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Items for discussion and decision: social statistics

Social statistics

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, which was prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2022/324 and past practices, provides a summary of work undertaken in 2022 by the Statistics Division to initiate a new Friends of the Chair group to initiate the review of the social and demographic statistics pillar pursuant to decision 53/105 of the Statistical Commission. The report also contains a summary of the work undertaken by the Division and the United Nations Expert Group on Migration Statistics to identify a set of core and additional indicators for international migration and temporary mobility, in response to Commission decisions 49/101, 50/117 and 52/109.

The Commission is invited to (a) express its views on the newly established Friends of the Chair group on social and demographic statistics, in particular on the proposed work priorities and deliverables; and (b) review and endorse the core and additional indicators for international migration and temporary mobility as an integral part of the upcoming revision of the Recommendations on Statistics for International Migration.

Action to be taken by the Commission is set out in paragraph 23 of the present report.

* E/CN.3/2023/1.



I. Introduction

1. The present report contains a summary of the achievements of the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat in 2022 to fulfil the requests of the Statistical Commission, namely: (a) establishing a Friends of the Chair group to review social and demographic statistics (Commission decision 53/105); and (b) identifying, in collaboration with the United Nations Expert Group on Migration Statistics, a set of core and additional indicators to measure and monitor international migration and temporary mobility, in the context of the upcoming revision of the Recommendations on Statistics for International Migration¹ (Commission decisions 49/101, 50/117 and 52/109).

II. Friends of the Chair group on social and demographic statistics

2. In 2022, the Statistical Commission, in its decision 53/105 on working methods, called upon the Bureau to initiate the review of the social and demographic statistics pillar through a Friends of the Chair mechanism and to report on progress made at the fifty-fourth session, in 2023. To that end, the Statistics Division, as secretariat of the Commission, initiated and facilitated discussions with Member States to gather their views on the objectives, deliverables and outcomes of this initiative and to identify national chief statisticians willing to contribute to the endeavour. In particular, the Division held a meeting on 4 November for a small group of high-level experts² in the field of social and demographic statistics from national statistical offices and the regional commissions to reflect on the scope of the work of the Friends of the Chair group and brainstorm on potential work priorities.

3. Acknowledging the success of the similar Friends of the Chair group on integrated economic statistics, which reviewed the economic statistics pillar from 2019 to 2022 and identified a set of recommendations to ensure that economic statistics remain relevant in the future by responding to emerging data needs, experts at the brainstorming session agreed to build on lessons learned from the work of that Friends of the Chair group. In particular, experts acknowledged the importance of (a) working with a small group of dedicated experts (chief statisticians and their teams) on clear outputs that can be delivered in a two-year period; and (b) organizing consultations with users early in the Friends of the Chair process to identify priorities on data, methods and related gaps, in particular for policymaking.

A. Scope of work

4. Through initial discussions, invited national statistical offices and the regional commissions welcomed the establishment of the Friends of the Chair group on social and demographic statistics as a timely initiative to improve the field of social and demographic statistics, which is a broad and segmented area, and to also elevate and shine a spotlight on this critical statistical pillar.

¹ *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration*, Revision 1 (United Nations publication, 1998).

² Chief statisticians from the following entities participated in the virtual brainstorming meeting: Statistics Canada; National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) of Colombia; Hungarian Central Statistical Office; National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) of Mexico; Statistics South Africa; Economic Commission for Europe; Economic Commission for Africa; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; and Statistical Division. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific provided feedback by email.

5. Invited experts agreed that the work of the Friends of the Chair group should be rooted in and contribute to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. In particular, the monitoring process for the Sustainable Development Goal indicators could be used as the guiding framework to identify persistent and remaining data and methodological gaps in the area of social and demographic statistics. It was also highlighted that the work of the group should be aligned with and promote the mainstreaming of a gender perspective into statistics, and an intersectional approach to data production and analysis. In that context, it was recognized that one of the biggest challenges facing this field of statistics was the need for more granular data, in terms of both spatial coverage and population subgroups, to ensure that data are captured on the most vulnerable, including on those who are still invisible to official statistics.

