Regional Workshop on Strengthening the Collection and Use of International Migration Data in the Context of the 2030 Agenda, 5-8 February 2019, Bangkok, Thailand

1. The UN Statistics Division (UNSD), in collaboration with and Population Division, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (represented by the Statistics Division and the Social Development Division), organised a Regional Workshop on "Strengthening the Collection and Use of International Migration data in the Context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", 5-8 February 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand. The workshop aimed to increase the capacity of participating countries to produce comprehensive national migration data that meets international standards, and to enhance understanding of the uses and limitations of migration data for policy purposes and for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

2. The workshop was attended by representatives from National Statistical Offices and Ministries in charge of international migration data collection from 11 countries in Asia (Armenia, Bangladesh, China, Georgia, Indonesia, Jordan, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand), as well as experts from international, regional and national organisations including Eurostat, ILO, IOM, UNICEF, UNODC, the US Census Bureau and Tokyo University of Foreign Studies.

3. The workshop discussed international standards on international migration statistics, global, regional and national policy and data gaps, national capacity in collecting and analyzing migration statistics and the needs for capacity building. The workshop also provided an opportunity for countries to provide input to the revision of the 1998 Recommendations for Statistics of International Migration.

Summary and conclusions

Countries:

4. [Policy and data assessment] Countries are encouraged to review existing policies and programmes that are relevant to international migration, including national development strategies and national implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, and identify the data needed for informing policy decisions and monitoring the progress. It is important that such assessment is carried out jointly by all relevant stakeholders, coordinated by the national statistical office in consultation with policymakers. The assessment should inform the development of National Strategies for the Development of Statistics.

5. [National Coordination] Countries are encouraged to establish mechanisms to strengthen coordination on international migration statistics among various institutions and stakeholders, including ministries in charge of collecting international migration data, national statistical offices and other relevant offices, to better harmonize concepts and definitions, refine data collection instruments, improve data sharing mechanisms, and evaluate the possibility of integrating data from multiple sources to obtain a more complete picture of international migration (both immigration and emigration). Consultative meetings with policy stakeholders in the country and gaining trust from them are important to ensure collaboration from policymakers.

6. [Censuses] National statistical offices (NSOs) or census authorities are encouraged to collect, compile, evaluate and disseminate data relevant to international migration from the 2020 round of population and housing censuses in accordance with the United Nations standards and guidelines, including the United Nations Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, the United Nations Handbook on Measuring International Migration through Population Censuses, as well as the standard set of migration questions developed by the United Nations so as to improve data availability and comparability across countries.

7. [Censuses] The quality and coverage of emigration data collected through population censuses is of a major concern. Experiences and assessment of results from the 2010 round of censuses in measuring emigration should be used to assess carefully whether emigration questions are to be included in the 2020 round of censuses.

8. [Surveys] For in-depth analysis of the migration phenomenon, countries are encouraged to collect data through a specialized migration survey or a module on international migration in existing household surveys. Given the fact that the percentage of migrants is small in many countries, careful consideration should be given on whether the sample size allows proper data disaggregation by migratory status. If migrant population are to be covered, special sampling strategies, such as covering population living in collective households and oversampling areas where migrants are more likely to stay, shall be developed that take into consideration percentage and distribution of migrants in the country.

9. [Administrative records] Countries are encouraged to explore the possibility of using existing administrative records to capture specific aspects of international migration and use them to a fuller extent to understand international migration in a cost-effective manner. Coverage and quality of each type of administrative sources should be evaluated and made available to users. This would help the users and policymakers in better understanding possible differences in data generated from different sources. Such assessment could benefit from following a national data quality framework for administrative data.

10. [Data integration] An integrated system of migration data built upon all relevant data sources is useful in providing accurate, timely and comprehensive information on migrants, their characteristics and their socioeconomic status in the country. Key elements in building such system successfully include (a) necessary legal agreement from all relevant agencies for data sharing that stipulate the definition of each data source, data format, the level of details to be shared and etc); (b) availability of unique identification for record matching; (c) data cleaning; (d) protection of confidentiality and (e) strong IT support. For countries that do not yet have an integrated migration data system – good practices on all necessary steps from those who have successfully implemented the system would be helpful.

