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Items for discussion and decision: social and demographic statistics

Friends of the Chair group on social and demographic statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2025/315 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.3/2026/1](#).



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

I. Introduction

1. The Friends of the Chair group on social and demographic statistics was established under the Statistical Commission to review these statistical areas and provide strategic recommendations that better reflect society and its connections with the environment and the economy.

2. At its fifty-second session, the Commission, in its decision 52/116, tasked the Bureau with initiating a Friends of the Chair process to review the area of social and demographic statistics. This was reiterated at the fifty-third session, in its decision 53/105, with a request to report on progress made at the fifty-fourth session. Subsequently, the Commission endorsed, in its decision 54/104, the formal establishment of the Friends of the Chair group.

3. At its fifty-fifth session, the Commission, in its decision 55/111, endorsed the Friends of the Chair group's proposed priorities and activities, including research towards an overarching conceptual framework in line with the group's objective of formulating strategic recommendations. At its fifty-sixth session, in its decision 56/108, the Commission commended progress on the conceptual framework and integrated data system, approved the work programme and requested the submission of its final report to the Commission at its fifty-seventh session, in 2026. The Commission also recognized the group's role in supporting well-being monitoring beyond gross domestic product (GDP).

4. The present report includes a summary of the activities of the Friends of the Chair group in 2025 (see sect. II); details of the challenges and opportunities in advancing social and demographic statistics (see sect. III); strategic recommendations for strengthening social and demographic statistics (see sect. IV); key design elements for developing a central framework for a system of population and social statistics (see sect. V); an outline of the functions of a proposed successor mechanism (see sect. VI); and actions for the Commission's consideration (sect. VII).

II. Activities of the Friends of the Chair group in 2025

5. In 2025, the Friends of the Chair group on social and demographic statistics held three plenary meetings and several sessions of its core writing group to advance work on a central framework for a system of population and social statistics.

6. At its tenth meeting, in March, the Friends of the Chair group reviewed achievements over the past two years, set priorities for its final year and emphasized the consolidation of results, ensuring conceptual coherence and policy relevance, including by aligning with global measures such as the Beyond GDP initiatives. At its eleventh meeting, in June, the group advanced key outputs – including the technical report and strategic recommendations on the central framework for a system of population and social statistics – and discussed potential successor arrangements to continue the work beyond the group's mandate. At its twelfth meeting, in November, the group finalized its strategic recommendations and agreed on a successor mechanism and on the preparations for the fifty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission.

7. The core writing group met in May and September to refine the framework, discuss key building blocks of social and demographic statistics and ensure their coherence, feasibility, and alignment with international standards. A technical

workshop held in Ottawa in September, hosted by Statistics Canada, brought together over 30 experts to advance research towards a central framework for a system of population and social statistics to strengthen countries' capacities to produce social and demographic statistics in a more coherent, structured and interconnected way.

8. Throughout 2025, the Friends of the Chair group actively collaborated with the Expert Group on Well-being Measurement, the High-Level Expert Group on Beyond GDP, the Network of Economic Statisticians and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to improve synergies and share practices. Progress was documented through technical and strategic reports, feedback sessions and presentations.

III. Challenges and opportunities in advancing social and demographic statistics

9. At the outset of its work, the Friends of the Chair group identified a set of persistent and emerging challenges, some of which are not unique to this domain, and opportunities shaping the capacity of national statistical systems to produce high-quality, timely and relevant social and demographic statistics. The challenges stem from evolving policy priorities, rapid technological innovation and available data – including outside the official statistical systems – opening up new avenues for the statistical systems to adapt, modernize, and respond to complex information needs.

10. A pressing challenge is the absence of an overarching conceptual framework for social and demographic statistics, limiting the ability of statistical systems to capture complex social dynamics. Without a unified logic, it is difficult to represent society as an interconnected network of people and relationships in specific times and places.

11. The growing demand for timely and granular data provides an important opportunity for social and demographic statistics, which are particularly well suited to providing fit-for-purpose information. Policymakers, researchers and the public increasingly expect rapid and disaggregated insights to identify disparities and tailor policies. Timely data are critical for responsive action during crises, including pandemics, natural disasters, forced displacement and climate migration. Social and demographic statistics are well placed to meet some of these requirements, but traditional data sources (population-based surveys and censuses) would benefit from further strengthening. Declining response rates, attrition in longitudinal studies and rising survey costs pose additional challenges. At the same time, innovative techniques and alternative data sources, such as administrative records, privately held data, citizen-generated data and geospatial information, could enhance analytical capabilities, improving granularity and timeliness. The expanding data ecosystem holds untapped potential requiring stronger quality assurance and governance mechanisms to enable sustainable and meaningful integration into national statistical systems.

