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## Statistical Commission

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### Items for discussion and decision: regional statistical development

## Report of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific on statistical development in Asia and the Pacific

### Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2018/227 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific on statistical development in Asia and the Pacific.

In 2016, countries across the Asia-Pacific region agreed to make national statistical capacity development a shared vision for all and agreed to act collectively in five action areas to ensure a coordinated approach. In support of the shared vision and collective actions, in 2018 countries across the Asia-Pacific region adopted a declaration entailing national commitment to support national statistical systems through political, institutional and financial means.

The present report provides an overview of national, regional and global issues shaping national statistical capacity development in Asia and the Pacific, particularly in light of the fast-approaching 2020 which is the target year for 21 of the 169 global targets adopted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The report summarizes prevailing challenges countries in the Asia and Pacific region are facing with respect to strengthening national statistical systems and supporting national, regional and global agendas and highlights five action areas addressing these challenges: engaging users and investing in statistics; assuring quality and instilling trust in statistics; integrated statistics for integrated analysis; modernizing statistical business processes; and developing requisite skills set.

The report reflects on skills development through training partnerships, joint advocacy efforts for strengthened statistical systems, public-private partnerships, and innovation among others. The report also outlines regional coordination mechanisms being leveraged for coordinated national statistical capacity development efforts.

The report concludes with recommendations to scale up international commitment, support and coordination for statistical development in Asia and the Pacific in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

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\* E/CN.3/2019/1.

## I. Introduction

1. The last report of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) on regional statistical development in Asia and the Pacific, issued on 18 December 2013,<sup>1</sup> was submitted to the Statistical Commission for consideration at its forty-fifth session held in March 2014. The report provided an overview of challenges countries in the region faced post the 2015 development agenda and posited, to meet compounding demands placed on national statistical systems, statistics need to be positioned as a development objective in its own right and should be included as a goal in the post-2015 development agenda.

2. The Statistical Commission's deliberations led to revived attention from countries across the region on the importance of strengthening national statistical systems as an integral part of national development. In line with the reflection of the report and the deliberation of the Commission, in 2016 the Asia and Pacific statistical community adopted a *Collective Vision and Framework for Action to Advance Official Statistics for the 2030 Agenda*<sup>2</sup>. This commitment was strengthened in 2018 by adopting a declaration *Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind* (Annex A) during a high-level segment attended by policy makers of the sixth session of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics.

3. Asia and the Pacific is home to 58 ESCAP members and associate members<sup>3</sup> ranging from Turkey in the west to the Pacific Islands in the east, the Russian Federation in the North and New Zealand in the South. Asia and the Pacific is home to six of the ten largest countries by population size, and three of the ten smallest. Chief Statisticians oversee centralized and decentralized statistical systems, statistical systems with and without statistical laws, with staff numbers as little as three and as large as 14,000.<sup>4</sup>

4. As of 2018, Asia and Pacific statistical systems have contributed twenty-four Voluntary National Reviews to the UN High Level Political Forum as part of the 2030 Agenda. Three statistical systems are poised to contribute to their countries second Voluntary National Review in 2019, bringing new challenges of monitoring progress, often with data sources with a ten-year periodicity (e.g. Census of Population and Housing).

5. The present report covers statistical development activities being undertaken in Asia and the Pacific in support of strengthened national statistical systems in line with the *Collective Vision and Framework for Action, a Regional Roadmap for Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific*<sup>5</sup> and the 2030 Agenda. The report indicates challenges faced by Asian and Pacific statistical systems as well as some key initiatives in support of strengthened statistical systems in Asia and the Pacific.

6. Countries have agreed on a number of global and regional targets to be attained by 2020 such as improved capacity of the national statistical systems to produce and disseminate basic economic statistics in line with international standards (Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics), a mid-point review of the Asia-Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade, 2015-2024 (Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific) and a total of 21 Sustainable Development Goal targets (Agenda 2030)<sup>6</sup>. With 2020 fast approaching, countries need to accelerate collective efforts and leverage national, regional and global efforts. The report accordingly reflects on the prevailing challenges in ensuring coordination at all levels.

7. In concluding, the report proposes actions to be taken by the Statistical Commission in order to scale up international commitment and support for statistical development in Asia and the Pacific in the global context of the 2030 Agenda and in the regional context of the Regional Roadmap for Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific.

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<sup>1</sup> E/CN.3/2014/15

<sup>2</sup> E/ESCAP/CST(5)/1/Rev.1

<sup>3</sup> ESCAP has 53 member States and 9 associate members. Four member States are not located in Asia and the Pacific.

<sup>4</sup> The staff number is derived from findings of a 2013 capacity screening exercise conducted to measure the status of economic statistics in the Asia and Pacific region.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/publications/SDGs-Regional-Roadmap.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Out of 169 global targets, 59 have a global target year of 2030, 21 are targeted for 2020, 3 have different target years including 2017 and 2025, and the remaining 86 have not set a deadline for achievement.

## II. National, regional, and global agendas

### National

8. In October 2018, the statistical community of Asia and the Pacific were joined by higher-level policy makers at the 6<sup>th</sup> session of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics and adopted a declaration, *Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind* (Annex A). Member States:

- a. Committed to integrate statistics development with national development policies and plans;
- b. Committed to strengthen and develop, where appropriate, a national monitoring framework and to integrate the framework into planning and budgeting processes;
- c. Committed to establish a high-level advisory body, where appropriate, to the national statistical system;
- d. Committed to specify the roles and responsibilities of the national statistical system;
- e. Resolved to empower heads of national statistical offices to assume the lead role in developing and coordinating their respective integrated national statistical systems;
- f. Endeavoured to strengthen necessary legislative provisions and institutional mechanisms;
- g. Resolved to improve communication with regard to statistics and to strengthen statistical literacy and culture;
- h. Committed to advocate for the expanded use of official statistics for evidence-based policymaking and transparent governance;
- i. Committed to revisit national policies and strategies, as appropriate.

