

Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys

Terms of Reference

Final (14 May 2020)

A. Background

1. Household surveys are a vital component of every national statistical system. They are the main source of social and economic statistics, including many indicators crucial for developing and monitoring country policies and tracking progress towards national and global development targets and goals, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They are also widely used for research on development issues. In recent years, the demand for data from social and economic surveys has continued to grow, particularly in developing countries, where administrative systems and other data sources are the weakest and the information gaps remain the largest.

2. With the recent adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,¹ the demand for household surveys has further increased; household surveys continue to be a critical source of data for the full implementation of the 2030 agenda and for monitoring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Despite significant improvements in data availability, in both topical and geographic coverage, and advances in methodologies, large disparities remain among countries. Some countries are still unable to sustain a long-term programme of high-quality surveys that are comparable over time and compliant with international standards.

3. With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, an additional problem that emerged is the insufficient coverage of SDG indicators by the national household survey program with respect to its full potential. Key challenges with respect to household surveys include the availability and frequency of household survey data, since household survey programmes are often not adequately covered and financially supported in national statistical plans; the lack of relevant and timely data; the low reliability and accuracy of household data in many low-income countries; the need for data comparability and coherence within surveys in a given country and across countries; the cost-effectiveness of household surveys; the need for adequate funds; and the accessibility and usability of the data produced through household surveys².

4. In order to address the above-mentioned issues, the Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys (ISWGHS) was established in 2015 by the Statistical Commission³ to foster coordination of efforts and harmonization of standards among development partners and across countries and to promote further methodological development relevant to household surveys. In addition, at its 49th Session⁴ and again in its

¹ General Assembly resolution 70/1, annex.

² E/CN.3/2015/10

³ E/2015/24-E/CN.3/2015/40, available at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/46th-session/documents/statcom-2015-46th-report-E.pdf>.

⁴ E/CN.3/2018/37, available at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/49th-session/documents/Report-on-the-49th-session-E.pdf>

latest session in 2020, the Commission tasked the ISWGHS with developing and updating methodological guidance on household surveys with a cross-cutting focus and providing guidance on different methodological areas.

B. Objective

5. The Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys is created to foster improvement in the scope and quality of social and economic statistics as delivered through national, regional and international household survey programmes, including through increased coordination and cooperation across at all levels. More specifically, ISWGHS:

- a. Provides a **vision** for a global household survey agenda and the development of integrated household survey systems to meet the need for social and economic statistics, including for monitoring the SDGs
- b. Fosters **coordination and cooperation** in the planning, funding and implementation of household surveys at the national, regional and international level;
- c. Promotes the **harmonization** of survey methods and instruments, where appropriate;
- d. Regularly reviews and provides strategic recommendations on new **methodological development and innovations** related to household surveys;
- e. Foster the production and adoption of tools and guidelines on household surveys with a cross-cutting focus, taking into account, specific country and regional contexts;
- f. Supports the adoption of **international statistical standards, methods and best practices**, in the area of data collection, compilation, dissemination, and integration of national, regional and international household survey programmes;
- g. Working closely with the IAEG-SDGs to improve **SDG monitoring** through household surveys, in particular on improving availability, quality, timeliness and disaggregation of data for relevant SDG indicators.
Develops partnerships and seek adequate **funding** and resources to support coordination at the global level as well as the development and adoption of methodological innovation and the diffusion of best practices in household surveys.

C. Membership and Governance structure

Intersecretariat Working Group

6. Members of the Group consist of international agencies and member states. Experts from the academia, donors and civil society organizations (CSOs) are invited to join the work of the Group and/ or the Task Forces on an ad hoc basis. CSOs and donors may be considered for membership in the Working Group on a case-by-case basis, according the relevance of their technical and financial contribution to the work of the Group.

7. Agency members of the Group should be responsible either for a survey programme (MICS, LSMS, 50x2030, etc.) or for providing regular training and support for household surveys in areas under their mandate (UIS, ILO, UNDP, etc.)

