

## CONTRIBUTION TO THE 2022 HLPF STATISTICAL COMMISSION

The General Assembly defined the theme of the 2022 HLPF to be “*Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda*”.<sup>1</sup>

The devastating impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has created an urgent need to harness the power of data. Fortunately, global statistical systems have shown strength and resilience, despite the unprecedented demand for timely and disaggregated data and statistics. The Statistical Commission provides strategic guidance to national and global statistical and data systems.

In 2022, The Statistical Commission also reviewed and updated its terms of reference, through an open, participatory-based, and transparent process. The revision process fits into the overall review that ECOSOC is conducting of its subsidiary bodies. It reflects the current and futuristic statistical and data needs faced by Member States as they:

- recover from COVID-19, and
- make efforts to get back on track to achieve the SDGs.

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.

- *(a) Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body, bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the SDGs and targets, including policy implications of their synergies and trade-offs;*

The Statistical Commission supports member States and their national statistical systems in the provision of data and statistics to measure progress towards the SDGs. A comprehensive overview of progress towards achieving the SDGs is contained in *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021*, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2021/>.

- *(b) Assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “leaving no one behind” against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, within the respective areas addressed by your intergovernmental body;*

The pandemic affects the world’s poorest and most vulnerable people the most. It has exposed harsh and profound inequalities in our societies and is further exacerbating existing disparities within and among countries. However, the lack of quality, timely and disaggregated data for vulnerable populations impedes the issuance of any strategic measures and policies to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on vulnerable populations. Therefore, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals Indicators

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<sup>1</sup> Focus on Sustainable Development Goals 4 on quality education, 5 on gender equality, 14 on life below water, 15 on life on land, and 17 on partnerships for the Goals.

(IAEG-SDGs) compiled and shared good practices on data disaggregation, including national plans and strategies for data disaggregation, disaggregation categories, and websites or publications on data disaggregation for SDG monitoring from countries. The compilation, presented in an online platform of Good Practices and Resources on Sustainable Development Goals Monitoring<sup>2</sup>, also contains existing tools and resources on data disaggregation from international expert groups and committees and regional and international organizations.

The Statistical Commission's work supports member States providing tools and initiatives to produce the evidence needed to address the principle of leaving no one behind. Some examples of work undertaken include:

- A [Toolkit on Using Small Area for SDGs](#), developed by the Statistics Division, under the guidance of the IAEG-SDGs and the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Household Surveys (ISWGHS), which aims to support countries in producing more timely and granular statistics through data integration.
- The COVID-19 impact survey web portal, established by the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Household Surveys (ISWGHS) in June 2020, continues to be updated regularly to support national efforts in producing data that assess the impact of COVID-19 on society and households. It now consists of information on more than 500 surveys for 180 countries to support the coordination of the COVID-19 impact surveys within countries. The Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Household Surveys is also supporting countries in survey operations through producing relevant technical guidance and organizing webinars for the exchange of national experiences.
- Under the Technical Advisory Group on COVID-19 Mortality Assessment 30 created by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the World Health Organization, a working group was established to provide recommendations to national statistical offices on the use of censuses and surveys to obtain time-sensitive and reliable information on COVID-19 mortality at the country level. 31 The ISWGHS contributed, in collaboration with the Statistics Division and the Population Division, to a [stocktaking exercise](#) on the use by countries of censuses and surveys for adult mortality data. A set of recommendations on the improved collection of adult mortality data through censuses and surveys in the context of COVID-19 will be produced for submission to the Commission at its fifty-fourth session.

Every ten years, the United Nations launches a census decade – everybody counts and should be counted. The 2020 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses, or 2020 census round, was launched by ECOSOC in 2015 and recognizes population and housing censuses as one of the primary sources of data needed for formulating, implementing and monitoring policies and programmes aimed at inclusive socioeconomic development and environmental sustainability. The 2020 World Programme urges all member States to conduct at least one population and housing census, or otherwise generate small-area census statistics, at least once in the period 2015–2024.

