

Statistical Commission

Fiftieth session

5 – 8 March 2019

Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda

**Items for discussion and decision: data and indicators for
the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

Background document

Available in English only

**Modernization of the United Nations Statistical System: A more effective and
efficient UN statistical system in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable
Development and beyond**

Prepared by the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building
for statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Introduction

A more efficient UN statistical system¹ as well as a better coordination has been a regular topic on the agenda of the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC). With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the situation changed radically. Illustrated in many different documents addressed to the UNSC in recent years, new challenges to the global statistical community and the UN system, such as dealing with new data sources, higher requests to official statistics, etc., have arisen.

The audit report by Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) recalled these new challenges in 2016: “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).”²

Based on this decision, the HLG-PCCB presented a background paper called: “Does the United Nations need a Chief Statistician?” at the 49th Session of the UNSC. The discussion showed that a more effective, efficient and better-coordinated UN statistical system is needed to face the challenges in the era of the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development.

From the discussion at the 49th Session of the UNSC (Decision 49/103³), in part stated:

- “(e) Recognized the need for stronger coordination and a more efficient United Nations statistical system, as well as the need for a stronger voice for official statistics within the United Nations system;
- (f) Considered, in this context, an early proposal to establish a United Nations chief statistician, and requested the High-level Group to report back to the Commission at its fiftieth session with a proposal that further clarifies the role, seniority and functions of this possible position, among other options, taking into account what is likely to improve global statistical performance in a wider context of ongoing reform processes in the United Nations;

¹ In this context and in this paper, the term “UN statistical system” covers all bodies of the United Nations that collect and/or produce data and statistics under the label of the UN.

² In 2016, the independent system-wide evaluation of operational activities for development with the topic “The contribution of the United Nations Development System to strengthen national capacities for statistical analysis and data collection to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other internationally-agreed development goals (JIU/REP/2016/5). This evaluation was not known while drafting the background paper to the 49th Session. The recommendations made are mirrored in the UN reform processes.

³ E/2018/24-E/CN.3/2018/37 under <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/49th-session/documents/>

- (g) Requested the High-level Group to conduct consultations with relevant actors, especially the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System;”

From July until November 2018, numerous consultations were conducted by the subgroup of the HLG-PCCB. At the UN World Data Forum held in October in Dubai, a session was organized by the subgroup of the HLG-PCCB to broaden the discussion.

This background document presents different aspects linked to the modernization of the UN statistical system. Two crucial elements in this discussion are:

1. As the UNSC already stated, a **higher coordination of the UN statistical system** is needed. It is assumed, that this would lead to a more effective and more efficient system. There are technical issues to be addressed, including: how the structure of the system is currently built-up and what path can be followed to improve the coordination. Some of these aspects are also well reflected in the discussion on data flows between international organizations and member states.
- 2.
3. Second, the **official statistics needs a stronger voice** to advocate for official statistics in the UN and a strong ambassador of the UN statistical system. In the era of the 2030 Agenda, different entities are producing metrics and indexes for SDG monitoring that are not aligned to the official SDG indicator framework and are not supported by any intergovernmental or country-led process. This is contravening ECOSOC Resolution 2006/6⁴ and leads to the under-utilization of official statistics, which is in turn a strong disincentive to capacity building efforts.

In this paper, chapter one, “UN governance: existing coordination mechanisms and on-going UN reforms,” provides an overview of the on-going UN reform process, as well as, all work streams that are linked with the existing coordination mechanism in the UN statistical systems. The second chapter presents issues that require a stronger coordination within the UN statistical system. The third chapter presents different approaches/options on how to achieve the goal of having a stronger coordination and a stronger voice for official statistics in the UN System. The fourth chapter outlines the HLG-PCCB recommendation for consideration by the UNSC. The last chapter contains a short summary of the paper and the recommendations as well as points for discussion, consideration and decision at the 50th Session of the UN Statistical Commission.

1 UN governance: existing coordination mechanisms and on-going UN reforms

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, together with the recognition that policy on security, humanitarian action and human rights require evidence and regular monitoring, has increased the visibility of data and statistics in the UN System outside of the circle of national and international statisticians. Yet, the response of the UN statistical system to this higher demand has largely remained fragmented, reflecting a complex UN

⁴ <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/docs/2006/resolution%202006-6.pdf>

system of agencies and inter-governmental structures organized mostly by theme. In this context, there is no single voice that can advocate for official statistics across all pillars of the United Nations (development, security, humanitarian and human rights).