8. Member states will join the Group, based on their needs if (a) their statistical systems rely significantly on household survey programmes or (b) if they can offer technical and/or financial support to the work of the Group. The participation of countries will ensure equitable regional representation, including members of the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. The initial list of countries will be proposed by the Secretariat. Additional Member States might express interest in participating as observers in the larger group.

9. Proposal for new members may be made by any current members and is subject to approval by the Steering Committee. Membership to the Working Group will be based on active participation and effective contribution of its members.

10. The Intersecretariat Working Group meets physically once a year, and otherwise conduct its work electronically through email exchange and virtual meetings. Participation in the physical meetings is self-funded. A limited number of developing countries may receive funding, when available, to support their participation in meetings.

Steering Committee

11. The work of the Working Group will be governed by a **Steering Committee** consisting of international agencies that provide regular financial and in-kind contributions to support the Group's work programme as well as by a core group of up to 5 countries, one per region.

12. The Steering Committee plans the work programme for the Intersecretariat Working Group and oversees the work of the task forces. The Steering Committee meets regularly to discuss priorities and review work progress and keeps all members of the Group informed about important discussions and key decisions.

13. The Steering Committee elects the 2 co-chairs of the Intersecretariat Working Group from among its members. The co-chairs will be elected for a rotating period of 2 years and are eligible for a second 2-year term. In order to ensure continuity, after the first 2-year period, one of the current co-chairs will rotate out.

14. The Steering Committee organizes regular virtual meetings to discuss priorities and review progress. If feasible, and requested by its members, they may also meet in-person once a year at the margin of the Statistical Commission or some other major statistics event.

Secretariat

15. UNSD is the Secretariat of the Working Group. It supports the work of the ISWGHS and works closely with the two co-chairs.
16. In addition to making technical contribution as full member of the Group and the Steering Committee, the Secretariat is responsible for (a) maintaining the ISWGHS website; (b) preparing reports for the Statistical Commission; (c) facilitating the communication with countries, regional and international agencies through the Statistical Commission, CCSA and CCS-UN ; (d) organizing and undertaking consultations with potential donors; and (e) providing logistical and other support to the ISWGHS.
17. As part of the Secretariat, a coordinator, with expertise in the field of household surveys, provide the substantive support to the co-chairs and the group. The coordinator, under the guidance of the co-chairs and the Steering Committee and UNSD, will be responsible for preparing a work programme for the Intersecretariat Working Group, overseeing the work of the task forces and organizing the Steering Committee and Working Group meetings. The coordinator also provides regular reports to the Intersecretariat Working Group on work progress, problems identified, solutions recommended and decisions to be made. In addition, the coordinator supports fund raising efforts, in close consultation with the Secretariat, the co-chairs and the steering group.

Task Forces

18. Substantive work of the Group is carried out through Task Forces, which can be proposed by member(s) of the Group and approved by the Steering Committee.
19. Topics of the task forces should be crosscutting and innovative. Task forces should have clear terms of reference (see Annex 1 for the template) and expected duration of work; and should report back to the Working Group periodically. Task forces should be led by one or multiple members of the Group and supported by other members of the Group. Task force lead may also invite resource persons outside of the Group to contribute to its work.
20. Output of the task forces are reviewed by the Group on a volunteer basis and approved by the Steering Committee and considered output of the Intersecretariat Working Group, to be submitted to the Statistical Commission for approval or for information per the nature of the output.

D. Duration

21. The work of the Intersecretariat Working Group will be on-going and renewal assessed annually. The ToR will be reviewed when needed and as requested by the UN Statistical Commission.

Annex 1. Terms of reference for the Task Force on XXX

- Rational
 - background of the stream of work and explain why establishing the task force
- Objective
 - What would task force achieve
- Tasks and output:
 - Tasks to be undertaken, breakdown with timeline
 - The output to be produced
 - Review process of the output
 - Final approval process and whether it requires approval from the Statistical Commission
- Membership
 - Who can join the task force
 - Responsibilities of members