9. The declaration recognises in the Asia-Pacific region, a large number of national statistical systems continue to struggle with producing and disseminating basic ranges of economic, environmental and social statistics; a fact brought home in a 2017 Asia and Pacific SDG Progress Report<sup>7</sup> which reported regionally consistent indicators were only available for 25% of the global Sustainable Development Goal indicators.

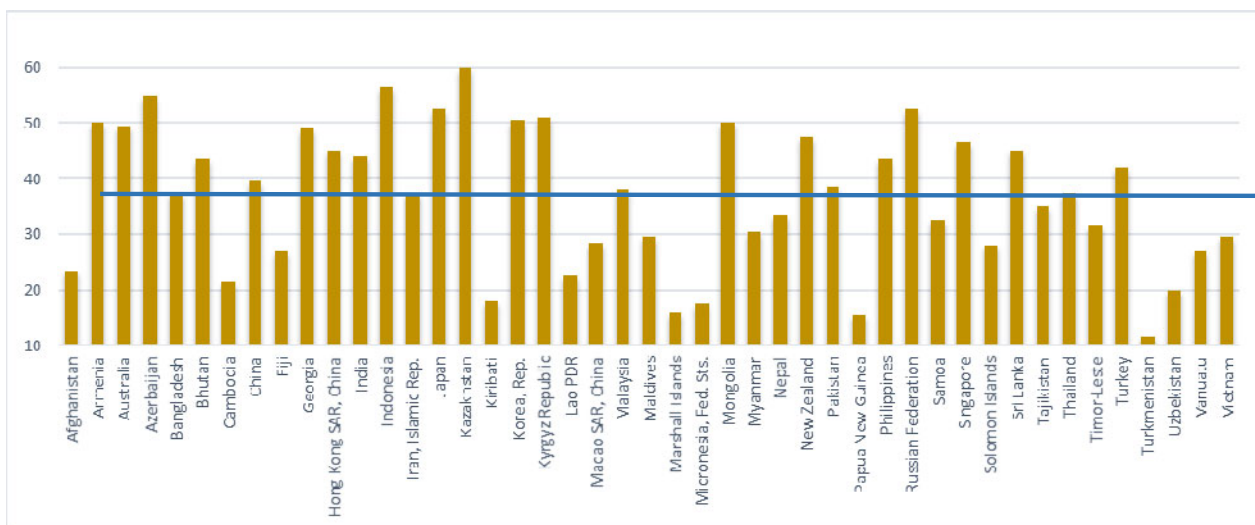
10. The Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Paris21) reports on the status of National Statistics Development Strategies (NSDS<sup>8</sup>) for countries across the world. Paris21 categorises the NSDS<sup>8</sup> in two main groups: one for existing and the other for future NSDS<sup>8</sup>. In general, countries in the region have an NSDS in place albeit at various stages of implementation. Of the 37 ESCAP member States included in the 2017 Paris21 report<sup>8</sup>, 41 percent have an NSDS which is in the implementation phase, 14 percent have an NSDS which is completed but awaiting adoption, 22 percent have an expired NSDS and 24 percent have no NSDS. Of the 9 ESCAP member States with no NSDS, 44 percent do not have a plan to design one.

<sup>7</sup> [Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2017](#)

<sup>8</sup> National Strategies for the Development of Statistics Progress Report 2017, Paris 21. Can be attained at <http://www.paris21.org/sites/default/files/2017-09/NSDS-status-Feb2017.pdf>

11. In terms of open data, the Asia-Pacific region is more or less on par with the global average for coverage and openness according to the 2017 Open Data Inventory<sup>9</sup>. Yet, there exists a wide dispersion among the 45 member States and associate members<sup>10</sup> for which data were available and for some, the status of coverage and openness of official statistics is lagging considerably behind regional and global averages. With global and regional averages of 36.4 and 36.9 respectively for coverage, the country-level minimum value stands at 11.5 while the maximum is 60 (Figure 1). The global and regional openness scores are 45.9 and 45.2 respectively but the dispersion is wide, with the country-level minimum standing at 17.5 and maximum at 87.5 (Figure 2).

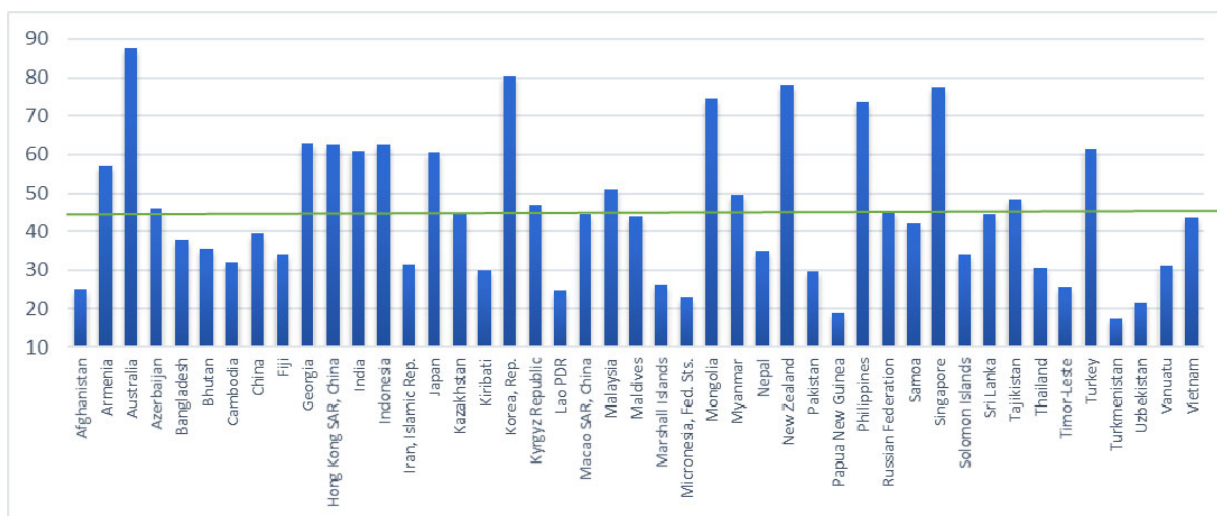
**Figure 1: Status of coverage score of ODIN in the Asia and Pacific region vis a vis regional average (for 45 countries)**