When approaching a topic like this in the UN, it is the first step to understand what mechanisms were established in the past and what reforms are currently underway. This chapter gives an overview of the existing bodies and on-going reforms.

1.1 The United Nations System

The UN System is complex, with distinct budgetary and governance structures for different components of the system. The United Nations System covers a wide variety of organizational entities with different institutional and functional structures. The principal organs and subsidiary bodies of the United Nations Secretariat are included under the regular budget of the United Nations approved by the General Assembly.⁵ Other agencies of the UN System have their own funding or are financed solely from voluntary contributions. These latter two categories possess a certain degree of autonomy.

Based on a paper presented at the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Conference of European Statisticians (CES) in June 2018, the UN organizations can be grouped into four levels: i) within the UN Secretariat; ii) specialized agencies; iii) other funds, programmes, and related organizations (outside of the Secretariat); and iv) other entities.⁶

1.1.1 United Nations Secretariat

The Secretariat is one of the six principal organs of the UN. Under the authority of the UN Charter, it carries out the day-to-day work of the organization under the regular budget or voluntary contributions. The Secretariat is headed by the Secretary-General, who is the chief administrative officer of the United Nations.

The Secretariat comprises 37 major organizational units which are broadly organized into departments and offices by topic (e.g., political affairs, legal affairs, public information), with specialized divisions and units within each larger department. There are also regional offices.⁷

An official accountable to the Secretary-General heads each of these 37 organizational units. These comprise departments and offices (27)⁸, regional commissions (5), several funds and programmes (4) and other entities (1).

⁵ This is the case for most of the Secretariat entities. Entities such as UNODC, UNEP or UN-Habitat are part of the Secretariat but their budget is mostly based on voluntary contributions. In UNODC for example, the regular budget is only around 5% of the entire budget, the rest is all voluntary contributions. The regular budget is approved through a centralized decision making process, but the total budget is approved by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) and the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ).

⁶ Understanding the system of custodian agencies for Sustainable Development Indicators (ECE/CES/2018/39).

⁷ E.g., UN Office at Geneva, UN Office at Nairobi.

⁸ E.g. Executive Office of the Secretary-General, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) or United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

1.1.2 Specialized Agencies

There are 15 specialized agencies⁹, which are legally independent international organizations with their own rules, membership, organs and financial resources. These agencies were brought into relationship with the UN through negotiated agreements with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and subject to approval by the General Assembly under the authority of Articles 57 and 63 of the United Nations Charter. Specialized Agencies are autonomous organizations outside of the UN Secretariat whose work is coordinated through ECOSOC at the intergovernmental level and through the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) at the inter-secretariat level.

CEB is the main instrument for supporting and reinforcing the coordinating role of the UN intergovernmental bodies on social, economic, and related matters. The CEB provides broad guidance, coordination and strategic direction for the system as a whole in the areas under the responsibility of executive heads. Focus is placed on inter-agency priorities and initiatives while ensuring that the independent mandates of organizations are maintained. It meets biannually and is chaired by the UN Secretary-General. CEB comprises 31 Executive Heads of the United Nations and its Funds and Programmes, the Specialized Agencies, including the Bretton Woods Institutions (The World Bank and IMF), and Related Organizations – the WTO, the UNOPS and the IAEA. CEB carries out its role through the High-Level Committee on Programs and the High-Level Committee on Management.

1.1.3 Other funds, programmes, and related organizations (outside the UN Secretariat)

Funds and programmes apply UN rules and regulations in the realm of administration and personnel. Nevertheless, they are directly managed by distinct inter-governmental bodies and derive most of their financial resources from sources other than the UN budget. Accordingly, they are somewhat more akin to specialized agencies than to “subsidiary organs” of the UN, such as UN commissions and committees. Their activities are operational and implemented at field level.

In total, there are 12 Funds and Programmes, of which eight¹⁰ are outside of the UN Secretariat.

There are 5 Related Organizations that are organizations whose cooperation agreement with the United Nations is similar to that of Specialized Agencies in terms of legal and

⁹ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), International Labour Organization (ILO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), International Telecommunication Union (ITU); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), World Bank Group (World Bank Group), World Health Organization (WHO), World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), International Maritime Organization (IMO); Universal Postal Union (UPU); World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO); World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

¹⁰ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Women, World Food Programme (WFP), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS); United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The UNSG chairs the CEB and represents all Secretariat departments in the CEB. There are some hybrid entities such as UNODC, UNEP and UN-Habitat which are full members of the CEB even if they are part of the Secretariat.

financial autonomy.¹¹ However, cooperation agreements for Related Organizations are not developed through ECOSOC as is the case for Specialized Agencies under Articles 57 and 63 of the UN Charter, but are approved by the General Assembly. These organizations are coordinated at the inter-secretariat level through the CEB.

