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Report of the Friends of the Chair group on social and demographic statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2023/325 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Friends of the Chair group on social and demographic statistics, which is submitted to the Commission for discussion and decision.

* [E/CN.3/2024/1](#).



Report of the Friends of the Chair group on social and demographic statistics

I. Background

1. The Friends of the Chair group on social and demographic statistics is a group established under the auspices of the Statistical Commission to review that statistical area and provide recommendations for strengthened social and demographic statistics that better reflect society and its connections with the environment and the economy.

2. At its fifty-second session, the Commission, through decision 52/116, tasked the Bureau with initiating a Friends of the Chair process to review the area of social and demographic statistics.

3. At its fifty-third session, the Commission, through decision 53/105, on working methods of the Statistical Commission, again 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.

4. At its fifty-fourth session, the Commission, through decision 54/104, endorsed the establishment of the Friends of the Chair group on social and demographic statistics as a timely initiative to improve this broad area of statistics, supported the goals of the Friends of the Chair group, acknowledged the proposed mapping exercise and evaluation of existing regional and global groups working on social and demographic statistics as essential to identify strengths and areas of opportunity, and welcomed the offer of specialized agencies to support this work.

5. In the same decision, the Commission requested the Friends of the Chair group to (a) identify methodological and data gaps to measure social and demographic concerns, guided by the Sustainable Development Goals framework; (b) promote gender mainstreaming and an intersectional approach to data production, analysis and use; and (c) encourage data integration within and across pillars, using traditional and innovative data sources and methods, for greater granularity in data, both spatial and in terms of population subgroups, and in this context acknowledged the value of geocoded data as a way to strengthen integration across data sources.

6. The present report provides an overview of the activities of the Friends of the Chair group since its establishment by the Commission in 2023. Section II contains an introduction to the group. Section III provides a summary of the preliminary results under the three workstreams prioritized by the group. Section IV provides information about the proposed way forward for the group. Lastly, section V sets out the action that the Commission is invited to take.

II. Introduction

7. The Friends of the Chair group on social and demographic statistics is composed of chief statisticians from Canada, Colombia, Denmark, Hungary, Indonesia, Lithuania, Mexico, Poland, South Africa and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Observers include representatives of the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic Commission for Europe, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), as well as the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat (also serving as secretariat of the group), represented by its Population

Division and Statistics Division. The Co-Chairs of the group are Hungary and Mexico.

8. The members of the Friends of the Chair group agreed to focus on three main workstreams, launched in parallel, in order to maximize the time allocated to the group. The group also agreed on the lead countries for each workstream in May 2023, and members volunteered to join the workstream groups.

9. The three workstreams, their lead countries and tasks are as follows:

- Workstream 1: workstream group 1, led by Colombia, is tasked with mapping and reviewing the collective global and regional work in the area of social and demographic statistics.
- Workstream 2: workstream group 2, led by Canada, is tasked with reviewing national approaches and identifying elements to be included in an overarching conceptual framework for social and demographic statistics and for better data integration within and across pillars.
- Workstream 3: workstream group 3, led by Poland, is tasked with elevating the role of social and demographic statistics in the eyes of data users and producers.

10. The Friends of the Chair group held five virtual meetings, on 4 May, 13 July, 10 August, 28 September and 16 November 2023. Additionally, the members of each workstream group organized separate meetings to advance their work, which remains at an early stage of development given that the workstreams were established only recently. At each of its meetings, the Friends of the Chair group was informed about the progress of activities made under the individual workstreams, was provided with feedback and discussed the road ahead.

11. The Co-Chairs and members of the Friends of the Chair group emphasized the importance of the interconnectedness of the three workstream groups. While they are working in parallel, the progress of each is informed and enhanced by the outcomes of the others. For example, given the evolving landscape of stakeholder needs, it is suggested that lessons learned under workstream 3 feed into the mapping exercise under workstream 1.

12. Furthermore, the Co-Chairs and members of the Friends of the Chair group highlighted the need to consider the larger context of United Nations events, processes and policy discussions to ensure that the group's efforts align with and support these larger initiatives. For instance, experiences and good practices with Sustainable Development Goal reporting and monitoring may contribute to the work of the group, and it is suggested that the group consider contributing to the world social summit proposed for 2025 and the preparations leading up to it, and to "beyond GDP" initiatives.

III. Summary of preliminary results under the three workstreams

A. Workstream 1: mapping and reviewing the collective global and regional work in the area of social and demographic statistics

13. Workstream group 1¹ is tasked with mapping and reviewing the collective global and regional work in the area of social and demographic statistics. The results of the mapping and reviewing exercise will be used by the Friends of the Chair group to:

¹ The members of workstream group 1 are Colombia (lead), Denmark, Indonesia, Lithuania and Mexico. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCWA), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and WHO are observers.

(a) Assess the range of areas that are currently covered and the priorities and challenges regarding the production, dissemination and use of related statistics;

(b) Identify gaps in social and demographic statistics in terms of lack of data, particularly Sustainable Development Goals data for which reporting is still weak; gaps related to geographical disaggregation and population subgroups; and methodological developments needed to produce more timely, granular and inclusive statistics.

14. The results of this exercise will contribute to the overall objective of the Friends of the Chair group to produce specific recommendations for an agile and more responsive system of social and demographic statistics, in line with the central promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind, while anticipating data needs beyond 2030.

15. Soon after the establishment of the Friends of the Chair group, the Co-Chairs and members agreed that, as a first step, the mapping and reviewing exercise should cover key stakeholders working in social and demographic statistics at the global and regional levels. Those include groups reporting to the Statistical Commission, groups reporting to United Nations regional statistical bodies, selected custodian agencies and Secretariat entities, and member countries of the Friends of the Chair group.

