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“Data and indicators for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” and the “Report of the High Level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”

Does the United Nations need a Chief Statistician?

Prepared by High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics
for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (HLG-PCCB)
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1 Introduction and brief history

The question whether the United Nations needs a chief statistician has already been discussed on various occasions under different contexts. First, in February 2007, the question was raised at the Monday High Level Forum on Official Statistics entitled, “The way forward” held prior to the UN Statistical Commission. However, the question was often related to new and more effective approaches of organization of the UN system or the global statistical community.

In 2007, Dennis Trewin, former head of the Australian Bureau of Statistics, raised the question how the global statistical system could be made ready for the next centuries.¹ One of the recommendations made was the appointment of UN chief statistician who could provide leadership to the global statistical system. Nevertheless, despite the difficulties in establishing a UN chief statistician, Mr. Trewin stated that the gains would lead to more effective coordination.

The coordination of the global statistical system has been a regular topic on the agenda of the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) in the past. Based on the discussion at its 43rd Session in 2012², the Friends of the Chair on the coordination of statistical activities in the United Nations system was established.³ The group reported back to the UNSC in 2013⁴ and 2014⁵. The final report focused on the following aspects of coordination that are needed on the global level: 1) Data collection and dissemination, and data quality; 2) Development and implementation of statistical standards; 3) Current organizational arrangements; and 4) Other relevant dimensions and considerations. The recommendations stated that a deeper coordination within the UN system was needed. However, the report itself has a stronger focus on a technical cooperation (data sharing, development of common standards, etc.).

Within the framework of the reform of the UN Development System⁶, a deeper discussion regarding the installation of a UN chief economist is on-going. The Secretary-General asked the “Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development to serve as Chief Economist of the United Nations and be responsible for spearheading cutting-edge analysis and policy innovation, thereby informing strategic integrated planning within the United Nations development system to support Member States, and serving as a strong technical interlocutor with international financial and economic institutions; moreover, the chief economist would work closely with regional commissions and with the United Nations development system to draw on the unique field based knowledge of the system to generate contributions and shape the global debate.”⁷

As documented in this report (under chapter “Existing coordination mechanisms”), many elements and recommendations of previous reports have already been implemented. However, with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the situation changed radically. Illustrated in many different documents addressed to the UN Statistical Commission in recent years, new challenges to the global statistical community and the UN system have arisen. The Audit report by Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) recalled these new challenges, cited below in chapter 2, and recommended, inter alia, that “DESA should, in consultation with the Statistical Commission, explore the possibility of designating a senior statistician as United Nations Chief Statistician to coordinate statistical matters across the United Nations entities”. In March 2017, the UN Statistical Commission “took note of the recommendation of the Office of Internal Oversight Services [...] and agreed that this topic should be discussed further by the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (HLG-PCCB).”⁸

¹ “An effective global statistical system – A prerequisite for consistency in global measurement” written by Dennis Trewin in 2007; published as “Challenges for Global Statistics” in *Statistical Journal of the IAOS*, Volume 25, Numbers 1,2, 2008, pp 19-25

² E/CN.3/2012/15 (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc12/2012-15-StatCoord-E.pdf>)

³ Decision 43/112 (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc12/2012-Report-E.pdf>)

⁴ E/CN.3/2013/13 (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc13/2013-13-UNCoordination-E.pdf>)

⁵ E/CN.3/2014/13 (<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc14/2014-13-UNCoordination-E.pdf>)

⁶ See <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/dsgsm1100.doc.htm>

⁷ Paragraph 98 in A/72/124 (https://digitalibrary.un.org/record/1298793/files/A_72_124%26E_2018_3-EN.pdf)

⁸ Decision 48/117 (<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/48th-session/documents/Report-on-the-48th-session-of-the-statistical-commission-E.pdf>)

At its 9th meeting in November 2017, the HLG-PCCB discussed the creation of a UN chief statistician and decided to support the official report⁹ of the HLG-PCCB to the 49th Session of the UNSC with this background document. This background document analyses the current structure of the UN Statistics Division as well as the existing coordination mechanisms. It highlights different challenges in the global statistical system and furthermore, it describes similar situations in different international organizations and countries that are in a similar situation. The background document outlines possible tasks of a UN chief statistician. Finally, the background document proposes different options of next steps.

2 Audit report by Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS)

2.1 Office of Internal Oversight Services Report 2016/032

In late 2015 and early 2016, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS)¹⁰ conducted an “audit of the management of the statistics subprogramme and related technical cooperation projects in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs”, covering the period from January 2014 to December 2015. The results of the audit were published on 22 April 2016 as Report 2016/0322.¹¹

According to the report, “the audit was conducted to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of the DESA governance, risk management and control processes in providing reasonable assurance regarding the effective management of the statistics subprogramme and related technical cooperation projects in DESA.”

The key controls tested for this audit were:

- a) Subprogramme management: controls that provide reasonable assurance that adequate and effective processes are established to guide the planning, direction, coordination, and execution of the statistics subprogramme activities; and
- b) Regulatory framework: controls that provide reasonable assurance that policies and procedures:
 - (i) exist to guide the operations of the Statistics Division; (ii) are implemented consistently; and
 - (iii) ensure the reliability and integrity of financial and operation information.

2.2 Results of the audit: recommendation #3: A UN Chief Statistician

The main outcome of the audit states that the DESA governance, risk management and control processes examined were initially assessed as *partially satisfactory* in providing reasonable assurance regarding the effective management of the statistics subprogramme and related technical cooperation projects in DESA. Based on the audit, OIOS made six recommendations to address issues identified through the audit process.

The third recommendation states: **“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”.**

This recommendation is based on the following observations presented in paragraphs 30 and 31 of the OIOS Audit report:

“30. The large number of players in the field of statistics presented coordination challenges. For example, the regional commissions [...] reported to their Executive Secretaries, both administratively and substantively. As long as individual United Nations entities retained the right to release data independently, overall accountability for statistical matters would remain undefined. Whereas coordination risk was being mitigated through informal and ad hoc arrangements, a more structured arrangement could increase accountability.”

