

Statistical Commission
Fifty-fifth session
27 February – 1 March 2024
Item 3(j) of the provisional agenda
Items for discussion and decision: Social statistics

Background document
Available in English only

Friends of the Chair Group on Social and Demographic Statistics - Workstream 3

Communication Strategies for Social and Demographic Statistics

Prepared by Statistics Poland and UNSD

Table of contents

Background	1
Objectives and implementation of the questionnaire.....	1
Summary of responses to the questionnaire.....	2
Importance of Social and Demographic Statistics	3
Stakeholder Engagement Strategies.....	4
Communication Channels.....	6
Microdata Access and Dissemination.....	7
Stakeholder Feedback on Innovations	8
Communication Strategies with Respondents to Improve Response Rates.....	9
Other Important Challenges	10
Annex: Template to collect information from Workstream 3 member countries.....	11

Background

Workstream 3 of the Friends of the Chair (FoC) Group on Social and Demographic Statistics is tasked with elevating the role of social and demographic statistics in the eyes of data users and producers. Initially, its focus is on assessing communication practices, engagement with stakeholders, and data access modalities in member countries of the Workstream.

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.

Objectives and implementation of the questionnaire

Under the leadership of Statistics Poland, Workstream 3 has held one meeting in 2023, where members discussed current challenges and their relevance for the Workstream, the organization of work, and the potential activities and deliverables.

Workstream members agreed to share experiences on how they communicate social and demographic statistics, as well as effective strategies to engage stakeholders, in particular respondents to promote their participation in data collection activities and improve related response rates.

Workstream members touched upon the need to design a set of recommendations for the communication of social and demographic statistics. As a first step, a mini questionnaire¹ was developed and sent out to Workstream 3 member countries.²

In particular, members of the Workstream 3 were asked to report on stakeholder engagement strategies, communication channels used, communication materials produced (including web content, publications, press releases, infographics, leaflets, booklets, videos), microdata access, methods to raise awareness and engage respondents to overcome decreasing response rates in surveys, mechanisms to obtain stakeholders' feedback on innovation and ways to communicate the importance of social and demographic statistics.

¹ See annex.

² Workstream 3 members are Poland (lead), Indonesia, Lithuania, Mexico, and the United Kingdom.

Summary of responses to the questionnaire

TOPIC	KEY RECURRENT WORDS AMONG RESPONSES
Importance of Social and Demographic Statistics	Reflecting current social and demographic situation Supporting public policies Promoting future development
Stakeholders	Government Academia Private sector Public Media
Engagement Strategies	Cooperation with other gov. bodies Training Dissemination of statistical products Consultation Collaborative research Collaboration in events and promotion Award and competition Hotline
Communication Channels	Publication Website, portal Press release Press conference Infographics Advertisement Newsletter Social media
Microdata Access and Dissemination	Data security and confidentiality Trust Safe locations or secure platforms
Stakeholder Feedback on Innovations	Non-traditional data Experimentation Concerns or fears Consultation
Improvement of Response Rates	Variety of media Relatable products Data story telling Training of enumerators Trust Cooperation with local authorities and leaders Modern technology Incentives
Other Important Challenges and Possible Solutions	Misinformation Lack of human resources Public trust Statistical literacy

1. Importance of Social and Demographic Statistics

Workstream 3 member countries emphasize the importance of social and demographic statistics and shared statements that they think could be used to make the case and elevate the role of social and demographic statistics. These statements could be mainly associated with three functions of social and demographic statistics as follows:

a) Reflecting the current social and demographic situation

Social and demographic statistics reflect the situation pertaining to a wide range of topics such as health, economy, technology, employment, etc., and help an understanding of relationships between these topics.

- Social and demographic statistics provide an overview of current social and demographic conditions and thus assist the government in evaluating development.
- The population is diverse and changes constantly.
- It is important that population statistics are timely and reliable so that they can accurately reflect the needs of everyone in a changing society.

b) Supporting public policies

Social and demographic statistics are indispensable for the government to plan, monitor, and evaluate its public policies and programmes.