16. To achieve its objectives, the members of the workstream group agreed that mapping should start with small, foundational steps but that there should be continued learning and refinement of the process based on the results and stakeholder input. The scope of the mapping exercise may later be expanded to include other international bodies working in the area of social and demographic statistics.

17. Under the leadership of the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) of Colombia, it was decided to initially approach: (a) the Chairs of the 12 groups in the field of social and demographic statistics currently reporting to the Statistical Commission; (b) the Chairs of the 17 groups in the field of social and demographic statistics currently (or recently) reporting to regional statistical bodies; (c) the 10 national statistical offices of the Friends of the Chair group member countries; and (d) three selected custodian agencies and seven Secretariat entities working in the field of social and demographic statistics. The full list of stakeholders that have been initially approached can be found in annex I.

18. Questionnaires were designed to capture information from the key stakeholders outlined above. It was agreed that the questionnaires should include information about the groups' expected duration, geographical coverage, membership, mandates and collaboration with other groups. They should also allow for mapping of methodological work, available data, solutions and tools, as well as of concerns, challenges and shortcomings identified by the stakeholders. Furthermore, the questionnaires included questions on perspectives and successful experiences concerning improved social and demographic statistics that have the potential to be replicated.

19. While responses to these questionnaires continue to be analysed by the Secretariat and the Chair of the workstream group, some of the preliminary results regarding the range of areas that are currently covered, membership overlaps, concerns and challenges, as well as successful experiences identified by the groups reporting to the Statistical Commission, regional statistical bodies, selected custodian agencies and Secretariat entities and Friends of the Chair group member countries are presented below. The full report will be available as a background document.

1. Range of areas

20. Looking at the focus of work of currently active groups reporting to the Statistical Commission and regional statistical bodies in the area of social and demographic statistics, 12 groups have a focus on specific population groups: international migrants (two groups), refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons (one group), urban populations (one group), slum populations and informal settlements (one group), persons with disabilities (one group) and older populations (one group). There is a relatively higher focus on gender-related statistics, with four groups focusing on women and men.

21. Time-use surveys, population and housing censuses and prison systems data are each the focus of work of one group. Civil registration and vital statistics systems and administrative records in general receive more attention from the statistical community, being the focus of two regional groups each. Household surveys receive much attention, with three groups focusing on them.

22. Groups cover a range of statistical domains. Gender statistics is the field most widely covered, with three regional groups and one global group focusing on them. Within the demographic and social statistics domain, groups are quite widespread across fields such as population, migration, labour, health, income and consumption, human settlements and time-use. Based on the Classification of Statistical Activities, the only fields not covered by groups in the demographic and social statistics domain are education, social protection and culture.

23. In addition, groups indicated that the focus of their work lies in various fields of the governance statistics domain and of the statistical infrastructure and methodology domain (see annex II).

2. Group membership

24. An examination of the membership of the groups highlights their diverse global composition as well as the extent to which countries are committed to collaborating on global and regional challenges in the field of social and demographic statistics. Groups reporting to the Commission are on average composed of 40 Member States. This number ranges from 8 members in the case of the Expert Group on Identifying Slum and Non-slum Enumeration Areas to 166 members in the case of the Washington Group on Disability Statistics. Groups reporting to regional statistical bodies have, on average, 18 members.

25. Canada, Italy, and South Africa are particularly notable for their active participation, each being a member of 11 global or regional groups. They are followed by Mexico and the United States of America, each being part of nine global or regional groups.

26. Annex III breaks down the membership of groups by world regions. It can be noted that Economic Commission for Europe member countries represent more than half of the members of the United Nations Expert Group on Migration Statistics, while almost half of the members of the Praia Group on Governance Statistics are members of the Economic Commission for Africa.

3. Concerns and challenges

27. Data comparability, timeliness, data granularity and resource constraints seem to have been recognized as the main challenges.

(a) Data harmonization and comparability

28. Of the 21 groups in the area of social and demographic statistics reporting to the Statistical Commission and regional statistical bodies that provided responses on the question of challenges and shortcomings,² a significant portion³ emphasized the lack of harmonized and comparable data, at both the national and international levels, as being among the main challenges.

29. At the national level, national statistical offices struggled to make international standards known and to ensure that they were followed among members of the national statistical system, notably data owners and providers, who were often in charge of maintaining administrative registers. That seemed to speak to the importance of conferring on national statistical offices a leading role for data harmonization across the various stages of the data value chain, including through the implementation of a strong capacity-building programme involving all relevant government institutions, while taking into account disparities in statistical infrastructure.

30. While groups recognized that administrative sources could support more timely, regular and granular data,⁴ they acknowledged that such sources, for example, population registers, border records, visa permits and civil registration records, were not fully in place in all countries and, in many cases, national statistical offices did not have access to utilize them for statistical purposes. Difficulties in comparing administrative data with other sources, such as surveys, due to different classifications or definitions, were also acknowledged. Those points were reiterated by Secretariat entities, which underlined challenges regarding the quality of administrative sources, access difficulties, especially on the micro level, and the insufficient influence of statistical offices over the content, timeliness and improvement of administrative sources.

31. At the international level, the need for international comparability through common definitions was explicitly highlighted. The need for internationally agreed guidance to keep up with changing societies was underscored, with examples given in the areas of migration and mobility, education, governance and sampling methodologies for marginalized population groups. The development of guidance and methodologies that were still lacking, for example regarding the combined use of various sources and classifications for demographic characteristics, was also highlighted as a significant challenge.