<sup>9</sup> Coverage scores are based on the availability of key indicators and appropriate disaggregation over time and for geographic subdivisions. Openness scores are based on whether data can be downloaded in machine-readable and non-proprietary formats, are accompanied by metadata and download options exist such as bulk download and user-selection or APIs and have an open term of use.

<sup>10</sup> Data was not available for 13 member States and associate members: American Samoa, Brunei Darussalam, Cook Islands, Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea, French Polynesia, Guam, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Tonga, and Tuvalu.

**Figure 2: Status of openness score of ODIN in the Asia and Pacific region vis a vis regional average (for 45 countries)**



12. In 2017, a screening exercise was conducted as part of the ESCAP Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics to assess the status of economic statistics production and dissemination in the region. Fifty countries participated in the screening exercise. Among others, the questionnaire contained questions on statistical infrastructure and institutional aspects of the national statistical system such as statistical law; standards and classifications; organizational structure; quality assurance; statistical registers, censuses and surveys; human resources; and statistical training.<sup>11</sup>

13. All but one of the 50 respondents in 2017 reported having a statistical act in place. All 49 statistical acts include provisions on the protection of confidentiality of respondents' information, 47 include provisions on transparency and 46 have provisions to protect the professional independence of official statistics. Thirty-six of the 49 statistical acts were reported to include provisions allowing agencies in the national statistical system to acquire administrative data for statistical purposes. However, twenty-five respondents indicated they planned to change the statistical act. The most common cited reason for this intended change being the current statistical act not providing sufficient access to administrative data.<sup>12</sup>

## Regional

14. Countries of Asia and the Pacific have developed and agreed to a regional road map to facilitate cooperation at the regional level for implementing the 2030 Agenda, supported by the ESCAP Secretariat and other United Nations entities. The road map was agreed during the 4th Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development in 2017<sup>13</sup> and subsequently endorsed by the ESCAP Member States via Resolution 73/9 adopted during ESCAP's 73th Commission session.

15. The road map identifies priority areas of regional cooperation for implementation of the 2030 Agenda. These priority areas underline the major challenges still faced in Asia and the Pacific, including leaving no one behind; disaster risk reduction and resilience; climate change; management of natural resources; connectivity; and energy. Priority actions under the means of implementation for the 2030 Agenda are also identified in the road map including data and statistics, technology, finance, policy coherence and partnerships.

<sup>11</sup> The full report is available at [http://communities.unescap.org/system/files/capacity\\_screening\\_2017\\_-\\_final\\_rev.pdf](http://communities.unescap.org/system/files/capacity_screening_2017_-_final_rev.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> ESCAP/CST/2018/INF/4

<sup>13</sup> [E./ESCAP/FSD\(4\)/2/Rev.1](#)

16. With regard to data and statistics, the roadmap acknowledges it will be impossible to review progress on Sustainable Development Goal implementation and, consequently, improve performance without credible figures and indicators. And with eighty-eight of the 232 global Sustainable Development Goal indicators lacking methodological guidelines or standards at the time the road map was endorsed in May 2017, the roadmap calls for urgently needed action on strengthening the statistical capacities of member States.

17. The roadmap outlines five opportunities for regional cooperation

- a. Promote the need for national statistical systems to be responsive to the requirements of users arising from the 2030 Agenda, and the need to encourage investments in national statistical systems which are adequate to meet statistical requirements and to support implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals as appropriate;
- b. Formulate and implement continuous, comprehensive and system-wide strategies for the development of statistics, including statistics for the 2030 Agenda;
- c. Provide and promote capacity-building support to national statistical systems to increase the availability of high-quality, accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated data, including to develop integrated measurement frameworks for Sustainable Development Goal statistics integrating data from multiple sources, including big data, in a coherent and consistent manner to support integrated analysis of sustainable development issues;
- d. Organize national statistical system business processes and modernize tools for strengthened quality, efficiency and effectiveness of statistical information management and exchange;
- e. Build the skills of the staff and management of national statistical systems, including of relevant data producers, to enhance the human resources capacity for generating the statistical products and services required for monitoring of national development plans and the 2030 Agenda.

18. The roadmap builds on a *Collective Vision and Framework for Action* adopted by the ESCAP Committee of Statistics in 2016 and endorsed by the ESCAP Commission in 2017. The *Collective Vision and Framework for Action* recognizes the statistical community in Asia and the Pacific needed to transform their understanding of what the core business of official statistics is from producers of time series and tables to providers of statistical products and services which are more directly tailored to the needs of users.