- The condition and structure of the population, its distribution, and the course of demographic phenomena and processes determine not only the basic conditions, but also determine the main tasks related to the country's social and economic policies in order to fulfill its obligations, in almost all its dimensions.
- Producing high-quality, timely population statistics is essential to ensure people get the services and support they need, both within their communities and nationwide.
- Social and demographic statistics are at the heart of budget allocation at local level and for a myriad of policy decisions. For example, to maintain social, health and pension care systems
- Social and demographic statistics provide evidence for policies and public services, as well as helping businesses and investors to deliver economic growth across the country.
- Social and demographic statistics play an important role in providing data needs for evaluating SDGs targets and national development plans required by the government, private sector and various related parties.

c) Promoting future development

Social and demographics statistics are also forward-looking, and can be the basis for social development, as well as the development in the area of economy and science.

- In addition to providing evidence for policies and public services, social and demographic statistics help businesses and investors to deliver economic growth across the country.
- Social and demographics statistics are also the basis for research projects and grants implemented by research centers. They contribute to the development of science.
- From an intersectional approach, social and demographic statistics are needed to understand inequalities among population subgroups, and promote inclusive social development.
- Demographic and social statistics today – your future tomorrow.

2. Stakeholder Engagement Strategies

All Workstream 3 member countries have communication strategies for engaging stakeholders in the context of social and demographic statistics. Workstream members categorize their stakeholders and apply different strategies in order to meet the needs and interests of each stakeholder group (see Table 1). For example, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) of the UK has developed “user personas” which categorize the users into five persona groups in terms of the level of knowledge, information needs, interests, behavior, and preferences³.

Stakeholder engagement is found to ensure effective use of social and demographic statistics by all audiences while improving the quality of data by increasing the response rate and taking advantage of the expertise of each stakeholder. The common categories of stakeholders and strategies applied to each group are provided below:

a) Government

- Cooperation with other government agencies, ministries, departments and local authorities to strengthen the National Statistical Systems (NSS) as a basis for producing intersectoral statistics.
- Delivery of statistical training for government officials, which are key elements for increasing the capacity of the entire government in producing high-quality official statistics, as well as for the communication strategy.
- Provision of census/survey results and population projections along with detailed data tailored to analyze specific policy fields that inform policymakers about the characteristics of the country’s population, its living conditions and the course of demographic phenomena.
- Consultation with the government on plans and results of surveys, publications and data demands, ensuring the statistical activities carried out by the NSO meet the needs of the government and public good.

b) Academia

³ <https://service-manual.ons.gov.uk/content/writing-for-users/user-personas>

- Conduction of collaborative research in a qualitative and/or quantitative basis. Grant approved researchers and academic institutes access to granular data for further analysis, while seeking possible collaboration.
 - Discussion of social and demographic indicators, methodologies, resulting data and data needs from the academic community to involve researchers in statistical production processes.
 - Dissemination of statistical products, supplemented by technical notes that describe more detailed information including relevant conceptual frameworks, through presentations and lectures.
 - Organization of competitions for the best master's and doctoral thesis aiming to build a strong relationship with researchers.
 - Provision of seminars and trainings addressing specific topics based on the interest of counterparts. Researchers could participate in the seminars and trainings not only as participants but also as speakers/panelists.
- c) Private sector
- Collaboration with the private sector to hold major events and disseminate calls for participation in censuses/surveys to the public, enabling NSOs to reach a wider audience.
 - Organization of meetings and consultations with companies, commercial chambers, and private associations in order to identify their needs for data and publications.
 - Awards for the most active contributions from the private sector in supporting statistical activities.
- d) The public
- Conduction of public consultations on critical statistical programs, such as changes in methodology or questionnaire for a census/survey and publications, to consider the feedback and possible adjustments from the user perspective.
 - Provision of thematic webinars to publicize the results of censuses/surveys to those interested in specific social and demographic topics.
 - Setting up meetings and hotlines for the public to consult their data demands and inquire about resulting data.
 - Dissemination of statistical products in understandable and accessible formats (e.g., comments in easy-to-read language, infographics, short videos, alternative (alt) descriptions, etc.) along with utilizing various social media in order to reach as many different groups as possible including people with disabilities.
- e) Media
- Ongoing contact with journalists, broadcasters, news outlets and publishers, providing the latest results of censuses/surveys in various forms (both printed and digital).
 - Consultation with media on data and publications for comments and suggestions regarding their needs and usability.