Based on a series of surveys conducted by DESA/Statistics Division and other available information, the Statistical Commission reiterated its concerns regarding the adverse impact that the COVID-19 pandemic is having on the conduct of censuses. Out of 110 national censuses for which data were available and that were scheduled (before the pandemic) to take place in 2020 and 2021, 71 (65%) are either postponed or with unknown status, and 39 were conducted or are planned to be conducted by end of 2021, with a number of them significantly extending the census enumeration period.

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<sup>2</sup> Good Practices and Resources on Sustainable Development Goals Monitoring website: <https://unstats.un.org/wiki/display/sdgGoodPractices/Home>

Consequently, the capacity to accurately and consistently assess the impact of development policies at national and especially sub-national levels may be hampered by the lack of granular and comprehensive statistics generated by population and housing censuses. Census data are essential for accurate planning for service delivery in terms of locating and building hospitals, schools and transportation infrastructure; allocation of budgetary resources; delineation of electoral districts; monitoring the implementation of 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda at lower civil divisions' areas or among populations disaggregated by income levels, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability and other characteristics, to name just a few.

In addition to the postponement of the conduct of censuses in many countries and increased costs of census operations, the circumstances of the pandemic, including mobility restrictions within the country and between countries, may have a significant influence on population distribution, the level of fertility and mortality, internal and international migration, and employment and unemployment rates. It is expected that the census data collected during the pandemic could show some extraordinary patterns, but it is currently unclear to what extent those patterns are attributable to the pandemic and whether they are short-term changes or more permanent ones.

In order to assess progress towards gender equality, the Statistical reviewed the impacts of the ongoing pandemic on the demand of gender statistics as well as on their supply. The Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics noted various efforts and initiatives undertaken by national statistical offices to gather almost real-time data during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to measure and monitor fast-changing circumstances quickly and efficiently. Innovative measures developed by national statistical offices to respond to the challenges of the pandemic included: new partnerships within and across organizations, accelerated investments in information technology, further exploration of non-traditional and complementary data sources such as administrative records, adopting different data-collection modes, in particular phone interviews and web applications and increased flexibility in planning.

It was also noted that the simplified access to administrative records during the pandemic was a welcome opportunity to better understand the nature and availability of information in administrative systems and a first step towards ensuring improved data integration across various ministries in the post-COVID-19 context. However, several issues still remain when using administrative data sources including: limited data capacity among sectoral ministries, a lack of coordination across sectors and institutions, a lack of correspondence and standardization of administrative registers with statistical definitions and coverage, and overall limited access to administrative data files.

*(c) Actions and policy recommendations in areas requiring urgent attention in relation to the implementation of the SDGs under review;*

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities among national statistical offices, and highlighted significant data gaps. More than two years after the crisis began, connectivity issues, and inadequate remote data processing capabilities, are among the most common challenges faced. There is a growing consensus that a range of transformational changes are required, to enable the production and supply of timely, high-quality, and open data for the post pandemic future.

Under the recommendation of the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a survey on the Implementation of the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data (CTGAP) was developed. Building on

the Survey of National Statistical Offices during COVID-19 series, the Statistics Division, World Bank and PARIS21 collaborated on the survey and began collection in late summer 2021 with 101 National Statistical Offices (out of 194) eventually responding. The final results from the survey highlighted areas of the CTGAP where implementation remained a priority such as the renewal of statistical legislation, a lack of broader frameworks for data privacy and protection, growing priority for additional coordination in the data ecosystem, use of administrative data, an open data strategy and new multi-stakeholder partnerships. On financing, the main result was the need for better certainty over the timing and levels of budgets, especially for large collection exercises like business and agricultural censuses. Overall, Covid-19's squeeze on NSOs remained apparent showing growing capability gaps and inequalities among NSOs related to connectivity issues, remote processing ability and general ICT infrastructure while at the same time greater demand pressures on all NSOs for data on health, social protection, education and the economy continued.