32. Resource allocation and availability was cited often as a factor hindering the adoption of international standards and hence international comparability, as insufficient resources prevented the scaling-up of technological solutions, training programmes and data integration.

² As at 27 October 2023, responses had been received from 12 global groups, 10 regional groups, 8 custodian agencies and Secretariat entities and 7 Friends of the Chair group member countries. These responses have been reflected in the present report, while additional responses received later will be addressed in the analysis contained in the background report and further analyses.

³ The United Nations Expert Group on Migration Statistics, the Expert Group on City Prosperity Index, the Titchfield Group on Ageing-Related Statistics and Age-Disaggregated Data, the Praia Group on Governance Statistics, the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys and the Technical Advisory Group on Demographic and Social Statistics for Arab Countries.

⁴ The Economic Commission for Europe Steering Group on Population and Housing Censuses, the United Nations Expert Group on Migration Statistics and ECLAC regional group responsible for the elaboration of recommendations for the integration of administrative records related to children.

(b) Data timeliness and granularity

33. Data gaps, especially those pertaining to vulnerable population groups, and the timely availability of data, were recurring themes recognized as significant challenges by a few groups.

34. Ensuring the granularity of data for in-depth analysis was a concern shared by multiple groups, custodian agencies and Secretariat entities. More detailed data disaggregation by various sociodemographic characteristics and the consideration of data linkage were found to be essential. For example, national surveys not specifically designed to adequately cover migrant populations could not generally produce data disaggregated by migrant status.

(c) Resource and capacity constraints

35. Several groups highlighted limitations that they faced in terms of funding and resource constraints in general as a common challenge hindering effective data collection and analysis. This point was also raised by Secretariat entities.

36. Technical capacity was an area of concern for at least four groups and Secretariat entities. Insufficient technical ability to collect, analyse and disseminate more comprehensive statistics while meeting the data needs of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was a recognized shortcoming, in developing countries in particular. Some of the groups touched upon the complexities related to non-response bias and issues related to data confidentiality and privacy. Ensuring accurate and comprehensive data while respecting privacy proved to be a complex task.

37. Lastly, a lack of strong cooperation and coordination between institutions and among departments within institutions was identified as a challenge, as were insufficiently developed advocacy and communication programmes.

38. Unstable conditions, forced displacements and the impact of conflict were also cited as obvious challenges for statistical systems, given their impact on the completeness of administrative records and on the implementation of population and housing censuses.

(d) Perspectives and successful experiences

39. When it comes to different perspectives and successful experiences that the groups, selected custodian agencies, Secretariat entities and Friends of the Chair group member countries believe should be considered by the Friends of the Chair group as having the potential to be replicated for an agile and more responsive system of social and demographic statistics, the recurring themes can be summarized as follows.

(i) Collaboration and stakeholder engagement

40. Several groups highlighted the value of cooperation and coordination throughout the national data ecosystem (beyond national statistical systems).

41. Stakeholder engagement and a collaborative spirit along the entire data value chain were found to improve data quality, foster a more comprehensive understanding of challenges and help with the development of effective solutions. Cross-disciplinary interlinkages, coordination and collaboration were found to be mutually reinforcing practices that rendered stronger results and significantly increased the impact that social and demographic statistics might have in policy design and implementation.

42. The formation of smaller but diverse subgroups focused on specific topics of interest was shared as a successful experience in making progress on new areas of

official statistics, with national statistical offices, producers of administrative data, international and regional institutions, researchers and civil society each bringing their complementary experience and specific expertise.

43. One Friends of the Chair group member country highlighted cross-pollination, whereby members of one group actively coordinate with other groups to advocate and share ongoing work, as a powerful practice.

(ii) *Sharing successful experiences from specific implementations*

44. Several groups and Friends of the Chair group member countries shared concrete examples, toolkits and self-assessment tools that had been effective in their respective areas, from time-use statistics to governance and the identification of slum areas. The establishment of platforms, repositories and compendiums, communities of practice and forums where users could access data and other resources and exchange views with peers was hailed as one of the most impactful practices. Those practical tools could serve as models for other groups and entities and underscore the value of practical, on-the-ground solutions.

(iii) *Development of statistical methodologies*

45. The use of common concepts, definitions and classifications across various sources was shared as a successful practice that facilitated the use of combined sources and expanded the range of available data.

46. Friends of the Chair group member countries appreciated the development of standards, frameworks and guidance for the collection and compilation of data on specific issues, highlighting their usefulness in boosting coverage and harmonization. In the same vein, member countries of the group welcomed instances in which indicators were aligned across different statistical frameworks, as that facilitated comparison and decreased the response burden.

(iv) *Inclusion of vulnerable or specific groups in statistics*

47. Some groups emphasized the importance of the systematic inclusion of various demographic groups, such as slum dwellers, migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons and persons with disabilities in data production processes. Ensuring that those demographic groups were represented in statistics aided in the development of informed policies tailored to the specific needs of vulnerable groups, ensuring that no one was left behind on the path to sustainable development.

(v) *Innovative data collection, statistics production and analysis*

48. Groups and Friends of the Chair group member countries highlighted the importance of using innovative methods (such as small area estimation) and the integration of multiple data sources, including non-traditional ones such as private and citizen-generated data, geospatial data (including satellite images and remote sensing), big data and administrative data. Those innovations enhanced the depth, breadth and applicability of data. Groups also emphasized the significance of building statistical capacity through training and the provision of technical and substantive support. Training on those innovative methods was recognized as paramount for implementation.

49. Based on the responses as a whole, it seems evident that a blend of inclusive data practices, collaboration, concrete practical solutions and innovative methodologies might hold the key to addressing contemporary challenges in the realm of social and demographic statistics.