- Issuance of press releases in two main formats, one with descriptive statistics that highlights the relevant national context accompanying visual elements, the other with more technical and detailed information for further analysis.

3. Communication Channels

Workstream 3 member countries utilize a variety of channels to communicate social and demographic statistics to diverse users, taking into account their needs, interests, usage of information, expertise and demographic attributes (see Table 1). The common channels are provided below:

- Publications (books, reports, booklets, leaflets and comics, both printed and digital form)
- Website/Portal
- Press release
- Press conference
- Infographics
- Videos/ Podcasts
- Advertisements (Posters and banners)
- Newsletters/Mails
- Social Media (X (Twitter), Instagram, Facebook, Threads and LinkedIn)

Table 1: Strategies and channels for each stakeholder

		Government	Academia	Private sector	The public	Media
Strategy	Cooperation with other governmental bodies	x				
	Training/ Seminar/ Webinar	x	x		x	
	Dissemination of statistical products	x	x (with technical notes)		x (in user-friendly formats)	x (constant contact)
	Consultation/ Discussion/ Meeting	x	x	x	x	x
	Collaborative research		x			
	Collaboration in events and promotion			x		
	Award/ Competition		x	x		

	Hotline				x	
Channel	Publication	x	x			x
	Website/Portal	x	x	x	x	x
	Press release	x	x		x	x
	Press conference					x
	Infographics	x	x	x	x	x
	Advertisement			x	x	
	Newsletter/Mail		x		x	
	Social media		x	x	x	x

Visualization is an effective measure in making statistical information easy to understand and appealing to broad users. The State Data Agency of Lithuania publishes an infographic on demographic changes in the country every month presenting key demographic indicators with visuals⁴. Additionally, all Workstream member countries utilize YouTube to deliver the video content. For example, the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) of Mexico shares videos and webinars through its YouTube channel⁵. Social media was also recognized as a key element for modernizing communication strategies and expanding stakeholder engagement.

4. Microdata Access and Dissemination

Microdata from censuses/surveys are valuable sources for academic studies and research projects conducted by government bodies, universities and other research institutes, which provide a more comprehensive and in-depth view of the social and demographic situation. However, some challenges were identified regarding the access and dissemination of microdata.

Maintaining data security and confidentiality is one of the main challenges for microdata access, given the growing awareness of privacy and security concerns among the public. This issue is closely related to the public trust in the statistical community. Microdata should be accessed in a secure environment (physically and/or online). It is also important to ensure that the microdata does not contain respondents' identifiable and sensitive information. Setting up safe locations (centers) where users can access microdata on-site, or secure data platforms for accessing microdata within regulatory limitations is one of the examples of potential solutions. ONS of UK provides microdata access through the Secure Research Service (SRS), formerly known as the Virtual Microdata Laboratory (VML), which uses the "Five Safes framework"⁶ (sometimes called the VML Security Model) developed in 2003 to describe the secure remote access in VML. The Five Safes framework is a framework for designing, describing and evaluating access systems for data, used by data

⁴ <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/infografikai>

⁵ https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=%40INEGIinforma

⁶ <https://www2.uwe.ac.uk/faculties/BBS/Documents/1601.pdf>.

providers, data users and regulators. INEGI adapts this framework to operate its Microdata Laboratory.