⁹ E/CN.3/2018/4

¹⁰ <https://oios.un.org>

¹¹ Publicly available on the OIOS website at <https://oios.un.org/page?slug=report>.

“31. The United Nations Secretariat does not have a position of Chief Statistician, who could be accountable for the statistics produced by the United Nations and its entities. DESA had also not designated any official in the Department to serve as the Secretariat’s focal point or Chief Statistician to effectively service the Statistical Commission on statistics matters globally, as the issue was not given priority. The need for a central focal point had become more crucial following General Assembly resolution 70/1 (Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development), which mandates the Secretary-General to prepare an annual progress report on Sustainable Development Goals in cooperation with the United Nations system based on the global indicator framework on data produced by national statistical systems and information collected at the regional level.”

The OIOS audit report, and in particular recommendation #3, was brought to the attention of the Statistical Commission at its 48th Session in March 2017 through the programme statement by the Director of UNSD.¹²

The Commission “took note of the recommendation of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, expressed in an internal audit of the statistics subprogramme conducted in 2016, that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in consultation with the Statistical Commission, should explore the possibility of designating a senior official as United Nations Chief Statistician to coordinate statistical matters across United Nations entities. The Commission agreed that this topic should be discussed further by the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Decision 48/117).¹³”

3 Current structure of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) within the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)

The UN Statistics Division (formerly UN Statistics Office) is currently one of nine divisions/offices of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). The director of UNSD reports to the Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs (USG), who is assisted by two Assistant Secretary Generals (ASGs), the ASG on Economic Development and the ASG on Policy Coordination & Inter-Agency Affairs. The current structure was established under Section 17 of the Secretary-General’s Bulletin “Organization of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs” of 15 September 1997 (ST/SGB/1997/9). The same bulletin established the core functions of the Division as follows:

- (a) Initiation and promotion of a coordinated system of international statistical programmes and activities by establishing international comparability of statistics through the standardization of statistical methods, classifications and definitions;
- (b) Conducting methodological studies in the fields of statistics;
- (c) Collecting, processing, evaluating and disseminating international statistics;
- (d) Providing professional advisory services to build national capacity in statistics and to encourage intraregional dialogue and networks;
- (e) Providing secretariat services to the Statistical Commission; and
- (f) Providing reports on statistical matters to the General Assembly and other United Nations conferences and meetings.

The following table shows an overview of the proposed total budget of UNSD for the biennium 2018-2019¹⁴:

¹² <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/48th-session/documents/statements-5-programme-statement-unsd-E.pdf>

¹³ <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/48th-session/documents/Report-on-the-48th-session-of-the-statistical-commission-E.pdf>

¹⁴ Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2018-2019, section 9 – Economic and Social Affairs (A/72/6 (Sect. 9), Table 9.23, see: [http://undocs.org/A/72/6\(Sect.9\)](http://undocs.org/A/72/6(Sect.9))

	<i>Resources (thousands of United States dollars)</i>		<i>Posts</i>	
	<i>2016-2017</i>	<i>2018-2019 (before recosting)</i>	<i>2016-2017</i>	<i>2018-2019</i>
Regular budget				
Post	31 880.7	32 290.7	123	123
Non-post	3 052.5	1 913.2	–	–
Subtotal	34 933.2	34 203.9	123	123
Extrabudgetary	8 128.0	9 779.4	1	1
Total	43 061.2	43 983.3	124	124

The UN Statistics Division (UNSD) is headed by a director at the D-2 level, who is assisted by the Executive Support Unit, the Capacity Development Section and other staff in the Front Office, such as a special assistant.¹⁵ The substantive work of the Division is currently carried out by five branches: a) the Economic Statistics Branch; b) the Trade Statistics Branch; c) the Demographic and Social Statistics Branch; d) the Environment and Energy Statistics Branch; and e) the Statistical Services Branch.

4 Coordination mechanism and legal framework

4.1 Existing coordination mechanisms

Within the UN system, there are a number of organizations, divisions and programs active in the areas of statistics, and some even are active producers of statistics. Many of the UN funds and programmes have their own statistics division. For example, UNESCO, FAO and the ILO, as well as all five regional commissions, all have their own statistics divisions. Within DESA, UNSD is not the only division that produces data and statistics, for example, the Population Division.

The UNSD performs substantive work in the area of statistics as mandated by the UN Statistical Commission and serves as secretariat to the Commission.

A core function of UNSD has been the coordination of international statistical programmes and activities. Coordination of global statistics takes place at different levels as follows:

- 1) The first level of coordination is among the five regional commissions and UNSD. This coordination is facilitated through regular bi-monthly conference calls. In addition, physical meetings take place back to back with other coordination meetings, such as one ones further outlined below;
- 2) A second level of coordination takes place at the so-called “cluster” level, which includes UNSD and the regional commissions as well as other entities from the UN Secretariat, namely UNODC, UNCTAD, UNEP and UN Habitat;
- 3) The third level is the Committee for the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System (CCS-UNS) which includes all secretariat entities and all other United Nations funds and programmes;¹⁶ and
- 4) The fourth level of coordination takes place in the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA), which includes all United Nations entities and other international and regional organizations.¹⁷

4.2 Challenges of international coordination of official statistics

In this chapter, a number of challenges in international coordination of official statistics are presented. The analysis covers more elements than cited in the Audit carried out by the OIOS.

¹⁵ More information on the different levels in the UN system: <https://careers.un.org/lbw/home.aspx?viewtype=SC>

¹⁶ see <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/unsystem/default.htm>

¹⁷ see https://unstats.un.org/unsd/acsub-public/workpartner_ccsa.htm

4.2.1 Design related challenges of statistical coordination

4.2.1.1 *Structural challenges*

The UN system represents a complex structure consisting of the Secretariat, further subdivided into departments, specialized agencies, funds, and programmes. Each part of the system undertake statistical activities related their mandate. In some cases, there is a dedicated organizational unit that deals with statistics. In some cases, the work on statistics might be carried out by various substantive policy-oriented units.

