

Summary report
**Third Meeting of the Friends of the Chair Group on the Future of Economic
Statistics**

United Nations Headquarters, New York, United States of America, 1 March 2020

Introduction

1. The third meeting of the Friends of the Chair (FOC) Group on the future of economic statistics was held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, United States of America, on 1 March 2020. The agenda comprised the following items: preparation for the agenda item on the Friends of the Chair Group at the 51st meeting of the United Nations Statistical Commission, 3-6 March 2020; review of the work programme of the Friends of the Chair Group for 2020; contributions from Friends of the Chair Group members for the agreed actions and projects in 2020; and date and venue of fourth meeting of the Friends of the Chair Group. The following is a summary of the points raised and conclusions for each agenda item.

Summary report and key observations

Preparation for the agenda item on the Friends of the Chair Group at the 51st meeting of the United Nations Statistical Commission, 3-6 March 2020

2. The chair of the FOC Group encouraged members to make interventions during the discussion of the report of the FOC Group to the United Nations Statistical Commission. Participants also discussed the draft of the oral introduction for the report. While participants appreciated the general conciseness of the draft introduction, some observed that some parts of it were not aligned with the report. These included the discussion on the future governance structure of the groups in the various statistical domains and the announcement of the organization of the global forum for economic statistics. In addition, others noted the need to elaborate on some parts of the draft to remove ambiguities and suggested that the oral introduction should focus on the content of the report and indicate that the various elements of the work plan 2020 will be further explored.

Action: The chair of the FOC Group in consultation with the members of the FOC Group will revise the draft introduction by incorporating the comments of the participants.

Review of the work programme of the Friends of the Chair Group for 2020

3. Participants discussed the present and future state of statistical groups; and the projects and use cases for the new working methods.

Present and future state of statistical groups

4. Participants appreciated the effort put into preparing the infographics describing the present and future state of statistical groups. The chair of the FOC Group highlighted the need to continue to review the working methods of the statistical groups as mandated by the Statistical Commission. He asked the Group to build on the strategic approach identified in the second FOC Group meeting to document, challenge and network the statistical groups of the system of economic statistics and identify new working methods and events such as the proposed UN Global Forum on Economic

Statistics to engage with the users of economic statistics on a sustained basis. The chair reminded the Group that the objective is to explore new ways in making the system of economic statistics more responsive and agile (e.g. by challenging the system through specific short-term projects on agreed topics to be implemented through new collaborative working arrangements between the statistical groups) and to streamline the existing governance structure of the various statistical groups supporting the maintenance and development of the system of economic statistics based on a set of common principles identified in the second meeting (that is, improving the responsiveness, coherence, transparency, accountability and trust in the deliverables of the system).

5. Participants agreed on the need to harmonize the mandates of the statistical groups working to address the issues identified in the second meeting of the FOC Group, that is avoiding duplication, improving coordination and agility, and engaging developing countries early on in the update of the manuals through experimentation and testing of new methods. They, however, differed on the type of mechanism to achieve these objectives. Some agreed with the recommendation to form new high-level groups or an informal mechanism for coordination and dialogue between Chief Statisticians of countries and agencies and users that would dovetail with the recommendation to form networks of chairs of existing groups. Others cautioned further steps towards an additional layer of coordination and suggested to build on emerging new methods of networking, such as between the ISWGNA and the BOP Committee on the update of the macroeconomic manuals. Further clarification is needed how the coordination role of a high-level group across all statistical groups could be included in the governance structures of existing groups. Thus, they suggested assessing if the coordination mechanism can be operationalized within the current working arrangements of existing groups.

Action: The chair of the FOCG will assess and clarify with the support of members of the FOC Group whether the coordination can be operationalized within the current working arrangements of the statistical groups concerned or whether the mechanism would require the formation of a new inclusive mechanism of coordination and dialogue.

Projects and use cases for the new working methods

6. The chair of the FOC group briefed the members of the Group on the proposals to consider the following five project teams to work on new working methods to challenge the system and to test the agility of the system of economic statistics: role of multi-national enterprises (MNEs); role of digital platforms; distribution accounts and statistics; classifications: metadata driven systems; and digitization of standards. It was noted that the second meeting of the FOC Group suggested the formation of these project teams.
7. In general, the members of the FOC Group welcomed the proposals as concluded in the second meeting of the FOC Group. They noted the need to solicit the engagement of existing statistical groups to join the proposed project teams and to seek interest from the members of the FOC Group to participate in the experimentation and testing of new conceptual developments of the system of economic statistics at country level. Some participants observed that in many Latin American countries, the central bank is responsible for compiling economic statistics, while the national statistical office is responsible for classifications. Thus, the work of the project teams could improve the coordination between the central bank and national statistical office in these countries through the introduction of new working methods. Some participants also suggested adding the informal economy to the list of projects. However, they noted that if there is a need to reduce the number of

project teams, criteria to select the projects and use cases should be developed. To avoid duplication, they also suggested that groups which are already working on the statistical issues for which projects and use cases are proposed (for example, role of MNEs; role of digital platforms; and distribution accounts and statistics) should be given the authority to continue the work and showcase new working methods such as use of networks and experimentation of the recommendations in countries in their guidance notes.

Action: The chair of the FOCG will develop criteria to select projects and use cases to showcase the responsiveness of new working methods to resolve specific statistical issues and seek support from members of the FOC Group to participate and lead the project teams.

Contributions from Friends of the Chair Group members for the agreed actions and projects in 2020

8. Participants were requested to indicate their preference for which of the above projects they would like to work on. The chair of the FOCG will contact the members of the Group to seek their collaboration.
9. Participants briefly discussed the concept note on the organization of a UN Global Forum on the Future of Economic Statistics to obtain user feedback and to discuss new working methods, which will bring more agility and responsiveness to the system of economic statistics in late 2020. The chair of the FOC Group will work with selected members of the Group to further detail the concept note for this event by elaborating the objective and value proposition of this event.

Date and venue of fourth meeting of the Friends of the Chair Group

10. It is expected that the fourth meeting will be held virtually in April with the main objective to approve the 2020 programme of work of the FOC Group based on updated notes on the various components of the program.