In addition, NSOs should verify users' affiliations and the intended use of microdata in order to ensure that provided microdata is used for scientific purposes by appropriate individuals/organizations. Requiring users to sign an agreement, including penalties for breaking rules, and to participate in training sessions about confidentiality and relevant regulations may assure the secure use of microdata within the research purposes and legal frameworks.

Challenges due to needs for more disaggregated geographical data were also noted by Workstream 3 member countries. Sometimes the geographical information of microdata is limited to a specific level (e.g., region, state, municipality), even if users need lower levels of geographic disaggregation for more targeted analysis.

Coordination with other departments of the NSO outside the social and demographic area, as well as other members of the NSS, may increase the feasibility of the analysis that the users will undertake. Such coordination requires users to be clear about the aiming output to decide whether relevant statistical bodies could provide their data while protecting data confidentiality.

5. Stakeholder Feedback on Innovations

Recognizing growing demands for more timely and granular data and data gaps in social and demographic statistics, NSOs and other statistical bodies are developing and experimenting with innovative methods, including integration of non-traditional data such as private and citizen-generated data, geospatial data (e.g., satellite images, remote sensing), big data and administrative data, etc. Workstream 3 member countries have provided various opportunities to let stakeholders be aware of and informed about the latest developments and to get feedback and address any potential concerns or fears they might have.

Consultations with stakeholders are a crucial way to get feedback and reviews on new statistical approaches regarding the methodology, data sources and usability based on user needs. For example, ONS of the UK ran a consultation on the future of a statistical system that would integrate administrative data into the population and migration statistics⁷. Relevant government bodies and academic institutions are included as relevant actors in these consultations.

Publications, websites and social media could publicize the latest developments, and ongoing and future projects. Adding explanations about the use of new data sources to metadata files is beneficial, in particular for professional users.

NSOs could also present their innovations through conducting meetings, forums and seminars, as well as attending the events organized by stakeholders.

⁷ <https://consultations.ons.gov.uk/ons/futureofpopulationandmigrationstatistics/>

6. Communication Strategies with Respondents to Improve Response Rates

Declining response rates for surveys and other data collection efforts is recognized as a common challenge to social and demographic statistics and other statistical fields. Workstream 3 member countries shared some effective communication strategies that they have employed to engage respondents and improve response rates.

Promoting censuses/surveys through a variety of media (e.g., letters, posters, flyers, magazines, newspapers, TV, radio, websites, newsletters, social media, etc.) is a fundamental way to involve all segments of society in the data collection process. Statistics Poland has a web portal for statistical surveys with comprehensive information about surveys and interviewers⁸. Statistics Poland also set up a hotline channel dedicated to specific surveys and their respondents. Collaborations with private sectors in disseminating advertisements and messages through their channels could amplify the reach and impact of the promotion. It is important to inform the public not only about the implementation of the surveys (e.g., survey period, methods, scope) but also their purposes and benefits, getting the respondents to be aware of the importance of data collection activities.

Disseminating the results of the censuses/surveys in a meaningful and relatable way could also motivate respondents; for example using interactive tools and data story telling that make statistical results relevant in day-to-day life.

When it comes to increasing the response rates, building public trust in censuses/surveys is also mentioned as a challenge. Solutions to overcome this challenge include conveying the importance of collecting and sharing data to the public through the promotion of statistical activities and training for enumerators to enhance their communication skills.

Trust in enumerators is another factor for improving the response rates. While performing their duties, enumerators should carry a letter or certificate issued by the NSOs that proves they truly belong to the NSOs and have been well-trained.

Cooperation with local authorities and community leaders may also increase the acceptance of the survey activities and enumerators in local communities.

To decrease respondent burden, applying modern technologies and offering respondents alternative data collection modes was mentioned as a strategy. The use of technologies have the potential to reduce the time of the interview, increase confidentiality of responses (in particular when sensible questions are being asked) and help to promote an inclusive approach facilitating that population with diverse characteristics (e.g., gender, age, occupation, health conditions, religion, language, disability, social and economic status) have more convenient options to respond in censuses and surveys. Providing the option for self-reporting either online, or using

⁸ <https://badania-ankietowe.stat.gov.pl/>

the NSO's devices (e.g. laptop, tablet, cell phone, earphones) is an example of such innovation. In this context, ONS of UK has carried out pilot studies and published information on how to improve survey engagement with a focus on online surveys⁹.