6. Another identified challenge for social and demographic statistics is their reliance on traditional data sources, mainly household-based surveys that still depend on field operations in many countries and result in high costs for national statistical offices, while administrative records are not yet used to their full statistical potential in the majority of countries. The need for integrating different data sources, including those not traditionally used for official statistics, was highlighted, as was the need to strengthen and apply statistical estimation techniques, such as small area estimation, to close data gaps and improve the frequency, timeliness and granularity of social and demographic statistics.

7. The need to improve the horizontal integration of data across the three dimensions of sustainable development to achieve integrated economic, social and environmental statistics was also considered critical for the future of social and demographic statistics, and the overall strengthening of national statistical systems. Horizontal integration could be achieved by promoting the mainstreaming of a social/demographic perspective into economic and environmental statistics, by using, for example, relevant social statistical frameworks, classifications, concepts and definitions and by identifying and promoting measures of inclusive well-being/quality of life, consistent with the Sustainable Development Goal indicators. The horizontal integration of data across statistical pillars would also be strengthened by including geocoded/georeferenced information in all data sets, thus providing information on “location” as the common denominator/layer for data integration and analysis.

8. Furthermore, the horizontal integration of data across social/demographic and economic statistics could be improved through accounting or input-output tables to better understand interactions between development pillars, including, for example, the impact of economic and fiscal policies on social concerns. In this context, the Network of Economic Statisticians, established by the Statistical Commission as an outcome of the work of the Friends of the Chair group on integrated economic statistics, is proposing to explore the feasibility of a research agenda for a new integrated statistical system for measuring inclusive and sustainable well-being, and is calling for the development of a “system of population and social accounts” (see [E/CN.3/2023/7](#)).

9. Invited experts took note of the Network’s invitation to reflect on the need, purpose, scope and policy applications of the proposed new system for sociodemographic accounting and agreed to consider its proposal in the future. Experts also stressed that the development of an accounting system would require significant additional resources for its conceptualization and implementation, while the use of such a system for social policies was not yet clear. It was further highlighted that many countries already had extensive experience in producing indicators to measure quality of life and/or well-being that could be further studied by the Friends of the Chair group on social and demographic statistics to advance the discussion on

going beyond gross domestic product. Lastly, experts pointed out that the group could also play a role in promoting and advancing evidence and methods to measure priority social and demographic concerns, such as: time-use, vital events, social inclusion, equality, migration, ageing, quality of life and well-being.

10. As a first step, experts agreed on the need for the Friends of the Chair group to undertake a mapping exercise and audit evaluation of existing regional and global groups reporting on social and demographic statistics to the Statistical Commission and the regional intergovernmental statistical bodies of the United Nations. The results of that exercise would then be used by the group to (a) assess the range of areas currently covered, regional priorities, and challenges in the production, dissemination and use of related statistics; (b) identify gaps in social and demographic statistics, in terms of the lack of data on social concerns – in particular those included in the Sustainable Development Goals for which reporting is still weak,³ and on geographical disaggregation and population subgroups, as well as in terms of methodological developments needed to produce more timely, granular, inclusive and fit-for-purpose statistics; and (c) agree on recommendations and a way forward for improved social and demographic statistics that fulfil data requirements under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and anticipate data needs beyond 2030.

B. Working methods, time frame and deliverables

11. It is proposed that the Friends of the Chair group mainly work remotely, through virtual meetings and email exchange, and take advantage of the Statistical Commission and other events to organize back-to-back in-person meetings, when needed. The group will work for a period of two years, spanning 2023 and 2024, and report back on agreed deliverables to the Commission in 2025. The Statistics Division, in collaboration with the initial group of experts who met virtually on 4 November 2022 and other invited experts from countries and from the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System will prepare the draft terms of reference of the Friends of the Chair group, to be made available as a background document on the Commission website. In addition, a high-level side event is planned for 15 February 2023 to initiate a global virtual consultation with chief statisticians and other partners, including from the user community, on the scope of work and expected outcomes of the group.