1.1.4 Other entities

There are 7 other UN system organizations and entities that are not members of the Secretariat or coordinated by the CEB at the inter-secretariat level.¹² These entities facilitate coordination among other UN system organizations with common subject areas. They are legally autonomous and receive funding generally through their member organizations.

There are 32 other coordination and inter-agency networks that do not otherwise fall under the hierarchical structure of the UN. These are not members of the CEB. None of these inter-agency coordination mechanisms (ICMs) are custodian agencies; however, several are “partner agencies” assigned to work with custodian agencies on selected indicators, such as UN Energy (5), Global Migration Group (1), and UN Water.

1.2 Existing coordination mechanisms of the UN statistical system

The UN statistical system includes not only the statisticians who work throughout the system, but also those who are involved in supporting data collection, setting up monitoring and evaluation systems (including those for UN Development Assistance Frameworks), as well as, those conducting data analysis and research and other tasks linked to the collection and use of data and statistics. The role of the Chief Statisticians of UN entities goes beyond the production of data and statistics. They also advocate for the use of high-quality statistics as a guide to policy making. The challenges faced by countries in coordinating their national statistical systems are mirrored in the UN System. UN statistical units have been developed over time within selected Secretariat departments and other components of the UN system. Most of these programmes have evolved in response to the need to provide evidence for guiding international policy on specific issues covered by UN entities and their governing bodies. This evolution may have produced some overlapping mandates.

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 the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the Statistics Division (UNSD) is not the only division that produces data and statistics. The Population Division, for example, also produces data and statistics.

¹¹ International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) and World Trade Organization (WTO).

¹² International Trade Centre (ITC), Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), “other UN Ocean Agencies”.

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.

1.2.1 Coordination between UNSD and the regional commission

The first level of coordination is between UNSD and the five regional commissions. This coordination is facilitated through regular bi-monthly conference calls. In addition, physical meetings take place back to back with other coordination meetings.

1.2.2 Coordination within the UN Secretariat

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 UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) and UN Human Settlements Programme (UN Habitat).

1.2.3 Committee for the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System

The third level is the Committee for the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System (CCS-UNS). The CCS-UNS was formally established in September 2014 in accordance with the decision 45/112 of the Statistical Commission. It comprises the statistical services of UN funds and programmes, specialized agencies and the Secretariat, as well as, the regional economic and social commissions, the mandates of which include the provision of international official statistics in the context of the Principles Governing International Statistical Activities.¹³

1.2.4 Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities

The fourth level of coordination takes place in the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA). In September 2002, the CCSA was established to continue coordination in the statistical sector. Prior to 2002, this was done by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Subcommittee on Statistical Activities. The CCSA adopted its terms of reference during its first session on 3 March 2003 in New York. These terms of reference were revised and approved by the twelfth meeting of the CCSA held in September 2008. CCSA includes all United Nations entities and other international and regional organizations outside of the UN system whose mandate includes the provision of international official statistics in the context of the Principles Governing International Statistical Activities, and which have a permanent embedded statistical service in their organization and regular contacts with countries. An annual report on ongoing committee activities is made available to the UNSC.¹⁴

¹³ See https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/statorg/principles_stat_activities/principles_stat_activities.pdf

¹⁴ See https://unstats.un.org/unsd/acsub-public/workpartner_ccsa.htm

1.3 UN Reform Processes

In January 2017, UN Secretary-General (UNSG) Antonio Guterres announced his intention to introduce wide-ranging reforms on how the UN works and how it delivers on its mandate. In September 2017, over 120 Member States signed a ten-point political declaration expressing their commitment to the Secretary-General's reform agenda.

According to the Secretary-General, the overall goal of his reform agenda is to create a '21st century UN' that is better equipped to address the complex contemporary challenges facing humankind. The reform should be guided by the need to reduce and eventually eliminate 'the horizontal and vertical fragmentation between the pillars of UN work'. The UN should deliver a country-orientated service, which understands that, for example, sustainable development and capacity building are essential prerequisites for building national resilience and preventing conflicts.¹⁵

In particular, the reform is across three areas: UN management (Secretariat); the development system; and the UN's peace and security architecture. The Secretary-General has assigned three 'different internal review teams working together' to lead each of the three reform areas.