12. National statistical offices often operate within tight fiscal environments, where funding shortages and capacity constraints limit their ability to sustain large-scale surveys, invest in innovation or modernize systems. Global disruptions such as pandemics, conflicts and climate events have further strained resources, disrupting regular data collection and creating long-term gaps. When resources are scarce, social and demographic statistics are often among the first areas to face reductions, despite their centrality to understanding people's lives and well-being. This calls for innovative financing mechanisms that complement public budgets, including private investment and contributions from development partners.

13. The decentralization of statistical responsibilities adds complexity. In countries where multiple agencies or levels of government collect data, coordination challenges

may cause duplication, inconsistent standards and fragmented results. Privately held administrative registers, legal barriers to the sharing and reuse of data, and limited use of innovative technologies further restrict these sources. Citizen-generated data could fill specific information gaps and support more inclusive statistics, although countries are still experimenting with their potential.

14. Modelling complex social phenomena remains challenging due to their multidimensional and context-specific nature. Integrating diverse data sources may be complicated by differences in quality, coverage, definitions and classifications, limiting the availability of coherent and comparable statistics. However, using artificial intelligence and machine learning to process these diverse sources offers new opportunities for statistical production.

15. Public perception and trust may represent additional constraints. Declining response rates reflect growing fatigue, scepticism, privacy concerns, and doubts about data collection relevance. Efforts to link survey, administrative and geospatial data often face resistance due to perceived risks, limited transparency and doubts about confidentiality. Strengthening public trust is essential to increase participation, encourage the use of innovative data sources and methods and ensure credible and usable statistical outputs.

IV. Strategic recommendations for strengthening social and demographic statistics¹

16. The Friends of the Chair group was mandated to deliver strategic recommendations for a more agile, responsive and integrated system of social and demographic statistics. Guided by the Statistical Commission, the group reviewed persistent challenges, opportunities and scalable best practices, and identified key areas of work for strengthening this pillar of official statistics. Its efforts were focused on identifying methodological and data gaps, advancing gender mainstreaming and intersectional approaches and fostering horizontal integration across the social, economic and environmental pillars of sustainable development. Such integration is vital to strengthen national statistical systems and ensure that data effectively capture society, its members and their relationships, providing a holistic view of inclusive and sustainable development. In the following subsections, the group presents its priorities.

A. Elevating the role of social and demographic statistics

17. Social and demographic statistics must be positioned as strategic instruments for governance, policy design, implementation and development monitoring. Social statistics cover health, education, work, social relationships and overall quality of life and are essential for evidence-based policymaking. Demographic statistics are essential for planning by all sectors of society and serve as denominators for many development indicators. The Friends of the Chair group recommends that Member States formally recognize these statistics as a core pillar of national development planning and secure predictable funding to sustain consistent time series, identify emerging issues and assess policy interventions.

18. Member States should strengthen and prioritize support for social and demographic statistical systems by modernizing infrastructure, enhancing technical capacities and adopting innovative solutions to maximize efficiency, impact and

¹ See the forthcoming background document, “Strategic recommendations for strengthening social and demographic statistics”, which will be available at the following link from the end of January 2026: <https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/statcom/documents/57>.

policy uptake. National statistical offices must assert their central role in producing actionable people-centred data, which requires targeted investments to advance methodologies, improve processes and integrate new data collection and analysis techniques. Offices should also implement strategies that anticipate evolving social phenomena, crises and shifting stakeholder needs while leading capacity-building efforts across government institutions through consultations, training and tailored technical guidance to ensure that statistical expertise informs governance effectively.

19. Harmonization and standardization are essential to elevate the credibility and policy relevance of social and demographic statistics. Consistent definitions, rigorous methodologies and alignment with international standards² ensure that data are trusted, comparable and fit for purpose. Statistical outputs should present a holistic view of development and societal dynamics. Development partners and international financial institutions are encouraged to continue to expand technical and financial assistance, including South-South cooperation and twinning arrangements, to support capacity-building and strengthen sustainable social and demographic statistical systems.

20. Integrating gender and intersectional perspectives throughout statistical production is essential. Data reflecting the realities of all population groups support more inclusive and equitable policymaking. Mainstreaming these perspectives improves coherence and quality by ensuring that gender differences and intersecting inequalities are meaningfully captured. Using inclusive concepts and methods reduces bias, enhances trust and supports the production of integrated, policy-relevant statistics for sustainable development.

