Does the UN need a Chief Statistician?

9th HLG-PCCB meeting
7-8 November 2017 – Ramallah, Palestine
Georges-Simon Ulrich
Audit report by Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS)

• Conducted from October 2015 to January 2016;
• Published on 22 April 2016 as Report 2016/032;
• Recommendation #3: A UN chief statistician: "DESA should, in consultation with the Statistical Commission, explore the possibility of designating a senior official as United Nations Chief Statistician to coordinate statistical matters across United Nations entities.”;
• UNSD (Stefan) presentend the recommendation to the UNSC in March 2017 in an oral report.
Four existing coordination mechanisms

1. Coordination among the five regional commissions and UNSD has been facilitated through regular bi-monthly conference calls.

2. Coordination takes place on the level called “cluster”, which includes UNSD, the regional commissions as well as other secretariat entities, namely UNODC, UNCTAD, UNEP and UN Habitat.

3. Meeting of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System which includes all secretariat entities and all other United Nations funds and programmes.

4. Coordination takes place in the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA) and includes all United Nations entities and other international and regional organizations (e.g. OECD, Eurostat or PARIS21).
A UN Chief Statistician? - Opportunities

• Increased **visibility of statistics in the whole UN System**. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires a high volume of data and statistics. A higher degree of communication amongst the producers of data as well as between users and producers of data and statistics is crucial;

• **A higher accountability** could strengthen the statistics produced by the UN system;

• A deeper coordination can lead to a **more efficient global statistical system** that will reduce on the long-term the costs.
A UN Chief Statistician? - Challenges

• Which rights (powers) should a UN Chief Statistician have regarding the UN statistics producers inside the UN Secretariat, within the UN System or even outside the UN System?;
• Review of existing legal frameworks – does the political situation allow for this type of overarching chief statistician role?;
• Discussion on the budgetary implications;
• Exploration of tools and mechanisms a Chief Statistician could use that would allow him/her to coordinate with other UN statistics producers.
Possible questions in a study

a) What are the expected benefits of creating the position of a UN Chief Statistician?;

b) Which organizations should be covered under the umbrella of the coordination of an UN Chief Statistician?;

c) Is there a legal framework or precedent that allows for the creation of a UN Chief Statistician?;

d) How can the installation of a Chief Statistician respond to different elements raised during the discussion on the repositioning the UN development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda?;

e) What costs would occur and how could they be covered?;

f) What is the best institutional setting to install an UN Chief Statistician?

g) What experiences have been made by other organisations when they installed a Chief Statistician?
Proposal for next steps

I. October 2017: UN Statistical Commission Bureau comments on this report – Done already!

II. November 2017: HLG-PCCB considers the topic, report and establishes a subgroup to look into the questions raised above and provide its results in a background document to the Commission in 2018;

III. November/December 2017: The HLG-PCCB (and the Bureau) will report on this topic in their document to the UN Statistical Commission;

IV. February 2018: The finalized report will be distributed as background documents to members and observers of the UN Statistical Commission;

V. March 2018: Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations system considers the topic;

VI. March 2018: As included in the HLG-PCCB report and as a background document, the topic (and points for decision) will be considered by the UN Statistical Commission and decisions on the next steps will be taken.