Therefore, the **first challenge** is the complexity of the system, resulting in an unclear understanding of the structure of statistical activities and of units responsible for these activities.

4.2.1.2 *Loose intergovernmental governance*

The issue of loose intergovernmental governance is a key challenge. For example, there is a loose connection between the UN Statistical Commission and the five regional statistical committees, whereby reporting of regions to the Commission is on a 5-year cycle. Furthermore, there is overlapping country membership and participation between the members of the five regional commissions. The reporting and linkages between the Statistical Commission and the five regional commissions is weak, whereas there is a stronger connection between ECOSOC and Regional Commissions.

In the past, there was an attempt to establish a stronger tie between the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) and the Statistical Commission, through dual reporting to both the regional commission (UNECE) and the Statistical Commission. However, this was connection did not last. There have been no attempts to establish a similar link for the statistics divisions of the four other regional committees.¹⁸

Other bodies only work within boundaries of their respective agencies, such as the Conference of Labour Statisticians within the International Labour Organization. In some agencies, there are no intergovernmental bodies specializing in statistics, and mandates for their statistics programmes emanate from the general policy organs.

Based on this, the **second challenge** can be identified as the lack of coherent intergovernmental governance of the work of the UN system on statistics.

4.2.2 Management related challenges

4.2.2.1 *Missing management link between statistical units of the UN system*

Directors and chiefs of statistical units within the UN Secretariat (UNSD, the statistics divisions of regional commissions, statistics branches/units of UNCTAD, UNODC, UNEP, Habitat, etc.) have different reporting mechanisms. For regional commissions, the director of the statistics divisions report to the heads of their departments. In other cases, the reporting might be to a different division, such as to directors of research or policy divisions (e.g. UNCTAD). In these cases, there might be competing directions given by their departmental managers. These different scenarios of reporting might result in inconsistencies, duplications and contradictions in statistical activities, whether related to data, normative work or capacity building.

Coordination meetings and committees, such as the Committee of Chief Statisticians of the UN system, hold non-binding discussions on coordination. However, these discussions and meetings do not provide a full remedy.

¹⁸ See Masthead of a parliamentary document (provisional agenda) of the Plenary Session of the Conference of European Statisticians in 2000 ("Statistical Commission and Economic Commission for Europe): <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/ece/ces/57.e.pdf> and Masthead of a parliamentary document (provisional agenda) of the Plenary Session of the Conference of European Statisticians in 2010: ("Economic Commission for Europe" only): <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/ece/ces/2010/zip.1.e.pdf>

A positive example of coordination across the UN Secretariat is the 10th tranche Development Account Programme on Statistics and Data, which brings together the ten implementing entities to work together on statistical capacity development.

The **third challenge** is a lack of a common or authoritative management of statistical activities within the UN Secretariat (and across the UN system, in general).¹⁹

4.2.2.2 *Professional Independence*

Principles 2, 4 and 8 of the “Principles Governing International Statistical Activities”²⁰ codify the use of “professional standards” and “sound professional criteria”. In particular Principle 2 stipulates “to maintain the trust in international statistics, their production is to be impartial and strictly based on the highest professional standards.

Institutional settings can strengthen or weaken impartiality and/or professionalism, so where and how statistical entities are anchored in their institutions matters. Statistical activities are sometimes carried out not in specific statistical units but by staff in substantive units. Extreme developments include the abolishment of the statistics divisions at UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA) and UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) in the early 2000s and their re-established after almost a decade.

The UN system is committed to implementing the “Principles Governing International Statistical Activities” in member entities and to support the implementation of the Fundamental Principles in Member States. Chief statisticians of agencies and entities producing international statistics endorsed the Principles more than ten years ago.²¹ UN System agencies are currently pursuing endorsement by the political leadership of their agencies; so far the principals of 15 entities have endorsed the Principles Governing International Statistical Activities.²²

The **fourth challenge** to statistical coordination arises from the possible lack of professional independence, as defined in the “Principles Governing International Statistical Activities”, when “non-statistical management” may prevail over the professional considerations by “statistical management”.

4.2.2.3 *Resource management*

The recent thematic evaluation of statistics divisions of regional commissions by the Office for Internal Oversight Services showed a very low level of statistical resources within regional commissions as compared to the situation at the global level. Similar results came out from other evaluations by OIOS and the Joint Inspection Unit.²³

There is a risk that currently under-resourced UN statistics divisions and units on the global and regional level will not see their resources aligned to the needs of data innovation, SDG reporting and other emerging demands for data and statistics linked with the new challenges arose with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda.

The **fifth challenge** is unsecured level of resources, and the lack of a global strategy of statistical resources hinders the creation of a true UN statistical system.²⁴

¹⁹ More information: Secretary General’s Bulletin ST/SGB/2010/7 defines the functions of the Statistics Division at the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia as follows: Section 7 - Statistics Division - 7.1 The Statistics Division is headed by a Chief, who is accountable to the Executive Secretary; 7.2 The core functions of the Statistics Division are as follows: (a) Acting as the regional focal point for the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations organizations, other international and regional organizations and member States; (b) Organizing and coordinating the meetings of the ESCWA Intergovernmental Statistics Committee, meetings of expert groups and statistical capacity-building workshops and seminars with a view to strengthening national statistical systems and harmonizing official statistics in the ESCWA region; (c) Coordinating the statistical data work of the ESCWA secretariat and the collection, production and dissemination of statistics in print and electronic media and through an online database. However, the point 7.2 (a) is not enforced, and the Management disputes the role of the Statistics division in dealing directly with UNSD and other organizations – to which it is the regional focal point. (Source: ST/SGB/2010/7 – available on <http://ods.un.org>).

