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Items for information: 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 2021/224 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Statistical Commission 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 Commission may wish to take into account the views of the Committee in its discussions under the relevant agenda items and is invited to take note of the report.

* [E/CN.3/2022/1](#).



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), 2020 (E/CN.3/2020/5) and 2021 (E/CN.3/2021/5). The 2020 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, World Health Organization (since July 2021)/United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (until June 2021). 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.3/2022/38).

II. Economic and Social Council resolution 2020/5 on strengthening coordination of the statistical programmes in the United Nations system, and Statistical Commission decision 52/104 on the coordination of statistical programmes

5. 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

¹ Until 2020, the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System 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/unsystem/documents/TOR-final.pdf>.

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

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.

6. In addressing the request from 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. The Road Map was presented to the Commission at its fifty-second session and is available as a background document for the Commission.

7. In its decision 52/104, the Commission, inter alia, “acknowledged and appreciated the work carried out by the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System as agile and responsive”, “welcomed 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 addressing the provisions of Economic and Social Council resolution 2020/5 of 18 June 2020” and “fully concurred with the identified priority activities, in particular the proposal of transforming the data.un.org portal into 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”. The Commission, furthermore, “suggested adding target 1.1 (To improve existing data sources and increase use of new data sources to expand coverage, relevance and timeliness of data and statistics produced and disseminated by the United Nations system) as a priority, in view of the growing need for new data sources, in particular in the light of the current pandemic”.

III. Progress towards the implementation of the System-wide Road Map for Innovating United Nations Data and Statistics

8. The paragraphs below contain a description of the progress made towards the implementation of the Road Map in the five priority areas.

Target 1.1. To improve existing data sources and increase use of new data sources to expand coverage, relevance and timeliness of data and statistics produced and disseminated by the United Nations system.

9. In 2020, 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,³ cooperation that has since been broadened to include the larger Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities.

10. As a first joint activity, the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities/Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System and the United Nations Geospatial Network organized a workshop on the integration between geospatial and statistical information in international organizations and Member States. The workshop was held virtually from 28 April to 12 May 2021 and was hosted

³ See <https://ggim.un.org/UN-GGIM-Thematic-Groups/>.

by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (see [E/CN.3/2022/38](#), para. 13).

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

11. At its fifty-second session, the Commission considered the report of the Secretary-General on data and metadata presentation and dissemination ([E/CN.3/2021/17](#)). In its decision 52/115, the Commission, inter alia, “endorsed the vision and way forward for the implementation of the new UNdata portal as the main entry point to authoritative statistical data and metadata from the United Nations system and other participating international and regional organizations, in line with countries’ priorities and with the Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere and the System-wide Road Map for Innovating United Nations Data and Statistics developed by the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System” and “endorsed the 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, agreed with its proposed terms of reference, and welcomed expressions of interest by countries and international agencies in supporting the work of the new mechanism”.

12. In September 2021, the Statistics Division organized a virtual focus meeting of stakeholders to develop the vision for the modernization of the statistics portal, in which Committee members were represented. In the meeting, which was co-facilitated by the Center for Open Data Enterprise and Open Data Watch, more than 50 representatives of national statistical offices, Committee members and the Secretariat, and data specialists from the business sector and civil society discussed methods to better address the needs of current and new users, the types of data sources that should be included, technical functionalities and emerging technologies, and how best to coordinate across organizations and country offices for effective governance. Meeting participants also discussed the way forward for the implementation of the new statistics portal, in line with the Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere, as well as with the Road Map.

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

13. A Committee task team on data literacy has worked closely with the United Nations System Staff College, also engaging academia in the content development. The first course is expected to be launched in December 2021. Depending on its success, further, more advanced and more sector-specific courses will be developed.

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

14. Work in this area began in February 2020 with the technical workshop on nowcasting in international organizations, organized by UNCTAD and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).⁴ Since then, an informal “nowcasting and forecasting” group has been established within the Global Network of Data Officers and Statisticians, with the goal of becoming an open channel for

⁴ See <https://unctad.org/meeting/ccs-un-technical-workshop-nowcasting-international-organizations>.

communication and discussion on nowcasting and forecasting techniques applied to all domains, but with a special emphasis on applications to sustainable development indicators. Given the diverse membership of the Global Network, the group can reach not only staff from international organizations and national statistical offices but also, thanks to the recently expanded membership scope of the Global Network, statisticians from non-governmental organizations, academia and the private sector. In the future, the group will be complemented by a platform that will facilitate the sharing of code libraries, documents and results among its members.

15. To promote the use of nowcasting methodologies in development indicators, including for Sustainable Development Goal indicators, UNIDO is currently preparing a first draft of the guidelines for nowcasting in international organizations. The guidelines will contain definitions of key concepts, introduce the most used methodologies in this area, discuss new developments and areas of future research, and elaborate on specific areas of concern for international organizations, such as the dissemination of nowcast estimates, the aggregation of estimates and the communication of results with national statistical offices and other users. UNCTAD is also working on a study entitled “Feasibility of nowcasting Sustainable Development Goal indicators: a comprehensive survey”, which will serve to establish a set of criteria, aligned with the guidelines, to determine which SDG indicators are potentially good candidates for nowcasting and which would be more challenging.

16. UNCTAD and UNIDO organized a session entitled “Methodological advancements in nowcasting development indicators” at the 2021 World Statistics Congress of the International Statistical Institute. In the session, four advances in nowcasting methodologies developed by international organizations were presented. The papers presented in the session and the study on the feasibility of nowcasting Sustainable Development Goal indicators are to be published in the second quarter of 2022 in the Statistical Journal of the International Association for Official Statistics.

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

17. 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. The global calendar of events⁵ developed by the Statistics Division is a concrete and practical step.

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

18. 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 regularly attend the Committee’s sessions and keep the Committee briefed on their efforts towards building capacity of the data officers through webinars and the role of the regional collaborative platforms.

⁵ Available at <https://unstats.un.org/capacity-development/calendar/all-events/>.

IV. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission

19. The Commission may wish to take into account the views of the Committee in its discussions under the relevant agenda items and is invited to take note of the present report.