B. Workstream 2: reviewing national approaches and identifying elements for an overarching conceptual framework for social and demographic statistics and for better data integration within and across pillars

50. Workstream group 2⁵ is tasked with reviewing national approaches and identifying possible elements for an overarching conceptual framework for social and demographic statistics in order to propose scalable solutions to produce and disseminate social and demographic statistics that will be fit for purpose now and in the future.

51. Under the leadership of Statistics Canada, workstream group 2 held six meetings between June and November 2023 (see annex V) to (a) learn from the development of social statistics over time; (b) take stock of ongoing work on “beyond GDP” initiatives undertaken by the Network of Economic Statisticians and the Network’s proposal for an integrated approach to the economic, social and environmental statistics pillars; (c) learn from the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting about the process of developing an accounting framework related to environmental outcomes such as ecosystem health and identify common elements between social and environmental statistics; and (d) review and reflect on the commonalities between domestic and international quality of life frameworks and start identifying potential building blocks for integrated social-demographic data ecosystems, beginning with “demographic accounting”.

52. The discussions at the meetings held so far may be summarized as follows:

(a) For more than 70 years, the Statistical Commission had been discussing and deciding on numerous initiatives aimed at conceptualizing and systematizing social and demographic statistics, a pillar covering a vast and diverse set of thematic areas. Past initiatives⁶ had contributed to the development and organization of the diverse areas and concerns covered in that field, including in terms of thematic conceptual frameworks with agreed classifications, concepts, definitions and methods. However, better integration within the pillar, across the themes, was needed, and the Friends of the Chair group was working on recommendations to address that challenge;

(b) The Network of Economic Statisticians was bringing forward a proposal for a central framework for inclusive and sustainable well-being, building on the System of National Accounts (SNA), the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting and a new system for sociodemographic accounts (yet to be developed). The Network was looking forward to collaborating with the Friends of the Chair group, in particular to receive feedback on the need, scope and policy applications of the proposed new system for sociodemographic accounting;

(c) Workstream group 2 had also learned from the evolution of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, a flexible framework that integrated economic and environmental data to provide a comprehensive view of how the economy and the environment interacted, including the natural capital assets that benefited society, such as ecosystem services. Key elements in the successful establishment and adoption of the System included (i) the definition of well-structured conceptual frameworks prior to the development of specific measurement approaches; (ii) the potential for evolution over time; (iii) the use of a wide variety of data sources, including geospatial information; (iv) the potential for interaction with social and

⁵ The members of workstream 2 are Canada (lead country), Indonesia, Lithuania, Mexico and the United Kingdom. ECLAC, ESCAP, ESCWA, ILO and WHO are observers.

⁶ See annex V.

economic statistics to provide better estimates of the health of the environment and its contributions to society and the economy; and (v) the use of physical flows, the spatial extent and condition of ecosystems and quality measures when valuations were not possible or appropriate;

(d) Regarding the initial steps towards establishing promising practices for the better integration of social and demographic statistics and environmental and economic outcomes, workstream group 2 had learned from the experience of Statistics Canada. In particular, it had taken stock of various initiatives, including the implementation of the Quality of Life Framework for Canada,⁷ for monitoring well-being and its determinants; the enhancement of data integration through the integrated social data programme;⁸ the increase in data granularity through the Disaggregated Data Action Plan; and the enhancement of timely data availability by means of the quarterly Canadian Social Survey. Throughout the development of the Quality of Life Framework, other international and national frameworks and indicators had been considered to ensure alignment.⁹ Within Statistics Canada, the Framework was providing additional impetus for a systems approach to social statistics that used harmonized outcome indicators to “unlock” the data through more consistent population- and place-based breakdowns across data sets and more consistent time series for social data. “People”, “places”, “outcomes” and “time” were building blocks for that approach.

53. Given that social statistics were ultimately about people, workstream group 2 had decided to start by unlocking the population data backbone and taking stock of national experiences in the establishment and maintenance of a population data system in a demographic accounting framework. To respond to the need for relevant national population estimates, countries had embarked on different initiatives. As encouraged by the Statistical Commission in its decision 53/107, Statistics Lithuania had developed a statistical population register, which collected and integrated data from administrative records and statistical surveys regarding usual residents, their distribution in territories and their demographic and economic characteristics. The register was currently used to produce demographic statistics on birth, mortality and migration. The Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom used a demographic accounting approach, which was at the centre of a hybrid statistics system. A dynamic population model produced estimates, including uncertainty, of population stocks and flows by single year of age, sex and calendar year, at the local authority level in England and Wales. Birth and death data was taken from registers, while information on migration was derived from models based on administrative data. As an extension of its demographic estimates, Statistics Canada produced population projections using the cohort-component method for projections by age and sex (and soon gender) at the national, provincial and territorial levels. It used microsimulation to project population characteristics (in relation to Indigenous status, ethnocultural diversity and linguistic projections, for example) and for population projections at lower levels of geography. Although they involved different

⁷ The Quality of Life Framework has been designed to incorporate the highest order of government priorities that drive data requirements. The Framework includes five domains: prosperity, health, society, environment and good governance. It also includes two cross-cutting lenses: fairness and inclusion (disaggregation beyond averages) and sustainability and resilience (a long-term view).

⁸ The integrated social data programme model takes a user-centric approach by providing different data collection options to serve different data needs.