²⁰ See: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/acsub-public/principles_stat_activities.htm

²¹ See https://unstats.un.org/unsd/acsub-public/Principles_stat_activities/endorse.htm

²² See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/unsystem/endorse-CEB.htm>

²³ Source: 2016 OIOS thematic evaluation of the UN Regional Commissions. (<https://oios.un.org/page/download2/jd/41>).

²⁴ More information: Across all five Regional Commissions, NSO representatives, and Regional Commission staff interviewed reported that the major obstacle to providing effective and reliable support to Member States was the insufficient capacities to address emerging statistical

4.2.2.4 Recruitment and structure of skills

The UN Secretariat has a common system for the junior entry-level recruitment: the Young Professionals Programme (YPP). The Programme establishes a roster of qualified young statisticians selected through a rigorous process. However, specific recruitments at all levels are managed by individual departments.

In some cases, non-statisticians are appointed to statistics-related posts. In some recruitment cases, other criteria, such as language experience or experiences in specific regions and/or policy areas, might prevail. Some examples include:

- In 2003, the hiring manager at a statistical division in an entity of the UN Secretariat was asked to fill a post of an Associate Statistician (P2 level) from the IT roster. The reason given was that the statistics roster was depleted;
- In 2012, following to an evaluation report calling for the strengthening of the Statistics Division of a regional commission, two professional posts (P3 and P4 levels) were transferred into the division from another division. The incumbents of the posts were Information Systems Officers;
- In 2013, after completing evaluations and interviews of candidates for Statistician (P4 level) in the Statistics Division of a regional commission, the Management decided to cancel the job opening and transfer an economist from another division into the post;
- In September 2014, the appointment of a non-statistician to the post of Associate Statistician (P2 level) in a regional commission's Statistics Division as part of the "Managed mobility programme".

However, discussions on the national, regional and global level showed, that new skills are crucial within a statistical division. The Conference of European Statisticians plenary session on the next generation of statisticians and data scientists discussed the skills and capabilities needed to address the challenges arising from the new data-driven world where statistics should be better integrated to support policy and decision making.²⁵ In parallel, the Partnership in statistics for development in the 21st century (PARIS21) launched the project "Capacity Development 4.0"²⁶ that showed the need for new skills (e.g. communication or negotiation skills) for people working in statistical divisions.

The **sixth challenge** is a weak strategic approach to human resources management around positions related to statistics related to the different challenges. In some contexts, there is also an inflow of non-statisticians in the system through local offices. There is concern that non-statisticians might not see a need for a common and well-coordinated statistical system. The local management of human resources and its impact on positions in the field of statistics is one of the obstacles to better cooperation and coordination. Secondly, there is a need for new skills for people working in statistics division.

4.2.3 Challenges related to statistical information systems

4.2.3.1 Information systems architecture

It is over two decades since national statistical systems started to adopt the process-oriented architecture of statistical information systems. These systems replaced the older stovepipe-oriented systems. In the case of the UN system, including at UNSD, there is a group of inherited databases, which are still structured by topic. The creation of UNData is an effort to combine these databases, and improve their interoperability.²⁷ In March 2018, the UN Statistical Commission will discuss the "Bogota Declaration" that proposes a "global platform initially for research and development in the discovery, access and use

needs and the lack of resources to respond appropriately. Despite repeated calls by Statistical Committees to ensure that adequate resources are secured, Regional Commissions currently dedicate an average of 6.8 per cent of their total budgets to statistics; while not entirely analogous, in comparison, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) dedicates 21 per cent of its budget to statistics. Resources dedicated to emerging statistical areas, while growing, are still limited. For example, ECLAC has recently appointed a P4 officer responsible for environmental statistics and ESCAP has recently recruited a Regional Adviser for environmental statistics. However, ECA and ESCWA have a staff member only partially dedicated to environmental statistics, and ECE has also only one staff member dedicated to environmental statistics. (Source: 2016 OIOS thematic evaluation of the UN Regional Commissions, paragraphs 38-39 (<https://oios.un.org/page/download2/id/41>)).

²⁵ See https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/ece/ces/2017/2_pager_Next_generation_of_statisticians_cj.pdf

²⁶ See <http://www.paris21.org/news-centre/events/workshop-cd40>

²⁷ See <http://data.un.org>

of data, statistical methodology, software applications and capacity building for the production of statistics and indicators.”²⁸

In some cases, regional commissions might have more advanced information systems. However, these information systems are implemented with little to no coordination, and result in regional stove piping. Furthermore, there is a repetition in the content (e.g. population data) in UN databases.

The **seventh challenge** is an outdated statistical information systems architecture which inhibits interoperability, data sharing, and common quality assurance.²⁹ Furthermore, a common or updated system would lead to less burden on the national statistical offices.

4.2.4 Challenges related to data flows

4.2.4.1 *Common data collection*

The development of an agreement on common approaches to data collection from national statistical offices and follow up on non-response, data editing and imputation, feeding data into UN databases and related issues takes time and will not be carried out or implemented immediately.

A single entity does not coordinate, and the mandates for data collection are not harmonized. There may be a higher chance to achieve a common approach within the Secretariat before attempting to unify data collection within the entire UN system. An example of the lack of coordination is that several indicators are requested by different UN agencies in the same year (e.g., by UNSD, FAO, UNESCWA, ITU, etc.), which are then published in different publications and databases.

The **eighth challenge** is a lack of a common data collection and sharing approach resulting in duplications, high response burden, and high overall resource requirements.³⁰

4.2.4.2 *Common data dissemination*

Statistics divisions/offices within the UN system are accountable to their superiors within their own organizations. Therefore, these offices do not “represent” a “UN statistical system” but rather their own organization and have to contribute to the visibility of their own organization. The fact that the resources for statistics also come from within the organization and are not managed centrally for a “UN statistical system” makes data dissemination under the own agency logo very important.