19. The *Collective Vision* communicates the shared level of ambition to the year 2030. The *Framework for Action* translates the vision into collective action in priority areas which include advocacy, investment, user engagement and enabling of the production and use of integrated statistics through methodological work, modernization of business processes and skills strengthening.

20. The *Collective Vision* states “We, the Asia-Pacific statistical community, comprising leaders of national statistical systems and development partners active in the region, share the vision: ... by 2030, national statistical systems are enabled and empowered to lead development of and to deliver innovative, trusted and timely products and services for urgently needed and evolving statistical requirements of Agenda 2030”. It also states “A transformed national statistical system means:

- a. Skills base of staff in statistical institutions transcend traditional disciplines;
- b. Statistical organizations, through modernized statistical business processes, are purveyors of information in the era of big data;
- c. Legal and institutional structures firmly support the application of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics in guiding statistical management and development in a changing environment of increased demands, new data sources and complex uses of statistics;
- d. Relationships with users of statistical products and services are recast with the clients at the centre.”

21. In the *Framework for Action*, the statistical community agreed to focus collaborative efforts on the following action areas:

- a. Action area A: Engaging users and investing in statistics
- b. Action area B: Assuring quality and instilling trust in statistics
- c. Action area C: Integrated statistics for integrated analysis
- d. Action area D: Modernizing statistical business processes
- e. Action area E: Having requisite skills set

## Global

22. The 2030 Agenda commits Member States to “engage in systematic follow-up and review of the implementation of this Agenda” between 2015 and 2030. “Developing countries, particularly African countries, least developed countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries,” will be supported “in strengthening the capacity of national statistical offices and data systems to ensure access to high-quality, timely, reliable and disaggregated data.” “Transparent and accountable scaling-up of appropriate public-private cooperation” will be promoted “to exploit the contribution to be made by a wide range of data, including earth observation and geospatial information, while ensuring national ownership in supporting and tracking progress.”<sup>14</sup>

23. The ESCAP regional roadmap and *Collective Vision and Framework for Action* directly support the strengthening of the capacity of national statistical offices and data systems to ensure access to high-quality, timely, reliable and disaggregated data.

24. However, more can be done to promote “transparent and accountable scaling-up of appropriate public private cooperation to exploit the contribution of a wide range of data, including earth observation and geospatial information, while ensuring national ownership in supporting and tracking progress”. Plans are discussed below in section III. Looking Ahead 2019-2024.

25. The goal of reducing the risk of impact from disasters features prominently in the 2030 Agenda, and targets and indicators on the topic are included in Goals 1 (End poverty in all its forms everywhere), 11 (Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable) and 13 (Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts). Global indicators related to disaster risk reduction are fully aligned with the agreed indicators for monitoring the targets of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, also adopted in 2015.

26. Current UN reforms are repositioning the UN Development System to meet the ambition of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (GA resolution 72/279).

27. Support for development of data and statistics for follow up and review of the 2030 Agenda is emerging as a key priority in many countries. Data and statistics is being identified as a development priority in country-specific UN Development Assistance Frameworks.

28. ESCAP is responding by aligning its country level activities to respond to this need. This includes direct support to national statistical offices, as well as support to and through UN Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams. In this regard, a Regional Advisor for Official Statistics for Agenda 2030 position has been created to be a focal point for single-country data and statistics support.

## III. Looking Ahead 2019-2024

### Action area A: Engaging users and investing in statistics

<sup>14</sup> A/RES/70/1 paragraphs 72 and 76

29. Outreach, user engagement and investing in statistics is critical to strengthening national statistical systems.

30. Following the successful trial of a Every Policy Is Connected (EPIC) tool in Samoa and the Philippines, the ESCAP Committee on Statistics has endorsed it as a generic tool to enhance user-producer engagement in order to establish effective demand for data at the national level in the context of the 2030 Agenda. Future plans are to invest in streamlining the tool with an app and continue to apply it in other areas, not just social policies and gender policies. Geospatial policies are one possible area for consideration. EPIC is a generic tool and all members of the Statistical Commission are invited to explore its use for engaging users and investing in statistics.

31. Disaster-related statistics is a particular area where ESCAP is pioneering and actively contributing to the global statistical standards. A Disaster-related Statistics Framework for Asia and the Pacific has been designed collaboratively by statistics users and producers, making it an example of the implementation of the principle of user engagement of the *Collective Vision and Framework for Action*. The Disaster-related Statistics Framework includes organized descriptions of the uses of the standard products of statistical offices, such as censuses and surveys, for evidence-based disaster risk reduction policy.

32. Acknowledging ESCAP's contribution to develop recommendations and guidance on disaster-related statistics, the forty-ninth session of the Statistical Commission decided to step up global efforts building on existing work by ESCAP among others. ESCAP is currently working with the Economic Commission for Europe and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction to bring the Disaster-related Statistics Framework for Asia and the Pacific to a global level at the 51st Session of the Statistical Commission. Progress is reported in ESCAP/74/2415 and E/CN.3/2019/16 of the current Statistical Commission agenda.

33. In 2020, ESCAP will host a Ministerial Conference to mark the mid-term review of the 2015-2024 CRVS "Get Every One in the Picture" decade. Noting civil registration systems are, could be and should be the source of around 67 global Sustainable Development Goal indicators,<sup>15</sup> ESCAP is exploring advocacy efforts to bring greater attention to the importance of well-functioning civil registration and vital statistics systems. The 2019 High Level Political Forum and 2019 World Economic Forum are two events ESCAP and partners are discussing.

