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Items for information: coordination of statistical programmes

Joint report of the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System and the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2023/325 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the joint report of the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System and the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, which is submitted to the Commission for information.

* [E/CN.3/2024/1](#).



Joint report of the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System and the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities

I. Background

1. Coordination between international organizations active in the area of official statistics is carried out by two Committees that work closely together: the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities and the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System.

2. The Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities is currently led by two Co-Chairs, Haishan Fu (World Bank, representing non-United Nations members) and Steve MacFeely (World Health Organization (WHO), representing United Nations members). Their work is supported by three Vice-Chairs, Mariana Kotzeva (Eurostat), Rolando Ocampo (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)) and Sylvia Montoya (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics).¹ The Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System is also led by two Co-Chairs, currently Mr. MacFeely and Ms. Montoya. The Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat serves as secretariat to both Committees. Information on the work of the two Committees is available on their respective web pages, hosted on the Statistics Division website.²

3. Both Committees operate through a network of task teams and generally hold two formal sessions (back-to-back) per year. The latest meetings of both Committees took place in October 2023 and were hosted by WHO in Geneva.

4. This is the first time that the two Committees are submitting a joint report to the Commission. This joint reporting reflects the intertwined nature of their work. The present report is also the first report to be submitted under the new two-year reporting cycle.

II. Progress towards the implementation of the System-wide Road Map for Innovating United Nations Data and Statistics (Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System)

5. On 18 June 2020, the Economic and Social Council adopted resolution [2020/5](#), on strengthening coordination of the statistical programmes in the United Nations system, on the recommendation of the Statistical Commission.

6. In addressing the request from the Council, the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System finalized in 2020 the System-wide Road Map for Innovating United Nations Data and Statistics ([CEB/2020/1/Add.1](#)), which was aimed at improving United Nations data and United Nations coordination in the delivery of statistical assistance to Member States. The Road Map was presented to the Commission at its fifty-second session and is available as a background document for the Commission.

7. In its decision 52/104, the Commission, inter alia, acknowledged and appreciated the work carried out by the Committee as agile and responsive, welcomed

¹ See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ccsa/documents/Table-Chairs.pdf>.

² See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ccsa/> and <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/unsystem/>.

the System-wide Road Map as a solid commitment of the United Nations system to strengthen coordination and modernize United Nations statistics and data addressing the provisions of Council resolution 2020/5 and fully concurred with the identified priority activities, in particular the proposal of transforming the data.un.org portal into a single point of reference for United Nations system data in order to strengthen the position of the United Nations system as a primary provider of global data and statistics.

8. With regard to this first priority area, in its decision 52/115, the Commission, inter alia, endorsed the vision and way forward for the implementation of the new UNdata portal as the main entry point to authoritative statistical data and metadata from the United Nations system and other participating international and regional organizations, in line with countries' priorities and with the Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere and the System-wide Road Map, endorsed the establishment of an inter-agency and expert mechanism for the full development and implementation of a new United Nations data hub and the regular review and update of its data and metadata, agreed with its proposed terms of reference and welcomed expressions of interest by countries and international agencies in supporting the work of the new mechanism. WHO, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Organization and ECLAC are participating in the pilot phase of the modernization and function as liaisons between the pilot group and members of the Committee. The Committee also received regular updates from the Statistics Division during its meetings. For more details on the status of the project, see the report of the Secretary-General on open data ([E/CN.3/2024/22](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/economic-affairs/secretary-general-report-on-open-data), paras. 3–5).

9. The second priority area identified was “to promote, within and outside the United Nations system, a culture of data literacy and provide evidence to support United Nations policies and programmes”. A Committee task team worked closely with the United Nations System Staff College to develop a modular Staff College course on data literacy, targeted at United Nations staff in general. The course, which consists of interactive, self-paced lessons and weekly instructor-led webinars, has since been successfully run by the Staff College. A detailed, modular online course on economic and financial statistics has been made available as part of the European Master in Official Statistics project, a joint initiative between academia and European institutions, coordinated by Eurostat.³

10. Work in the third priority area, “to embed predictive analytics, including nowcasting and forecasting, into United Nations system data/statistical programmes so as to ensure the provision of timely information in order to address emerging policy issues”, began in February 2020 with a technical workshop on nowcasting in international organizations, organized by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). Since then, an informal network, managed by UNIDO, has been established. The network has been sharing know-how and lessons learned concerning the implementation of nowcasting and forecasting methodologies, the dissemination of estimates and the application of techniques in the context of sustainable development indicators.

