

Statistical Commission
Fifty-fourth session
28 February - 3 March 2023
Item 3(b) of the provisional agenda
Items for discussion and decision: social statistics

Background document
Available in English only

Terms of Reference of the Friends of the Chair Group on Social and Demographic Statistics

Prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)¹

¹ This document has not been formally edited.

Terms of Reference of the Friends of the Chair Group on Social and Demographic Statistics

I. Mandate

1. The Friends of the Chair (FoC) Group on Social and Demographic Statistics is a group established under the auspices of the Statistical Commission to review these statistical areas and provide recommendations for strengthened social and demographic statistics that better reflect society and its connections with the environment and the economy.
2. At its fifty-second session, the Statistical Commission, through decision [52/116](#), tasked the Bureau with initiating a Friends of the Chair process to review the area of social and demographic statistics, similar to the process followed by the Friends of the Chair Group on economic statistics over the period 2019–2021.
3. At its fifty-third session, the Statistical Commission, through decision [53/105](#) on Working methods of the Statistical Commission, again called upon the Bureau to initiate the review of the social and demographic statistics through a Friends of the Chair mechanism and to report on progress made at the fifty-fourth session in 2023.
4. Previously, at the fifty-first session, the Statistical Commission, through decision [51/125](#), as well as through the report of the Bureau on working methods ([E/CN.3/2020/27](#), para. 64), commended the efforts carried out in the economic pillar, and requested the Chairs of groups in other pillars to initiate similar self-assessments as soon as possible.

II. Background

5. The United Nations Statistics Division, as secretariat of the Commission, initiated and facilitated consultations with Member States to gather views on the objectives and deliverables of this Friends of the Chair process, as well as to identify national chief statisticians willing to contribute to its work.
6. Initial consultations with a group of high-level experts in the field of social and demographic statistics, from national statistical offices and the UN Regional Commissions,² were held on 4 November 2022, to discuss the scope of work of the Group and brainstorm on potential work priorities.
7. Experts at the brainstorming session agreed to build on lessons learned from the work of the Friends of the Chair Group on Economic Statistics, which reviewed the area of economic statistics from 2019 to 2021 and identified a set of recommendations to ensure

² Chief Statisticians from the following entities participated in the brainstorming virtual meeting organized by the Statistics Division (UNSD) on November 4, 2022: Statistics Canada, National Administrative Department of Statistics in Colombia (DANE), Hungarian Central Statistical Office, National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico (INEGI), Statistics South Africa, UNECE, UNECA, UNECLAC and UNSD. UNESCAP provided feedback via email.

economic statistics remain relevant in the future by responding to emerging data needs. In particular, experts acknowledged the importance of (a) working with a small group of dedicated experts (chief statisticians and their teams) on clear outputs that can be delivered in a two-year period; and (b) organizing consultations with users early in the process to identify priorities on data, methods and related gaps, particularly for policy making.

8. Additionally, a high-level side event to the 54th session of the Statistical Commission is planned for 15 February 2023 to gather feedback from chief statisticians and other partners, including from the user community, on the scope of work, related priorities and expected outcomes of the Friends of the Chair Group on Social and Demographic Statistics.

III. Membership

9. The Friends of the Chair Group on Social and Demographic Statistics is composed of Member States. Observers can include United Nations agencies and non-United Nations agencies.

10. Members of the Group include chief statisticians from Canada, Colombia, Denmark, Hungary, Indonesia, Lithuania, Mexico, Poland, South Africa, United Kingdom. Observers include representatives from UNECE, UNECA, UNECLAC, UNESCAP, UNESCWA, WHO and UNSD. Members and observers are committed to actively contribute to the work of the FoC Group. Additional country representatives and international organizations may join the Group. The membership may be increased or decreased as the exigencies of the work require.

11. The co-Chairs of the Group are Hungary and Mexico.

12. The co-Chairs, in collaboration with the Secretariat, propose the Programme of Work of the Group and chair the meetings of the Group. Co-chairs also represent the Group in strategic meetings or discussions whenever its members consider it necessary, and can invite, after consultation and in agreement with the members, observers to participate in the work of the Group.

13. The Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs serves as the Secretariat of the Friends of the Chair Group. The Division, in close consultation with the co-Chairs, coordinates the overall work of the Group, organises regular meetings, prepares and maintains records of discussions and agreements, hosts and keeps an up-to-date website for the Group, prepares the reports to the Statistical Commission and liaises with the secretariats of other Groups.

III. Objectives

14. The overall objective of the Friends of the Chair Group is to produce specific recommendations for an agile and more responsive system of social and demographic statistics, in line with the central promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind, while anticipating data needs beyond 2030.

