brand, through global coordination

19. The Committee has also increased or established communication with two major groups or offices, namely the United Nations Geospatial Network and the Policy and Innovations Section of the Development Coordination Office of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group. Representatives of the Policy and Innovations Section have attended the Committee’s sessions in 2020 and kept the Committee briefed on their efforts towards building capacity of the data officers through webinars and the role of the newly established regional collaborative platforms. The formal launch of the Global Network of Data Officers and Statisticians at the United Nations World Data Forum (see [E/CN.3/2021/3](#), paras. 38–40) provides new opportunities for the Committee and its members to engage.

IV. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission

20. **The Commission, also taking into consideration previous reports on this issue, is invited:**

(a) **To welcome the System-wide Road Map for Innovating United Nations Data and Statistics as a solid commitment of the United Nations system to strengthen coordination and modernize United Nations statistics and data, and to invite the Committee to prioritize its implementation;**

(b) **To comment on the relevance of the Road Map in addressing the provisions of Economic and Social Council resolution [2020/5](#), and to provide guidance to the Committee on priority areas and adjustments if needed;**

(c) **To provide general guidance on the work of the Committee.**

⁷ See <https://ggim.un.org/UN-GGIM-Thematic-Groups/>.