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Items for discussion and decision: food security and nutrition

Food security and nutrition data and statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2024/312 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organization on food security and nutrition data and statistics, which is submitted to the Commission for discussion and decision.

* [E/CN.3/2025/1](#).



Report of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organization on food security and nutrition data and statistics

I. Introduction

1. The present report is the inaugural report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) on food security and nutrition (FSN) data and statistics, prepared pursuant to decision 55/110 of the Statistical Commission ([E/2024/24-E/CN.3/2024/36](#)) to create a new agenda item on FSN statistics under the aegis of the Commission.

2. The report is divided into four main sections. Section II traces the antecedents to the Commission's approval of the creation of a new statistical domain on FSN statistics. Section III provides an update on the establishment of a new stand-alone FSN data domain and version 2.0 of the Classification of Statistical Activities (CSA). Section IV elaborates the rationale for the creation of an expert group on food security and nutrition data and statistics and the consequent adjustment of the mandate of the current United Nations Committee of Experts on Food Security, Agricultural and Rural Statistics. Section V highlights certain prominent recent initiatives in the area of FSN data and statistics. The final section proposes actions to be taken by the Statistical Commission for the furtherance of this new statistical domain.

II. Background to the Statistical Commission's approval of a food security and nutrition data domain

3. The Committee on World Food Security is the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform working to ensure food security and nutrition for all. The Committee reports to the General Assembly through the Economic and Social Council and to the FAO Conference. At its forty-sixth session, in response to rising levels of hunger and malnutrition, the Committee included a reflection on data collection and analysis in its multi-year programme of work for the period 2020–2023, in which it emphasized the essential role of timely, relevant and granular data and of appropriate analysis tools to enhance the capacities of countries to make evidence-based policy to achieve food security and adequate nutrition for all, consistent with Sustainable Development Goal 2.

4. As a result of an inclusive, multi-year process, guided by the insights of the Committee's High-level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition, which produced a background document entitled *Data Collection and Analysis Tools for Food Security and Nutrition: Towards Enhancing Effective, Inclusive, Evidence-Informed Decision-making*, the Committee's policy recommendations on strengthening collection and use of FSN data and related analysis tools (CFS 2023/51/5) were endorsed during the fifty-first plenary session of the Committee, in October 2023.

5. The policy recommendations were endorsed as an action-oriented, intergovernmentally agreed, voluntary and non-binding global policy framework in support of country-led efforts towards improving food security and nutrition policies and actions. They contain a collective call for action targeting diverse stakeholders with the objective of further strengthening FSN data systems for improving decision-

making in support of the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security.

6. The Committee noted in its policy recommendations that, inter alia, there is no multilaterally agreed definition of FSN data, including within the Statistical Commission, and that FSN statistical data are often not standardized and are fragmented across different international agencies, government sectors and public and private institutions. Hence, the Committee encouraged Governments, international organizations and regional bodies to, inter alia, promote the harmonization, coherence and interoperability of FSN data and relevant platforms (recommendation 4 (a)) and to consider the need to address FSN statistics as a potential domain within the United Nations Statistical Commission, taking into account ongoing United Nations intergovernmental processes in this regard (recommendation 4 (b)).

7. In line with these policy recommendations, FAO, UNICEF and WHO supported the creation of a new statistical domain on FSN statistics under the Statistical Commission, which was endorsed in 2024 by the Commission in its decision 55/110. Specifically, the Commission “welcomed the Committee on World Food Security policy recommendations on strengthening the collection and use of food security and nutrition data and related analytical tools” and “approved the inclusion of a new agenda item on food security and nutrition statistics under the aegis of the Commission, invited the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children’s Fund to report on progress made on this item every two years, and recommended that the United Nations Committee of Experts on International Statistical Classifications consider food security and nutrition as a stand-alone statistical data domain in the classification of statistical activities and report back to the Commission”.

8. This new data domain has the dual aim of catalysing higher and more focused attention on FSN within the statistical community and of better coordinating efforts and addressing the challenges outlined in the Committee policy recommendations relating to the lack of standardized, harmonized and internationally agreed concepts, methods, minimum set of indicators and data on FSN.