34. In terms of investing in statistics, several statistical development activities are underway or planned in Asia and the Pacific. ESCAP has worked with member States to pilot the use of geospatial data, integrated with official statistics, in support of Sustainable Development Goal <sup>11</sup>. This work was presented at the 2018 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)/International Association for Official Statistics Conference and received positive feedback and much interest. ESCAP is also directly supporting several National Statistics Offices as they trial the use of mobile phone data for official statistics. We have also undertaken research on integrating household survey and census data to support poverty measurement and co-hosted with United Nations Statistics Division a regional workshop on use of earth observations for official statistics.

35. Member States are, however, looking for more. National Statistical Offices are wanting to, or being asked by their Ministers to exploit a range of data including administrative, scanner, mobile phone and geospatial data. Several Asian countries are members of the UN Global Working Group on Big Data, the group providing welcomed leadership in this area, and ESCAP is actively promoting the Global Working Group activities to the wider statistical community of Asia and the Pacific. ESCAP, as a member of the Global Working Group, wove the use of a wide range of data sources into each of its four contributions at the 2018 UN World Data Forum. ESCAP is also co-organising a side event, in conjunction with UNSD, at the 2019 World Statistics Congress in Malaysia to share knowledge and build skills across Asia and the Pacific in the use of big data sources for official statistics. A Special Topic Session at the 2019 World Statistics Congress has also been organised. The 2019 Asia Pacific Economic Statistics week, an annual forum to produce and share practical research on the improvement of economic statistics, is placing emphasis on papers which demonstrate the use of alternative data sources for official statistics.

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<sup>15</sup> The report can be reached at [https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/E74\\_24E%5B1%5D\\_0.pdf](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/E74_24E%5B1%5D_0.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> [Civil Registration and Monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals](#)



36. Public-private partnerships are also needed. In this regard, the Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) Modernising Statistical Systems for the 2020 Round of Population Censuses grants programme has been promoted by ESCAP to member States in Asia and the Pacific. ESCAP also welcomes ESRI's support to the oceans, as well as the Federated System of SDG Data Hubs. ESCAP will also be promoting and looking for partnerships, such as twinning arrangements and south-south cooperation, to support the Asia and Pacific statistical community to exploit the use of a range of data for official statistics.

37. As a regional commission, ESCAP showcases regional progress towards the 2030 Agenda. In 2017, only 25% of the global Sustainable Development Goal indicators could be reported on at a regional level - there is a long way to go to address gaps in official statistics for measurement and full understanding of progress towards the 2030 Agenda. Using a greater range of data sources for the global Sustainable Development Goal indicators is one means to achieving this. Using a range of statistics for the global Sustainable Development Goal indicators, not just statistics traditionally considered as official statistics, is another option.

38. The 2017 UN ESCAP Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report, for example, tested the use of six proxy indicators from official statistical sources where official global Sustainable Development Goal indicators are still under development and the 2018 report is looking to present an analysis of where a wider range of data sources can be used for Sustainable Development Goal reporting purposes.

39. Countries and development partners in Asia and the Pacific are also searching for advice and assistance with a major user engagement challenge – reporting and communicating progress with the 2030 Agenda.

40. The UN is disseminating many types of reports and communicating progress in a number of ways (e.g. globally, sectorally, regionally). For instance, at the global level, the UN Sustainable Development Goal report<sup>17</sup> presents a descriptive statistical analysis of selected global indicators for each of the 17 Goals. At the regional level, UN ESCAP Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report<sup>18</sup> presents an analysis of progress towards goals and targets based on the global indicators (and a small number of proxy indicators from official data sources where sufficient data was not available for a Goal).

41. There are also other reports, for instance, the Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Sustainable Development Solutions (SDSN) SDG Index and Dashboards report<sup>19</sup> which presents a ranking of country-level achievement of the 2030 Agenda using a combination of the global indicators and indicators and statistics from both official and non-official data sources.

42. Whilst these reports address different needs of decision makers, they do pose challenges to the country-led nature of the 2030 Agenda and to coherent progress narratives. To this end, ESCAP is working with countries to build reporting and communication skills. ESCAP is also providing tools and progress measurement methods to enhance Sustainable Development Goal follow-up and review capacities at the country and regional level for indicators and targets. ESCAP is also releasing, in March 2019, a regional gateway to the global Sustainable Development Goal indicators and a tool for countries to self-assess their progress against targets.

43. ESCAP is also working within the UN System, including with the Regional UN Sustainable Development Group Asia-Pacific, to showcase the tools and methodologies to UN Country Teams. ESCAP is also active in discussions with UN Country Teams of the different types of reporting, the advantages and disadvantages of each, and issues which can arise (e.g. country rankings, use of non-official data sources, divergence from the global Sustainable Development Goal indicator framework).

44. ESCAP is partnering with the Bureau of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics to discuss reporting and communication for the 2030 Agenda, and invites the Commission to discuss navigating the various reporting and communication challenges given coherence is a global, regional and national issue.

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<sup>17</sup> UN Sustainable Development Goal Report (<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2018>)

<sup>18</sup> Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2017

<sup>19</sup> SDSN SDG Index and Dashboard

45. The ESCAP Committee on Statistics and ESCAP Commission are key intergovernmental forums for engaging with users and investing in statistics. In adopting the declaration, *Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind*, ESCAP agreed to

- a. support member States in their efforts to implement the *Collective Vision and Framework for Action* in an integrated manner and in light of the regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific;
- b. continue engagement with development partners, and other relevant stakeholders, to ensure the ongoing, coordinated and effective implementation of the Declaration on *Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind* and the *Collective Vision and Framework for Action*;
- c. prepare an overview of progress in implementing the Declaration, every two years, for review by the Committee on Statistics;
- d. submit the outcome of the high-level segment of the sixth session of the Committee on Statistics, including the Declaration, to the Commission at its seventy-fifth session, in 2019;
- e. organize a midpoint conference in 2024, as appropriate, to gauge the extent of success and to reflect on our commitment.