⁹ Particular attention was given to alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (Canadian Indicator Framework), the Gender Results Framework of Canada (Gender-based Analysis Plus), the Social Inclusion Framework of Statistics Canada (Canada’s Anti-Racism Strategy), the Disaggregated Data Action Plan, the Canadian Index of Well-being and the Framework for Measuring Well-Being and Progress of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

approaches, all of those initiatives shared three common elements: (a) they had been developed to respond to policy concerns and provided timely demographic estimates disaggregated by characteristics of national interest and responded to data needs related to the planning exercises of key stakeholders; (b) they required strong partnerships and collaboration with the owners of the administrative records; and (c) they required intensive and skilled resources.

54. From a global perspective, it was acknowledged that there were challenges for international comparability arising from the diverse types and availability of data sources and the use of a variety of statistical concepts (for example, de facto versus de jure resident populations) and methods. The need to evaluate data quality and make adjustments (for example, to address census undercoverage or overcoverage and demographic or distributional distortions) had also been stressed. At the country level, it was important to address discrepancies between data sources (through external validation or the development of model-based estimates).

55. Workstream group 2 would continue to discuss key building blocks and identify existing national practices for organizing social and demographic statistics programmes, with a view to identifying both common themes and promising solutions that might be scalable to improve granularity, frequency, timeliness and overall data integration.

C. Workstream 3: elevating the role of social and demographic statistics in the eyes of data users and producers

56. Workstream group 3¹⁰ is tasked with elevating the role of social and demographic statistics in the eyes of data users and producers. It aims to assess communication practices, engagement with stakeholders and data access modalities in the member countries of the workstream group.

57. The results of this work will contribute to the overall objective of the Friends of the Chair group to produce specific recommendations for an agile and more responsive system of social and demographic statistics, in line with the central promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind, while anticipating data needs beyond 2030.

58. The members and Co-Chairs of the Friends of the Chair group initially agreed that the workstream group:

(a) Should consider the expectations and perspectives of users of social and demographic statistics, while promoting the role of statisticians in designing statistical products that contextualize data for specific user needs and highlight the human meaning behind statistics;

(b) Could elevate the role of social and demographic statistics in the eyes of data users and producers by teasing out an opposite angle, namely the question of what happens to societies when social and demographic data are not available;

(c) Should showcase the work of national statistical offices on data protection and privacy, to address low public acceptability of data linkage and the need for investment in cybersecurity and technology infrastructure;

(d) Should discuss communication of future of social and demographic statistics, including the use of new data sources like mobile data and remote sensing.

¹⁰ The members of workstream group 3 are Poland (lead), Indonesia, Lithuania, Mexico and the United Kingdom. ESCWA is an observer.

59. Under the leadership of Statistics Poland, the workstream 3 group held one meeting in 2023, at which members discussed current challenges and their relevance for the workstream, the organization of work and the potential activities and deliverables.

60. Some of the challenges that were emphasized as particularly crucial for the workstream included (a) increasing demands for data disaggregation and timeliness; (b) declining response rates in household surveys; and (c) low public acceptability of administrative data linkage. Some additional challenges were also noted, such as insufficient use of data potential, and there was growing awareness of privacy and security concerns. Microdata access and dissemination issues also were mentioned as common challenges. Potential solutions shared included the establishment of safe centres for the use of microdata within regulatory limitations or the creation of secure data platforms for accessing microdata for research purposes. It was stressed that stakeholders needed to be aware of those developments, to address any fears or concerns they might have.

61. Members also noted challenges in communicating data from different sources, such as administrative data and data from censuses and surveys, due to variations in classifications and definitions. Difficulties in achieving harmonization and consistent definitions to meet diverse needs were acknowledged, with examples being shared by Poland and the United Kingdom. Reaching out to various stakeholders, including line ministries, within the national statistical system was noted as being crucial for effective communication.

62. The members of the workstream group agreed to share their experiences in communicating social and demographic statistics and to share effective communication strategies for engaging respondents and enhancing their participation, in order to improve response rates.

63. Workstream group members touched upon the need to design a set of recommendations, or a “general framework”, on the communication of social and demographic statistics. It was proposed that, as a first step, a mini questionnaire be sent out to workstream group 3 member countries to collect information about their communication practices, stakeholder engagement and means or channels of communication.

64. A template was developed to collect information from the workstream group 3 member countries. In particular, member countries were asked to report on stakeholder engagement strategies, communication channels used, communication materials produced (including web content, publications, press releases, infographics, leaflets, booklets and videos), microdata access, methods for raising awareness and engaging respondents in order to overcome decreasing response rates in surveys, mechanisms for obtaining stakeholder feedback on innovation and ways to communicate the importance of social and demographic statistics.

65. Responses to these questionnaires will be analysed by the Secretariat and the Chair of workstream group 3. The analysis will be presented as a background document to that report. Based on the results from these questionnaires and outcomes of workstreams 1 and 2, a workplan will be formulated, which might include the production of bespoke communication materials, a set of recommendations or a “general framework” on the communication of social and demographic statistics, and thematic webinars at a later stage.

IV. Proposed way forward for the Friends of the Chair group

66. It is expected that the Friends of the Chair group will continue its work and produce a report with strategic recommendations for strengthened social and demographic statistics that better reflect society, as well as its connections with the environment and economy, to be presented at the fifty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission, in March 2026.

67. The Friends of the Chair group will continue mapping and reviewing the collective global and regional work in the area of social and demographic statistics. It will also continue assessing communication practices, engagement with stakeholders and data access modalities in the area of social and demographic statistics and will seek dialogue opportunities with key users.