9. In the immediate term, it is proposed that the new FSN data domain, supported by a stand-alone committee of experts (as proposed in section IV) will be aimed at addressing some critical challenges identified by the Committee relating to the lack of an internationally agreed definition of FSN data or an agreed-upon minimum set of indicators to effectively monitor the state of FSN beyond what currently exists within the Goals monitoring framework. This work has been initiated in the form of a guidance note on FSN data and statistics and is described in section IV of the report.

10. The report of FAO, UNICEF and WHO for this new agenda item will also serve to inform Members of the Statistical Commission on recent initiatives in the area of FSN data and statistics (see section IV) with the objective of raising awareness and promoting collaboration.

III. Creation of a stand-alone data domain under the Classification of Statistical Activities

11. The present section provides an update on the establishment of a stand-alone statistical data domain on FSN in the CSA version 2.0, as also reported by the Committee of Experts on International Statistical Classifications (see [E/CN.3/2025/18](#)).

12. As mentioned previously, at its fifty-fifth session, the Commission approved the creation of an agenda item on FSN under the Statistical Commission and

recommended that the Committee of Experts consider the inclusion of FSN as a stand-alone statistical data domain in the CSA.

13. Since then, FAO, UNICEF and WHO have worked closely with the secretariat of the Committee of Experts to develop and proceed with an amendment proposal to the CSA version 2.0 for the inclusion of a stand-alone data domain on food security and nutrition. The proposal was reviewed by an expert group on food security and nutrition data and statistics, composed of various FSN experts from national statistical offices, international and regional organizations, research centres and academia and created temporarily as a task team under the United Nations Committee of Experts on Food Security, Agricultural and Rural Statistics.

14. This proposal was presented to the members of the Committee of Experts in October 2024, together with a proposed process for updating the CSA version 2.0. As a result, and as reported in the report of the Committee of Experts on International Statistical Classifications (E/CN.3/2025/18), the Committee of Experts is recommending that the Commission approve the initiation of an update process to the CSA 2.0 that is limited in scope, restricting the update to consideration of including FSN as a stand-alone domain and any rearrangements or subdivisions at the lower levels of the classification that may be needed to enable the inclusion of the proposed domain. If the Commission approves such a process, it is foreseen that the updated CSA will be submitted to the Commission for approval at its fifty-seventh session, in 2026.

15. FAO, UNICEF and WHO, with the support of the above-mentioned expert group on food security and nutrition data and statistics, reiterate their commitment to supporting the Committee of Experts and its Bureau in this process.

IV. Creation of an expert group on food security and nutrition data and statistics

16. While the Commission's endorsement of a new FSN data domain under its purview is a welcome development, this does not automatically entail a comprehensive mechanism for developing and documenting good practices and guidelines on concepts, methods and statistical standards for food security and nutrition.

17. To that end, FAO, UNICEF and WHO propose – in consultation with the States members of the United Nations – the establishment of a technical body, consisting of member countries, that will be able to advance the agenda of methods and standards of measurement of food security and nutrition statistics. This technical body could adopt a similar form and format to existing United Nations expert groups and would henceforth be designated as the United Nations expert group on food security and nutrition data and statistics.

18. While there are other possible arrangements within the nomenclature of subsidiary groups under the Commission (e.g. city groups, inter-agency and expert groups or committees of experts), the three proposing agencies maintain that the expert group format is best suited to the task at hand. An expert group will address the need for a group at a technical level that will be able to focus on methods, standards and coordination while being composed of Statistical Commission member States as well as international or regional organizations, non-United Nations agencies and academia, as observers. As FSN is not, strictly speaking, an emerging topic, the establishment of a city group is of limited appeal. In addition, an expert group appears to be more appropriate than a working group, as an expert group may recommend

some capacity development activities but is not expected to be involved in capacity development programmes itself.

19. As explained in section II, the lack of harmonization and coordination in FSN data and statistics at the national, regional and global levels was identified as a key weakness impairing the interoperability and linkage between data sets, which is necessary for a holistic understanding of FSN status and its drivers for decision-making. This new expert group is therefore expected to be the mechanism for addressing the fragmented FSN ecosystem and the need for greater alignment and consensus in methods, standards and tools for FSN data and statistics.