#### **Action area B: Assuring quality and instilling trust in statistics**

46. Since 2012, ESCAP has been involved in the global expert discussion regarding the development, capacity building and implementation of a generic National Quality Assurance Framework. Currently, ESCAP is actively engaged in the expert discussions in updating the generic Framework and developing a UN manual for implementation (refer E/CN.3/2019/6 of the current Statistical Commission agenda).

47. Trust in official statistics is fundamental to our business. A special session organised in conjunction with the 2018 OECD-International Association of Official Statistics Conference brought together the official statistical community to discuss importance of assuring quality and ensuring trust in statistics as a foundation of demand for statistics. Asia and the Pacific is no exception to this value and as such, continues efforts for ensuring trust in national statistical systems and official statistics.

48. ESCAP will be working with UN Statistics Division on a new thematic seminar series of regional conferences on managing statistical offices in times of change. The conferences will bring together chief statisticians across the region to share experience and knowledge to prepare for ever increasing needs of the national statistical systems.

49. Civil Registration and Vital Statistics is a particular area where instilling trust is needed. Many vital statistics in the Asia and Pacific region continue to be produced from survey sources. ESCAP will continue to advocate for vital statistics produced from civil registration systems, including with global partners.

50. Developments in the area of legal identity systems have the potential to impact on trust in civil registration and vital statistic systems. ESCAP is keeping a watchful eye on developments with legal identity systems as the ongoing progress across Africa and other regions and reinforcing the importance of trusted and well-functioning civil registration systems for official statistics.

#### **Action area C: Integrated statistics for integrated analysis**

51. The ocean is vital to the global climate and economy, yet it is being degraded by overfishing, pollution and climate change. Policies affecting the ocean are as fragmented as the data. Unified ocean governance needs unified ocean accounts. ESCAP is pioneering a partnership-building initiative for the development of oceans accounts based on the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA). ESCAP is leveraging its convening role to build partnerships to enhance awareness and understanding of ocean issues and to accelerate action for a healthy ocean. At the 49<sup>th</sup> Session of the Statistical Commission, ESCAP and the United Nations Environment Programme's offer to lead development of statistical guidance on ocean accounts as part of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting Experimental Ecosystem Accounting (SEEA Ecosystem Accounting Revision) was accepted and our response is contained in E/CN.3/2019/15 on the current Statistical Commission agenda.

52. ESCAP is currently strengthening its activities in support of data integration. Specifically, it is expanding its activities with member States to build capacity to

- f. integrate survey, census and administrative data for official statistics.
- g. integrate traditional data sources, such as survey, census and administrative data, with a wider range of data, such as scanner, geospatial and mobile phone data, for official statistics.

53. ESCAP welcomes the support of development partnerships in these areas, particularly support of National Statistical Office partners to twin with countries in the region to build knowledge, skills and capabilities.

#### **Action area D: Modernizing statistical business processes**

54. ESCAP has prioritized modernization of the statistical systems as highlighted in the Collective Vision and Framework for Action. ESCAP's support to modernization of statistical systems focuses on three areas of strengthening business registers, increasing quality and coverage of civil registrations, and improving technical capacity of countries for data and metadata exchange. In this regard, ESCAP collaborated with UNSD to host a regional SDMX workshop in December 2018.

55. ESCAP has initiated efforts in supporting countries for modernizing statistical business processes. In 2018, ESCAP supported a member State to participate in a workshop for trainers to learn and subsequently transfer the knowledge on Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange. The experts from national statistical offices, central banks, international agencies, and the private sector worked together to identify and resolve issues and work towards development of the standard. The collaboration among various stakeholders as well as knowledge sharing is expected to accelerate the work in modernizing statistical business processes in the region.

56. ESCAP will be increasing its focus on modernising statistical business more generally. In particular, as noted earlier, several statistical development activities are underway or planned in Asia and the Pacific to promote "transparent and accountable scaling-up of appropriate public private cooperation to exploit the contribution of a wide range of data [to the 2030 Agenda], including earth observation and geospatial information, while ensuring national ownership in supporting and tracking progress". If successful, ESCAP would hope to see a wider range of data used for official statistics in country-led Voluntary National Reviews and the ESCAP Asia and Pacific SDG Progress Report. Member States in the region are keen and the continued support of global partners, particularly the UN Global Working Group on Big Data, is greatly appreciated. Twinning and south-south cooperation would also be very welcome.

#### **Action area E: Having requisite skills sets**

57. The Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP), a regional institution of ESCAP, is mandated “to strengthen, through practically oriented training of official statisticians, the capability of the developing members and associate members and economies in transition of the region to collect, analyse and disseminate statistics as well as to produce timely and high-quality statistics which can be utilized for economic and social development planning, and to assist those developing members and associate members and economies in transition in establishing or strengthening their statistical training capability and other related activities.”<sup>20</sup>

58. Over the 48 years since the Institute was established in 1970, ESCAP member States have relied on the Institute to be effective, efficient and dynamic in providing, leading and coordinating statistical training in the region. The Commission, at its 74th session in May 2018, “expressed appreciation for the work of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific, including the statistical training provided by the Institute in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Commission suggested further strengthening of the stream of work, including through additional e-learning courses on indicators for measuring the Sustainable Development Goals and training on disaster-related statistics, climate change statistics, and the application and use of geographic information systems and big data to produce official statistics.”<sup>21</sup>

59. The Institutes training programmes are aligned with the *Collective Vision and Framework for Action* and the regional roadmap.