The **ninth challenge** is a lack of a common data dissemination strategy within the UN Secretariat and the UN system.³¹

²⁸ See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/bigdata/conferences/2017/Bogota%20declaration%20-%20Final%20version.pdf>

²⁹ The statistics function is dependent on flexible and high-capacity IT systems to store, manipulate and disseminate data, but IT resource issues were one of the most frequently-cited sources of frustration in the [UN Statistics] Division. - The [statistics] Division’s ability to introduce major user-demanded innovations, such as geospatial datasets (where the data are shown in spatial distributions) and interactive databases, has been consistently limited by the difficulty of accessing the required hardware and software. (Source: Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the United Nations Statistics Division (https://usun.state.gov/sites/default/files/organization_pdf/167920.pdf), paragraph 71) Further strengthen internal coordination within each Regional Commission with regard to the production and dissemination of sectoral data. This could include: c. Central data management and monitoring to ensure effective collaboration of when updating databases within Regional Commissions. (Source: 2016 OIOS thematic evaluation of the UN Regional Commissions, Recommendation 4 and paragraphs 41-46 (<https://oios.un.org/page/download2/id/41>))

³⁰ Data inconsistencies and duplications were illustrated by one example of a regional commission where bottlenecks in the flow of data undermined dissemination across divisions, leading to duplications in data requests to Member States and bypassing the quality assurance check provided by the statistics division. (Source: 2016 OIOS thematic evaluation of the UN Regional Commissions, paragraphs 38-39 (<https://oios.un.org/page/download2/id/41>)).

³¹ Poor coordination of dissemination platforms (national, regional and global) or a lack of coherence between concepts or estimates (as identified in the findings) do not help to promote more effective use, and need to be addressed. (Source: Joint Inspection Unit report JIU/REP/2016/5 – available on <http://ods.un.org/>).

5 Overview on structures in other international organizations and selected countries

This chapter summarizes the main elements found in the analysis made in connection with several International Organizations, specifically, FAO, ILO, OECD, and Eurostat and one National Statistical Office, the UK, all of which have already established a chief statistician position. The analysis has been carried out by taking into account a set of standardized questions to the chief statistician involved and, in most cases, through a direct interview. More detailed information regarding the current situation in each international organization and within the UK is included in the annex.

From the analysis it can be concluded that there are many differences and similarities within both the role of the chief statistician in each organizational structure and the tasks assigned to this position. Also, another important conclusion is that the hierarchical position held by a chief statistician within an organization have an impact on the recognition of statistics in general. This recognition might have a direct effect on the implementation of the tasks of a chief statistician.

In most cases, the chief statistician is located at a relatively high position in each organization and is selected based on his/her professional skills. Generally, the chief statistician is also the responsible official (director) for the Statistics Division/Department. Only in one case covered in this study, the chief statistician is separated from the director of the respective statistical division with dedicated resources. Nevertheless, in both cases the chief statistician and director for statistics each have a clear definition of their mandate and tasks.

In all the cases the chief statistician position has been established in order to provide strategic leadership on statistical activities and to enhance trust in statistics. Thus, such responsibility means also that the chief statistician should hold a strong coordination role regarding the importance of promoting a better coordination with all the other producers of statistics that are part of the organization. Another important aspect of the chief statistician is to have an active role in the process of planning the activities to be included into the respective statistical programs. Moreover, the chief statistician also has the mandate to represent the organization into the international statistical fora.

6 What could be the role of a UN Chief Statistician?

This chapter describes the core (and possible additional tasks) of a future UN chief statistician. Even if it is not possible to compare organizations, analysis has shown that similar tasks are covered by the chief statisticians in different organizations. The chapter also describes the proposed rank and the position of a UN chief statistician as well as necessary skills.

6.1 Tasks of a UN chief statistician

A few core task of a future UN chief statistician can be outlined based on the analyses in chapters 3 to 5. The establishment of a UN chief statistician will address the nine challenges described in chapter 4.3. Based on this, two key tasks of the UN chief statistician are:

- a) Providing a **single voice** speaking on behalf of UN statistics: The UN chief statistician will represent the UN statistical system as a whole and implement the decisions by the UN Statistical Commission and the CCSA at high-level and regional meetings, such as the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. She or he is the first contact point for all political leaders as well as highest representative in the UN system related to statistical and data topics. This is even more crucial since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda;
- b) Providing **leadership, overall strategic direction and coordination** for the various offices' work in the area statistics in the UN: Defining the overall UN strategy in the area of statistics, in particular with respect to measuring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and assure that

it is carried out with integrity, independence and quality in a timely way, providing support and advice to various units within the agencies engaged in statistical activities. It is crucial to ensure coherent and effective coordination across NSOs, UN agencies and other international statistical bodies. The UN chief statistician will not have the mandate to interfere with specialized agencies' governing bodies (e.g. ILO or FAO) or programmes and funds (e.g. UNDP or UNODC) related to statistics based on the current legal framework. Nevertheless, support and coordination between these agencies can and should be improved. Thus, the establishment of a UN chief statistician will put a head to the statistical system of the UN.

Based on these two key tasks of a UN chief statistician as well as to support the implementation of the Cape Town Global Action Plan³², the following tasks should also be covered:

- i) **Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and quality of data:** Promote the implementation of the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, the Principles Governing International Statistical Activities; and agreed upon quality assurance standards;
- ii) **Standards and good practices:** Set statistical policies, standards and good practices with the aim of fostering consensus on definitions, indicators and implementation guidelines and developing the necessary strategies to facilitate wide application in all regions;
- iii) **Support to national statistical offices:** Provide professional support to heads of offices, in particular when statistical policy issues arise;
- iv) **Capacity development:** Provide leadership and oversee the development of capacity development initiatives in Member States in international statistical standards and applications, as well as on data production, compilation and tools and models for the dissemination in the area of statistics;
- v) **Availability of official statistics:** Promote and provide support to increase the availability of official statistics across UN Member States, assuring the timely identification of gaps and assist in filling the gaps;
- vi) **Innovation:** Coordinate research and development of data skills in the area of statistics and data science throughout the UN system. Advance a “UN statistical system” that develops its skills, including different resources and new skills such as data science; Advance innovation in various areas including but not limited to the use of non-traditional data sources;
- vii) **Management and finances in the UN system:** Support efficient use of human and financial resources, with a special focus on the implementation and the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda, for a timely delivery of products in accordance with results-based management principles. Ensure that key risks are identified, assessed and managed for the achievement of agreed results and that risk management is embedded in all core processes and functions. Regularly report to Member States the overall resource allocation and use available in the UN system.