³ See <https://www.youtube.com/@europeanmasterinofficialst492/playlists>.

III. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities and the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System)

A. Liaison with the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators

11. The Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities has continued to liaise closely with the Co-Chairs of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators and the Secretariat to ensure an open dialogue between custodian agencies and Member States (see also [E/CN.3/2024/4](#)).

12. At the thirteenth meeting of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group, held in Bangkok in November 2022, the Co-Chairs invited the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities to submit comments or recommendations pertaining to the second, and final, comprehensive review of the global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which will be concluded at the fifty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission, in 2025.

13. A special session of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities was held on 28 March 2023 to solicit views from the chief statisticians of custodian agencies. The following issues were raised at that meeting:

(a) Concerns were expressed that many tier 2 indicators might be dropped from the global indicator framework as part of the comprehensive review, especially those that still had limited country coverage at the end of 2024. Many of the tier 2 indicators covered areas that were new to official statistics when the Goals were approved, so even if they had not reached the desired coverage, the steady progress in data availability, although insufficient, still reflected great success in the gradual implementation of new statistical methodology. The Committee stressed that the expansion of the boundaries of official statistics, and the subsequent investment and effort (made by custodian agencies and countries), should be taken into consideration;

(b) It was noted that the 2030 Agenda had been endorsed by the General Assembly and could not be significantly altered. As a custodian of indicators that sometimes measured issues that posed challenges for some Member States, the Committee should avoid any attempts to remove politically sensitive indicators unless they were demonstrably non-performing;

(c) Assistance was offered to the Inter-Agency and Expert Group in facilitating any consultations required. Custodian agencies were also happy to work with the Group to ensure that national statistical offices or lead agencies of national statistical systems fulfilled their critical coordination role in respect of the Goal indicators;

(d) The reactivation of regional consultation mechanisms was encouraged, in order to enable Group members to represent their respective regions. That could help ameliorate situations where custodian agencies had to explain Group decisions to some non-member countries whose positions appeared not to have been taken into account;

(e) It was suggested that the Group continue to take on board subject matter expertise when making important decisions and maintain the highest possible levels of transparency and engagement in the decision-making process. It was stated that custodian agencies would welcome the opportunity to participate in the Group's

deliberations, especially when crucial decisions such as those regarding the deletion or addition of indicators were being made;

(f) It was stated that no countries, regions within countries or groups (such as small island developing States or least developed countries) must be left behind. It was noted that some Member States had the capacity to be more active than others, and that it was important that all reasonable steps be taken to ensure that all the opinions of all Member States were reflected;

(g) The Group was urged to encourage Member States to collect disaggregated data to identify and monitor progress regarding groups facing multiple inequalities and deprivations and to use robust methodologies to delineate cities (functional urban areas) and settlements by their degree of urbanization in order to enhance international comparability in Goal monitoring.

14. The Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities was also invited to present any further reflections to the Inter-Agency and Expert Group in Copenhagen in October 2023. This continued dialogue has greatly assisted custodian agencies in understanding and accommodating the views of Member States.

B. Activities related to the Sustainable Development Goals Summit

15. At the Sustainable Development Goals Summit held in September 2023, a high-impact initiative on the power of data, aimed at unlocking the data dividend in relation to the Goals, was launched. The Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System co-leads this initiative together with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Bank and the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data. This initiative will mobilize the high-level political support, leadership and investment needed for national data systems to accelerate progress in the lead-up to 2030. This focus on data will further galvanize the efforts of the many stakeholders who are driving the data revolution and demonstrate to high-level decision makers that strengthening data availability, transparency and financing is one of the most effective ways to target and accelerate efforts to realize the 2030 Agenda and achieve the Goals.