1.3.1 Management reform

According to the Secretary-General, the management reforms are based on the premise that the UN Secretariat must be better organized and thus 'better able to deliver on our mandate.' Central to this is the idea that the current highly centralized management system (developed in the 1940s and 50s) must be reformed to better reflect the modern reality of the field-based UN.

In July 2018, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) approved the reorganization of the current Department of Management and Department of Field Support into a new Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, and Department of Operational Support, as envisioned by the Secretary-General in his management reform proposals.

According to the Secretariat, in presenting its report on this topic, the new management paradigm will increase the delegation of authority, accompanied by a simplification and streamlining of the rules, policies and procedures, and by the development and dissemination of administrative guidance along with training, support, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms.¹⁶

1.3.2 Reform of the development system

In July 2017, the UNSG presented a report to the ECOSOC on "Repositioning the UN development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda – Ensuring a Better Future for All", in which the UNSG presented some initial priorities, strategic guidelines and proposals

¹⁵ The Secretary-General introduced the Management Reform Initiative to the Secretariat staff on 26 July 2017 <http://u-seek.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/SG-Townhall-26-July-final-1.pdf>

¹⁶ See <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/gaab4284.doc.htm>

for reform.¹⁷ The report observes that the UN development system needs to move towards better cross-pillar support, building on existing frameworks, commitments and structures that cut across silos, and towards more joint risk analysis and joined-up planning, policy advice, monitoring and reporting.

The Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed (DSG) oversees the UN Development Group (UNDG) that is composed of 40 UN entities. This is in line with the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review 2017-2020 (QCPR) mandate.¹⁸

Following on a mandate developed through a series of consultations for the QCPR, and resulting proposals from the UNSG presented in his July and December 2017 reports, on 31 May 2018 the UNGA adopted a resolution (72/279) aimed at aligning the UN development system with the 2030 Agenda through a “repositioning” process.

By the resolution adopted on 31 May 2018, the UNGA sets out decisions, requests and calls related to:

- a “new generation” of UN country teams;
- “reinvigorating” the role of the Resident Coordinator (RC) system;
- revamping the regional approach;
- strategic direction, oversight and accountability for system-wide results;
- funding the UN development system; and
- following up on the repositioning efforts at the global, regional, and country levels.

In addition, the resolution says, UNGA “looks forward to the update by the Secretary-General” on efforts to align DESA with the 2030 Agenda.

Currently, the Secretary-General’s proposals for reinvigorating the RC system, and presented by the DSG through the 24-month implementation plan introduced in July 2018, are in the first phases of implementation. Member States are also engaging in negotiations on a new “Funding Compact” for funding the UN development system, while proposals are being prepared by the Secretariat on revamping the regional approach. Both progress in implementing the reform of the UN development system and the Secretary-General’s proposals for revamping the regional approach will be presented to Member States from 23 to 25 May 2019, during the Operational Activities for Development Segment.

1.3.3 Reform of the peace and security architecture

On the reforms addressing UN’s peace and security architecture, the Secretary-General proposed creating a Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and a Department

¹⁷ Economic and Social Council, Repositioning the UN development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda: ensuring a Better Future for All, Report of the Secretary-General. A/72/124-E/2018/3.

¹⁸ For more information, see: <http://sdg.iisd.org/commentary/policy-briefs/an-annotated-guide-to-the-un-secretary-generals-reform-proposals/> and A/72/L.52.

of Peace Operations in his 2017 report on ‘Restructuring of the United Nations peace and security pillar’ (A/72/525).

This was then taken up by the UNGA’s Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary) and, on 5 July 2018, at the conclusion of the Committee’s resumed session, governments endorsed the establishment of these two bodies (UNGA resolution <https://undocs.org/A/RES/72/262c>).

2 The importance of and need for a strong coordination within the UN statistical system as well as more advocacy within the UN System for official statistics

The UN Statistical Commission, in its decision 47/103 regarding the Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics, “Reconfirmed the necessity to modernize and strengthen statistical systems, at the national, regional and global levels, built around standards-based architecture, taking into account national specificities, in order to respond more effectively and efficiently to the needs of emerging users, and in particular to address the data demand in relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and related initiatives.” This and other related UNSC decisions clearly show that strong coordination of the UN statistical system is required.

