CONTRIBUTION TO THE 2021 HLPF

STATISTICAL COMMISSION

18 March 2021

The General Assembly defined the theme of the 2021 HLPF to be "*Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development*".[1]

The COVID-19 pandemic presented the world with a wide array of challenges that further increased existing disparities in statistical capacity to achieve sustainable development for all. The global statistical community came together to rapidly respond to the data demands of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the past year, the community has responded to both the disruptions in the regular data production operations as well as the increased demand for data to monitor the pandemic. Strong systems for reporting and reviews on the sustainable development goals (SDG) at all levels, national and subnational, and global are needed for an effective data system to monitor both the 2030 Agenda as well as the impact of the pandemic.

The Statistical Commission supports the building of strong data and statistical system. It also strives to develop methodologies to innovate and modernize statistical production operations, to explore ways to integrate all data sources, including new and innovative sources outside the traditional statistical systems, and to analyze, visualize and disseminate data in an open, timely and effective way while ensuring the quality of statistics. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the statistical community has built new partnerships to respond to the new data demands. In these unprecedent times, the statistical community continues to address the need for quality, accessible, open, timely and reliable disaggregated data as fundamental for the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and the full realization of its ambition of leaving no one behind. However, the pandemic has also emphasized the need to invest in the modernization of data collection, processing, and dissemination infrastructure.

In this context, the Statistical Commission thanks the President of ECOSOC and provides herewith our most salient contributions to the 2030 Agenda, following the template suggested.

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[1] Sustainable Development Goals 1 on no poverty, 2 on zero hunger, 3 on good health and well-being, 8 on decent work and economic growth, 10 on reduced inequalities, 12 on responsible consumption and production, 13 on climate action, 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, and 17 on partnerships in depth. The Forum will consider the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the SDGs.

(a) Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the SDGs under review in the 2021 HLPF from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body, bearing in mind the interlinkages with other SDGs;

Demand for data and statistics was already extensive before the COVID-19 pandemic further heightened the demand. Despite the more intense demand, the data gaps are larger and more pervasive. Data production operations were interpreted by the pandemic. Throughout the global pandemic the global statistical community under the guidance of the Statistical Commission undertook many efforts to assess and address the impact of the pandemic on the national statistical and data ecosystems.

Given the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the SDGs, The Statistical Commission' Inter-agency and expert group on SDG indicators assessed the global indicator framework to examine areas that have been highly impacted. While the IAEG-SDGs agrees that all global indicators remain important and relevant, the Expert Group noted that many National Statistical Offices (NSOs) have had disruptions and delays in the collection of data for the SDGs. The Expert Group devised a list[2] of indicators likely to reflect the impacts the Goals highly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the COVID-19 Survey[3] of National statistical offices, it found that by May 2020, more than half of population and housing, agriculture, and enterprise or business census programmes that were scheduled for 2020 had to be postponed, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Under the leadership of the Statistical Commission, the national statistical systems responded to the heightened demands and adapted their working methods. According to the COVID-19 Survey of National Statistical Offices, in October 2020, 81.5 percent of a sample of 125 National Statistical Offices were involved in efforts to collect data on COVID-19 and its impacts.

The Statistical Commission continues to work to address data gaps, by supporting the development of statistical standards and methodologies. In response to the ongoing pandemic, technical guidance notes, expert group meetings, surveys, among other initiatives were developed and carried out to assist national statistical offices in adapting and conducting data collection operations under the pandemic conditions. As a result of the pandemic, statistical offices have introduced new measures in their statistical production processes, many of which will persists after the pandemic ends.

(b) Actions, policy guidance, progress, challenges and areas requiring urgent attention in relation to the SDGs and to the theme within the area under the purview of your intergovernmental body;

The COVID-19 pandemic emphasizes that one of the main challenges faced by the Statistical Commission and countries continues to be the lack of resources. The working groups of the Statistical Commission, including the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and

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[2] https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/52nd-session/documents/BG-3a-COVID-19_and_the_global_SDG_indicators-E.pdf
[3] United Nations and World Bank (2020). Survey of National Statistical Offices (NSOs) during COVID-19. Available from https://covid-19-response.unstatshub.org/statistical-programmes/covid19-nso-survey.

