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Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda*

**Items for discussion and decision: coordination of
statistical programmes**

Report of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2020/211 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Statistical Commission the report of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities. The report provides an overview of the work carried out by the Committee in 2020 and a summary of the main conclusions of the Committee at its thirty-fifth and thirty-sixth sessions as well as two extraordinary sessions held between these formal sessions to discuss the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on international statistical programmes. The Statistical Commission may wish to take into account the views of the Committee in its discussions under the relevant agenda items and is invited to take note of the report.

* E/CN.3/2021/1.



I. Historic context

1. The Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities is an inter-agency body that promotes coordination and cooperation across statistical programmes in regional, supranational and international organizations. The Committee currently has 45 members,¹ 40 of which attended at least one session in 2020. The second extraordinary session, held virtually, was attended by a record 40 organizations, with over 70 delegates. The Committee's terms of reference are available online.²

2. The Committee operates through a network of task teams and generally holds two formal sessions per year. The thirty-fifth session was held in New York on 2 March 2020, prior to the fifty-first session of the Statistical Commission; and the thirty-sixth session was held virtually on 10 and 11 September 2020. In addition, the Committee held two extraordinary sessions on 4 May 2020 and 18 June 2020, respectively, to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on international statistical programmes; both were conducted virtually.

3. In addition to the two current co-chairs, Angela Me (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) and Haishan Fu (World Bank) the work of the Committee was supported by three vice-chairs: Mariana Kotzeva (Eurostat), Oliver Chinganya (Economic Commission for Africa) and Steve MacFeely (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development).³ The Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat serves as the secretariat of the Committee; it also maintains the web pages of the Committee on the Division website.⁴

II. Work of the Committee in 2020

A. COVID-19

4. The most pressing topics that occupied the Committee in 2020 focused on the challenges that COVID-19 brought to international statistical programmes. At a time when reliable information is more essential than ever, many statistical systems are struggling to compile basic statistics, owing in part to the pandemic but also because of a lack of resources needed to modernize operations and infrastructure. Throughout this crisis, the international statistics community has continued to work together, in partnership with national statistical offices and systems around the world to ensure that the best quality data and statistics are available to support decision-making during and after the crisis. Members worked together in two main areas: assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on the work of national statistical offices to tailor technical support to the new needs and better coordinate different efforts; and delivery of international statistics that could describe almost in real-time the rapid social and economic changes that the pandemic triggered in just a few months.

1. New publication entitled "How COVID-19 is changing the world: a statistical perspective"

5. The United Nations and other member organizations of the Committee collect and make a wealth of impartial data and statistics available free of charge in the spirit of promoting facts-based planning. In this spirit and in response to the pandemic, the Committee created a new publication entitled "How COVID-19 is changing the

¹ See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ccsa/members.cshtml>.

² <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ccsa/documents/TORfinal.pdf>.

³ See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ccsa/documents/Table-Chairs.pdf>.

⁴ See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ccsa/>.

world: a statistical perspective”, two of which volumes have been published thus far. Volume I was released on 13 May 2020, and volume II on 1 September 2020. Both volumes are available on the Committee’s website as well as member organizations’ websites.⁵ A total of 38 international organizations have thus far contributed to the new publication, which presents a snapshot of some of the most recent information available on how COVID-19 is affecting the world. Owing to the high interest from their users, the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT) translated both volumes of the publication into Russian.⁶

6. The quantitative knowledge presented in the publications covers different aspects of public and private life, from economic and environmental fluctuations to changes that affect individuals in terms of income, education, employment and violence and changes affecting public services such as civil aviation and postal services. The publication also highlights the effects for some sub-population groups such as women and children and for geographical regions.

7. The publication received excellent feedback, including from the Office of the Secretary-General. The first volume was also mentioned in the press release of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination “as a strong example of what the international statistical community can achieve when confronted with a dire global challenge”.⁷

8. On that basis, the Committee is currently planning to issue a third volume in early 2021. The Committee will assess the usefulness and usage of the publication before discussing the continuation of such a joint publication beyond the pandemic.

2. Country needs assessment and related surveys

9. The Committee received regular briefings on the global needs assessment survey conducted by the World Bank and the Statistics Division in collaboration with the regional commissions (see E/CN.3/2021/3, paras. 41 and 42). The first three rounds of the survey took place in May, July and October 2020. The results of each round have been made available on the Division’s and World Bank’s website at the aggregated level. Data from the survey has also been made available to Committee members, upon request, at the more disaggregated level, conditional on individual countries’ consent to data sharing.

10. The results of the global survey were inter alia analysed by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific to assess the impact of COVID-19 on statistical operations in Asia and the Pacific. A report was produced following the first round of the survey;⁸ a second report on the results of the second wave will be published later in 2020.

11. Paris21, a member of the Committee, conducted a short survey, developed with the World Bank and the Statistics Division, on how international organizations have been impacted by the pandemic in September and October 2020. The report is currently being finalized and is expected to be available by the end of 2020.

⁵ See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ccsa/pubs/>.

⁶ The Russian translations are also available on the website of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ccsa/pubs/>.

⁷ <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/note-correspondents/2020-05-14/note-correspondents-the-virtual-meeting-of-the-chief-executives-board>.

⁸ <https://www.unescap.org/resources/monitoring-state-statistical-operations-under-covid-19-pandemic-asia-pacific-region>.

B. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

12. The Committee continued to receive regular briefings from the Statistics Division on the revision of the indicator framework for monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals, in view of the critical supporting role of international organizations as custodians of indicators in their respective areas of work and in view of their respective mandates in monitoring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

13. The Committee received the final report from the task team on the use of population data for the global monitoring of progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals. The recommendations of the task team were as follows: (a) upgrade the United Nations population estimates published in the biennial revisions of the World Population Prospects publication, in particular by generating annual estimates for single-year age categories; (b) enhance and improve metadata for population estimates, including both national estimates submitted by countries for inclusion in the United Nations Demographic Yearbook and the global estimates published in World Population Prospects; (c) continue the preferential use of the United Nations population estimates for computing and aggregating Sustainable Development Goal indicators expressed on a per capita basis, while allowing flexibility in situations in which the use of population estimates from national governments or other sources may be advisable for technical reasons and to accommodate reasonable agency-specific preferences and prior agreements about the use of national data; and (d) acknowledge the central role of custodian agencies in choosing the most appropriate population estimates for use in computing a particular indicator, consulting as necessary and appropriate with Member States and the Population Division to resolve issues that may arise. The task team concluded its report by calling for the Population Division and Statistics Division to report jointly to the Committee in September 2021 on efforts to improve the metadata for population estimates and on possibilities for developing global standards for population estimates.

14. The Committee also continued to be briefed on the work of the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

C. Strengthening the interlinkages with the geospatial community

15. Over the past years, the Committee has intensified its work in the area of geospatial information. Previous efforts of the Committee in leveraging geospatial information within the statistical community has been reported previously to the Commission (see E/CN.3/2020/6, paras. 14 and 15). Building on a stocktaking exercise of the use of geospatial data and tools in member organizations conducted in 2019, the Committee started engaging further with the geospatial community, in particular the United Nations Geospatial Network, which is “a coalition of entities within the United Nations system which engage in geospatial information management activities”.⁹ The United Nations Geospatial Network reports to a complementary subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council, the United

⁹ “The Network mission is to strengthen the coordination and coherence of geospatial information management within the United Nations system, including its overarching trends, technology, practices, data, needs, capacity building, and partnerships. The Network is composed of designated representatives, nominated by United Nations system entities. Representatives are to be considered as the most senior geospatial professional within their entity and are supported by a nominated alternate representative.” (see <https://ggim.un.org/UN-GGIM-Thematic-Groups/>).

Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management, and offers a practical mechanism that the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities can use to support the integration of statistical and geospatial information within the United Nations system.

16. As a first joint activity, the Committee and the United Nations Geospatial Network are organizing a workshop on current geospatial applications and enabling technologies to enhance and complement the statistical and geospatial activities in international organizations. The focus of the event will be on sharing best practices, lessons learned and transferable skills among international organizations on the following main topics: the production of international statistics using geospatial information and enabling technologies; the dissemination and visualization of geospatially enabled statistical data; and technical assistance delivered by international organizations to Member States to improve national statistics by integrating geospatial approaches.

17. The aim of the workshop is to empower international organizations to improve the operational integration and interoperability between geospatial applications and statistics. Further, the workshop will enable members of both the Committee and the Network, as the respective representatives of the statistical and geospatial communities of international organizations to Member States, to identify mechanisms with which to share resources and experience, and possibly enable greater interlinkages between and within these organizations. The workshop will be hosted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and will be held virtually, in early 2021. To further build on the foundation developed through the convening of the workshop, the future work of both the Committee and the Network will seek to develop the operational capacity of their members and foster the collaboration and coordination of technical assistance delivered to Member States. Specific activities in this area are to be further elaborated upon, following the workshop, and will be guided by the mandates of the respective intergovernmental bodies for both the Committee and the Network.

D. Other work areas

18. At the Committee's second extraordinary session, held on 18 June 2020, the World Bank presented a concept note on the "World Development Report". This was followed up by a dedicated focused consultation on 1 July 2020, organized by the secretariat and the World Bank. As follow-up to the briefing, the Committee was asked to contribute to the Report, highlighting the possible need for a global data convention.

III. Publications and presence at international conferences

A. Publications by the Committee

19. The Committee publishes various outputs on its website, including the new 2020 publication "How COVID-19 is changing the world: a statistical perspective", two volumes of which have been published thus far. Both volumes are available on the Committee's website (see paras. 5–8 above).¹⁰

20. Earlier publications include the special issue paper entitled "Case studies: using non-official sources in international statistics" (September 2016),¹¹ which

¹⁰ See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ccsa/pubs/>.

¹¹ Available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/acccsub/2016docs-28th/E-publication.pdf>.

complements a paper entitled “Recommended practices on the use of non-official sources in international statistics” (November 2013).¹² Other publications, as well as the Global Inventory of Statistical Standards, are available on the Committee website.¹³

B. Committee presence at international conferences

21. The Committee has regularly organized special sessions at relevant international conferences such as the World Statistics Congress of the International Statistical Institute, the International Association for Official Statistics conference and the European Conference on Quality in Official Statistics. Most recently, the Committee organized a special session on geospatial information for statistics during the sixty-second World Statistics Congress of the International Statistical Institute, held in Kuala Lumpur from 18 to 23 August 2019. The presentations are available on the Committee website.

IV. Future work

22. The Committee will continue its work in the relevant areas as outlined above. It will hold its thirty-seventh session virtually, ahead of the fifty-second session of the Statistical Commission. The thirty-eighth session will be held in during the fourth quarter of 2021.

V. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission

23. The Commission may wish to take into account the views of the Committee in its discussions under the relevant agenda items and is invited to take note of the present report.

¹² Available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/accsub-public/practices.pdf>.

¹³ <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ccsa/>.