Moreover, the following issues need to be taken into consideration in the discussion of the efficiency of the UN statistical system and stronger advocacy for official statistics in the UN system.

2.1 Public confidence in official statistics

The Data Revolution, and in particular easily available information and communication technologies, have brought a proliferation of data made available on-line by various providers outside of official statistics. Concerns have been expressed that these sources are often unverifiable and do not meet the quality standards of official statistics produced by the National Statistical Systems.

The UNSC is considered the apex body for official statistics and for professional discussion, coordination, standards setting and decision making for official statistics on the global level. Its annual sessions are attended by most, if not all countries. NSOs, UN Statistical Agencies and non-governmental organizations actively participate in its deliberations either as members or as observers of the UNSC.

To achieve its true potential, the UN statistical units have to act as one in providing statistical assistance to Member States and managing international statistics. The implementation of UN common quality assurance standards approved by the CCS-UNS

can help to improve the credibility of UN-system statistics while better coordination can improve the impact of single agency interventions.

2.2 Support for official statistics

While many efforts have been made by UN agencies to maintain a coordinated approach to official statistics (through CCSA and UN chief statisticians group), there is still the need of a dedicated and authoritative leadership in the field of statistics. Such leadership to be effective has to work with all UN Chief Statisticians, beyond formal lines of reporting, to build a sense of belonging around a UN common vision on statistics. At the same time, the leadership needs to have the authority to interact with senior UN leaders to be able to promote the values of statistics at the highest levels, both within the UN and outside.

Official statistics should be a robust enabler of sustainable development and, in general, the bedrock for an evidence-based decision-making process rather than just a purely technical field. Its crosscutting nature is more apparent, especially with the adoption of 2030 Agenda. Through strengthening the UN statistical system, the official statistics community has a chance to gain recognition and political support at both the international and national levels.

2.3 Professional independence of official statistics

The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the Principles Governing International Statistical Activities provide for statistical governance to be based solely on professional and scientific considerations. This is easier to defend if the UN statistical system is unified under the common leadership.

2.4 Improving quality and consistency of data

It is very important that data published by the UN statistical system are consistent and provide clear and reliable information to users. Any inconsistency in data published by UN statistical units represents a risk of loss of credibility and undermines the reputation of the statistical system. The UN statistical system should ensure a proper division of labor between statistical units of various offices, agencies, funds and programmes.

2.5 Minimizing the reporting burden on national statistical systems

The burden of multiple requests sent to NSOs and other national producers of official statistics has considerable costs. Many attempts to harmonize and streamline these processes have improved the situation over the years, but the situation is still less than desirable. One of the major consequences is a high level of non-response to international questionnaires. Therefore, it is in the best interest of the UN statistical units as well as national statistical systems, that the international data flows are highly coordinated.

3 Creating a modernized statistical system – Proposed approaches and other considerations

This chapter will propose various options on how to create a modernized statistical system ensuring a more effective and efficient United Nations Statistical System. The role of organizational leadership is critical and necessary to address the challenges, needs, and goals of the organization and its employees. Roles and responsibilities need to be clearly defined, as well as reporting authority. All are important criteria for building an efficient and modern organization. Below are possible options, for consideration, on ways to improve the effectiveness of the UN statistical system. The list is not exhaustive, but rather a starting point for discussion and consideration. It is not the task of the UNSC to decide which option to pursue rather to discuss the possible direction within different options.

3.1 Option 1 – Strengthening existing mechanisms and positions

Under this option, there is no change in the structure. However, a few elements need to be improved: a) strengthening coordination of the statistical functions of the UN in the current structure; b) minimizing duplication\redundancies; c) better utilizing resources by allowing joint projects with similar objectives\goals. For example, the UNSD Director should be tasked with new coordination and representation duties to support and defend the entire UN statistical system within the UN and outside. This position should be the focal point at the UN for all questions related to data and statistics. This is an important position requiring communication skills and dedicated resources (both human and financial). In general, the existing coordination mechanisms need to be strengthened immediately.

3.2 Option 2 –Matrix management approach with the adoption of a UN Central Statistics Office (CSO).

UNSD (currently headed by a Director at D2 level) takes on the responsibilities of a centralized UN CSO. In any of these options listed below, the position of the UNSD Director may be elevated to a senior post (probably Assistant Secretary-General).