21. Public trust and engagement must be strengthened through transparent and collaborative approaches. National statistical offices should adopt strategic engagement campaigns that encourage survey participation, explain confidentiality safeguards and demonstrate the tangible societal benefits of participation through concrete examples of policy impact to counter declining response rates and build public support for data integration. Statistical practices must adhere to internationally recognized standards, such as the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics of the United Nations, in order to reinforce credibility and ethical integrity. Building trust also requires sustained partnerships, stronger statistical literacy for data users and clearer data-to-policy links illustrating how social and demographic statistics inform decisions and improve lives. This includes capacity development that strengthens the ability of users to interpret, apply and advocate data-driven policies; institutionalized consultations, webinars and feedback channels to capture user needs; and targeted outreach with disaggregated reporting for marginalized and hard-to-reach populations.

22. Communication and dissemination must be user-centred, accessible and aligned with policy priorities. Social and demographic statistics should be published and translated into actionable insights that support policymaking, research and public dialogue. Modern dissemination tools should be combined with clear storytelling that links statistical evidence to social realities and policy objectives. Engagement with media includes ongoing contact with journalists, consultations on usability, and press releases tailored for general and technical audiences. In addition, communication strategies should address data quality, ethics and privacy transparently to sustain confidence in official statistics.

23. Collaboration and coordination must be formalized and strategically focused. National statistical offices should strengthen networks with research institutions, non-governmental organizations, international organizations and government agencies to promote methodological innovation, data integration and joint analysis. Cross-disciplinary networks can advance innovation, shape research agendas and enhance

² See also section C.1 below.

the practical use of statistics across the production cycle. Partnerships with academia should be focused on joint research, data access for approved researchers, collaborative seminars, and the recognition of academic contributions. Engagement with civil society organizations should foster citizen- and community-generated data that complement official sources, especially where traditional data are limited. Civil society can help to reach underrepresented populations, co-design data collection instruments and promote data use for accountability and inclusion. To ensure quality and trust, clear mechanisms for data validation, feedback and integration into national statistical systems should be established. Partnerships with the private sector can unlock new and timely information sources through consultations on data needs, data-sharing agreements and co-organized outreach initiatives, as well as recognition mechanisms such as awards for active contributions to the public good. Finally, collaboration with policymakers is essential to demonstrate the relevance and policy use of social and demographic statistics, reinforcing their visibility, credibility and societal value.

B. Improving coordination efforts at the global and regional levels

24. International collaboration is critical, as it supports the sharing of best practices, methodological alignment and capacity-building, which together contribute to a coherent, comparable and reliable integrated system of social and demographic statistics. At the international level, the current landscape of such statistics features multiple groups operating under the Statistical Commission, regional bodies and specialized agencies. While each group provides valuable expertise, in order to strengthen the international statistical system, it is essential for the Commission to implement strategic measures that enhance coordination, simplify processes and facilitate complementarity across initiatives:

- (a) Rationalize and align global- and regional-level groups:
 - Conduct periodic reviews³ of all working groups under the auspices of the Statistical Commission and other regional statistical bodies working in the area of social and demographic statistics to identify the completion of mandates, overlapping activities, and opportunities for consolidation.
 - Request regular cross-pollination between groups, ensuring that members coordinate and share progress, enhancing collaboration and avoiding duplication.
- (b) Foster agile and responsive governance:
 - Establish a successor mechanism to the Friends of the Chair group to implement the group's recommendations, including by acting as a focal point for coordination across the social and demographic statistical space, leveraging existing work, liaising with thematic groups within this domain and maintaining connections with the economic and environmental pillars.
 - Align global and regional initiatives with broader strategic objectives, ensuring that national, regional and global efforts contribute to a unified and effective statistical ecosystem.

³ See https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/statcom/session_55/documents/BG-3j-FoC-WS1-E.pdf.

C. Advancing towards a more integrated system of social and demographic statistics

25. Achieving a more integrated system of social and demographic statistics requires a deliberate, stepwise approach that aligns national priorities, resources and capabilities. National statistical offices should focus on harmonizing definitions, classifications, metadata standards and methodologies across all data sources. Efforts should be made to reduce fragmentation, promote interoperability and enable the seamless linking of data sets across thematic areas and geographical levels while filling critical measurement gaps. Integration should be guided by policy-relevant objectives, ensuring that data can serve to inform targeted interventions, monitor social outcomes and respond effectively to emerging societal challenges. Incremental improvements – supported by technical capacity-building and legislative facilitation, including adapting laws to innovative technologies – and strategies to enhance citizen participation are essential to ensure that the system remains sustainable, inclusive, and responsive to evolving information needs.

1. Adopt international statistical standards to improve comparability and integration

26. The consistent application of international standards is essential to address fragmented definitions and methodologies across and within countries. Common standards enhance coherence within social and demographic statistics, ensure compatibility with other domains, reduce siloed production and enable integrated analyses across social, economic and environmental pillars. Frameworks such as the Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses and the Recommendations on Statistics for International Migration and Temporary Mobility guide national statistical offices in improving the coverage, accuracy and granularity of national data. Standardized definitions of social groupings, including households and families, facilitate data-set integration and cross-country analyses. Standards adopted by the International Conference of Labour Statisticians provide another key reference, showing interoperability, as in the recent alignment between Conference forms of work and the System of National Accounts (SNA). This model could help to inform future standard-setting in other areas.