20. The mandate of the new expert group will partially overlap with the existing United Nations Committee of Experts on Food Security, Agriculture and Rural Statistics. The mandate of this Committee of Expert includes food security statistics, but not nutrition statistics. The possibility of expanding the mandate and scope of work of the existing Committee of Experts to also cover nutrition was considered, but is undesirable according to the three proposing agencies, for the following reasons. Currently, the fact that food security is within the scope of the Committee of Experts is already problematic, leading to some dysfunction. This is due mainly to the fact that member countries are typically represented in the Committee of Experts by distinct branches of the national statistical offices. Rural and agricultural statistics matters are usually dealt with by representatives of the economic stream of their national statistical offices (e.g. agricultural statisticians), whereas food security experts typically come from the social and demographic stream or, in some cases, the international cooperation group of the national statistical office, or even official institutions outside the national statistical offices. Interactions between these members are often siloed and difficult to manage, with each type of expert usually admitting to a lack of background and experience in the other topic.

21. Therefore, FAO, UNICEF and WHO propose that the two groups be split in such a way that FSN data and statistics is henceforth addressed by a new expert group on FSN data, and the existing Committee of Experts will no longer deal with food security statistics but will instead focus solely on rural and agricultural statistics. This arrangement is also in keeping with the proposed amendment to the CSA that foresees FSN as a stand-alone domain under domain 5 (cross-cutting statistics).¹

22. The proposed terms of reference of the new United Nations expert group on food security and nutrition data and statistics is provided as a background document for consideration. The adjusted mandate and governance of the existing Committee of Experts (with the removal of “food security” from its mandate) is also provided as a background document. It is also proposed that the newly created expert group will report on progress to the Commission as part of the report of FAO, UNICEF and WHO on FSN data and statistics, while the Committee of Experts will continue to provide its updates in the report of the FAO on agriculture and rural statistics.

¹ FAO, UNICEF and WHO, “Amendment proposal to the Classification on Statistical Activities 2.0 for the inclusion of a new Food Security and Nutrition data domain and related adjustment to the ‘Agriculture, forestry and fishing’ statistics domain”, meeting of the United Nations Committee of Experts on International Statistical Classifications, 10 October 2024. Available at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/classifications/Meetings/UNCEISC2024_2nd/Session_2_Proposal_FS_N_classification.pdf.

V. Recent initiatives in the area of food security and nutrition data and statistics

Guidance note on food security and nutrition data and statistics

23. Since the Commission's fifty-fifth session, FAO, UNICEF and WHO have initiated the development of a guidance note on food security and nutrition data and statistics with the objective of proposing a common definition of FSN statistical data, a minimum set of core indicators for assessing and monitoring the state of FSN, and some recommendations and best practices regarding the prioritization and facilitation of the collection, dissemination and use of relevant FSN data at the national level. This work is a direct response to recommendation 2 (d) of the Committee on Food Security (see CFS 2023/51/5), which encourages international organizations to foster FSN data collection at country level and provide guidance to countries, outlining a minimum set of core FSN data, with respective methodologies and indicators, to help countries identify priorities when collecting FSN data.

24. In June and July 2024, a definition of FSN statistical data, a minimum set of core indicators for FSN and a draft outline of the guidance note were developed by the three organizations. These initial documents were presented to the group of experts on FSN data and statistics described in paragraph 13 and were discussed during a two-day expert group meeting held in Rome on 7 and 8 August 2024.

25. Comments received during the meeting were incorporated and a second meeting of the expert group was held on 24 September 2024 to further discuss and refine the documents. Between September 2024 and January 2025, the three organizations developed a draft guidance note, an annotated outline of which is provided as a background document for the present report. With respect to next steps, the guidance note will be reviewed by the expert group in January and February 2025 and further improved before the final draft is sent to Statistical Commission members for open consultations from March to June 2025. The three organizations aim to finalize the guidance note in October 2025 and to present it for endorsement at the fifty-seventh session of the Commission.