Capacity Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda, the United Nations Committee of Experts on Big Data and Data Science for Official Statistics[4] and other statistical entities, advance the work of the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data.

The Statistical Commission and the General Assembly resolution A/RES/71/313 stress the importance of using the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data (CTGAP), launched at the first United Nations World Data Forum in Cape Town, South Africa, in January 2017, as the framework for discussion, planning, implementation and evaluation of statistical capacity-building pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In 2020, the virtual UN World Data Forum was held remotely, and the "Global data community response to COVOID-19: Data for a changing world" was announced. The response e response appeals to the whole data community to come together to support the response to the Covid-19 pandemic and accelerate action on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

(c) An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of "ensuring that no one is left behind" at the global, regional and national levels against of background of the COVID-19 pandemic in achieving the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, within the respective area addressed by your intergovernmental bodies;

The lack of quality, timely and disaggregated data to help with the measurement of progress and to ensure that no one is left behind continues to be one of the critical gaps in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

The IAEG-SDGs prepared a compilation of existing methodologies, guidelines and tools for data disaggregation[5] that have already been developed and agreed by key international expert groups, mechanisms or committees. This work is to provide countries with a centralized reference of useful resources on data disaggregation. The group also established a task force on small area estimation (SAE) for SDG indicators aiming at standardizing SAE applications and the assessment of the methodologies, encouraging the provision of SAE methodology in standard statistical software, and centralizing relevant documents of reference. In addition, the IAEG-SDGs provided input to the development of a Practical Guidebook on Data Disaggregation for the SDGs[6], developed by the Asian Development Bank and UNSD.

(d) Cooperation, measures and commitments at all levels in promoting sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic;

The Statistical Commission continues to develop statistical standards that help provide the evidence needed. Better coordination of the UN statistical system through strengthening of the capacity of coordination mechanisms and better coordination at the global level will contribute to

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[4] Formerly the Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics.
[5] https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/52nd-session/documents/BG-3a-Compilation_of_tools_and_resources_for_data_disaggregation-E.pdf
[6] https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/52nd-session/documents/BG-3a-Practical_guidebook_on_data_disaggregation_for_the_SDGs-E.pdf

address a cohesive approach to realizing the Decade of Action. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Statistical Commission has incorporated

The Statistical Commission contributes to acceleration action and transformative pathways in the following areas:

- The Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) continues to refine the global SDG indicator framework and included an assessment of the challenges COVID-19 places on the statistical systems and SDG monitoring.
- The IAEG-SDGs will continue to review methodological developments, and created a subgroup on metadata to improve the quality of metadata and facilitate better implementation of the indicator framework.
- The IAEG-SDGs will continue their work on data disaggregation, in particular the focus on small area estimation to provide additional comprehensive guidelines and tools for countries.
- The Commission strongly supported the establishment of a working group on data stewardship within the Commission to develop guidance for national statistical offices on approaches to data stewardship.
- Capacity building projects carried out by UNDESA/Statistics Division and regional and international organizations directly respond to the need to enhance monitoring on SDG indicator by supporting countries in improving their statistical systems and overall access to better statistics and data, particularly linked to SDG indicators. This includes the UNSD-FCDO project on SDG monitoring[7] which has supported 20 countries in setting up national SDG data and metadata platforms, structuring data and metadata and reaching out to more users with this information.
- The Commission strongly supported the Data for Now initiative to build capacity in countries to utilize new data sources for timelier and disaggregated statistics and indictors. The Data for Now initiative aims to increase the use of robust methods and tools that improve the timeliness, coverage and quality of data on the Goals. The initiative involves working closely with national statistical offices and all relevant government agencies to make innovative methods for data production and analysis easily accessible in order to support and monitor progress towards the Goals.
- The Commission endorsed the establishment of the new Collaborative on administrative data[8] which aims to respond to the urgent need to strengthen the capacity of national statistical systems to leverage the use of administrative data for statistical purposes, in order to fill gaps in the data available to policy and decision makers to monitor progress and implement the 2030 Agenda, and to address to emerging challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The work of the Global Network of Institutes for Statistical Training (GIST)[9] to improve coordination of statistical training was much appreciated by the Commission, including

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[7] For more information, visit the project website: https://unstats.un.org/capacity-development/UNSD-FCDO/
[8] https://unstats.un.org/capacity-development/admin-data/
[9] https://unstats.un.org/gist/

the establishment of a hub for courses in official statistics[10] and proposals for more sustainable statistical training programs in countries[11].