Additionally, some Workstream 3 members offer incentives to the respondents, especially to those who participated in a long interview or online self-reporting in the form of a souvenir, special prize or lottery.

7. Other Important Challenges and Possible Solutions

Apart from the central challenge of addressing declining response rates, there were some (non-financial) challenges for communication in the area of social and demographic statistics which Workstream 3 member countries commonly mentioned. Reaching to a variety of users, misinformation, lack of human resources and promoting public trust were emphasized as particularly crucial.

While engagement with all stakeholders is essential for successful communication of social and demographic statistics, it is difficult to find suitable and effective forms of communication for the respective group of audience. NSOs are struggling to disseminate their deliverables, information and messages, including complicated methodologies in an understandable way for all users, whereby strengthening statistical literacy across society. Accessibility and inclusivity of statistical products for elderly people and people with disabilities should also be considered.

Given the current situation where fake news and misinformation are having an increasingly serious impact on communication, there is a concern about ensuring the accuracy of information. It is noted that the NSOs need to prevent incorrect data and information from spreading across the public, especially through mass media and social media.

Another challenge lies in the lack of human resources with skills for external communication, such as analyzing data needs and interests of stakeholders, optimizing the dissemination channels and strategies and enhancing data visualizations.

9

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/methodologies/labourmarketsurveyresearchandresultsoverview>
<https://blog.ons.gov.uk/2019/01/10/designing-future-surveys/>

Annex: Template to collect information from Workstream 3 member countries

Workstream 3 Mini Questionnaire: Communication Strategies for Social and Demographic Statistics

Dear WS3 Member,

Thank you for your participation in our ongoing discussions about communication strategies for social and demographic statistics. Your insights and experiences are invaluable to our collective efforts to elevate the role of social and demographic statistics in the eyes of users and producers. Please take a few minutes to complete this questionnaire below.

Part 1: General Information

Country Name:

Institution Name:

Name and title of respondent:

Part 2: Stakeholder Engagement Strategies

Please describe your office's strategies for engaging stakeholders in the context of social and demographic statistics. Do you categorize various stakeholders to enhance the effectiveness of your communication efforts? If so, please share any specific strategies used for each group (e.g., government, academic researchers, the public, private sector, the media, etc.)

Part 3: Communication Materials

Please list the various channels of communication and materials your office utilizes for disseminating and communicating social and demographic statistics (e.g., web content, print publications, electronic publications, press releases, infographics, leaflets, booklets, videos, and social media).

Part 4: Microdata Access and Dissemination

Are there any challenges in microdata access and dissemination that your office has encountered? If so, please describe these challenges. Have you implemented any solutions to address these challenges, such as safe data centers or secure data platforms for research purposes? Please provide details.

Part 5: Effective Communication Strategies with Respondents

Can you share any effective communication strategies your office has employed to engage respondents and improve response rates for surveys and other data collection efforts in the field of social and demographic statistics?

Part 6: Stakeholder Feedback on Innovations

How do you ensure that stakeholders are aware of and informed about the latest developments in the field of social and demographic statistics (for example when exploring the use of nontraditional data sources)? How do you get feedback and address any potential concerns or fears they might have?

Part 7: Importance of Social and Demographic Statistics

What statement, in your view, would summarize the importance of social and demographic statistics, that could be used by the Workstream to make the case and elevate the role of social and demographic statistics?

Part 8: Most Important Challenge

What do you think is currently the most crucial challenge (non-financial) for communication in the area of social and demographic statistics in your institution? Please elaborate or explain if possible.

Part 9: Additional Comments

Please provide any additional comments, insights, or suggestions related to communication strategies for social and demographic statistics that you would like to share.