11. [Data integration] Integration of data also refers to the use of "small-area estimates" that integrates a data source that covers small areas such as censuses, administrative sources and geospatial data and a data source that collects more in-depth information such as sample surveys. Countries are encouraged to use and experiment with this type of data integration to produce data that are more disaggregated, to respond to the call for "leaving no one behind".

12. [Big data] Experiences of using big data such as social media, mobile phone and flight data for statistics related to international migration were shared during the workshop. Big data presents both opportunities and challenges in its use for official

statistics. Crucial elements in leveraging the potential of big data include: achieving a full understanding of the big data source, establishing sustainable data sharing mechanisms with the big data owners and experimenting with the new data sources and checking against benchmark generated from official statistics. For such exercise to be successful, protection of the confidentiality of individual information should always be enforced.

13. [Data analysis and communication of key messages] Participants emphasized the importance of making standard statistical methods available for countries but also the need to expand the workshop session with guidance on the evaluation of census data for such method, as well as the use and interpretation of the results. Countries are encouraged to bring samples of their own data to use as input and present an analysis of the results for future workshops. Hands-on exercises on how to communicate statistical results with users would be helpful.

14. [Collaboration with other countries] National statistical offices are encouraged to expand their collaboration with relevant countries, in particular on sharing of experiences, developing national capacities and exchanging statistical data to obtain information on emigrants from the country.

15. [SDG indicators] Countries expressed appreciation that progress has been made in developing methods for SDG indicators directly related to international migration, as well as indicators that need to be disaggregated by migratory status. It was suggested that in addition to the detailed guidance on how to disaggregate SDG indicators by migratory status, the Technical Report on Migration-relevant SDG Indicators should cover methods for SDG indicators directly relevant to migration such as 10.7.1 and 10.7.2 and 16.2.2, with reference to more detailed methodologies maintained by custodian agencies. The draft Technical Report should be made available to countries as soon as possible.

Revision of the 1998 Recommendations

16. Discussion around the definitions of policy-relevant population groups and international migrants showed that national definitions vary greatly across countries. They range from de facto population group, i.e., anyone who is in the country are counted in usual resident count that adopts different duration of stay (2 months to 12 months). The most common duration of stay requirement for defining usual residence is 6 months. Both cumulative and continuous duration of stay have been used in countries, depending on the data sources that capture such information.

17. In addition to long term migrants using a 12-month residence criterion or other relative long period of stay (e.g., 6 months), short-term labour mobility is also crucial for policy purposes and should be covered by the revision of the Recommendations.

18. Terminologies, concepts and definitions available at the international level should be harmonized to avoid any confusions. Harmonized terminologies and their definitions should be presented in a glossary for easy reference. A glossary with harmonized migration terminologies, concepts and definitions should be created.

Regional/International cooperation

19. [Assistance] International and regional organizations are encouraged to provide technical as well as financial assistance to enhance the capacity of national statistical systems, for improved data collection, compilation, dissemination and analysis on

international migration, as stipulated in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

20. [Regional cooperation] To enhance migration data for policies that are relevant for the Asia Pacific region, regional cooperation mechanism could be strengthened, in particular in the area of international migration statistics, building upon existing mechanisms. The strengthened regional cooperation mechanism could aim to harmonize concepts and definitions across countries in the region, facilitate data exchange between countries and facilitate voluntary review of the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration at the regional level. Good practices from other regions related to regional cooperation on migration statistics could be informative on how this region could move forward.

21. [Sharing of good practices] The United Nations are encouraged to promote good practices and guidelines for the collection, compilation, dissemination and communication of migration data derived from various sources.

22. [Developing methods] The United Nations Expert Group on Migration Statistics is encouraged to continue its methodological work addressing technical challenges raised in the workshop, covered in earlier parts of the recommendations.