There are alternatives within this option:

3.2.1 Option 2.1

The statistical units remain where they are and staff administratively report to their current management but programmatically report to the UNSD, functioning as a CSO.

3.2.2 Option 2.2

The statistical operating units are positioned within the UNSD administratively and programmatically they report to the UNSD, functioning as a CSO, by agreement with regional commissions and select other UN units.

3.2.3 Option 2.3

Establish a centralized UN Statistics Office with the UNSD as the starting point. All of the UN statistical functions would take place within this office. The UN Statistics Office would be a service provider to all of the UN departments of the secretariat. The Statistics Office is based in New York with the possibility of local branches in other UN locations.

3.3 Option 3 – New senior post in the UN-DESA (maybe a UN Chief Statistician)

The establishment of a senior post in the UN-DESA (probably at the Assistant Secretary-General level, i.e. Assistant Secretary-General for Statistics and Data Steward or Assistant Secretary-General and UN Chief Statistician) is covered under this option.

There are two alternatives within this option.

3.3.1 Option 3.1

The position, independent of the UNSD, would be responsible for overseeing and coordinating all of the statistical functions of the UN. Directors/Heads of UN statistical units would programmatically report to this position. A small staff would provide assistance. Statistical program activities would remain with and be distributed among the current UN statistical units, including the UNSD, regional commissions, etc.

3.3.2 Option 3.2

The director of the UNSD (or CSO) would fulfill all tasks described in option 3.1.

3.4 Option 4 – Establish a senior position, independent of the UN-DESA

Establish a senior position independent of UN-DESA – See Option 3 for a brief description of the position.

3.5 Option 5 – Complete reorganization of UN statistical system

Options 2 through 4 include some changes in the institutional organization of the UN. Option 5 requires a critical review and assessment of all the statistical functions done within the UN, and their business processes. The result is a reorganization of all statistical functions, statistical operating units and reporting responsibilities.

Duplication of efforts and gaps should be identified and addressed; essential functions should be retained and nonessential functions eliminated. The next steps include a deliberate and measured review of the statistical operating units. Moving forward the essential functions would be reviewed and mapped out to redefined, yet existing, statistical units, and/or when appropriate, to new operating units.

3.6 Evaluating the Options

Below is a chart with the proposed options. For each option, advantages and disadvantages are listed. The next chapter will discuss a proposed option for consideration.

<u>Proposed Option</u>	<u>Advantage</u>	<u>Disadvantage</u>
Option 1 – Strengthening existing mechanisms and positions – no change in the institutional structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain "the stable work environment" within the UN system; • The existing mechanisms systems or positions can be tasked with new elements without having approval from a higher body than the UNSC; • Strengthening the UN statistical system can be achieved fast and without the need to wait for the adoption of the ongoing UN-reform; • The CCS-UNS could have the overview on all mandates of the UN agencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not address all of the current reporting or coordinating challenges; • Does not address latest challenges to bring statistics up front when debating global/regional policy issues; • Risk that nothing will change; • The mandates and tasks of the different UN bodies will remain separate with possible overlaps and/or duplication.
Option 2 – UNSD is the basis for a UN CSO (with further refinement in three sub-options). The position of the Director of the UNSD may be elevated to a senior post (probably Assistant Secretary-General).		
2.1 – Dual reporting, units remain where they are, administrating report to current management, report program functionality to UN CSO.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple matrix management; • Operating remains intact, with just reporting responsibilities changing; • Minimal change is incurred. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At first challenging to implement; • Need very well defined and communicated lines of authority; • Dual reporting calls for trouble to maintain "common" working culture/environment; • Does not strengthen resource utilization; the focus adds another management.
2.2 – Reposition all UN statistical units to the UNSD, who direct statistical work and administratively support units.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starts to address some of the issues to a point; • Better coordination; • Consolidation of statistical plans and work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to address incentives for other stat operating units to agree; • Could trigger resistance, especially from "original owners" of the statistical units; • Outside of the overall change within the UN system. Possibility to fail is high!
2.3 – Establish a UN CSO.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearer lines of authority and reporting responsibilities; • Managing within one operating unit is much easier than managing across operating units; • Clear and well defined tasks and responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to address incentives for other stat operating units to agree; • Very centralized organizational set up is not compatible with the UN system, which is de-centralized by nature.