C. Use of population data for global monitoring of the Goals

16. Given the crucial importance of population data in computing many Goal indicators, the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities formed a task team to review the use of population data for the global monitoring of the Goals, as such data are one of the main sources of differences between Goal indicators published by custodian agencies and national indicators. The task team, led by the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, submitted its final report to the Committee in early 2021. In response to the final recommendations of the task team, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs has taken the following action, through its Population Division and Statistics Division:

(a) Starting with the 2022 revision, *World Population Prospects* now provides annual time series and population estimates and projections disaggregated by single age and sex for all countries or areas with at least 1,000 inhabitants;

(b) The next revision of *World Urbanization Prospects*, planned for mid-2025, will provide a comprehensive set of estimates and projections of the urban and rural population for all countries and areas of the world, based on national definitions and the degree of urbanization;

(c) The Population Division has expanded the *World Population Prospects* metadata available for all inputs used in creating estimates for population size and for each of the demographic components of population change (fertility, mortality and migration) and published a technical paper documenting the detailed protocol used to evaluate and adjust population size by age and sex using data collected in population censuses;⁴

(d) The Statistics Division has enhanced and improved the collection and dissemination of the metadata for national population estimates available through the *Demographic Yearbook*;

(e) The work of the Department in this area has focused on how to best use existing, empirical data, how to close data gaps, and how to address discrepancies between national estimates and those published by *World Population Prospects* in a collaborative and transparent manner.

IV. Other areas of coordination

A. Coordination of statistical activities in the field

17. The statistical community works closely with the Development Coordination Office, which is represented in the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System as an observer. To date, this collaboration has been focused on building the capacities of and providing support to United Nations resident coordinator offices in streamlining, coordinating and enhancing country team support for national statistical systems through United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and enhancing data use and analysis in common country analyses and voluntary national reviews of Member States. The Office and the Committee continue to deepen their partnership in line with their respective coordination mandates.

B. Coordination with the High-level Committee on Programmes and the High-level Committee on Management

18. The Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System has been assisting the High-level Committee on Programmes in developing a coherent view of data governance. This work began in 2021, following the publication of the *World Development Report 2021: Data for Better Lives* and the UNCTAD *Digital Economy Report 2021: Cross Border Data Flows and Development – For Whom the Data Flow*, both of which highlighted the need for a global data governance framework. The Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities was invited by the World Bank to write a piece on data governance for the *World Development Report 2021*, which was entitled “The need for a new global consensus on data: A call to action”. The first round of this work culminated with the publication, by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board, of a paper entitled “International data governance: pathways to progress” (CEB/2023/1/Add.2), which sets out pathways or possible road maps for improving data governance. The High-level Committee on Programmes subsequently asked the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System to explore what a set of universal data principles might include. Some preliminary work has begun, and the two Committees are now in discussions on how best to begin consultations on this topic. This work also informed the Our Common Agenda policy brief on a global digital compact for an open, free and secure digital

⁴ See www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesa_pd_2022_tp-methodprotocol.pdf.

future for all ([A/77/CRP.1/Add.4](#)), in which the importance of data governance is highlighted as a prerequisite for a safe digital transformation.

19. The Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System is also working with the High-level Committee on Management on the question of how to improve data governance and data-sharing within the United Nations. This involves developing common data risk classifications and adopting common data dissemination licences, among other things. Given the growing interest in data governance across United Nations entities, in October 2023 the Committee agreed to develop a generic data governance framework for United Nations entities. This work is being done in cooperation with the High-level Committee on Management and the Data Governance Board established as part of the Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere.