2. Leverage technological solutions to enhance timeliness and efficiency

27. Resource constraints and outdated technologies limit statistical efficiency. Digital-first and multi-mode collection, artificial intelligence-driven processing and cloud-based platforms enable near-real-time monitoring, early anomaly detection and timely corrective actions in statistical operations. Such technologies reduce reliance on costly field operations, facilitate the inclusion of underrepresented populations and allow high-frequency updates without compromising historical continuity. Strategic investments in information technology infrastructure, automated validation and secure platforms strengthen the efficiency, timeliness and reliability of integrated social and demographic statistics.

3. Strengthen data infrastructure and governance to reduce fragmentation and improve coordination

28. Fragmented data production across agencies and levels of government undermines integration and efficiency. Strengthened data governance and infrastructure address this challenge by ensuring interoperability and harmonization across survey, census, administrative and non-traditional data sources. Formal data-sharing agreements, secure protocols and clear business processes define responsibilities and promote accountability. Investments in capacity-building, including the training and

upskilling of personnel, ensure that national statistical offices can manage integrated data sets effectively.

4. Integrate geospatial data to improve the targeting and precision of analysis

29. Geography provides a common reference point that enables the integration of data from multiple sources within the sociodemographic pillar and across other statistical domains. By linking censuses, surveys, administrative records, privately held data and geospatial information through shared geographies (e.g. census blocks, grids and administrative boundaries), national statistical offices can reduce fragmentation and promote interoperability. This supports statistical reporting, geostatistical analyses and visualization at multiple scales. Integrating statistical and geospatial information strengthens the analytical power of data, enabling location-sensitive analysis, identification of spatial disparities, precise targeting of interventions and monitoring at small geographical scales. Promoting interoperability through common data formats and standards such as the “Degree of Urbanisation” and the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework is vital. Comprehensive national address files and geocoded data sets create a standardized spatial foundation. Visualization tools such as maps and spatial dashboards communicate complex, multidimensional information clearly, supporting evidence-based decisions. Through targeted investments in geographic information system technology, spatial analysis skills and privacy-preserving techniques, national statistical offices can improve the granularity and comprehensiveness of statistics.

5. Manage data quality to enhance reliability and enable integration

30. Population and housing censuses and household surveys are indispensable for social and demographic statistics, providing detailed data on population size, characteristics and distribution to guide policy design and track development goals. They are complemented by administrative records and used to validate insights from alternative or modelled data sources. To address challenges faced by these critical data sources, national statistical offices should implement robust quality assurance procedures that standardize metadata, definitions and validation rules across censuses, surveys⁴ and administrative records, facilitating data interoperability and improving efficiency. Operational solutions include automated validation, reconciliation routines, innovative mixed-mode survey designs and the use of geographic information system technology for precise field operations. Modernizing censuses through register-based or combined approaches can reduce costs and burdens while expanding coverage. Strengthening technical capacity, methodological research and governance ensures that integrated statistics are accurate, timely, policy-relevant and trustworthy while maintaining privacy and confidentiality.

6. Utilize non-traditional data sources to fill critical gaps

31. Traditional data sources alone cannot meet the growing demand for timely and granular statistics. Additional data sources – such as satellite imagery, mobile phone data, web-scraped content, social media and citizen-generated information – complement and enrich official statistics, enhancing coverage of hard-to-reach populations, capturing emerging social phenomena and enabling near-real-time monitoring of demographic and social changes. National statistical offices should establish clear governance, privacy safeguards and validation protocols to ensure that non-traditional sources enhance the statistical system without compromising data quality or confidentiality. This includes developing methods to assess consistency

⁴ See the forthcoming edition of the Handbook of Surveys on Households and Individuals: Foundations and Emerging Approaches, to be released in 2026.

with official statistics, establishing metadata standards for interoperability and documenting data provenance and quality. Consolidating good practices and sharing country experiences helps to optimize efforts, build on proven approaches and avoid repeating mistakes.

7. Explore and scale innovative methods to strengthen integration and address data gaps

32. Innovative methods are central to advancing an integrated system of social and demographic statistics. Techniques such as small-area estimation, spatial modelling, synthetic data for small population groups and nowcasting provide timely, granular insights. Linking administrative records with survey, census and geospatial data enhances the accuracy and coherence of population and household estimates. Longitudinal studies and national transfer accounts reveal life-course pathways and transitions, intergenerational dynamics and resource distribution by age cohort. Approaches based on the person-time-event-location framework support the linking of information across sources and time for coherent analysis of transitions and policy effects. Scaling up these innovations requires strong data and privacy safeguards, training, clear methodological guidance, harmonized metadata and adherence to quality standards in order to maintain statistical integrity.

