

Informal Meeting of the United Nations Network of Economic Statisticians
Brussels, Belgium
9 November 2022
Conclusions

Andre Loranger, Co-Chair of the United Nations Network of Economic Statisticians (Network) and Assistant Chief Statistician, Strategic Data Management, Methods and Analysis, Statistics Canada, opened the meeting. He updated participants on the outcomes of the four sprints (organizational, beyond GDP, access to private data and treatment of owner-occupied housing services costs in the consumer price index) that the Network has organized so far and invited participants to consider participating in the follow-up work of the beyond GDP sprint and access to private data sprint.

The meeting discussed the statistical initiatives related to the broader framework for well-being, inclusion, and sustainability and Beyond GDP statistical challenges.

Participants at the meeting:

1. Expressed their appreciation for the work done by the Bureau in organizing the informal meeting and preparing the comprehensive agenda and to Statistics Canada for funding the excellent venue for the informal meeting.
2. Expressed their appreciation for the thorough presentations given by the various speakers.
3. Underscored that the Network should assess the governance arrangements for its proposed activities, consider organizing another organizational sprint to prioritize its activities to avoid duplication with the work of other groups and determine the appropriate time for other groups to follow up on these activities.

Panel on statistical initiatives related to the broader framework for well-being, inclusion, and sustainability

Delivering the UN Network of Economic Statisticians' Beyond GDP Vision

4. Supported the proposal to establish an integrated statistical system comprising a System of Population and Social Accounts (SPSA) and Central Framework for Inclusive and Sustainable Well-being, which gives clarity around how the range of statistical standards and outputs can be utilised to give a comprehensive picture of the modern world, and deliver a coherent framework within which users can utilise different data in varied ways to meet complex policy questions.
5. Welcomed the objective of the integrated statistical system to build on existing standards such as SNA and SEEA to better understand developments in the economy, environment and society by utilizing consistent methods across the economic, environmental, and social domains, to cater to the diverse needs of different users.
6. Suggested that the integrated statistical system could consider adding an additional domain on freedom and governance and observed that this could be tracked using multilateral indices.

7. Suggested that the Network should standardize the use of terminologies for instance, in collaboration with the SNA update editorial team, to ensure the consistent communication of economic statistical concepts to users.

Beyond Dutch GDP: concepts, policy use and challenges

8. Appreciated the Dutch well-being monitor , its dimensions of here and now, later and elsewhere and its integration with the SDG framework which allows for an annual policy debate in the Parliament on inclusion and sustainable wellbeing.

9. Noted that the Network can consider building on the Dutch initiative and promote an indicator system on well-being with three dashboards: Present wellbeing, Future wellbeing (sustainability) and Inclusive wellbeing (distribution of wellbeing within and between countries), in collaboration with Statistics Netherlands.

10. Observed the need to assess the ongoing practices in maintaining well being dashboards in developing countries and the impact of dashboards on policy-making.

11. Noted the user requirements for understanding the trade-offs between indicators through the computation of well-being and sustainability composite indices and suggested that potential solutions could include (a) limiting the number of components in these composite indices and assigning the appropriate weights to them or (b) creating a set of core indicators for international comparison while giving compiling agencies the choice to add more national indicators according to their circumstances.

Towards a System of Population and Social Accounts: Building on past and current practices in social accounting, statistics, and indicators

12. Appreciated the overview of the various initiatives of the Statistical Commission to systematically develop social demographic accounting and related social statistics and indicators sets, with a focus on the individual/family, time, and location as the observation units, since 1954.

13. Observed that any attempt to develop a coherent system of population and social accounts will require close collaboration between the economic statistics, national accounts, socio-demographic statistics, and economic-environmental accounting communities.

Plenary discussion – addressing challenges in Network’s Beyond GDP work

14. Underscored the importance of collaborating closely with the national accounts, economic-environmental accounting, and socio-demographic statistics community, especially the proposed Friends of the Chair group on socio-demographic statistics, to resolve conceptual, methodological and classification issues and to avoid duplicating the work of other groups when the Network undertakes future work to develop complementary measures to GDP.

15. Suggested to exploring the development of an online space containing digital tools and applications for countries from the global south to use in the compilation of economic statistics.

16. Underscored the need for significant additional human and financial investments in implementing agencies for years to come to obtain the source data (including privately-held data and partner country data) to produce the required beyond GDP data on a sustainable basis and recommended an incremental approach should be adopted in producing these statistics.