*(d) Policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda;*

Data and statistical systems have been long underfunded, while costs and demands have risen. Current donor commitments and support for data and statistics are a fraction of needs. Therefore, the international community should increase the share of official development assistance (ODA) for data and statistics, especially to strengthen national statistical systems of LDCs and SIDS, as well as support the development of national data strategies. Enhanced coordination and greater integration of efforts, including through the new global funds and instruments, such as the Global Data Facility (GDF), are vital to mobilize finance for data and statistics. The international community should ensure that country ownership and development effectiveness principles are at the center of increased efforts and investments.

A national data strategy in the context of an integrated national financing framework (INFF) can help implement an integrated data system to realize the full value of data for achieving national sustainable development strategies. Governments should develop a national data strategy to implement an integrated national data system in accordance with their level of data maturity, which outlines responsibilities and institutional arrangements to enhance effective data use throughout government, the private sector and civil society, including through improved data access and data integration initiatives to improve data literacy. At the same time, the establishment of stewards will help promote issues of data access, interoperability and governance. Governments should also prioritize domestic resources for data and statistics and clearly convey priorities for external support to implement the data strategy.

Although there are only a few remaining gaps in the global SDGs indicator framework where global reporting has not yet started, all stakeholders should work together to close these SDGs data gaps, including advancing gender statistics and measuring the new indicator on development support under SDG Target 17.3 that the United Nations Statistical Commission just adopted.

The Statistical Commission continues to support countries in the use of innovative sources, technologies and methods for the production and dissemination of better, more timely and disaggregated data related to the Sustainable Development Goals. The Commission recognizes that a lack of timely, quality and disaggregated data exposes difficulties to fully implement and monitor the SDGs and calls for countries to further incorporate non-traditional methods for data collection, including citizen-generated data, other data sources, and innovative solutions.

The importance of developing a strong communication strategy and strengthen the skills of national statistical offices in effective and contemporary approaches to disseminating statistics should be acknowledged and promoted. In times of crises such as the current pandemic, a strong communication strategy is key to informing data users and the broader public about changes adopted by national statistical offices and international entities in the methodology used to collect data. A clear and targeted communication campaign should also be adopted when releasing survey/census results, in particular to highlight that data collected in the time of COVID-19 might not be comparable to pre-COVID-19 data, owing to data quality limitations or changes implemented in the data-collection instruments used.

*(e) Key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2022 HLPF.*

As the pandemic continues to unfold, and the world moves further off-track in meeting the 2030 SDG deadline, timely and high-quality data are more essential than ever. Indeed, data strategic assets in building back better and accelerating the implementation of the SDGs. What is needed now are new investments in data and information infrastructure as well as human capacity to get ahead of the crisis and trigger earlier responses, anticipate future needs and design the urgent actions needed to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified long-standing issues of gender inequality and has highlighted the need for more and better gender statistics. An initial assessment of national practices in the use of non-traditional sources of data for gender analysis reveals that more and more countries are now exploiting sources of gender data that they did not traditionally use. Depending on national experiences, newer sources may include administrative registers, big data, citizen-generated data or combinations of sources. The HLPF should call for additional resources to strengthen the capacity of national statistical systems to invest in new technologies, continue to innovate and become more agile, and to use non-traditional data sources, in order to meet the data demands for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The HLPF should express concern about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the 2020 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses, resulting in postponements in the conduct of censuses and difficulties in ensuring the quality of census planning and operations and the overall quality of the resulting census statistics.

The HLPF should urge all Member States to remain firmly committed to the goals of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme, to continue planning and preparing to conduct a population and housing census, or otherwise the production of census-like small area statistics, when the national conditions permit, taking into account international and regional recommendations, using recently developed methodological solutions building on successful national practices, and to continue securing financial and human resources to that end.