8. Set the foundations for a conceptual framework to guide integration and harmonization

33. A robust overarching conceptual framework is essential to position the statistical architecture for a better understanding of society and to overcome fragmentation. Inconsistent definitions, methodologies, limited metadata, and siloed data sources and statistical programmes hinder the ability of national statistical systems to produce coherent, consistent, comparable and policy-relevant information. Building on its initial mandate to identify persistent data and methodological gaps, the Friends of the Chair group recognized the need for a more structured and enduring approach – one that establishes an integrated system for social and demographic statistics comparable in scope and influence to SNA and the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting.

34. A critical strategic recommendation of the Friends of the Chair group is the development of a central framework for a system of population and social statistics to provide a unified structure for integration and harmonization across social and demographic domains. The framework should be guided by a common language of universal definitions that harmonize concepts and support interoperable infrastructures for cross-cutting analysis; a coherent structure organizing the building blocks – people, relationships, outcomes, places and time – to support systematic observation while ensuring integration with other statistical systems; and governing principles defining scope, boundaries and key properties to ensure scientific soundness and operational practicality.

35. The central framework is envisioned as a multipurpose system used for analysis of emerging issues, responsive evidence-based policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and foresight. It should be agile enough to respond to current policy priorities – such as those reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals – as well as to emerging ones, including the Beyond GDP initiatives and post-2030 development frameworks.

36. Universality should underpin the central framework. Its taxonomy must be culturally and politically neutral, ensuring representation of all societies, not only data-rich regions. Its development should ensure the engagement of the Global South through inclusive consultations and participatory design.

37. The central framework should allow for gradual implementation through a system of horizons, enabling all countries to participate according to their statistical capacities and available resources. The core horizon would establish a basic set of fundamental statistics that every country can produce in the near term, providing a practical and universal foundation emphasizing feasibility. Subsequent horizons would progressively expand to cover more complex and specialized topics. Areas not yet ready for standardization could initially be developed as experimental modules. This modular design ensures both flexibility and scalability while promoting international comparability.

38. The central framework should promote vertical and horizontal integration within and across statistical domains. Common, hierarchical and mutually exclusive classifications will facilitate comparisons across population groups, time and places. Harmonized variable structures will enhance usability for policymakers and the public, improving the targeting of policies and resource allocation. Integration with systems such as SNA and the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting should be reinforced through common concepts and classifications and coordinated revision cycles to ensure consistency and reduce reporting burdens.

39. The central framework should also be clear and accessible, remaining understandable to both technical and non-technical audiences through clear documentation and transparent dissemination practices.

40. The creation and consolidation of the central framework require a fundamental shift towards a system-based approach. Statistical systems must evolve from siloed data production to an integrated, holistic model that reflects the interconnected nature of human behaviour and society as a network. By providing a shared data architecture grounded in standardized definitions and a common metadata framework, the framework will enable data linkage and interoperability. This will strengthen the capacity of statistical systems to capture relationships among the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, thereby improving the measurement of social outcomes and the understanding of why they occur.

41. Given the scope and complexity of this effort, the Friends of the Chair group recommends that substantive design work on the central framework continue beyond its current mandate under the proposed successor mechanism, as its development and implementation will require sustained technical and financial resources at global, regional and national levels over a multi-year period. The group recommends that:

(a) The successor mechanism mobilize resources for central framework development, including by seeking voluntary contributions from Member States and development partners, partnering with international financial institutions and coordinating with existing funding mechanisms for statistical capacity-building;

(b) Technical expertise be mobilized to support central framework development through the participation of national and international experts in the activities of the successor mechanism.

V. Towards a central framework for a system of population and social statistics⁵

A. Need for and purpose and policy applications of the central framework

42. The central framework is envisioned as a formal, systematic and comprehensive statistical description of population and society, designed to guide the measurement of population and of social phenomena. It responds to the growing need for coherent, interoperable, agile and policy-relevant social and demographic statistical data.

43. The central framework addresses a longstanding gap: the absence of an internationally agreed conceptual framework to unify multidimensional social and demographic statistics. It would introduce a unified overarching structure to bridge fragmented approaches.

44. The central framework would serve as:

- (a) A set of recommendations to measure population and society;
- (b) A common language built on shared concepts, definitions and classifications;
- (c) An overarching structure and logic to organize, integrate, modernize and interpret data and statistics about social actors, their social functions and the relationships between them, as well as how they are shaped by places and change over time;
- (d) A set of shared reporting standards, providing harmonized tabulations to enable consistent, comparable reporting over time and across countries.