Proposed additions of food security and nutrition indicators to the Sustainable Development Goals indicator monitoring framework

26. Minimum dietary diversity is a proposed new Goals indicator under target 2.2 on ending malnutrition in all its forms. The indicator was proposed in early 2024 by Switzerland, with the support of Bangladesh, Brazil, Malawi and a coalition of international organizations (including FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, UNICEF, the World Food Programme and WHO), in the context of the 2025 comprehensive review of the indicator framework for the Goals, led by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators. It was emphasized in the proposal that, while healthy diets are fundamental to Goal 2 and unhealthy diets are the leading cause of poor health and non-communicable diseases worldwide, diets are not specifically captured by any indicator in the current Goals framework. The proposed new Goal indicator on minimum dietary diversity will be collected for the two population groups for which the measure has been validated: children aged 6 to 23 months and non-pregnant women aged 15 to 49 years, with UNICEF and FAO as respective custodian agencies. Following an open consultation in July and August 2024 (in which the minimum dietary diversity proposal garnered the highest number of positive comments) and further deliberations in the period from September to November, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group approved minimum dietary diversity as an additional indicator in December 2024, subject to the final endorsement of the Commission (see [E/CN.3/2025/6](#)).

Healthy Diets Monitoring Initiative

27. Unhealthy diets are recognized globally as key contributors to morbidity and mortality. In addition, the decisions people make about what to eat carry extensive consequences for the health and sustainability of our planet. As agrifood systems and dietary patterns evolve globally, the importance of monitoring what people eat has never been more critical. However, while FAO and WHO have defined the universal properties of a healthy diet,² a lack of consensus remains regarding how to measure these properties (beyond minimum dietary diversity) across contexts for the purposes of monitoring and policymaking. The resulting omission of comprehensive healthy diet metrics from national and global monitoring frameworks is highly consequential.

28. In collective recognition of this challenge, the Healthy Diets Monitoring Initiative, an equal partnership among FAO, UNICEF and WHO, was established in 2022 with financial support from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The Initiative's mission is to enable national and global decision makers and stakeholders to monitor and achieve healthy diets for people and the planet. The Initiative is committed to building consensus with national and global stakeholders to guide the generation of actionable, fit-for-purpose dietary data and statistics that can be used to inform evidence-based approaches, policies and programmes. The Initiative aims to achieve this by raising awareness, developing guidance for the monitoring of healthy diets, implementing a prioritized research agenda and facilitating the uptake and use of metrics for assessing and monitoring diets worldwide.

29. In 2024, new guidance for monitoring healthy diets globally was published, which offers an overview of the purposes of measuring healthy diets, the types of surveys that are appropriate for this monitoring, suitable dietary assessment methods, relevant types of dietary data and potential healthy diet metrics for national and global monitoring.³ The Initiative is reviewing available evidence on the validity and cross-context equivalence of priority healthy diet metrics and data collection methods for global monitoring. Furthermore, three virtual regional consultations were held between August and October 2024 to foster understanding of country challenges and gaps with respect to the collection and use of dietary data. Over the next year, Initiative guidance for monitoring healthy diets globally will be refined to include the latest technical and operational recommendations, following extensive consultations with countries and experts involved in survey implementation and data collection processes.⁴

Child food poverty and the child food insecurity experiences scale

30. A number of initiatives are under way to monitor the diets of vulnerable children and adolescents worldwide. UNICEF has developed computation methods to analyse child food poverty⁵ (i.e. the percentage of children not meeting minimum dietary diversity) using dietary data collected in large-scale household surveys.

31. In 2022, UNICEF, in collaboration with partners, developed a globally applicable, valid and cross-contextually equivalent measure of the experiences of food insecurity of school-aged children and adolescents, called the child food insecurity experiences scale.⁶ This scale would be available as a module for future

² FAO and WHO, "What are healthy diets? Joint statement by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Health Organization" (Geneva, 2024).

³ WHO, FAO and UNICEF, "Guidance for monitoring healthy diets globally" (Geneva, 2024).

⁴ WHO, "Harmonizing and mainstreaming the measurement of healthy diets: technical expert meeting, Bellagio, Italy, 28 November–2 December 2022" (Geneva, 2023).

⁵ UNICEF, "Child food poverty: a nutrition crisis in early childhood", October 2022.

⁶ Edward A. Frongillo, Maryah S. Fram, Hala Ghattas and others, "Development, validity, and cross-context equivalence and the child food insecurity experiences scale for assessing food insecurity of school-age children and adolescents", *Journal of Nutrition*, vol. 152, No. 9 (September 2022).

child-centric surveys supported by UNICEF technical assistance to national statistical offices under the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey programme.