12. Guided by the results of a mapping exercise and audit evaluation of what the statistical community is collectively doing in the area of social and demographic statistics, the Friends of the Chair group will highlight areas to be strengthened, by initially benchmarking the results of the evaluation (what is being done) against what is needed, in terms of data and methods, to measure and monitor progress towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals related to social and demographic concerns, in particular by focusing on indicators with still-significant data gaps. The group will then consider the call to collaborate with the Network of Economic Statisticians and will formulate recommendations for improved sociodemographic statistics that are fit for purpose, respond to user needs, both now and in the future, and facilitate horizontal integration with economic and environmental statistics.

13. It is also proposed that the draft terms of reference⁴ of the Friends of the Chair group be discussed at the fifty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission and

³ See tier classification of Sustainable Development Goal indicators as of 9 June 2022, available at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/Tier%20Classification%20of%20SDG%20Indicators_9%20Jun%202022_web.pdf.

⁴ Available as a background document of the fifty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission on its website.

adopted by the Bureau of the Commission at a post-session meeting, to allow the Statistics Division and the group to reflect on and incorporate feedback received from Members States.

III. Core and additional indicators on international migration and temporary mobility

14. The Statistical Commission last discussed international migration statistics at its fifty-second session (see [E/CN.3/2021/11](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/sconcerns/migration/index.cshtml)), when it endorsed the revised conceptual framework and related statistical concepts and definitions on international migration and mobility, proposed by the Statistics Division and the Expert Group on Migration Statistics,⁵ as the core elements for the upcoming revision of the Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration.

15. The Statistical Commission also approved the work priorities of the Statistics Division and the Expert Group, including the development of a set of core and additional indicators to be included in the revised Recommendations to support the operationalization of the revised conceptual framework. Building on the results of a global consultation conducted in 2019, the Division and the Expert Group initially agreed on six key broad policy areas that are relevant for international migration, in line with the 2030 Agenda and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (General Assembly resolution [73/195](#)), and later identified corresponding indicators to monitor progress in each of these areas. The six policy areas identified are: area 1, improve the measurement of international migration and temporary mobility stocks and flows; area 2, address irregular cross-border movements and visa overstays; area 3, ensure access to basic services by migrants and temporary populations vis-à-vis other population groups; area 4, increase the integration and well-being of migrants; area 5, empower labour migrants; and area 6, eliminate all forms of discrimination and end violence against migrants and temporary populations. The Expert Group then agreed on a set of indicators specific to migration to inform policy areas 1 and 2 and identified other indicators that should be disaggregated by migratory status (migrant/non-migrant) and by relevant dimensions/topics to inform policy areas 3–6.⁶ This work was spearheaded by the Expert Group task force on data and indicators⁷ and was undertaken following a highly inclusive and collaborative approach, which included several rounds of feedback from experts and culminated in a technical meeting held in Rabat from 20 to 22 June 2022. The report of the Expert Group containing the complete list of indicators for international migration and

⁵ See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/sconcerns/migration/index.cshtml>.

⁶ Based on the current production of indicators in countries and the feasibility of producing the proposed indicators and their topics for disaggregation. See conclusions and recommendations of the technical meeting on indicators and operationalization of the conceptual framework of international migration statistics, held in Rabat from 20 to 22 June 2022, available at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/meetings/2022/egm-technical-meeting-on-indicators-and-operationalisation-of-the-conceptual-framework/Conclusions-Technical-Meeting-on-Indicators-and-Operationalization-of-the-Conceptual-Framework-of-International-Migration-Statistics.pdf>.