Proposed Option	Advantage	Disadvantage
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More coordination; • Consolidation of statistical plans and work; • Better utilization of resources. 	
3 – Establish a senior position in the UN DESA.		
3.1 – Independent from UNSD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statistical operating units remain as is; • Reduce the overlapping; • Clearer reporting authorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have to get acceptance from Directors/Heads of statistical operating units; • No incentive (or “moral” authority) to align UN agencies towards the position; • Requires more resources (human and financial); • Lines of authorities need to be re-drawn; • Another level of authority that would add more bureaucracy; • Risk for a political appointment that does not fulfill the criteria for an official statistician.
3.2 – as the head of UNSD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statistical operating units remain as is; • Reduce the overlapping; • Clearer reporting authorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have to get acceptance from Directors/Heads of statistical operating units; • No incentive (or “moral” authority) to align UN agencies towards the position; • Requires more resources (human and financial). Lines of authority need to be re-drawn; • Risk for a political appointment that does not fulfill the criteria for an official statistician.
4 – Establish a senior position, independent of UN DESA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statistical operating units remain as is; • Working under the auspices of the UNSG, the senior position would be more easily accepted by UN entities; • Focus on issues of concern that current set up does not have resources to follow; • Would position official statistics at higher political level; • May have more acceptance and attention outside of DESA. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have to get acceptance from Directors/Heads of statistical operating units; • Another level of authority that would add more bureaucracy; • Coordination functions of UN DESA need to be re-examined to ensure synergies; • Is there political interest to do it? • Risk for a political appointee that does not fulfill the criteria for an official statistician.
5 – Complete Reorganization of UN statistical system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will address all of the concerns and should be forward-looking for the next 20-30 years; • Brings better utilization of resources; • Minimize redundancies/ duplication; • Better coordination; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will require a fair amount of time and other resources to develop and implement; • Time driven; • Resource driven; • Political will to “reform”; • Resistance to change.

<u>Proposed Option</u>	<u>Advantage</u>	<u>Disadvantage</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be linked with the ongoing UN reform. 	

3.7 Function of a senior position

At the national level, a chief statistician typically plays three important roles: (a) spokesperson or advocate for the importance of statistics, (b) coordinator of the national statistical system and (c) guardian of the impartiality and independence of statistics against political interference. The role of the UN chief statistician could be somewhat different given the complexity of the system.

A few core tasks of a senior position can be outlined based on chapter 2. The establishment of a senior position (e.g. UN chief statistician) should include the following mandatory tasks:

- a) **Providing leadership, overall strategic direction and coordination for the various statistical offices in the UN:** Defining the overall UN strategy in the area of data and statistics, in particular with respect to implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the review of progress, and assuring 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 is key. It is crucial to ensure coherent and effective coordination across UN agencies. Within the system, the different actors are involved in such a way that the overall strategic goals and objectives are attained and that each actor contributes according to standard and quality frameworks. It is essential that the efforts at all levels must be coordinated – by managing the links between the activities performed and the actors involved.¹⁹ The senior position 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 and adequately resourced. Mutual trust between the partners can help to avoid conflicts of priorities, and build commitment. Thus, the establishment of a senior position will create a head of the statistical system of the UN.
- b) **Providing a single voice speaking on behalf of UN statistics:** The senior position will represent the UN statistical system as a whole, act as the chief advocate and spokesperson for data and statistics and implement the decisions by the UN Statistical Commission and the Committee for the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System (CCS-UNS) 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. She or he can actively be in a dialogue with policy makers and other stakeholders in order to collect information needs and be proactive to explain and better communicate statistics. This is even more crucial since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda;

The following tasks should also be covered:

¹⁹ Generally, coordination is characterized by the following components: goals (identifying goals), activities (mapping goals to activities), actors (selecting actors, assigning activities to actors) and interdependencies (‘managing’ inter-dependencies).

- I. **Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and quality of data:** Promote the knowledge and 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:** Promote the use of statistical policies, standards and good practices with the aim of fostering consensus on definitions, classification, 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 political issues arise in relation to the production and use of data and statistics and when representatives of official statistics are challenged;
- IV. **Capacity development:** Provide leadership, and coordinate initiatives in order to avoid overlapping of initiatives for capacity development. Promote 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, ensuring the timely identification of gaps and assisting in filling the gaps;
- VI. **Innovation:** Coordinate and promote research and development of data skills in the area of statistics and data science throughout the UN system. Advance a “UN statistical system” including by developing new skills of staff such as on 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 and advocate for an 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.