60. ESCAP, through the Institute and the Statistics Division, are working together to strengthen the network of training institutes in Asia and the Pacific. In this regard, the Institute and the Statistics Division are developing a collaboration with the Russian Federal State Statistics Service (ROSTAT) and the Moscow Higher School of Economics at the National Research University with a focus on joint development and delivery of face-to-face and distance training programmes in the Russian language meeting the requirements of Central Asian countries. The Institute and Statistics Division is also developing, in collaboration with the Pacific subregional office of ESCAP, a collaboration with the University of South Pacific with three potential areas of focus: official statistics, environment statistics and Sustainable Development Goal indicators for Pacific countries.

#### **IV. Collaboration and Coordination**

61. One of the key principles of the *Collective Vision and Framework for Action* is to realign and sharpen the focus of existing collaborative initiatives towards accelerating progress in meeting 2030 Agenda. Keeping the principle as the guiding rule, ESCAP continues working under the guidance of several regional capacity development initiatives overseen by member States and international organizations. These include the Steering Group of the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics, the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific and the Regional Steering Committee for Asia and the Pacific for the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics.

62. Regional mechanisms on integrated statistics and innovation was identified as a priority by the Asia and the Pacific statistical community at the 6th Session of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics, and virtual communities of practice will be established.

63. In 2013, the Bureau of the Committee established the Network for the Coordination of Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific which is now comprised of 25 countries and international organizations as members. Though the Network is facing some challenges in terms of commitment from the members and implementation of the targets, ESCAP is working with the Network to expedite knowledge sharing through sharing of training materials as well as expanding new scope of training subject.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/docs/2005/resolution%202005-36.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> E/ESCAP/74/44, para 132

<sup>22</sup> ESCAP/CST/2018/4

64. In addition to the Steering Groups, ESCAP is coordinating with FAO Global Strategy on Agriculture and Rural Statistics and with the UN Statistics Division in a number of thematic areas such as Ocean Accounts, Disaster-related Statistics and Big Data. Notably, UNSD is member of all regional steering groups in Asia and the Pacific.

65. At the regional level, ESCAP is leveraging the UN Regional Coordination Mechanism in facilitating coordinated approach for statistical capacity development of the member States through Thematic Working Groups on Statistics, Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience for Disaster-related Statistics, and for gender statistics, through the Thematic Working Group on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women.

66. To help improve coordination at the regional level, in adopting the declaration, *Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind* (Annex A), member States in Asia and the Pacific called upon development partners to

- h. provide coordinated technical, financial, technological and capacity-building assistance to countries and to ensure countries have full access to data held by development partners in support of the implementation of the Collective Vision and Framework for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- i. consult the national statistical office or national statistical system concerned before conducting any statistical study or survey;
- j. continue to develop and strengthen international statistical standards and to provide technical support for their implementation.

## VI. Action requested from the Statistical Commission

The Statistical Commission is invited to:

1. Discuss the global relevance of the Asia-Pacific declaration on *Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind* and consider recommending the declaration for adoption by the Economic and Social Council as a critical means of implementation for the 2030 Agenda and the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.<sup>23</sup>
2. Take note of the progress made by Asia and the Pacific and development partners to implement the *Collective Vision and Framework for Action by the Asia-Pacific statistical community for Advancing Official Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and discuss the outlined approaches for advancing the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific; in particular:
  - a. Collaboration to strengthen national statistical systems to exploit a range of data sources and methods for official statistics and to address availability challenges with the global Sustainable Development Goal indicators, leapfrogging the era of sample survey reliance where appropriate (paragraphs 34-36);
  - b. Navigating Sustainable Development Goal reporting and communication to ensure trusted, coherent progress narratives at national, regional and global levels (paragraphs 37-44).
3. Support the call by member States in Asia and the Pacific for development partners to:
  - a. Provide coordinated technical, financial, technological and capacity-building assistance to countries;
  - b. Ensure countries have full access to data held by development partners;
  - c. Consult the national statistical office or national statistical system concerned before conducting any statistical study or survey; and

<sup>23</sup> The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics were adopted by the Council through resolution 2013/21 and subsequently endorsed by the General Assembly through resolution A/RES/68/261.

- d. Continue to develop and strengthen international statistical standards and to provide technical support for their implementation.

## **Annex Declaration on navigating policy with data to leave no one behind<sup>24</sup>**

*We, the Ministers and representatives of the members and associate members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, assembled at the sixth session of the Committee on Statistics, held in Bangkok, from 16 to 19 October 2018:*

**Recognize reliable and timely statistics as indispensable for evidence-based decision-making and of principal value for transparency, accountability and inclusive societies,**

**Acknowledge official statistics as an indispensable element in the information system of a democratic society, serving governments, the economy and the public with data on the economic, demographic, social and environmental situation,<sup>25</sup>**

**Emphasize transformative shifts in the production and use of official statistics as imperative for successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,<sup>26</sup>**

**Reaffirm our responsibility to ensure official statistics are available, accessible, and used for impactful analysis and transparent decision-making, consistent with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics,<sup>25</sup>**

*Therefore:*

*Reaffirming* the pledge to leave no one behind through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,

*Recalling* the commitment to engage in systematic follow-up to and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,

*Reaffirming* the importance of regular and inclusive reviews by member States of progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the national and subnational levels, as country-led and country-driven processes to serve as a basis for regular reviews by the high-level political forum on sustainable development,