45. The central framework establishes a coherent and unified conceptual base, ensuring the following:

- (a) **Usefulness for analysis.** It enables users to draw statistically robust conclusions about the state and direction of change in society, facilitating a holistic view of development that is comparable with conclusions drawn from economic and environmental statistics;
- (b) **Consistency over time.** It ensures that data remain reliable and comparable across years (to the extent that available time-series data allow), supporting effective long-term analysis;
- (c) **International comparability.** It is aligned with shared international standards to ensure that social and demographic statistics are comparable across countries, even when national data infrastructures differ;
- (d) **Interoperability.** It improves the comparability, discoverability and consistency of population and social statistics over time, enabling diverse data sources for jointly supporting analysis, policy evaluation and forward-looking research through granular, geocoded and intersectional data that capture multidimensional aspects of quality of life and are used to monitor inequalities.

46. The central framework is designed to address the following key needs in global decision-making and development measurement:

⁵ See the forthcoming background document “Towards a central framework for a system of population and social statistics”, which will be available at the following link from the end of January 2026: <https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/statcom/documents/57>.

(a) **Policy relevance.** It provides a structured and integrated view of social and demographic trends to equip policymakers with the means to design and evaluate strategies that address multiple dimensions of people's lives in a coordinated manner;

(b) **Leaving no one behind.** It ensures that differences in outcomes across population groups and geographical areas are visible, allowing countries to identify inequities and take action to close persistent gaps;

(c) **Support for the Beyond GDP initiatives.** It establishes the statistical foundation for measuring some aspects of societal progress and well-being, capturing multidimensional outcomes. By aligning social and demographic statistics with economic and environmental statistics, it enables a holistic evidence base to monitor well-being and sustainability and strengthen the role of social statistics in decision-making;

(d) **Completion of the statistical architecture.** It complements established frameworks such as SNA and the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, providing the essential social and demographic dimension required for a comprehensive and integrated view of development to assist policymakers with complex trade-offs across the pillars of sustainable development.

47. The central framework would also serve as a conceptual model for understanding the lived realities of people over the life course and how societies structure themselves and evolve. It would provide a statistical description of how individuals – with distinct characteristics and as members of social groups – live in specific places, interact within various social contexts and experience life's transitions and events. Beyond the mandate of the Friends of the Chair group, its continued development will deepen understanding of key social dynamics, including people's lives and life transitions; community and social development; the interplay between individual agency, institutions and social actors; the determinants and interlinkages of social outcomes; and the interactions between society, the economy and the environment.

B. Scope and building blocks of the central framework

48. Throughout the work of the Friends of the Chair group, there has been strong consensus that five building blocks – people, relationships, places, time and outcomes – are cross-cutting and the relevant starting point for organizing population and social statistics systematically. The blocks are conceived as interconnected rather than discrete, constantly interacting to shape human, community and social development, which makes them foundational to how social statistics are used to make sense of social phenomena. The building blocks serve two critical functions: as subjects of analysis offering relevant perspectives on social phenomena for an overarching conceptual framework; and as the relevant units of measurement and variables needed for an integrated data foundation through consistent language, standards and classifications.

49. People are the primary actors in society and constitute the basic unit of measurement in the central framework. People are understood not only as demographic units but as agents and rights-holders who possess and exercise capabilities to shape their own well-being and that of others through their actions and relationships. This perspective anchors the system in human development and well-being over the life course, ensuring that measurement frameworks account for demographic, health, educational and other social dimensions while respecting individual agency, autonomy and diversity. Characteristics of people, such as their current age, sex, race, ethnicity, disability and migratory status, also influence their trajectories.

50. Relationships capture both the structure of society and the dynamic linkages and interactions among individuals, households, groups, communities and institutions, including governments. These relationships are fundamental to defining what makes humans “social” and can be considered structurally as a unit of measurement (e.g. household and institutional entity) but are fundamentally about the interactions between their members. Relationships include the role of trust, networks, social capital and civic engagement. Measuring the quantity and quality of these relationships is an area of development for social statistics within the central framework for a system of population and social statistics, requiring careful conceptual clarity to avoid conflation across dimensions such as extent, function, quality, and impact on relational as well as non-relational outcomes.

51. Places refer to the spatial contexts in which people live their lives. Everything happens somewhere. It is not merely geographical location but also encompasses place-based access to resources, infrastructures, opportunities, and exposures to risks. In this way, places, such as the place of birth and residence, influence human well-being. Measurement of social outcomes is often anchored in a place-based understanding of social development, whether at the national or the community level.

