



GCC-STAT HIGH-LEVEL WEBINAR “ENABLING OFFICIAL STATISTICS IN THE GCC COUNTRIES TO BE MORE RESPONSIVE IN FUTURE PANDEMICS AND DISASTERS –LESSONS LEARNED FROM COVID-19”

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Video message

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Distinguished Colleagues from the GCC countries,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address you, today, from the United Nations through this video message, and to virtually join this High-Level Seminar. I would like to thank Mr. Sabir Said Rashid Al-Harbi, not only for taking the leadership in organizing this very timely webinar, but also for providing me this opportunity to address you.

GCC-Stat has been an important partner in fostering the development of the national statistical offices in the Arab region. GCC-Stat has been an active member of Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities and was a part of its Bureau as Vice chair. Moreover, in 2017, GCC-Stat hosted the thirtieth session of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities in Muscat and I retain of course fond memories of visiting GCC-Stat, meeting all its staff and enjoying your incredibly kind hospitality.

Dear colleagues,

Good and efficient international statistical cooperation is more important than ever before, given the historical challenges we are all facing: There is first the broad and ambitious scope of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, that requires a comprehensive and sustained production of a wide range of data. Furthermore, the current global pandemic has forced us, in the professional statistical community to adjust and adapt – and to do so quickly. I must say, I am proud to see how the global statistical community has come together, in the past months, to share solutions and, thus, to enable official statistics in all countries, including the GCC countries, to respond more effectively to the crisis.

My office has taken the lead, together with the World Bank and with the support of the five UN regional commissions, to design a global COVID19 website in order to collect practical solutions and to also conduct a survey to assess the needs of National Statistical Organizations in the short and medium term. Allow me to highlight a few of the key findings:

- The pandemic has, indeed, disrupted the operations of the vast majority of national statistical offices, requiring office closures, telework and the suspension of traditional data collection methods such as face-to-face interviews. Alternative data collection methods through telephone or on-line surveys were quickly developed.
- We do need more decisive investments in cloud-based digital technologies and other IT infrastructure to support remote work, training, data collection, and data storage, which are vital for NSOs to continue operating during the pandemic.
- One of the most important lessons learned is that to cope successfully with the COVID-19 pandemic, we must engage with our users more pro-actively and directly, for instance, through modern social media channels.
- A special responsibility fell upon National Statistical Office to draw data from a variety of sources effectively together, such as from census and survey programmes, civil registration, social security, and other sources of administrative data, as well as from more innovative sources, such as call detail records, satellite imagery, and social media; especially those newer data sources were needed to ensure that everyone, but specially the most vulnerable, are counted and accounted for, and that governments, businesses and communities have the information they need to be able to save people's lives and livelihoods.
- This demonstrated how crucial the role is, that NSOs play, not only as the stewards of reliable and trusted data to inform all levels of government and all sectors of society, but also as a source of technical guidance and expertise to help other members of the national statistical system leverage their data assets during a national emergency.

After this COVID-19 pandemic is over—and we are sadly still far from reaching that point—we need to make sure we are ready for the next crisis. We can't go back to business as usual. We need to build sustainable and resilient national statistical systems – under the leadership of strong National Statistical Offices as data stewards. At the global level we have strong tools for that: namely the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, adopted at the highest level by the United Nations General Assembly. They call for strictly scientific methods and the independence of the national statistical system. The application of the United Nations Fundamental Principles will build the trust needed to guide policy decision making at all levels.

Trust is also the central theme of our forthcoming World Statistics Day 2020 to be celebrated on the 20 October this year all around the world: Its theme is: “Connecting the World with data we can trust”! I invite all of you to contribute and to celebrate with us.

Dear colleagues,

The challenges for the global statistical community are considerable. But, I am deeply convinced that thanks to our joint professionalism we will succeed. Thank you for your cooperation.

Thank you for your attention and I wish you a successful High-level webinar.