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations methodological handbook for computing food balance sheets and supply utilization accounts

32. A new edition of the FAO methodological handbook for computing food balance sheets and the related supply utilization accounts was prepared in 2024 and will be published electronically in the first quarter of 2025. The new edition describes the methodology currently in use at FAO for computing these key agricultural statistics, which results from several significant improvements undertaken since 2014.

33. Updates in the computation methods mostly concern balancing criteria, the link between crops and livestock products and procedures for estimating missing information. With this new handbook, FAO wishes to provide the international community with an analytical and transparent methodological tool that can serve multiple purposes. It will offer effective support to the users of the data and will serve as a guide for national and regional stakeholders that may be interested in computing food balance sheets and supply utilization accounts at the regional and national levels, including per capita energy and nutrient supply statistics, which are very relevant in the context of food security and nutrition data.

Guidance on processing food consumption data from household consumption and expenditure surveys

34. As decided in paragraph (f) of its decision 55/110, the Commission endorsed the guidelines on processing food data from household consumption and expenditure surveys. The guidelines were developed by the task team on food security and food consumption measurement, chaired by Statistics Norway and established under the Committee of Experts. They were prepared by a team of experts on food security and consumption statistics from Statistics Norway, the Pacific Community, FAO and the World Bank, with several rounds of consultations involving a large group of experts from national statistical offices, international organizations and academia.

35. The guidelines contain a description of how to process data collected through the food consumption modules of household consumption and expenditure surveys. They build on existing guidance available in the FAO and World Bank publication *Food Data Collection in Household Consumption and Expenditure Surveys: Guidelines for Low- and Middle-Income Countries*, which had been endorsed by the Commission at its forty-ninth session (see [E/2018/24-E/CN.3/2018/37](#), decision 49/112, para. (e)).

36. Following the endorsement of the guidelines, they were finalized and, at the time of writing the present report, they were in the process of being published and further disseminated.⁷ The development of dedicated training material and tools to facilitate their uptake are being discussed. Member States are invited to encourage the implementation of the guidelines with a view to improving the quality and comparability of statistics produced using food consumption data from household consumption and expenditure surveys.

Extension of the World Health Assembly comprehensive implementation plan on maternal, infant and young child nutrition targets from 2025 to 2030

37. WHO began the process of extending the 2025 comprehensive implementation plan on maternal, infant and young child nutrition to 2030 to align with the broader

⁷ FAO and the World Bank, *Food Data Collection in Household Consumption and Expenditure Surveys: Guidelines for Low- and Middle-Income Countries* (Rome, 2018).

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by publishing a discussion paper⁸ proposing extended targets for the outcome indicators and new process indicators and targets linked to each specific outcome. WHO also conducted an open public online consultation, followed by several consultations with various stakeholders, to solicit feedback on the proposals.

38. A resolution that takes into account the proposal of the discussion paper and feedback from the various consultations will be considered by WHO member States at the next World Health Assembly, in 2025.

39. Upon adoption of the resolution on extending the targets, WHO will further align the targets for four of the six outcome indicators (childhood stunting, childhood overweight, childhood wasting and anaemia in women of reproductive age) in the Goals monitoring framework to the targets in the forthcoming World Health Assembly resolution.

VI. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission

40. **The Commission is invited:**

(a) **To take note of the progress made in establishing a stand-alone FSN data domain in CSA version 2.0;**

(b) **To endorse the creation of a dedicated expert group on food security and nutrition data and statistics under the umbrella of the Statistical Commission and its terms of reference, and invite members of the Statistical Commission to express interest in joining this group;**

(c) **To endorse the proposed amendment to the name and the terms of reference of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Food Security, Agricultural and Rural Statistics;**

(d) **To take note of the progress made on the development of a draft annotated outline of the guidance document on FSN statistics and encourage Members to participate in the consultation process that will support the finalization and endorsement of the guidance at the fifty-seventh session of the Commission;**

(e) **To take note of the other recent initiatives in the area of food security and nutrition data and statistics.**

⁸ WHO, “2025–2030 World Health Assembly global maternal, infant and young child nutrition targets and proposal for process indicators”. Available at https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/nutrition-and-food-safety/discussion-paper-2025-2030-wha-nutrition-targets.pdf?sfvrsn=9fe91c03_8.