*Recognizing* that the high-level political forum on sustainable development has a central role in overseeing the network of follow-up and review processes of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global and regional levels,

*Recognizing also* progress made by the members and associate members of the Commission to strengthen official statistics for monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals and to actively pursue solutions appropriate to national contexts, including defining national, subregional and regional targets and indicators,

*Noting* that, despite considerable progress, many members and associate members report significant constraints on administrative structures, human resources and financial issues with regard to national statistical offices and the statistical units of government agencies in their efforts to improve the quality of data, and recognizing that this area requires capacity-building assistance to enable policy to be geared to disadvantaged groups to leave no one behind,

*Acknowledging* the laudable efforts of the Asia-Pacific statistical community to advance official statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through the collective vision and framework for

<sup>24</sup> As appearing in [ESCAP/CST/2018/7](#)

<sup>25</sup> See General Assembly resolution 68/261.

<sup>26</sup> General Assembly resolution 70/1.

action,<sup>27</sup>

1. *Reiterate* our shared vision that, by 2030, national statistical systems, including national statistical offices, are enabled and empowered to lead the development of and to deliver innovative, trusted and timely statistical products and services for the urgently needed and evolving statistical requirements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

2. *Recognize* the commendable commitment of the Asia-Pacific statistical community to modernize statistical business processes, acquire the requisite skills and develop integrated statistics for integrated analysis to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

3. *Affirm* that the realization of the collective vision and framework for action transcends the capabilities of national statistical systems and requires a whole-of-government approach with adherence to three principles:

Principle 1: Linking policy with data is imperative for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and requires continuous dialogue between both users and producers of official statistics;

Principle 2: Investments in national statistical systems need to correspond to resource requirements for the statistical products and services demanded by users;

Principle 3: To deliver timely, innovative and reliable products and services, national statistical offices and the statistical units at all levels of government need to be empowered to operate as one integrated system, upholding standards articulated in the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, including confidentiality, transparency and professional independence, and resourced to implement modern statistical methods for producing, aggregating and disseminating statistics, data and microdata;

4. *Commit* to the implementation of the collective vision and framework for action with collaborative and integrated efforts between policymakers and statistics producers through the following action areas at the national level:

(a) Committing to integrate statistics development with national development policies and plans<sup>28</sup> by setting targets for improvements to the national statistical system and statistical activities to ensure reliable evidence for policymaking and evaluation, recognizing a country's specific local circumstances;

(b) Committing to strengthen and develop, where appropriate, a national monitoring framework, including an indicator set to produce robust evidence for policy development and monitoring and to integrate the framework into planning and budgeting processes;

(c) Committing to establish a high-level advisory body, where appropriate, to the national statistical system to represent the interests and demands of policymakers and other users of statistics, such as the media, the private sector and the general public, to support the development and monitoring of a system-wide statistical programme responding to users' needs;

(d) Committing to specify the roles and responsibilities of the national statistical system, where necessary, to improve coordination and cooperation among statistical units of government agencies at all levels and to transform statistical business processes;

(e) Resolving to empower heads of national statistical offices to assume the lead role in developing and coordinating their respective integrated national statistical systems, avoiding duplicated activities in producing and disseminating official statistics;

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<sup>27</sup> E/ESCAP/CST(5)/1/Rev.1.

<sup>28</sup> Noting that the structure, function and terminology of national development policies and plans vary from country to country and that efforts to integrate statistics development therefore will take a variety of forms and shapes depending on the country context.



- (f) Endeavouring to strengthen necessary legislative provisions and institutional mechanisms to enable national statistical systems to take full advantage of new, innovative and frontier technologies, to follow national and, where appropriate, international standards of data exchange and to build partnerships with all stakeholders for data sharing, while respecting the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics;
- (g) Resolving to improve communication with regard to statistics and to strengthen statistical literacy and culture to facilitate accurate and impactful analysis for evidence-based policymaking and transparent governance in pursuit of achieving the ambition of leaving no one behind;
- (h) Committing to advocate for the expanded use of official statistics for evidence-based policymaking and transparent governance, including, where appropriate, regular organization of statistical awareness programmes with governments and decision-makers;
- (i) Committing to revisit national policies and strategies, as appropriate, to enable implementation of the above action points;

5. *Call upon* development partners:<sup>29</sup>

- (a) To provide coordinated technical, financial, technological and capacity-building assistance to countries and to ensure countries have full access to data held by development partners in support of the implementation of the collective vision and framework for action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- (b) To consult the national statistical office or national statistical system concerned before conducting any statistical study or survey;
- (c) To continue to develop and strengthen international statistical standards and to provide technical support for their implementation;

6. *Request* the Executive Secretary:

- (a) To support member States in their efforts to implement the collective vision and framework for action in an integrated manner and in light of the regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific;<sup>30</sup>
- (b) To continue engagement with development partners, and other relevant stakeholders, to ensure the ongoing, coordinated and effective implementation of the present Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind and the collective vision and framework for action;
- (c) To prepare an overview of progress, including a status update on each of the topics mentioned in paragraphs 4 (a) to 4 (i) and 5 (a) to 5 (c) in implementing the present Declaration, every two years, for review by the Committee on Statistics;
- (d) To submit the outcome of the high-level segment of the sixth session of the Committee on Statistics, including the present Declaration, to the Commission at its seventy-fifth session, in 2019;
- (e) To organize a midpoint conference in 2024, as appropriate, to gauge the extent of success and to reflect on our commitment.

<sup>29</sup> Development partners include international, regional and subregional organizations, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and civil society.

<sup>30</sup> E/ESCAP/73/31, annex II.