6.2 Position of a future UN chief statistician

The position of a chief statistician is discussed in the 2003 Handbook on Statistical Organisation³³: “He or she should be in a position to develop rapport with policy advisers of other government departments and to negotiate various proposals.” While the Handbook is written for national circumstances, parallels can be drawn on the global level. In both the national and international/UN context, the position of the chief statistician needs to be on a certain level to be able to successfully advance the tasks described in chapter 6.1, particularly to be the focal point as well as highest representative in the UN system related to statistical and data topics.

A few chief statisticians in the UN system hold the position of a director at the D2 level. Those include, the director of UNSD, the chief statisticians of FAO, ILO and UNESCO. The next higher position is the

³² See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/hlg/Cape-Town-Global-Action-Plan/>

³³ Handbook of Statistical Organization, Third Edition: The Operation and Organization of a Statistical Agency, Paragraph 76 (https://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesF/SeriesF_88E.pdf). The revision of the handbook will be discussed under item 3b at the 49th Session of the UN Statistical Commission in March 2018.

one of an Assistant-Secretary General (ASG) who is appointed directly by the UN Secretary-General. To be accepted as the voice of the whole “UN statistical system”, the UN chief statistician should be appointed at a higher level than the highest-ranking director(s) of statistics in the UN system, and should therefore be at the level of an ASG.

As seen in the previous chapter, there are models with the situation to have one chief statistician and with one head of the statistical unit (e.g. in FAO) or that the chief statistician is at the same time the head/director of the statistical unit (e.g. OECD). If the second model would be chosen, the UN chief statistician would be at the same time the head of UNSD.

6.3 Necessary skill set of a UN chief statistician

A UN chief statistician who heads the UN statistical system and provides leadership in the global statistical system needs to have different skills to be effective. The selection below is based on the paragraphs 91 to 95 in the Handbook of Statistical Organizations, the Audit report and the information collected by the international organizations.

The following skills are key:

- A) **High understanding of official statistics / highly respected by his/her peers:** The person needs to have this understanding, otherwise there will be no acceptance in the community of official statistics. The production of official statistical system is and will be the main task of a statistical system. The importance of the use of new data sources (e.g. big data) is one element that is essential. Without understanding all challenges (and opportunities) related to official statistics, a UN chief statistician would not be in the position to work on the tasks described under chapter 6.1;
- B) **Excellent knowledge of decision making processes within the UN and countries:** In addition to excellent substantive knowledge and respect by peers, the challenges surrounding the establishment of the global SDG indicator framework have shown that excellent knowledge of decision making processes in and outside the UN will be a key skill for a UN chief statistician. Without the understanding of how to navigate the political world, the resources needed, the understanding for statistical office, etc. cannot be solved in a satisfying way;
- C) **Leadership skills:** This person needs to lead the UN statistical system;
- D) **Strong communication skills:** As the main focal point for Member States, intergovernmental bodies, the UN Secretary-General, political leaders, media and civil society, excellent communications skills are indispensable;
- E) **Management skills:** If the UN chief statistician is at the same time the director of UNSD, this person has to run a large professional organization.

6.4 Institutional setting of the UN chief statistician

As described in the previous chapters, different options are possible and in use when it comes to the where and how to anchor the position of a chief statistician in the organizational structure. Possible set ups are presented in the following paragraphs.

In any case, to fulfill his/her role, the UN chief statistician needs to have sufficient dedicated resources.

6.4.1 Model A: The UN chief statistician is also the director of the UNSD

This model implies that there is a single position that fulfills both the role of Director of UNSD and at the same time the role of UN chief statistician with dedicated resources. This model is or was used for example within the UN system in ILO, FAO and UNESCO as well as in other organizations outside the UN system such as OECD and Eurostat. The model has been applied in the past within the UN Secretariat and DESA for the Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, which was an ASG level position. The incumbent fulfilled certain functions in her role as Special Advisor and reported directly to the Secretary-General in this role. At the same

time, the incumbent also headed the Division of the Advancement of Women and in this role reported to the USG of DESA.³⁴

The experience of FAO, who used Model A from 2012 to 2017, shifted to Model B in 2017, shows the limitations of this approach: 1) limited or no dedicated human resources for coordination and technical assurance activities; 2) no functional reporting mechanism between the different statistics units and the chief statistician; and 3) a potential conflict of interests for the chief statistician who could be perceived as favoring UNSD over the other statistics units.

Therefore, FAO moved another model in 2017, which is further described below.

6.4.2 Model B: The UN chief statistician and the director of UNSD are separate positions

This model implies that the position of UN chief statistician would be separate from the Director of UNSD with clear functions of guidance for the statistical activities of the UN system and with dedicated resources. To ensure its visibility and independence (from UNSD) its position could be within the Office of the UN Secretary General (OSG). If the UN chief statistician is part of the UNSG staff, it helps to clarify the role of leadership, the responsibility for standards (including upholding the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics), and coordination across the system and capacity development could be copied. Aspects to do with data collection and access could be adapted to reflect the wider governance structures of the UN system.

7 Summary

The creation of the position of a UN chief statistician is part of a vision for the UN statistical system, to enhance coordination and assess the implementation of quality standards in the area of statistics across the UN system. The UN chief statistician will not be the CEO of the UN statistical system, but the main focal point for statistics within the UN system as well as the main coordinator. A stronger coordination within the UN statistical system as well as a better link to the political bodies are required to fulfill the new tasks that have arisen with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda.