4 Recommendations by the HLG-PCCB

The different options listed above have their disadvantages and advantages. However, all of them can contribute at least in part to the two main goals described at the beginning of this document:

- First: To have higher coordination that leads to a more effective and more efficient UN statistical system, and
- Second: To ensure official statistics has a stronger voice in the UN that leads to better advocacy.

The UN Statistical Commission is not in the position to change structures of the UN. Many actors like the programmes and funds of the UN are outside of the UN Secretariat. This makes it even more complex to change structures. The UNSC is also not the body to discuss budget related questions. This is done in the fifth committee of the UN General Assembly.

However, the UN Statistical Commission is the body that advocates for and governs the UN statistical system. The UNSC is different in comparison with the other functional commissions under the umbrella of ECOSOC: The members are the Chief Statisticians of the Member States that coordinate their national statistical systems. Thus, a direct link to these systems is guaranteed.

It is the duty and task of the UNSC to reflect on the current situation. If there are opportunities or needs that are crucial for official statistics, they need to be discussed. Finally, official statistics are tasked, as stated by different of UN resolutions, to provide data and statistics for the UN system as well as for the regions and countries.

Based on these reflections, the different options described in the previous chapter as well as on the numerous consultation that were conducted, the HLG-PCCB recommends the following:

4.1 Recommendation 1: Strengthening the existing mechanisms

The existing mechanism needs to be strengthened immediately. This can be done without additional budget. The following actions are needed:

- Recommendation 1a: The organization of the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the UN System (CCS-UNS) shall be modernized with the aim to reach the two main goals that are described above;
- Recommendation 1b: The UNSD Director has to play the role of the main coordinator for the UN statistical system;
- Recommendation 1c: UNSD shall provide more (human) resources to strengthen the role of the secretariat to fulfill the coordination role within the UN statistical system under the regular budget;
- Recommendation 1d: The UNSD Director defends and advocates the official statistical system within the UN system at all levels (including the 5th Committee of the UN General Assembly);
- Recommendation 1e: The UNSD Director should be the main and first focal point within the UN for all questions and tasks related to data and statistics;
- Recommendation 1f: The CCS-UNS should update its Terms of Reference latest by fall 2019 in collaboration with the Bureau of the UNSC as well as the co-chairs of the HLG-PCCB;
- Recommendation 1g: The HLG-PCCB, the bureau of the UNSC in collaboration with the CCS-UNS and UNSD shall report back to the 51st Session of the UNSC in 2020 on the progress made related to this topic.

4.2 Recommendation 2: Take the issue to the next level

The UN reform process led by the UN Secretary General presents a unique opportunity to improve system-wide coordination in all domains, including statistics. Enforcing coordination through a centralized mechanism will not be feasible in all cases. Therefore, a stable means of respecting institutional mandates while also supporting the sound functioning of the System suggests a need to raise awareness about the role of statistics at a high political level. Without a change of mindset, and with only patches to the institutional structures, UN reform in the area of statistics will have only a marginal impact. The UNSC is not the body that changes the UN system or decides about creating new positions in the UN. However, it is important that the issues are stated in the area where changes can happen. The following actions are needed:

- Recommendation 2a: A consultation with relevant stakeholders (e.g. UN agencies and regional commissions) on the better coordination of the UN statistical system will be carried out to inform the message in recommendation 2b.
- Recommendation 2b: The UNSC shall give a clear message to ECOSOC, the UNGA as well as to all actors involved in the on-going UN reforms;
- Recommendation 2c: This issue needs to be linked with the UN reforms (especially with the DESA reform and the reform of the development system);

4.3 Recommendation 3: Active involvement of the statistical community

While recommendation 1 focuses on the decision power of the UNSC, recommendation 2 focuses on raising the issue to the level where decisions are taken related to the UN reforms and budget. Recommendation 3 puts the actors of the statistical community in a more active role outside of the UNSC. The following actions are needed:

- Recommendation 3a: The UNSC Chair, with support of the UNSC bureau, shall contact all relevant actors who are involved in the UN reform processes (including UNSG, DSG and the USG of DESA) actively;
- Recommendation 3b: The UNSC Chair, with support of the Bureau and the HLG-PCCB, should be an active player and be involved in the on-going UN reform processes.

5 Conclusions

Based on the findings of this report, the HLG-PCCB hopes that the discussion at the Commission will help shape consensus on how to achieve the goals identified by the HLG-PCCB, and on the recommendations and options presented in this report.