68. The Friends of the Chair group has agreed on the need for an overarching conceptual framework and the identification of an integrated data infrastructure to organize social and demographic statistics. However, it has also acknowledged that this framework and infrastructure will take time and engagement to fully flesh out. This process will include careful consideration of the multiple frameworks that have already been developed. The group is also mindful of the need to identify multiple options or road maps for improved social and demographic statistics to suit national statistical systems at various levels of development. Building on the mapping and reviewing of the collective global and regional work in the area of social and demographic statistics and reflecting on the national and international frameworks for organizing social and demographic data, the group is identifying key building blocks belonging to the social and demographic pillar, as well as areas that are cross-cutting across pillars, and is considering ways to better integrate social and demographic statistics within and across pillars. Additional information is available in the background document to the present report.

A. Building blocks: social and demographic statistics and their components

69. The Friends of the Chair group acknowledges that social and demographic statistics concern people and their relationships with one another and that the objectives regarding those statistics are multifaceted. Demographic statistics serve as a crucial foundation for policymaking, providing evidence concerning the quantity and characteristics of people over time and across places. Social statistics provide insights into well-being, quality of life and standards of living, encompassing social outcomes like health, education, income security, housing and access to food over time and across places. Both objective and subjective measures of well-being are important for understanding the human condition. Those statistics also provide insight into life-course perspectives, relationships, age- and gender-specific matters and distributional differences, over time and across places.

70. The Friends of the Chair group has reflected on elements of national and global frameworks that serve as key building blocks, although sometimes grouped differently, for social and demographic statistics:

- People: population stock (such as counts, estimates and projections providing quantity), population flows (such as births, deaths and migration) and characteristics of individuals (such as age, union status, disability status, gender and other intersectional considerations)

- Outcomes:
 - Objective: education, health, time use (such as unpaid work, work-life balance and leisure), employment, income, wealth and housing, among other things
 - Subjective: well-being, including physical and mental health, learning, sense of purpose and contribution and meaningful work, among other things
- Relationships: safety and violence; social cohesion and social capital, including trust in others; sense of belonging to community; confidence in institutions; and community safety.

71. In addition, two cross-cutting building blocks that are paramount for social and demographic statistics have been identified:

- Places: geography as an element for analysing social and demographic statistics and as a link across themes and domains
- Time: time as an aid in understanding and anticipating changes in population, outcomes and relationships.

72. The Friends of the Chair group acknowledges the imperative of having a flexible framework that can adjust and cater to user needs. It acknowledges being in the early stages of conceptualizing the structure, understanding that there are more complex factors involved. The group will continue its ongoing discussions to refine each key building block and enhance the elements of the initial proposal.

73. The Friends of the Chair group will also identify and consider existing international standards (international concepts, definitions and frameworks), methods (national and international) and national data sources, enabling environments for statistical production (such as legal frameworks, data governance and resources) and data gaps. The review will include current solutions adopted by countries to improve the granularity, frequency and timeliness of data and overall data integration.

B. Better integration: achieving more coherent social and demographic statistics and the use of accounts

74. Social statistics are often used to inform public policy decisions about social services and understand the effectiveness, cost-effectiveness and optimal targeting of these services. There is a strong demand among decision makers for timely and granular data to inform such decisions.

75. The Friends of the Chair group acknowledges the need to identify areas that are cross-cutting across other statistical domains. Strengthening the integration of economic, social and environmental statistics offers tremendous potential to provide decision-makers with better visibility of multidimensional trade-offs. However, the group expresses concern that an economic accounting approach might not be an adequate tool for addressing and capturing the complexity of human behaviours and interactions and notes that social accounts are seldom used for informing social policy.

76. The potential for place-based statistics to be used in organizing and mapping relationships between multidimensional outcomes has been highlighted as an alternative.

77. In the context of exploring ways to better integrate social and demographic statistics and establishing links with the economic and environmental pillar, the group reviewed, as a starting point, a sample of existing national and international practices

on demographic accounting, particularly for the computation of population estimates, estimates of demographic components and population projections. Population estimates provide information on the number of people and their characteristics (including age, sex and location). Together with the components of population growth (births, deaths and migration), they are essential for the fulfilment of many legislative mandates, for responding to crises, as total controls for statistical surveys, for population projections, as denominators of many socioeconomic indicators and, in general, for the harmonization of statistics across different domains. Future work may involve looking into national transfer accounts and time accounts.

78. The group will continue to explore the feasibility of social and demographic accounts based on non-monetary metrics such as people, places and time, in line with the SNA extended accounts.

79. The group has noted the work of the Network of Economic Statisticians on the development of a central framework for inclusive and sustainable well-being and a system of population and social statistics and looks forward to receiving its initial proposal.

V. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission

80. **The Commission is invited:**

(a) **To take note of and express its views on the activities undertaken by the Friends of the Chair group on social and demographic statistics in 2023;**

(b) **To endorse the priorities and proposed activities of the group for 2024 and 2025, in particular:**

(i) **Continuing the ongoing research to identify and build upon an overarching conceptual framework and related data infrastructure to better organize and integrate social and demographic statistics within and across pillars;**

(ii) **Compiling and documenting country experiences to identify common solutions and promising practices that may be scalable for the establishment and maintenance of a population data system in a demographic accounting framework. Future work may involve looking into national transfer accounts and time accounts;**

(iii) **Continuing the ongoing mapping and reviewing of collective global and regional work in the area of social and demographic statistics, including with regard to methodological and conceptual tools.**