8 Points for discussion and next steps

Any decision of the Commission will be transmitted to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and later on to the UN General Assembly (UNGA). The Fifth Committee is the Committee of the General Assembly with responsibilities for administrative and budgetary matters.³⁵ Based on the reports of the Fifth Committee, the General Assembly considers and approves the budget of the Organization. The General Assembly also considers and approves financial and budgetary arrangements with specialized agencies and makes recommendations to the agencies concerned. That means, the 5th committee decides and accepts the budget of the UN secretariat and also on the creation of a UN chief statistician.

Therefore, establishing the position of a UN chief statistician cannot be decided by the UN Statistical Commission alone. Nevertheless, the UN Statistical Commission can and should express its professional opinion.

Based on the findings of this report, the HLG-PCCB invites the Commission

- **to express its support for the establishment of the position of a UN chief statistician at an adequate level;**
- **to express its opinion on a preference for model A or model B;**

³⁴ See ST/SGB/1997/9, sections 7-9.

³⁵ More information under: <http://www.un.org/en/ga/fifth/index.shtml>

The Commission may also

- **Request the HLG-PCCB to prepare a more comprehensive report for the 50th session analyzing the feasibility of establishing a UN Chief Statistician; the feasibility of model A and B; the financial impact and a possible job description of UN chief statistician including the requirements of different skills;**

Given that the UN budget process may start before the 50th session of the Commission is being held in March 2019, the Commission may also

- **Authorize the Bureau to actively engage in existing processes to support the establishment of a UN chief statistician in the long-term.**

Annex

This annex provides detailed information regarding the current situation in selected countries and international organizations that discussed or installed a position of a chief statistician. The information was collected in December 2017 and January 2018.

Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO)

FAO's statistical system is decentralized as each technical department has its own statistics unit. With the rapid growth of the statistical work of the Organization during the last decade, some challenges emerged with respect to the harmonization of the statistics practices, duplication of statistical activities, and publication of consistent data across departments.

In order to improve the coordination of its statistical system, at the end of 2012 FAO has established the position of Chief statistician (CS) and created the Interdepartmental Working Group (IDWG) on Statistics. Initially, the Director of Statistics Division served as the chief statistician and played the dual role, and was at the same hierarchical level as the directors of other technical departments. There were three main limitations to these coordination arrangements: 1) no dedicated human resources for coordination and technical assurance activities; 2) no functional reporting mechanism between the different statistics units and the CS; and 3) potential conflict of interests for the Chief Statistician who could be perceived as favoring the Statistics Division, which produces more than 50% of FAO's statistics, over the other statistics units.

In order to overcome these limitations, in 2017 a new Office of the chief statistician was created with specific functions and dedicated resources, while the role of chief statistician was separated from the Director of the Statistics Division. According to the new arrangements, the chief statistician has a programmatic and technical oversight function over the FAO statistics units, which report only technically, not functionally, to the chief statistician. Service Level agreements are signed at the beginning of each biennium between the chief statistician and the statistics units to implement the planned statistical activities.

With the establishment of the Office of the chief statistician, the coordination of statistical activities at FAO has improved. The chief statistician, with different functions from the Director of the Statistics Division, has a more strategic role in planning the FAO programme of work and monitoring the implementation of FAO's Quality Assurance Framework. Moreover, having dedicated resources allows the chief statistician to provide guidance on methodological development, the production and dissemination of statistics, and the design of plans for the improvement of FAO statistical processes. However, the chief statistician still does not have a direct supervisory role on the staff of the FAO statistical units. Moreover, the overall amount of resources dedicated to corporate statistical activities is still limited.

International Labour Organisation (ILO)

The Organizational Structure of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) is supported with having three Deputy-Director Generals (DDG) reporting to the Director General: one for Policy, the other for Management and Reform and the third for Field Operations. The Department of Statistics is one of the nine technical departments reporting to the DDG for Policy (DDG/P). The ILO has a Director of the Department of Statistics who also serves as the ILO's Chief Statistician. The Chief Statistician chairs a Committee for Data coordination where the rest of the technical departments are present along with field specialists. The Global Technical Team (GTT) is composed of four regional labour statisticians (Americas, Arab States, Africa and Asia and the Pacific) and other regional labour statisticians (two in Africa and one in Asia and the Pacific). The chief statistician coordinates with the GTT.

The Department of Statistics was created in 2009 as well as the post of the Chief Statistician, along with the Director of Statistics. The reason behind creating this position was the need to establish coordination

mechanisms and assure proper coordination and avoidance of overlaps and duplications, and to assure quality in the statistical products of the organization.

The Director /Chief Statistician is in charge of the following tasks:

- 1) Providing leadership and overall strategic directions for the Office's work;
- 2) Overseeing the development of capacity-building initiatives in member States;
- 3) Providing oversight for compliance with agreed statistical quality frameworks and best practices within the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics;
- 4) Involving ILO's constituents in technical discussions on setting statistical standards at the national and international levels;
- 5) Promoting and providing support to enlarge the availability of labour and decent work statistics data across the Member States;
- 6) Representing the Organization at the high-level and regional meetings in statistics;
- 7) Taking overall management responsibility for the Department's human and financial resources;
- 8) Leading and managing the staff of the Department of Statistics by establishing work plans and evaluating performance based on objectives;
- 9) Leading a statistical global team, including regional labour statisticians and project staff dealing with statistical activities;
- 10) Collaborating with the ILO Training Centre in Turin on the development of knowledge sharing activities and training programmes in labour and decent work statistics, and;
- 11) Ensuring mobilization of extra-budgetary resources.

As for positive effects resulting from the creation of the ILO Chief Statistician, they can be highlighted as follows: i) facilitating the harmonization and coordination of statistical activities that are formerly carried out by other technical departments not complying with fundamental principles of official statistics; ii) merging existing databases, and selecting only those areas passing quality assessment scrutiny led by the chief statistician; iii) allowing more visibility and enforcement of proper statistical practices in the ILO.

The existing structure is fit for the present purpose of the ILO. It has been reconfirmed with the upgrade of the position in 2014 to a D2 position, after an external competition was carried out.