52. Time is crucial for understanding how individual experiences and relationships evolve over the life course, influenced by factors such as education, family dynamics, ageing and social roles. Monitoring change over time reveals trends, serves to anticipate societal needs and shows the impact of policy and progress towards societal goals. Life-course approaches highlight the interconnectedness of experiences across stages, with longitudinal data providing key insights into intergenerational inequality, health, migration and social mobility. Time-use data reveal how individuals allocate their time, offering a nuanced view of quality of life beyond economic indicators. Human, community and social development, social change, and population dynamics are inherently time-based concepts. All statistics are anchored in time of observation, with varying time interval scales as the unit of measurement, ranging from a specific time stamp or time-use diary entry to a broad historical period or intergenerational frame.

53. Social outcomes measure human and social development, such as well-being, inclusion and sustainability. Well-being is multidimensional. Inclusion takes account of equity gaps or disadvantages experienced by population subgroups across outcomes and lived experiences. Sustainability takes account of “later” and “elsewhere”, not just “here and now”. Measuring outcomes enables policymakers to understand emerging issues, equity gaps and the impact of the initiatives that they introduce. Measurement of social outcomes and demographic change is the bedrock of evidence-based social policy.

C. Major contributions of the Friends of the Chair group towards a central framework

54. The central framework for a system of population and social statistics advances a systems approach to such statistics, in recognition of the fact that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This approach organizes statistics in a coherent, multidimensional framework that connects the building blocks both conceptually and operationally. By doing so, it allows statistics to move beyond isolated silos and instead function as an integrated system capable of explaining complex social phenomena and their interdependencies. Integration is achieved through interlinked dimensions: horizontal (across outcome domains), vertical (within each building block), spatial (place-based), temporal (change over time) and structural (societal actors at the macro, meso and micro levels).

55. Together, the five building blocks provide conceptual scaffolding for establishing such a central framework. They ensure that statistics capture both individual and collective experiences and behaviours that result in social processes and their outcomes for people, measured both objectively and subjectively. Further work is needed to conceptualize the role of individual agency and the functions of social actors in shaping social and other outcomes and change across time and places, and the interactions between outcomes. These dynamic elements are acknowledged as potential future directions for the development of the central framework.

56. A key contribution of the central framework is the formal recognition of a population data system as the heart of the framework: the population spine. While many countries already maintain population registers, censuses and surveys that provide its foundation, the framework is intended to formalize and operationalize the population data system as an integrated, functioning system that coherently links these components to produce consistent, multidimensional and longitudinal statistics. A mature population data system serves as the structural core for vertical integration – maintaining an up-to-date record of all usual residents (population stock), supporting alternative bases such as the workday population and accurately capturing demographic flows and transitions over time. Furthermore, it should enable flexible and standardized disaggregation (e.g. by age, sex and disability) aligned with international standards, provide near-real-time information, ensure the ethical governance of sensitive data and enhance access to life-course microdata by linking events longitudinally.

57. Having identified a gap in the suite of social measurement standards and guidelines with respect to measuring the connections among people, the Friends of the Chair group has also been developing a statistical framework based on existing literature to better understand and measure these relationships. The relationships framework is aimed at capturing both interpersonal and institutional dimensions of relationships and serves as a starting point for integrating these measurements into the broader central framework for a system of population and social statistics. In the relationships framework, three levels are proposed that allow users to map the whole of society, including macro levels of social governance and social cohesion and meso-level institutional functioning, to better understand and measure these relationships, alongside the micro-level individual and family interactions that shape daily lives over the long term. The framework introduces a structural perspective to understanding how society is structured for measurement purposes. Furthermore, it contains four lenses through which to structure measurement activity: extent (stock – the number of relationships and characteristics), function (activity or service), quality (the condition of relationships) and impact (how the relationship influences social and other outcomes). The lenses support the evaluation of why relationships matter and the value of measuring their multifaceted influence on social outcomes. This focus on the social functions performed by social actors contributes directly to a better causal understanding of social phenomena measured through social outcomes.

58. A critical contribution of the central framework is its focus on the spatial dimension (places) through the robust integration of geospatial information into social statistics. Prioritizing place-based data is essential for identifying inequalities and designing policies that address place-based disparities. The Friends of the Chair group proposed aligning the central framework with international geospatial frameworks, specifically the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework and the United Nations Integrated Geospatial Information Framework. This commitment encourages adherence to these standards, acting as an enabler of integration by standardizing location-based concepts to facilitate georeferencing across diverse data sources while keeping data privacy and security considerations in mind. This organization of geographies in a hierarchical global structure supports vertical integration within the places building block. Ultimately, the framework promotes the use of geographic

information system layers and place-based analysis as a robust tool for integrating spatial data across social, economic and environmental statistics.