15. The work of the Friends of the Chair Group should contribute to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In particular, the SDG indicators monitoring process could be used as the guiding framework to identify persistent and remaining data and methodological gaps in social and demographic statistics. Attention should also be given to the modernization of censuses and surveys, the increased use of administrative registers and non-traditional data sources including big data. Moreover, the work of the Group should be aligned with and promote the mainstreaming of a gender perspective into statistics as well as an intersectional approach in data production, analysis and dissemination/communication.

16. As a first step, a mapping of existing regional and global groups reporting on social and demographic statistics to the UN Statistical Commission³ and UN regional intergovernmental statistical bodies will be undertaken. The mapping exercise may be expanded to include other international bodies working in the area of social and demographic statistics.⁴ The results of this exercise will be used by the Friends of the Chair Group to:

(a) assess the range of areas that are currently covered, regional priorities, and challenges in the production, dissemination and use of related statistics;

(b) identify gaps in social and demographic statistics in terms of lack of data - particularly those included in SDGs for which reporting is still weak⁵; and on geographical disaggregation and population subgroups; as well as in terms of methodological developments needed to produce more timely, granular, and inclusive statistics; and

(c) agree on recommendations and a way forward for strengthened social and demographic statistics that fulfil data requirements under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and anticipate data needs beyond 2030.

³ Groups under the social pillar of the UN Statistical Commission include: Expert Group on City Prosperity Index, Expert group on identifying slum and non-slum enumeration areas, United Nations Expert Group on Migration Statistics, Expert Group on Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Statistics, Intersecretariat Working Group on Household Surveys, Washington Group on Disability Statistics, Titchfield Group on ageing related statistics and age disaggregated data, Praia Group on Governance Statistics, Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics, Advisory Expert Group on Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics, Expert Group on Innovative and Effective Ways to Collect Time-Use Statistics.

⁴ It is proposed to include relevant intergovernmental statistical bodies of agencies represented in the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA). Further mapping could be requested by the FoC Group to these bodies through this Committee. Initial priority could be given to WHO, UNESCO-UIS and ILO as representatives of the UN system dealing with key social concerns such as health, education and work, respectively.

⁵ Please see [Tier Classification of SDG Indicators_9 Jun 2022_web.xlsx](#)

17. Guided by the results of the mapping exercise of what the statistical community is collectively doing in the area of social and demographic statistics, the Group will highlight areas to be strengthened. It will do so by benchmarking the results of the evaluation against what is needed in terms of data and methods, to measure and monitor progress towards the achievement of SDGs related to social and demographic concerns.

18. The Friends of the Chair Group will also promote horizontal integration of data across the three pillars of sustainable development to achieve improved social and demographic statistics that better reflect society and its connections with the environment and the economy, and for the overall strengthening of national statistical systems. In particular, the Group will reflect on the need, purpose, scope, and policy applications of a new System of Population and Social Accounts.⁶

19. In its tasks, the Friends of the Chair Group might want to undertake global consultations to ensure all regions and sectors provide input into the work of the Group.

IV. Organisation of work and expected duration

20. The Group will work for a period of three years: 2023, 2024, 2025 and report back on agreed deliverables at the fifty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission in 2026.

21. Reports to the Statistical Commission are drafted by the secretariat, under the guidance of the co-Chairs, and reviewed and approved by the members of the Group. Consensus during meetings is determined by the co-Chairs and reported in the meeting minutes.

22. The Friends of the Chair Group will work through electronic exchanges and periodic meetings, which are to be held at least twice a year. When possible, and subject to available resources, face-to-face meetings will be conducted, for example in conjunction with the Statistical Commission or other events held throughout the year.

23. The terms of reference will be reviewed when needed, and if requested by the Statistical Commission.

V. Proposed timeline

24. In line with its mandate and further guidance given by the Commission, the Friends of the Chair Group on Social and Demographic Statistics will carry out its activities following the initial milestones proposed below:

⁶ As proposed by the Network of Economic Statisticians

https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/statcom/session_54/documents/2023-7-EconomicStats-E.pdf, established by the Statistical Commission in 2022 as an outcome of the work of the Friends of the Chair on Economic Statistics.

2022

- November: Initial consultations with a group of high-level experts in the field of social and demographic statistics.

2023

- February: Side event to the 54th session of the Statistical Commission to discuss mandate of the newly established FOC Group.
- March: draft TORs of the FoC Group discussed at the 54th session of the Commission and endorsed by the Bureau of the Commission during the intersessional period.
- May: 1st meeting of the Group: Adoption of the Programme of Work.
- November: 2nd meeting of the Group.

2024

- May: 3rd meeting of the Group.
- November: 4th meeting of the Group.

2025

- May: 5th meeting of the Group.
- November: 6th and final meeting of the Group.

2026

- March: Final report submitted to the 57th session of the Statistical Commission.
 - Endorsement of the recommendations and dissolution of the Group. Follow up actions of the Commission decisions, if any.
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