⁷ Chaired by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the Government of Morocco, and comprising the following members: Canada; Georgia; Ghana; Malaysia; Mexico; Republic of Moldova; Sweden; South Africa; United States of America; International Organization for Migration; Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; Population Division; Statistics Division; United Nations Children's Fund; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; World Health Organization; African Union Institute for Statistics (STATAFRIC); Eurostat; Australian National University; Bristol University; Colgate University; and Lomonosov Moscow State University.

temporary mobility will be made available on the website of the Commission as a background document, while key elements of the proposal of the Expert Group are highlighted in tables 1 and 2.

16. Acknowledging the challenge of identifying indicators and topics for disaggregation that would be applicable in all countries, the proposal of the Expert Group strives to find the right balance between relevance to national policymaking, and promotion of international comparability across countries. Table 1 shows the number and type of indicators proposed by policy area.

Table 1
Number of core and additional indicators by policy area

<i>Policy area</i>	<i>Core indicators</i>	<i>Additional indicators</i>
1. Improve the measurement of international migration and temporary mobility stocks and flows	4 indicators (on international migration)	5 indicators (on temporary mobility)
2. Address irregular cross-border movements and visa overstays	–	8
3. Ensure access to basic services by migrants and temporary populations vis-à-vis other population groups	6 indicators, selected from the Sustainable Development Goal indicators framework	2
4. Increase the integration and well-being of migrants	4 indicators, selected from the Sustainable Development Goal indicators framework	7
5. Empower labour migrants	6 indicators, 4 of which are selected from the Sustainable Development Goal indicators framework	5
6. Eliminate all forms of discrimination and end violence against migrants and temporary populations	5 indicators, selected from the Sustainable Development Goal indicators framework	4

17. The four core migration indicators to measure and monitor international migration stocks and flows under policy area 1, and their topics for disaggregation, are presented in table 2 and, all countries are recommended to prioritize them to ensure their regular production and dissemination, as they form the basis for accurate population estimates and projections and are thus essential to inform proper planning and policymaking on a variety of government issues. In line with the revised conceptual framework for statistics on international migration, the core indicators proposed are presented as building blocks with a view to enabling countries to produce them incrementally over time.

Table 2
Core indicators and topics for disaggregation (primary and secondary) under policy area 1 on measuring international migration stocks and flows

		<i>Core</i>		<i>Additional</i>
		<i>Migration indicator</i>	<i>Primary topics for disaggregation^a</i>	<i>Secondary topics for disaggregation</i>
Stock	1.1	Number/proportion of people in the total resident population who are: Foreign-born population Foreign citizens Foreign-born citizens Native-born foreign citizens Foreign-born foreign citizens Native-born (native) citizens	1. Age 2. Sex 3. Country of birth 4. Country of citizenship	Duration of stay, educational attainment, labour force status, location of residence within country, reasons for migration, native-born/foreign-born status of parents
	1.2	Number of people who obtained citizenship over a given year who are: Native-born foreign citizens Foreign-born foreign citizens	1. Age 2. Sex 3. Country of birth 4. Country of citizenship	Educational attainment, labour force status, location of residence within country, duration of stay, legal grounds for obtaining citizenship (or reasons for migration), native-born/foreign-born status of parents
Flow	1.3	Annual number of immigrants ^b who are: Foreign-born Foreign citizens Foreign-born citizens Native-born foreign citizens Foreign-born foreign citizens Native-born (native) citizens	1. Age 2. Sex 3. Country of birth 4. Country of citizenship	Country of previous residence, educational attainment, reason for move, labour force status prior to move, location within country

		<i>Core</i>		<i>Additional</i>
<i>Migration indicator</i>		<i>Primary topics for disaggregation^a</i>		<i>Secondary topics for disaggregation</i>
1.4	Annual number of emigrants ^b who are: Foreign-born Foreign citizens Foreign-born citizens Native-born foreign citizens Foreign-born foreign citizens Native-born (native) citizens	1.	Age	Country of next residence, educational attainment, reason for move, labour force status, departure location within country
		2.	Sex	
		3.	Country of birth	
		4.	Country of citizenship	

Notes: Labour force status: employed, unemployed, outside labour force; reasons for migration (according to the International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics): employment (including military service), education and training, marriage, family reunification or family formation, forced displacement (refugees, asylum seekers, temporary protected status, others), other.