59. The central framework serves to emphasize the temporal dimension by encouraging enhanced longitudinal data linkage and harmonization to enable integration over time through longitudinal and time series analysis. Integrated data systems are instrumental here, facilitating the construction of time series, event histories and sequence analysis by effectively combining different data sources. A key priority is establishing predictable time series for social data at relevant intervals, based on national capacity, with the ideal goal of coordinating these timelines across different outcome domains. This coordination is essential for making complex interactions and period effects visible, thereby supporting a deeper, intertemporal understanding of social change and life-course dynamics.

60. A major conceptual contribution of the central framework is that it moves the focus on outcomes beyond fragmented silos towards horizontal integration. This involves establishing consistent, harmonized outcome domains to better organize social statistics and relevant standards and classifications. By standardizing and unifying the structure for measurement, the central framework creates a more agile, responsive “back-end” that can produce measures that meet a wide range of policy and analytical demands, ensuring a coherent and comprehensive assessment of societal progress.

D. The way forward

61. The successor mechanism of the Friends of the Chair group should focus on advancing the development and implementation of the central framework for a system of population and social statistics through a sequenced, inclusive and pragmatic approach. A key first step will be to decide on the prioritization of activities and tasks and to identify the composition of the core horizon, the foundational set of statistics that every country can produce in the near term. This work will ensure that the central framework horizons are both nationally relevant and globally coherent. The process should be guided by user needs, the maturity of national statistical systems, and policy priorities at the national and subnational levels. The approach should also be aligned with existing international recommendations on data sources, methods and key thematic areas.

62. Additional tasks for the successor mechanism include preparing a concise and accessible preamble to the central framework, outlining its value proposition, scope, boundaries and components and establishing an agreed ontology and typology that support integration across systems. In this regard, ensuring shared concepts and clearly defined boundaries with SNA and the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting will be essential to promote communication across statistical domains and determine which elements belong to each system. The successor mechanism can act as a counterpart for existing governance structures around these pre-existing standards to resolve boundary issues.

63. Further priorities include:

- Advancing the conceptualization, operationalization and implementation of mature population data systems, including their relationship with existing standards and coordination mechanisms.
- Agreeing on an international standard approach to population disaggregation for advancing vertical integration.

- Developing and agreeing on a set of social outcome domains for advancing horizontal integration.
- Identifying gaps and misalignments in domain-specific concepts, definitions and classifications.
- Proposing a process for the development or revision of classifications.
- Advancing the work on the relationships framework.

VI. Successor mechanism

64. Advancing an integrated approach for social and demographic statistics requires a mechanism that ensures collaboration, continuity and sustained progress. The mechanism must serve as an institutional anchor, combining strategic leadership, coordination, technical work and experience-sharing, supported by robust governance and efficient working methods. Aligning stakeholders and fostering collaboration across the global system, it will enable social and demographic statistics to function in a coherent, accountable and responsive way, capable of meeting evolving demands. The Friends of the Chair group has identified the following core functions for the successor mechanism:

(a) **Advance technical work and develop the central framework for social and demographic statistics.** The mechanism must lead the technical development of the central framework while maintaining coherence with existing frameworks in other statistical pillars. The process must involve technical experts, operate on a clear time-bound basis and include mechanisms for updates and revisions to maintain relevance, methodological rigour and comparability. Collaboration with complementary initiatives, such as the Expert Group on Well-being Measurement, will ensure synergies and coherence;

(b) **Coordinate stakeholders and actors.** As a coordinating body within the Statistical Commission, it should act as the focal point for national statistical offices, expert groups and international organizations. It should provide horizontal coordination across United Nations statistical groups under the social and demographic statistics pillar and promote partnerships with academia, civil society and the private sector;

(c) **Promote the sharing of experiences.** The mechanism should facilitate systematic experience-sharing across countries and regions. Building on existing initiatives, such as the Network of Economic Statisticians, the mechanism could support thematic approaches in areas requiring rapid response or overlapping with economic statistics.

65. To operationalize these functions, it is recommended that the Statistical Commission establish a Committee of Experts on Population and Social Statistics.⁶

VII. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission

66. **The Commission is invited:**

(a) **To endorse the recommendations presented in the report, including the establishment of a Committee of Experts on Population and Social Statistics;**

⁶ For the proposed terms of reference of the Committee of Experts on Population and Social Statistics, see the background document “Strategic recommendations for strengthening social and demographic statistics”.

(b) **To invite Member States to express their interest in joining the Committee of Experts;**

(c) **To call upon donors and the international community to support, with financial and human resources, the development of the central framework for a system of population and social statistics;**

(d) **To request that the statistical groups working on demographic and social statistics strengthen coordination and collaborate with the Committee of Experts;**

(e) **To dissolve the Friends of the Chair group on social and demographic statistics.**