C. Beyond GDP

20. As part of the Our Common Agenda initiative, the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities has been providing support to the lead agencies (the United Nations Development Programme, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UNCTAD) in developing the normative outline for the Beyond GDP initiative (see [E/CN.3/2024/10](#) and [E/CN.3/2024/34](#)). This work led to the publication of the Our Common Agenda policy brief on valuing what counts, a framework to progress beyond gross domestic product ([A/77/CRP.1/Add.3](#)), which presents proposals for the development of a universal and comprehensive measurement of progress and sustainable development to complement gross domestic product (GDP), with three concrete recommendations for Member States to consider, concerning:

(a) A renewed political commitment to creating a conceptual framework that can accurately “value what counts” for people, the planet and the future, anchored in the 2030 Agenda and the commitment set out therein to leave no one behind;

(b) The elaboration of a robust technical and scientific process, informed by sound and disaggregated data, resulting in a United Nations value dashboard of a limited number of key indicators that go beyond GDP;

(c) A major capacity-building and resourcing initiative to enable Member States to use the new framework effectively.

21. In 2023, the political declaration of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly, as set out in the annex to resolution [78/1](#), concluded with the words: “We confirm our political commitment to explore measures of progress on sustainable development that complement or go beyond gross domestic product to have a more inclusive approach to international cooperation and reaffirm our call to engage in United Nations-led intergovernmental discussions in consultation with relevant stakeholders.”

22. The Secretary-General notes in his policy brief on a framework to progress beyond gross domestic product that “the technical work of selecting and verifying data indicators should be undertaken through the Statistical Commission, which also hosts the global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda, to ensure the robust and scientific accuracy of the metrics” ([A/77/CRP.1/Add.3](#), para. 22).

V. Current and future work

23. Both Committees are planning to follow up on and continue most activities, including:

(a) Liaising with relevant groups on their work, in particular with the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators but also with the Friends of the Chair group on Social and Demographic Statistics (Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities);

(b) Work in the area of the 2030 Agenda, including on the recommendations of the task team on the use of population data for the global monitoring of progress toward the Goals (Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities);

(c) Work on data governance with the High-level Committee on Programmes and the High-level Committee on Management (Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System).

24. In addition, new areas of work have arisen, where work has commenced in newly established task teams. Such areas include:

(a) The availability of internationally comparable data on the number of households. A task team has been established to review ongoing international data collection efforts concerning the total number of households, to explore methodologies and new data sources and to outline the resources and timelines necessary to produce comparable time series data on the total number of households (Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities);

(b) Measuring gender identity⁵ (Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System);

(c) The role and future of artificial intelligence in member organizations (Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities).

VI. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission

25. **The Commission is invited:**

(a) **To take into account the views expressed in the present report by both Committees in its discussions under the relevant agenda items;**

(b) **To take note of the present report.**

⁵ See the report of the Secretary-General on gender statistics (E/CN.3/2024/14).

Annex

Historical context

1. Formal coordination between international organizations active in the area of official statistics goes back to 1967, when the Administrative Committee on Coordination Subcommittee on Statistical Activities held its first meeting in Rome. It was active until its disbandment on 31 December 2001.
2. Recognizing the need for continuing coordination of statistical activities, it was decided at an inter-agency meeting on the coordination of statistical activities, held in New York from 17 to 19 September 2002, to establish a committee for the coordination of statistical activities.
3. Today, the coordination between international organizations active in the area of official statistics is carried out by two Committees that work closely together: the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities and the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System.
4. The Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities is an inter-agency body that promotes coordination and cooperation across statistical programmes in regional, supranational and international organizations. The Committee currently has 45 members,¹ 29 of which are also members of the smaller Committee for the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System. The Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities was established in 2003 as the successor to the Subcommittee on Statistical Activities. Its terms of reference are available online.²
5. The Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System comprises the statistical services of United Nations funds and programmes, United Nations specialized agencies and the Secretariat, including the regional commissions, the mandates of which include the provision of international official statistics in the context of the principles governing international statistical activities. The Committee comprises a subset of the members of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities. The Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System was formally established by the Statistical Commission in its decision 45/112 and met officially for the first time on 10 September 2014, in conjunction with the twenty-fourth session of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, held in Rome. The Committee's 2020 report to the Commission (E/CN.3/2020/5) contains a full list of current members in its annex I, the Committee's terms of reference in its annex II and a more detailed history of coordination in the context of the United Nations system in its annex III.

¹ See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ccsa/members.cshtml>.

² See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ccsa/documents/TORfinal.pdf>.