- The development and use of SDMX data structure and metadata structure definition for the exchange and dissemination for SDG data greatly facilitate interoperability and use of data.
- The Commission requested the High-Level Group on Capacity, Coordination and Capacity Building (HLG-PCCB) to establish a working mechanism to address the issue of data stewardship and the role of the statistical offices in the new data ecosystem. This is part of a much larger discussion on how governments should utilize government and private data for policy making, policy execution and the delivery of government services in an information and technology-based economy and society. A much better utilization of data already available within government and development of an adequate and integrated data infrastructure within government, and improved access to data in the private sector would allow a leap forward in closing existing data gaps for SDG data. For this to happen, governments would need to scale-up or further develop their digital strategies, update their regulatory frameworks for data access and use and provide adequate investment into their data infrastructure, especially their national statistical systems;
- The third UN World Data Forum will be held in Bern, Switzerland in October 2021. The forum provides " Bern Data Compact for a Decade of Action on the Sustainable Development Goals" and is the critical space for constructive exchange among different data communities and users for the launch of solutions and new initiatives and partnerships. There is a desire to showcase some concrete commitments, especially news way of partnering with different segments of the global community whether Government, private sector, academia or civil society.
- The Commission recognized the contribution of United Nations Committee of Experts on Big Data and Data Science for Official Statistics in strengthening the institutional environment, methodology and quality assurance framework in the use of Big Data, including with a broad spectrum of stakeholder communities.

(e) Various measures and policy recommendations on building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development;

A key priority measure is to strengthen the capacity of national statistical systems, especially in the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS and other countries in vulnerable situations, to meet the data demands for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and for monitoring and reporting on the SDGs and targets.

Furthermore, the Statistical Commission recognized that a well-coordinated and efficient statistical system is more important than ever, especially as the international statistical community and the statistical programmes must grapple with the additional challenges brought

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[10] https://www.unsdglearn.org/statistics/
[11] https://unstats.un.org/gist/resources/documents/Sustainable-statistical-training-programs-at-NSOs.pdf

about by COVID-19. Better coordination of the UN statistical system will strengthen the voice of the statistical community in the dialogue with policy makers and reduce the data reporting burden and eliminate data discrepancies across the UN system. A better coordinated UN statistical system will help support national statistical offices in their efforts to provide data and statistics for sustainable development. In this context, the Statistical Commission endorsed the vision and way forward for the implementation of the new UNdata portal as main entry point to authoritative statistical data and metadata from the United Nations system and other participating international and regional organizations, in line with countries' priorities and with the Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere and the road map for innovating United Nations data and statistics developed by the Committee of Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System.

In order to build an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development the value of funding cannot be underestimated. The Statistical Commission continues to work on the implementation of the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data. This plan is a framework to leverage the activities related to the statistical capacity building necessary to achieve the scope and intent of the 2030 Agenda.

Investing in data and statistics for the SDGs and strengthening statistical capacities to address gaps in data on the Sustainable Development Goals in order to allow countries to provide high-quality, timely, reliable, disaggregated data and statistics and to fully integrate the Sustainable Development Goals in monitoring and reporting systems. The COVID-19 pandemic further emphasized the need to adequately fund national statistical systems.

The Statistical Commission would eagerly contribute to a specific session on data and statistics and the response of the statistical community to the COVID-19 pandemic. ECOSOC is in a position to support and enhance the visibility of statistical offices and statistical systems. Under the leadership of Statistical Commission, the official statistical community will continue to provide substantial contributions to the evidence needed for the decade of action.