World Bank

The World Bank does not have a chief statistician. However, in 2014 it was established what is now the World Bank's Development Data Council to fulfill similar functions. The Council is the World Bank's first-ever data governance structure and provides strategic direction, coordination, and information-sharing on the World Bank's data priorities, activities, and implementation.

The Development Data Council is comprised of Chief Economists and Directors from across the World Bank and oversees a range of cross-cutting technical working groups of Bank staff, each of which focuses on a dedicated data priority and related solutions. The Council reports to the World Bank's Chief Executive Officer and generates recommendations on development data priorities, opportunities, and activities to the Bank's senior leadership.

The Council's current work program helps enable the Bank's institutional objectives of eliminating extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity through its support for: (i) increasing country capacity to produce, use, and share data; (ii) strengthening the World Bank's staff and optimizing the Bank's systems and processes to enable institutional access, management, use, and sharing of data; and (iii) producing global public goods to inform decisions and influence debate across regions.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

The OECD is structured in Directorates. One of them is the OECD Statistics Directorate (STD) that was created in 1996. Many key statistics, like national accounts, prices statistics or trade statistics are compiled by STD, but a number of Directorates also have strong statistical functions (e.g. Science and Technology, Environment, Education and Health).

The position of the OECD Chief Statistician was established in 2000. The reason to create this position was that it is the most effective way of managing a rather decentralized statistical system within the OECD. In many ways, the statistical structure at the OECD is similar to a national statistical system that includes a NSO and other statistical producers.

The Chief Statistician is also the Director of STD. This person has responsibility for the following tasks: a) advising the OECD Secretary-General on statistical matters and contributing to implementing the OECD mission; b) providing strategic orientations for the Organization's statistical activities; c) coordinating statistics internally; d) advancing the OECD statistical agenda as a whole; e) managing STD; and f) representing the OECD outside, e.g. media, international statistical fora. The Chief Statistician reports directly to the OECD Secretary-General.

Positive effects after the creation of the OECD Chief Statistician include the following: i) better internal coordination within the OECD; ii) higher coherence; iii) standardized quality control and; iv) a single voice towards the outside, all of which are ensured while preserving a decentralized structure that keeps statistical work close to analytical and policy work. On the negative side, the coordination costs can be higher than in the previous system.

The OECD regularly evaluates the improvements in the system that have taken place and it will continue to do so. Currently, no major change is forthcoming.

European Union (Eurostat)

Eurostat is the statistical authority of the European Union and a Directorate General (DG) of the European Commission. The role of the authority is established in the European Statistical Law (Regulation (EC) No 223/2009 on European Statistics as amended). As part of this role, Eurostat shall coordinate the statistical activities of the institutions and bodies of the European Union, in particular with a view to ensuring consistency and quality of the data and minimizing reporting burden. The role of the Chief Statistician is clearly established in the Commission Decision on Eurostat (2012/504/EU), which further clarifies Eurostat's role in coordinating the development and production of European statistics within the Commission.

The Chief Statistician is the Director General of Eurostat, who must act in an entirely autonomous manner in carrying out his/her tasks. These tasks include deciding on how to produce European statistics and when and what to disseminate, in line with the European Code of Practice. Eurostat is in charge of coordinating statistical activities within the European Commission, to ensure coherence and comparability of European statistics. This coordination, along with closer cooperation between Eurostat and other Commission services on statistical matters, ensure a better reaction to future challenges and more coordinated activities on European statistics in accordance with the European statistical Program, thereby allowing a more efficient use of the Union's resources and helping to reduce the response burden. The Chief Statistician is selected by a transparent recruitment procedure based on professional criteria only.

The role of the Chief Statistician and of Eurostat is also to guarantee the quality of European statistics and to be responsible for monitoring and assessing the quality of data that Eurostat collects and receives, including in the context of the EU's enhanced economic governance. Eurostat also monitors the implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice within the European Statistical System at the level of NSIs and other national authorities, while the compliance of Eurostat with the Code is monitored by an external body (European Statistical Governance Advisory Board- ESGAB).

The Chief Statistician chairs the European Statistical System Committee (ESSC), which provides professional guidance to the ESS for developing, producing and disseminating European statistics in line with the statistical principles.

United Kingdom (UK)

The National Statistical Institute (NSI) of the UK is the Office for National Statistics (which is the executive office of the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA)) which has the responsibility “to promote and safeguard the publication of official statistics”. A wide range of other organizations also produce official statistics in the UK. Those organizations are coordinated through the Government Statistical Service.

The reason behind creating the National Statistician position is the concern about the independence of statistics which made successive governments call for the strengthening of statistical governance.

The National Statistician is the Chief Executive of the UKSA and is responsible for the statistics produced by the Office for National Statistics. He or she is also the Head of the Government Statistical Service, providing leadership to all statisticians producing official statistics, providing statistical services to government departments and agencies and ensuring coordination of statistical services across government. The National Statistician is in charge of the following tasks: a) engaging with users of statistics to understand and respond to the questions that need to be addressed by statistics (being “helpful”); b) producing statistics (and supporting the production of statistics by others) that present a coherent and high quality picture of the economy and society (being “professional”); c) developing methods to turn data into insightful statistics (being “innovative”); d) managing resources to get best value (being “efficient”); and e) and building a system that acquires and develops its skills, including new skills such as data science (being “capable”).

The structure of the UK Statistics Authority and the role of the National Statistician seeks to get the advantages of independence, notably public trust and scale with the advantages of decentralized statistical units and closeness to policy, reinforcing relevance and utility. This too has a challenge in seeking to ensure both relevance and integrity since the system needs to manage ambiguity and be able to demonstrate both technical credibility and political acumen. Those attributes in combination are scarce and hard to develop. A feature within the UK statistical system is the Office for Statistics Regulation which provides independent regulation of all official statistics produced in the UK.

The main structural change being implemented in the UK Statistics Authority is radically improved access to data to enable the system to benefit from the opportunities of the data revolution. 2017 legislation comes into effect in 2018.