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Item 4 (j) of the provisional agenda*

Items for information: coordination of statistical programmes

Coordination of statistical programmes in the United Nations system

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report has been prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2014/219. It provides a summary of the work of the United Nations chief statisticians, presenting the main conclusions of two meetings, one held in New York on 6 March 2014 and one held in Rome on 10 September 2014. The main topics discussed in the report include the formal establishment of the group, including the definition of its working methods, its contribution to measuring sustainable development in the context of the post-2015 development agenda, its current work in strengthening the implementation of the principles governing international statistical activities and its work towards a common quality assurance framework for the United Nations system. The Statistical Commission is invited to take note of the report.

* E/CN.3/2015/1.



I. Background

1. By its decision 45/112, the Statistical Commission endorsed the proposal that the United Nations chief statisticians hold regular meetings and mandated the group to follow up on the recommendations of the Friends of the Chair on the coordination of statistical activities in the United Nations system (see [E/CN.3/2014/13](#)) and report back to the Commission. Subsequently, the group, which had met informally for several years, conducted a brief preparatory session on 6 March 2014 in the margins of the forty-fifth session of the Commission and held its first formal session on 10 September 2014 in Rome, immediately before the twenty-fourth session of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities.

II. Composition

2. The group comprises the statistical services of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and the Secretariat, whose mandate includes the provision of international official statistics in the context of the principles governing international statistical activities. Representation at sessions is expected to be at the level of the director of an organization's statistical service or equivalent.

3. The group effectively forms a subgroup of the members of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, which comprises the statistical services of the United Nations system and of non-United Nations international, supranational and regional organizations (see [E/CN.3/2015/29](#)).

III. Terms of reference and working methods

4. At its first formal session, the group adopted its terms of reference and working methods (see annex). A chapeau will be added to the description of those methods and include the key objectives, functions and deliverables of the group. A task team was formed in December 2014 to draft the chapeau, which will be discussed by the group in March 2015. To ensure effective and efficient cooperation with the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, the working methods stipulate that the Co-Chair of the Committee representing the United Nations members of the Committee may be selected also to chair the group.

5. In addition, members agreed that it would be beneficial to meet immediately before the regular formal sessions of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, held twice a year, to allow for adequate coordination among United Nations entities. The group uses a newly established website, managed by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and formally linked to the Division's website, as a working platform. It is currently password protected, but the outcomes of the work of the group will be made publicly accessible, following the model of the Committee's website.

IV. Work of the group in 2014

6. When establishing its priorities for its work, the group was guided by the discussions of the Friends of the Chair. For example, the Friends had identified the

quality of United Nations data and their consistency with national sources as a key concern. To tackle that issue, the group included the topic of a common quality assurance framework for the United Nations system in its work programme. Furthermore, it was agreed that a better description and understanding of the architecture of the various intergovernmental bodies driving the work programmes of the statistical units of the United Nations system were needed in order to identify opportunities for or potential obstacles to better coordination. Work on governance was therefore initiated. Given the importance of and the current focus on the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, it was also decided to jointly review and strengthen the application of the principles governing international statistical activities within the United Nations system. Moreover, the group agreed to include in its agenda a number of practical harmonization issues. Lastly, given its central importance to the United Nations system overall, statistical support for the discussions on the post-2015 development agenda and the implementation of the agenda was considered a central theme for the group for the foreseeable future. Current activities under the priority themes are briefly described below.

A. Common quality assurance framework for the United Nations system

7. Members are sharing the status of their quality assurance work using the group's website. The possibility of developing a common quality assurance framework for the United Nations system was discussed and a task team established to explore how such a joint framework could best be developed, building on existing frameworks. The task team will report to the group in 2015.

B. Governance structures of United Nations system entities

8. Members shared their very different governance structures, referring to the intergovernmental processes that determined programmes and budgets. They decided that it would be useful to compile an inventory of governance structures as a first step towards a better mutual understanding. A task team will work with the secretariat of the group on a short questionnaire, the results of which will be considered in March 2015.

C. Principles governing international statistical activities

9. The group considered a document compiled by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations that contained additional results of a survey carried out by the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities on the implementation of the principles governing international statistical activities focusing on United Nations organizations, which provided a detailed analysis of the areas where agencies were actually following the principles and where there remained room for improvement. Members agreed that the Statistics Division, as the secretariat of the group, would draft a letter to bring the recent endorsement of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics by the General Assembly (see resolution 68/261) to the attention of the principals of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and to encourage them to endorse the

principles governing international statistical activities at the highest level of the United Nations system, striving ideally for complete coverage of the system.

D. Country names

10. The group also considered a document prepared by the Statistics Division on official country names and groupings, which provided information on the M49 classification for standard country or area codes and geographical regions for statistical use. Specific issues and problems with regional groupings were mentioned. Members agreed to check the listing that they used against the standard classification. Discrepancies are to be reported to the Division and will be discussed at future meetings of data managers.

