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## Statistical Commission

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Item 4 (g) of the provisional agenda\*

**Items for information: statistics of human development**

## Report of the United Nations Development Programme on the statistics of human development

### Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2019/210 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the United Nations Development Programme on the statistics of human development to the Statistical Commission. The Commission is invited to take note of the report.

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\* [E/CN.3/2020/1](#).



# Report of the United Nations Development Programme on the statistics of human development

## I. Introduction

1. The Human Development Report Office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has provided updates on the *Human Development Report* and human development indicators at various sessions of the Statistical Commission, most recently the forty-sixth session, held in 2015. The present report is submitted in follow-up to a request by the Commission at that session.

2. The *Human Development Report* is produced by the Office drawing on work and consultations with leading scholars, development practitioners and other stakeholders. The report, which is global in nature, has been published annually since 1990. It pertains to a different topic each year, with a theme relevant to the field of human development. For example, the theme of the 2019 edition is “Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today: inequalities in human development in the twenty-first century”. In the 2020 edition, issues critical to sustainable human development will continue to be explored and analysed.

3. Each edition contains a statistical annex, which is a thematic compendium of the most recent available statistics, some of which are summarized in five composite indices of which the Human Development Index is the best known and used. The report, including the extensive database of human development indicators, is also published on the website of the Office.<sup>1</sup>

4. The General Assembly, in its resolutions [49/123](#) and [57/264](#), affirmed that the report was a separate and distinct exercise that was not an official document of the United Nations. That position was also reiterated by the Executive Board of UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services in its decision 94/15. The Statistical Commission has also explicitly recognized that UNDP is not a data collection entity and that the report is an editorially independent report commissioned and published by UNDP. The Executive Board, in its decision 2011/12, recognized that the report was an important tool for raising awareness about human development around the world.

5. For the production of the composite indices and the statistical annex, the Office is a user of statistics and indicators rather than a data producer. It relies on data from other United Nations entities and international organizations with mandates for data collection, verification, compilation and public dissemination based on international definitions and standards.

6. In addition to the annual report, more than 800 national or regional human development reports have been produced in over 140 countries since 1992. However, the Office is neither a producer nor a responsible party in that regard. Those reports are produced by regional and national teams of experts, often with the support of local or regional UNDP country offices.

## II. Communications and other related processes

### A. Direct communication with national statistical offices

7. The Office emphasizes communication with national statistical offices to effectively address areas of concern, in particular the discrepancy between national

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://hdr.undp.org/en>.

and international data. The Office regularly writes to all heads of national statistical offices, permanent missions to the United Nations and the regional economic commissions and the secretariats of the Caribbean Community and the Pacific Community, informing them about the key indicators and international data sources that will be used in the forthcoming edition of the report and its statistical annex. The letter also contains important dates and milestones relating to the report's production and a comprehensive list of data sources that will be used in the upcoming edition. In that way, national statistical offices have an opportunity to review the indicators and bring any existing discrepancy between national and international data to the attention of the relevant international organizations.

## **B. Consultations, workshops and meetings**

8. The Office regularly seeks to attend regional and global gatherings of statisticians. Each such occasion has provided a valuable opportunity to consult official statisticians and solicit feedback. In addition, the Office organizes an annual workshop on statistics of human development as a side event to the session of the Statistical Commission. All delegates are invited to the workshop. Furthermore, engagement with national statistical offices has expanded, including through invitations to Office-coordinated thematic regional consultations and through bilateral meetings. Regional-level workshops and conferences on human development concepts and measurements have been held, most recently a workshop on the computation of the global and national Multidimensional Poverty Index, held in Havana from 7 to 9 October 2019, and a workshop on the Human Development Index, held in Niamey from 5 to 7 November 2019.

9. The Office has been representing UNDP in the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities and the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System.

10. The Office conducts two annual briefings for the Executive Board on the development of the report.

## **C. Expert group meetings on measuring human progress held between 2017 and 2019**

11. The Office held an expert group meeting on measuring multidimensional poverty at the University of Geneva in April 2017. It brought together leading experts in the area of multidimensional poverty, covering concepts, measurements, statistical quality and use for policymaking and awareness-raising, in the context of developing and developed countries. The methodology of the Multidimensional Poverty Index was thoroughly discussed and its extension to assessing overlapping deprivations in developed countries considered.

12. In March 2018, the Office held an expert group meeting on recasting human development measures with the objective of presenting, discussing and proposing how the methodologies of current human development indices could be improved so that the indices would remain relevant in monitoring progress in human development, with a view, in particular, to strengthening the usefulness of the indices for policy debates within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Fifteen experts were invited. Sudhir Anand, Stephan Klasen and Marc Fleurbaey initiated the discussions

by presenting the major findings and proposals from their review papers commissioned by the Office.<sup>2</sup>

#### **D. Statistical advisory panel**

13. The statistical advisory panel met in 2017, 2018 and 2019. Its membership consists of statisticians and analysts from international and national statistical offices and academic institutions, who are leading experts in the field. While the membership was partly refreshed every year, the objectives of the panel generally remained as being to provide advice, guidance and feedback to the *Human Development Report* team with regard to the overall methodology of the composite indices, including the conceptual validity, appropriateness and statistical quality of the indicators presented in the report's statistical annex and used in the key analyses in the report. The panel also provided advice on the online content (data presentation and visualization) and on issues relating to consultations and effective interaction with the statistical community.

### **III. Global human development composite indices, methodology and data**

#### **A. Updates to the methodology**

14. During the period under review, there were no updates to the methodology used for the composite indices, with the exception of the Multidimensional Poverty Index.

15. The multidimensional approach to measuring poverty gained wide acceptance, with several Governments adapting the Multidimensional Poverty Index to reflect their own national socioeconomic and cultural realities. The Office entered into a partnership with the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative in 2018 with a view to jointly working on improving the conceptual framework and estimation methodology of the Index. Some minor changes were adopted to better reflect recent child mortality, child malnutrition with lasting consequences (stunting) and gains in primary school attainment. Programmes used to estimate the Index and its components can be downloaded from the Office's website.<sup>3</sup>

#### **B. Planned updates to the methodology for 2020**

16. On the basis of the critical reviews, discussions and recommendations at the expert group meetings and by the statistical advisory panel, the Office will consider proposing innovations in the calculation of human development composite indices in 2020. They will include updates to the scaling parameters for the Human Development Index computation, so-called goalposts and a possible refinement of the human development categories. The current gender indices – the Gender Development Index and the Gender Inequality Index – will be considered for revision and updates in partnership and collaboration with data and research colleagues in the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

17. A panel of experts will meet in 2020 to discuss how to expand the current human development measurement framework to allow an evaluation of the sustainability of

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/recasting-human-development-measures>, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-indices-and-indicators-critical-evaluation> and <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-indicators>.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/mpi-statistical-programmes>.

human progress more explicitly, which is likely to lead to a new measure of sustainable human development.

18. The Office would appreciate having the opportunity to report to the Statistical Commission at its fifty-second session on updates to the methodology.

#### **IV. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission**

19. The Statistical Commission is invited to take note of the present report.

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