Annex I

Key stakeholders identified by workstream group 1

Groups reporting to the Statistical Commission

1. Advisory Expert Group on Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics (established in 2019, at the fiftieth session of the Commission)
2. Expert Group on City Prosperity Index (established in 2019, at the fiftieth session of the Commission)
3. Expert Group on Identifying Slum and Non-slum Enumeration Areas (established in 2019, at the fiftieth session of the Commission)
4. Expert Group on Innovative and Effective Ways to Collect Time-Use Statistics (established in 2018, at the forty-ninth session of the Commission)
5. United Nations Expert Group on Migration Statistics (established in 2018, at the forty-ninth session of the Commission)
6. Expert Group on Refugee, Internally Displaced Persons and Statelessness Statistics (established in 2016, at the forty-seventh session of the Commission)
7. Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics (established in 2011, at the forty-second session of the Commission)
8. Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (established in 2015, at the forty-sixth session of the Commission)
9. Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys (established in 2015, at the forty-sixth session of the Commission)
10. Praia Group on Governance Statistics (established in 2015, at the forty-sixth session of the Commission)
11. Titchfield Group on Ageing-Related Statistics and Age-Disaggregated Data (established in 2018, at the forty-ninth session of the Commission)
12. Washington Group on Disability Statistics (established in 2002, at the thirty-third session of the Commission)

Groups reporting to United Nations regional statistical bodies

1. Gender Statistics Network (Economic Commission for Africa (ECA))
2. Working group on the assessment of statistics on work relationships and labour informality (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC))
3. Working group on the compilation of experiences in generating statistics relating to prison systems (ECLAC)
4. Group of Experts on Gender Statistics and Steering Group on Gender Statistics (Economic Commission for Europe (ECE))
5. Group on Measuring Poverty and Inequality and Steering Group on Measuring Poverty and Inequality (ECE)
6. Group of Experts on Migration Statistics and Steering Group on Migration Statistics (ECE)

7. Group of Experts on Population and Housing Censuses and Steering Group on Population and Housing Censuses (ECE)
8. Working group on the guidelines for mainstreaming the gender perspective into statistical production (ECLAC)
9. Working group on the recommendations for measuring perceptions in household surveys (ECLAC)
10. Working group on the recommendations for quality analysis of household surveys (ECLAC)
11. Working group on the recommendations for the integration of administrative records related to children (ECLAC)
12. Regional civil registration and vital statistics core group for Africa (ECA)
13. Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP))
14. Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics (ESCAP)
15. Task force on hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources (ECE)
16. Technical Advisory Group on Demographic and Social Statistics for Arab Countries (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA))
17. Task Force on Population and Housing Censuses in Arab Countries (ESCWA)
18. Regional Coordination Committee on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (ESCWA)

Selected custodian agencies and Secretariat entities

1. International Labour Organization
2. Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs
3. Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs
4. ECA
5. ECE
6. ECLAC
7. ESCAP
8. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics
9. ESCWA
10. World Health Organization

Friends of the Chair group on social and demographic statistics member countries

1. Canada
2. Colombia
3. Denmark
4. Hungary

5. Indonesia
 6. Lithuania
 7. Mexico
 8. Poland
 9. South Africa
 10. United Kingdom
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Annex II

Focus of groups in the area of social and demographic statistics reporting to the Statistical Commission and regional statistical bodies

	<i>Number of groups reporting to the Statistical Commission</i>	<i>Name(s) of group(s) reporting to the Statistical Commission</i>	<i>Number of groups reporting to regional statistical bodies</i>	<i>Regional commission(s) to which reporting is provided</i>	<i>Total</i>
A. Population group					
International migrants	1	United Nations Expert Group on Migration Statistics	1	ECE	2
Refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons	1	Expert Group on Refugee, Internally Displaced Persons and Statelessness Statistics	–		1
Urban population	1	Expert Group on City Prosperity Index	–		1
Slum population and informal settlements	1	Expert Group on Identifying Slum and Non-slum Enumeration Areas	–		1
Population with disabilities	1	Washington Group on Disability Statistics	–		1
Older population	1	Titchfield Group on Ageing-Related Statistics and Age-Disaggregated Data	–		1
Women and men	1	Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics	3	ECE, ECLAC, ECA	4
B. Data source					
Time-use surveys	1	Expert Group on Innovative and Effective Ways to Collect Time-Use Statistics	–		1
Household surveys	1	Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys	2	ECLAC	3
Population and housing censuses	–		2	ECE, ESCWA	2
Civil registration and vital statistics	–		3	ESCAP, ECA, ESCWA	3
Administrative records	–		2	ECE, ECLAC	2
Prison systems	–		1	ECLAC	1
C. Statistical domain^a					
1. Demographic and social statistics					
101: Population	–		2	ECE, ECA	2
102: Migration	2	United Nations Expert Group on Migration Statistics, Expert Group on Refugee, Internally Displaced Persons and Statelessness Statistics	1	ECE	3
103: Labour	–		1	ECLAC	1
105: Health	1	Washington Group on Disability Statistics	–		1
106: Income and consumption	–		1	ECE	1

	<i>Number of groups reporting to the Statistical Commission</i>	<i>Name(s) of group(s) reporting to the Statistical Commission</i>	<i>Number of groups reporting to regional statistical bodies</i>	<i>Regional commission(s) to which reporting is provided</i>	<i>Total</i>
108: Human settlements statistics	2	Expert Group on City Prosperity Index, Expert Group on Identifying Slum and Non-slum Enumeration Areas			2
110: Time-use	1	Expert Group on Innovative and Effective Ways to Collect Time-Use Statistics	–		1
199: Demographic and social statistics, not elsewhere classified	–		2	ESCAP, ESCWA	2
4. Governance statistics					
404: Access to and quality of justice	1	Advisory Expert Group on Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics	–		1
406: Absence of corruption	1	Advisory Expert Group on Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics	–		1
408: Safety and security	1	Advisory Expert Group on Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics	–		1
499: Governance statistics, not elsewhere classified	1	Praia Group on Governance Statistics	–		1
5. Cross-cutting statistics					
503: Gender statistics	1	Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics	3	ECE, ECLAC, ECA	4
504: Special population groups	2	Washington Group on Disability Statistics, Titchfield Group on Ageing-Related Statistics and Age-Disaggregated Data	–		2
505: Living conditions and poverty	–		1	ECE	1
599: Cross-cutting statistics, not elsewhere classified	1	Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys	–		1
6. Statistical infrastructure and methodology					
	1	Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys			1

Abbreviations: ECA, Economic Commission for Africa; ECE, Economic Commission for Europe; ECLAC, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; ESCAP, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; ESCWA, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

^a See revised Classification of Statistical Activities.

