

## United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM)

### Contribution to the Thematic Review of the 2021 HLPF

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*“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”.*

#### Background

Established by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 2011, the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management, or UN-GGIM, is the apex intergovernmental mechanism for making joint decisions and setting directions with regard to the production, availability and use of geospatial information within national, regional and global policy frameworks. For those not so familiar, ‘geospatial information’ describes the location of ‘where’ all things are, and provides the digital connection between a place, its people and their activities. In this regard, geospatial information reflects the digital version of our physical world, in which all human, economic and environmental activity takes place.

The annual themes of ECOSOC and the HLPF inform the work of the Committee of Experts. This work is conducted in the context of developing geospatial methods, frameworks, guides and standards to assist Member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, other global development agendas, and national development priorities. The 2030 Agenda provides a transformative framework and integrated approach to sustainable development, and presents countries and the global development community with a set of significant monitoring and reporting metrics that are almost entirely geographic in nature. This requires new and innovative data sources and data integration approaches to address the world’s development challenges and to ‘leave no one behind’. Although not readily apparent, the SDGs are highly dependent on geospatial information and enabling technologies as the primary data and tools for relating people to their location, place and environment, and to measure ‘where’ progress is, or is not, being made, particularly at sub-national and local levels. To fully implement and monitor progress on the SDG’s, decision-makers everywhere need geospatial data and statistics that are accurate, timely, relevant and accessible.

Given the impact and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Committee of Experts welcomes the theme of the 2021 Council and the HLPF. While this theme intersects the pandemic with the social, economic and environmental complexities of sustainable development, and seeks solutions towards greater resilience and faster recovery, within this decade of action, they all happen somewhere. As it continues, the pandemic has not only exacerbated our world’s vulnerabilities within and among countries, it has reinforced pre-existing obstacles to realizing the SDGs – structural inequalities, socio-economic gaps, and systemic challenges and risks – and a lack of timely fundamental data and enabling technologies to measure and monitor what is happening where, when, and how.

#### Response

In April 2020, the Committee quickly shifted its focus to address the impact of COVID-19 and to find practical solutions to not only operationalize the use of geospatial information in response to the SDGs but also the pandemic. A key action was the convening of a series of regional COVID-19 virtual seminars to explore the influence and impact of the geospatial data ecosystem to the pandemic. The seminars and associated case studies highlighted many common and persistent issues, all of which



were elaborated further within a white paper, 'COVID19: Ready to Respond', prepared by the Committee of Experts for its tenth session in August 2020.<sup>1</sup>

The pandemic has reinforced that, as with the SDGs, the most vulnerable countries continue to face the greatest challenges in collecting, analyzing and using high-quality, timely and reliable data, including geospatial data, Earth observations, statistics, and other location-based data. In many countries, while much of the urgently needed data might exist in some form somewhere, it is often not discoverable, structured, interoperable or standardized. Critical data cannot be readily accessed, shared and, more importantly, integrated with other data for decision-making. However, while it may be seen that there are gaps that exist, we are finding new ways and opportunities for countries to strengthen their geospatial capabilities and achieve a more comprehensive, sustainable and integrated approach through the implementation of the strategic frameworks and methodologies that have been developed by the Committee of Experts.

## Recovery

At its tenth intergovernmental session, convened virtually in August and September 2020, the impact of the pandemic permeated across the Committee's programme of work. In making decision 10/101: Strengthening of geospatial information management<sup>2</sup>, the Committee of Experts specifically highlighted the critical need for and the value of geospatial information, the importance of responding rapidly and efficiently, and noted the suggestions to:

- Continue to work with Member States and related bodies on the response to the pandemic;
- Ensure that experiences gained and lessons learned are shared;
- Deepen the analysis of vulnerability, based on disaggregated demographic and health data;
- Consider strategies and modalities to support Member States in mobilizing financial resources to strengthen national geospatial information management; and
- Ensure that response is coordinated, effective and sustainable, including through the implementation of the strategic geospatial frameworks developed by the Committee;

Given the numerous issues and challenges pertaining to a constrained data ecosystem, a key mechanism developed by the Committee of Experts to support countries, and especially developing countries, in their geospatial journey, is the United Nations Integrated Geospatial Information Framework (IGIF)<sup>3</sup>. A globally adopted geospatial framework for the world, the IGIF is a multi-dimensional Framework that is aimed at strengthening national geospatial information arrangements in all countries. It comprises an overarching **strategy**, **implementation** guidance, and **action** plans at the country level. At the strategic level, the IGIF contains a vision, mission, strategic drivers, 7 principles, 8 goals, 9 strategic pathways, and many defined benefits. However, through the Implementation Guide, anchored by the 9 strategic pathways, the IGIF provides the detailed guidance towards 'integrating' geospatial information with any other meaningful data to solve societal and environmental problems, and to provide understanding and benefit from a country's national circumstances, development priorities and the SDGs.

At its tenth session, the Committee of Experts noted the global significance of the IGIF, which serves as a key umbrella for the many activities under the purview of the Committee of Experts, and which could be applied to any country to guide transformational change. Therefore, in making decision 10/103: Integrated Geospatial Information Framework<sup>4</sup>, the Committee endorsed the establishment of a dedicated high-level group of experts, with balanced geographical representation and expertise,

<sup>1</sup> [https://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/10th-Session/documents/Covid-19\\_Ready-to-Respond.pdf](https://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/10th-Session/documents/Covid-19_Ready-to-Respond.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/10th-Session/documents/GGIM10\\_report\\_e.pdf](https://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/10th-Session/documents/GGIM10_report_e.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://ggim.un.org/IGIF/>

<sup>4</sup> [https://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/10th-Session/documents/GGIM10\\_report\\_e.pdf](https://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/10th-Session/documents/GGIM10_report_e.pdf)





as a mechanism to provide strategic leadership, coordination and oversight in order to ensure the sustained success of the IGIF, and to mobilize the resources necessary to maintain the momentum and refinement of the IGIF as a continuously evolving process.

Established in February 2021, the High-Level Group of the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework (HLG-IGIF) aims to: provide the strategic leadership, promotion, coordination, planning and oversight to successfully sustain the uptake and implementation of the IGIF; explicitly demonstrate the societal value and impact of the IGIF, and associated progress towards enabling the achievement of the SDGs; provide expertise and advice to assist countries in their implementation of the IGIF at the country level; and mobilize needed resources for implementation and to maintain the momentum and evolving refinement of the IGIF with Member States and other key stakeholders.

Guided by the High-Level Group, the IGIF, new data sources, and innovative technologies, are now assisting countries, to measure, monitor and report on their progress towards the implementation of the SDGs – and to respond and recover from COVID-19.

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United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM)

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