^a Dissemination of indicators by single country of birth or citizenship may not be possible owing to data protection and privacy concerns.

^b If information required to compute indicators 1.3 and 1.4 is not available to the national statistical office, then total net migration over a given year must be computed in lieu of those indicators.

18. Another 21 core indicators are recommended for disaggregation by migratory status (operationalized as native-born/foreign-born status and/or citizenship status) and by other topics relevant to the monitoring of policy areas 3–6. Of these 21 core indicators, 19 are part of the global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and 2 are indicators traditionally produced by national statistical offices.⁸ All indicators referring to international temporary mobility and temporary populations are considered additional, in line with decision 52/109 of the Statistical Commission. Lastly, “additional” migration indicators, which countries might consider collecting and disseminating according to national priorities or circumstances, are also identified in the report of the Expert Group.

19. With regard to the disaggregation of the proposed indicators, the Expert Group is prioritizing the following primary dimensions/topics: age, sex, foreign-born/native-born status and/or citizenship status (national or foreign). In line with the revised conceptual framework endorsed by the Statistical Commission, these latter topics would be needed to cluster the resident population into four main subgroups that could be compared across indicators and over time: foreign-born foreign citizens, foreign-born citizens, native-born foreign citizens and native-born citizens. All countries are strongly encouraged to produce the data required for the core indicators disaggregated by primary topics, in order to design, monitor and evaluate policies related to international migration and to address issues concerning migrants in countries of origin, transit and destination.

Plans and priorities for migration statistics

20. In 2023 and 2024, the Statistics Division and the Expert Group will finalize the revision of the Recommendations on Statistics for International Migration, by bringing together the revised conceptual framework and corresponding operational guidelines, the set of core and additional indicators, a review of data sources related

⁸ I.e., labour force participation rate and employment-to-population ratio.

to international migration, and other technical material on data integration for the production of migration statistics. In addition, the revised Recommendations will include advice on communication issues related to the production and dissemination of statistics on international migration and migrants.

21. The Statistics Division will continue to provide expert advice and secretariat support for all activities of the Expert Group and will continue to implement capacity development activities related to international migration statistics, including through e-learning courses.

22. The Statistics Division and the Population Division will hold the Third International Forum on Migration Statistics,⁹ in collaboration with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the International Organization for Migration, in Santiago from 24 to 26 January 2023. The Forum will be hosted by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and will consist of 6 plenary sessions and 24 parallel sessions, a workshop, a poster exhibition and side events. It will offer a unique space in which to engage in global dialogue, exchange information and network for a broad range of stakeholders, including both users and producers of data, from national and international statistical offices, other government agencies, international organizations, academia, civil society and the private sector, with the aim of building and strengthening migration data capacities around the world. The Forum will also provide a platform for sharing innovative approaches to filling data gaps in the measurement of migration and migration-related topics.

IV. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission

23. **The Commission is invited:**

(a) **To express its views and provide guidance on the scope of work, priorities, deliverables, time frame and membership of the Friends of the Chair group on social and demographic statistics; and approve the proposed plan and way forward, including the endorsement of the group's terms of reference by the Bureau of the Commission;**

(b) **Request the Friends of the Chair group to report back to the Commission in 2025;**

(c) **Endorse the set of core and additional indicators on international migration and temporary mobility as a core element of the upcoming revision of the Recommendations on Statistics for International Migration, and request the finalization of the Recommendations and their submission to the Commission in 2025.**

⁹ All documentation is available on the forum website, at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/migrationstat-forum-2023/index.html>.