Annex III

Regional breakdown of members of groups in the area of social and demographic statistics reporting to the Statistical Commission

Number of States members of each regional commission that are members of groups in the area of social and demographic statistics reporting to the Statistical Commission

<i>Regional commission</i>	<i>United Nations Expert Group on Migration Statistics</i>	<i>Expert Group on Refugee, Internally Displaced Persons and Statelessness Statistics</i>	<i>Expert Group on City Prosperity Index</i>	<i>Expert Group on Identifying Slum and Non-slum Enumeration Areas</i>	<i>Advisory Expert Group on Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics</i>	<i>Expert Group on Innovative and Effective Ways to Collect Time-Use Statistics</i>	<i>Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys</i>	<i>Washington Group on Disability Statistics</i>	<i>Titchfield Group on Ageing-Related Statistics and Age-Disaggregated Data</i>	<i>Praia Group on Governance Statistics</i>	<i>Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics</i>	<i>Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators</i>
Economic Commission for Africa	3	21	4	5	–	2	3	46	12	21	5	7
Economic Commission for Europe	11	17	1	–	–	5	2	43	19	7	7	7
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean	4	3	2	1	–	2	–	29	9	9	3	5
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific	3	11	1	2	–	6	4	36	14	7	5	5
Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia	–	5	1	–	–	–	1	12	4	3	1	2
Total	21	57	9	8	–	15	10	166	58	47	21	26

Annex IV

Meetings of workstream group 2

<i>Meeting type</i>	<i>Meeting number</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Discussions</i>
Level-setting meetings	1	29 June 2023	Overview of the discussions held and decisions taken by the Statistical Commission on social and demographic statistics since 1947
	2	20 July 2023	Knowledge gained under the economic statistics pillar
	3	17 August 2023	Lessons learned from the process of developing an environmental economic accounting framework and elements in the frontier between social and environmental statistics
Meetings on common elements in national systems for social and demographic statistics	4	26 September 2023	Quality of Life Framework for Canada and integrated social data programme of Statistics Canada
	5	24 October 2023	Country experiences with the establishment and maintenance of a population data system (Canada, Lithuania, United Kingdom)
	6	9 November 2023	Building blocks for a conceptual framework to organize social and demographic statistics

Annex V

Overview of the discussions held and decisions taken by the Statistical Commission on social and demographic statistics since 1947: a chronological journey through initiatives

1. The Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs undertook a comprehensive historical overview of the development and transformation of social and demographic statistics within the Statistical Commission, highlighting key initiatives and debates, the evolution of social domains and concerns over time, and contemporary efforts to ensure the continued relevance of such statistics in achieving global development goals. A summary of the findings is presented below.
2. In the 1950s, a review of national practices resulted in the publication, in 1954, of a report entitled “International definition and measurement of standards and levels of living”, articulating the need for policy-relevant social statistics and indicators, identifying a list of basic components and outlining a number of steps for improving the quality of data and strengthening national capacity in the field of social statistics. In 1956, the Statistical Commission adopted the first set of principles and recommendations for population and housing censuses, laying the foundation for structuring social and demographic statistics.
3. Subsequent activities in the 1970s led to the formulation of the System of Social and Demographic Statistics in 1972 and the Framework for Social and Demographic Statistics in 1975, which were aimed at harmonizing concepts, definitions and data linkages across various dimensions.
4. During the 1980s, the Commission engaged in a debate about whether to establish a more comprehensive system for social and demographic statistics or prioritize the development of headline indicators. While the latter was favoured, the Commission emphasized coordination among data producers and the development and use of basic data sources, and also the harmonization of underlying statistical concepts, classifications and definitions. The Statistics Division issued the Handbook on Social Indicators in 1989 as a practical tool for the selection and compilation of social indicators by countries and international organizations.
5. In the 1990s, the demand for social statistics and indicators grew significantly as a result of the need to monitor progress in the attainment of the goals and objectives agreed upon at international conferences and summits, particularly the 1990 World Summit for Children, the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, the 1995 World Summit for Social Development, the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women and the 1996 second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. In response to these demands, the Statistics Division adopted, in 1997, the minimum national social data set, comprising 15 key indicators, to guide countries in the production of basic social statistics. Methodological guidance on the extent to which the minimum set could be derived from census data was provided in a chapter of the Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, issued in 1998.
6. In 2003 and 2008, expert group meetings on setting the scope and content of social statistics were organized and hosted by the Statistics Division to identify areas of social concern and accompanying statistical data collection and its components (concepts and definitions, international standards, recommended topics, recommended tabulations and defined periodicity), population groups and geographical level of disaggregation.

7. The eight Millennium Development Goals adopted in 2000 formed a blueprint agreed to by all countries and all of the world's leading development institutions to eradicate poverty, illiteracy, hunger, discrimination against women, unsafe drinking water and environmental degradation. Monitoring of the Goals required 48 indicators linked to specific Goals. In contrast, the Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2016 are more comprehensive and ambitious, with 17 goals, 169 targets and 231 indicators. The Sustainable Development Goals encompass a wide range of topics concerning social, economic, environmental and governance issues.