E. Update on the post-2015 development agenda and the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals

11. The group discussed a document on work on the indicator framework for the post-2015 development agenda and a background document on matching indicators to targets of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals as set out in the outcome document of the Open Working Group, both prepared by the Statistics Division. The Division further informed the group about the establishment and terms of reference of the Independent Expert Advisory Group on the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development. Members welcomed the information provided and the opportunity to discuss matters with the Co-Chair of the Expert Advisory Group, Enrico Giovannini, as part of the session of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities. Subsequently, the Committee submitted a joint contribution on the topic to the Expert Advisory Group on 16 October 2014, to which members of the United Nations system contributed significantly. The joint contribution focused on more efficient use of existing and new non-traditional sources of data and metadata; strengthened governance, coordination and partnerships; fostering the necessary statistical capacity-building; and the role of the international statistical community.¹ In addition, individual members of the group submitted to the Expert Advisory Group relevant documentation on the data revolution for development and notes on what the ongoing data revolution means for their organization.

V. Next sessions

12. The group will meet in the first quarter of 2015 in New York in conjunction with the forty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission and in the fourth quarter of 2015 in conjunction with the twenty-sixth session of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities.

¹ Available from <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/acccsub-public/docs/IEAG.pdf>.

Annex

Terms of reference for the group of United Nations chief statisticians

I. Background

1. The first meeting on statistical programmes of United Nations entities was held on 9 September 2007 in Madrid, in the margins of the tenth session of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities. Since then, a group of United Nations chief statisticians has met regularly twice a year, once in the first quarter, on the occasion of the annual session of the Statistical Commission, and once in the fourth quarter, on the occasion of the second session of the year of the Committee.

2. The Statistical Commission considered the coordination of statistical activities in the United Nations system at its past three sessions (see decisions 45/112, 44/112 and 43/112). In its most recent decision, the Commission endorsed the proposal that the United Nations chief statisticians hold regular meetings and mandated the group to follow up on the recommendations of the Friends of the Chair on the coordination of statistical activities in the United Nations system (see [E/CN.3/2014/13](#)) and report back to the Commission.

II. Working methods

A. Membership and level of representation

3. The group comprises the statistical services of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and the Secretariat, whose mandate includes the provision of international official statistics in the context of the principles governing international statistical activities.

4. Prospective members should register with the secretariat of the group.

5. Representation at sessions is expected to be at the level of the director of an organization's statistical service or equivalent.

B. Organization

6. The group elects a Chair, who will serve for two years and is eligible for re-election for a second term. The Chair may also be the Co-Chair of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities representing the United Nations members of the Committee to ensure close coordination with the activities of the Committee.

7. The functions of the Chair are:

(a) To decide on the draft agenda items as proposed by the secretariat of the group, on the basis of decisions taken at the previous session and subsequent requests by members;

(b) To conduct the sessions of the group, including summarizing the discussion of each agenda item as a basis for preparing the report of the session;

(c) To propose draft minutes of the sessions, as prepared by the secretariat of the group, to be approved by written procedure by all members who attended the session;

(d) To represent the group whenever members consider it necessary;

(e) To invite, upon a proposal from one or more of the members, observers to participate in the work of the group;

(f) To approve the report to the Statistical Commission prepared by the secretariat of the group, as necessary.

8. The secretariat of the group will be provided by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations.

9. The functions of the secretariat of the group are:

(a) To prepare the draft agenda in collaboration with the Chair and following consultation with members;

(b) To ensure that all documentation is made available to members in time;

(c) To organize the group's sessions and coordinate with the agreed host of a given session;

(d) To prepare draft minutes of each session in cooperation with the Chair, to be approved by written procedure by all members who attended the session;

(e) To create, host and keep up to date a protected website for the group;

(f) To prepare the draft report to the Statistical Commission for approval by the Chair as necessary.

C. Sessions, decisions, minutes and reporting

10. The group meets twice a year. The first session is held in the first quarter in New York in the margins of the session of the Statistical Commission, while the second session is held in the margins of the second session of the year of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, at the venue of that session. The exact timing and length of the sessions are decided by the Chair in consultation with members, upon a proposal by the secretariat of the group. The draft agenda is prepared by the Chair with assistance from the secretariat of the group and in consultation with members on the basis of decisions taken at the previous session and subsequent requests by members.

11. Coordination of activities between sessions, for example through electronic discussion groups, is an important and integral part of the work of the group.

12. Consensus during sessions is determined by the Chair and reported in the minutes of the session. A report on decisions and actions is prepared for adoption after each session by the secretariat of the group in a timely manner. The report specifies the lead agencies responsible for any action and follow-up.

13. The group regularly reports to the Statistical Commission. Such reports are drafted by the secretariat of the group and approved by the Chair.