Road to Bern conference in Moscow, Russia in preparation for the United Nations World Data Forum 2021 in Bern, Switzerland
10 September 2021, Virtual meeting

Recorded remarks
Stefan Schweinfest
Director, United Nations Statistics Division
Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Dear colleagues,

It is a great pleasure for me to address you today from the United Nations Headquarters in New York. As you know, we are busy, making the final preparations for our third United Nations World Data Forum to be held in Bern, Switzerland between 3 and 6 October 2021.

I am proud that we are able to convene this important Forum, especially at a time when there is so much expectation on the global data and statistical community.

Thanks to the hard work and concerted planning of our gracious hosts, the Swiss Government and the Federal Statistical Office, I am confident we can hold this event in a safe and secure manner mitigating the ongoing risks related to the Covid-19 virus, while allowing for a wide and diverse participation.

And much appreciation goes to the Forum’s hard working Programme Committee and the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development who have prepared a very engaging programme.

The Forum represents an opportunity for many of you to present or hear about the incredible ongoing work to produce the data solutions to support the response and recovery from the pandemic, and to get us back on track to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

We are now more than one third into our way to meet the SDGs by 2030. Yet the report we released in July this year tells us that the news is not good. Even before the pandemic, the world was not on track to meet the Goals. And now Covid-19 is having catastrophic impacts, and in many cases, turning back the progress that many have worked so hard to achieve.

To turn this around, timely and disaggregated data and statistics are vital.
The United Nations Statistics Division has taken a proactive approach to monitoring the pandemic’s effect on statistical operations across the world in an effort to provide the necessary support to statistical systems in these unprecedented circumstances.


The surveys revealed the tremendous impact the Covid-19 pandemic had on all statistical operations. The survey also revealed, that some national statistical offices were able to rise to the challenge and adopt innovative data solutions in response to the new data demands of the pandemic. However, the surveys mostly showed that many countries were being left behind because of lack of resources and decreasing international support, which is urgently needed to ensure even the continuity of basic statistical operations.

As a result, we have now intensified our cooperation with our partners to focus on better financing of data and statistics in line with our Cape Town Global Action Plan which was agreed at the 1st UN World Data Forum in January 2017.

Of course, one of the big lessons of the pandemic was the movement of events online; and this year’s Forum will be no exception. Building on the success and experience of our 2020 virtual Forum some sessions of the programme remain virtual, but the majority will be conducted in a hybrid format with speakers both in-person and online. All sessions will be broadcast through an event platform just like the 2020 virtual Forum.

For those unable to travel, you may wish to join a local Forum meet-up to bring together the data community within your local area to connect and watch the Forum proceedings.

70 plus sessions and over 400 speakers – you will have quite something to look forward to. I will be very happy to see many of you at our United Nations World Data Forum.