



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
18 December 2020

Original: English

---

## Statistical Commission

### Fifty-second session

1–3 and 5 March 2021

Item 4 (g) of the provisional agenda\*

**Items for information: statistical capacity development**

## Statistical capacity development

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report, which was prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2020/211 and past practices, provides an overview of the recent activities undertaken by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat in support of the efforts of countries to strengthen their national statistical capacity so as to better respond to the data challenges in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The report also provides information on collaborative efforts for synchronizing initiatives and leveraging partnerships and coordination in the area of statistical capacity development, as well as emerging strategic frameworks. It also provides information on changes to the planned programme owing to the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The Statistical Commission is invited to take note of the report.

---

\* E/CN.3/2021/1.



## I. Introduction

1. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>1</sup> brought increased attention to the need to strengthen the statistical capacity of developing countries to measure, monitor and report on the Sustainable Development Goals, including the associated targets and indicators. The 2030 Agenda explicitly requests that Member States enhance, by 2020, their capacity development support to developing countries with the purpose of increasing significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.

2. The global indicator framework for the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets presents a tremendous challenge to producers of official statistics. Countries must fulfil the new data demands arising from the 2030 Agenda, including defining national targets and indicators, in order to implement it. Countries need to develop and adapt their national statistical systems to respond to those demands and put in place streamlined processes to ensure the timely production of official statistics.

3. The Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data, launched during the first United Nations World Data Forum in January 2017, identified the gaps in national statistics programmes and statistical coordination in response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Action Plan thus serves as a road map for the capacity development efforts of the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat and other international, regional and national agencies involved in the production of official statistics.

4. The present report provides an overview of the capacity development activities undertaken by the Statistics Division as part of the regular programme of technical cooperation, as well as recent and ongoing Development Account and donor-funded projects. Additional details on the Division's capacity development initiatives in specific substantive areas, such as national accounts, demographic and social statistics, trade statistics, environmental economic accounting and big data, are provided in domain-specific reports submitted to the Statistical Commission.

## II. Impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on capacity development activities

5. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a great impact on the planned capacity development activities for 2020. With physical meetings being impossible to conduct during most of the year, great efforts have been made to develop new capacity development activities using newly available tools, but also recognizing their limitations, either as modified versions of the originally planned activities, as new activities replacing the previously planned activities or as new activities directly addressing data needs created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

6. The Statistics Division has modified a number of planned events to organize them as virtual events. Experience in the Division, as well as knowledge obtained from other users, has shown the limitations of this approach, including to the length of the meetings to ensure the undivided attention of participants, to personal interactions during meetings and to technical aspects of interpretation services,

---

<sup>1</sup> General Assembly resolution 70/1.

among others. Virtual events are now designed in a way that maximizes their effectiveness, given the restrictions mentioned above. As a result, some events had to be spread out over a longer period of time (for example, two-hour sessions each day spread over six weeks instead of a single three-day event) or had to be reduced in content and interaction compared to what would normally be planned for a physical meeting. It was also agreed that some meetings that rely primarily on interactions would still be best organized as physical events and therefore postponed until 2021. An apparent advantage of virtual events is the larger number of participants who are now able to follow proceedings, made possible by recent advances in technology that facilitate such arrangements. The Statistics Division continues to evaluate the different formats of virtual events to improve their efficiency in the future.

7. The development of e-learning courses has gained momentum in the Statistics Division in the past few years, either as stand-alone activities or as components of hybrid capacity development activities. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the usefulness of e-learning courses and has prompted the faster development of such courses and their application to a wider range of statistical domains.

8. The Statistics Division has also adapted its capacity-building programme to respond to the need for new, reliable and high-frequency data required for policy decisions to deal with the pandemic. Webinars on such themes, highlighting the use of existing data for policy responses, as well as on the production of new statistics specific to this situation, have been organized. In addition, adjustments to the content of existing programmes had to be made to support national statistical offices in the continuation of statistical programmes where traditional in-person data collection methods are no longer feasible and new or alternative methods and data sources have to be used (for example, those related to censuses, price collection and household surveys).

9. The sections below indicate how the programme has been adapted in each of the described areas.

### **III. Implementation of the capacity development programme in the period 2019–2020**

10. In the period 2019–2020, the Statistics Division organized 34 in-person workshops and seminars and 28 expert group meetings, at which a total of over 2,500 professionals shared experiences and received training (see table 1). During the period, the Division also engaged in a series of e-learning courses on topics from different statistical domains, reaching a large number of participants around the world.

11. In addition, over 130 individual fellowships were awarded to national statisticians and geospatial information experts from developing countries to enable them to attend 16 regional and international meetings.

Table 1  
Number of in-person events and participants, 2019 and 2020

Year	<i>Workshops and seminars</i>		<i>Expert group meetings</i>		<i>Study visits</i>	
	<i>Number of events</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Number of events</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Number of events</i>	<i>Participants</i>
2019	31	1 193	26	1 110	16	114
2020	3	139	2	68	2	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>1 332</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>1 178</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>132</b>

12. In table 2, the themes of the in-person events held are broken down into six broad categories, namely, (a) demographic and social statistics; (b) economic statistics, such as international trade, economic globalization, tourism, energy and industrial statistics, as well as national accounts; (c) environment statistics and environmental-economic accounting; (d) events related to Sustainable Development Goal indicators; (e) general statistics themes (including management themes); and (f) geospatial information management.<sup>2</sup>

Table 2  
Number of in-person workshops, expert group meetings and seminars, by theme

Year	<i>Demographic and social statistics</i>	<i>Economic statistics (trade, globalization, tourism, energy, industry, national accounts)</i>	<i>Environment statistics and environmental-economic accounting</i>	<i>Sustainable Development Goal indicators and general statistics</i>	<i>General statistics topics (SDMX, management of national statistical systems)</i>	<i>Geospatial information management</i>
2019	9	10	8	11	9	10
2020	–	2	–	–	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>

Abbreviation: SDMX, Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange.

## A. Regular programme of technical cooperation

13. The regular programme of technical cooperation<sup>3</sup> supports developing countries in their capacity development efforts, especially those geared towards achieving strategic area 3 of the Cape Town Global Action Plan: strengthening of basic statistical activities and programmes. The capacity development activities of the Statistics Division under the regular programme draw substantively from the normative work of the Statistical Commission and respond to the policy guidance and programmes of action agreed at the sessions of the Commission.

14. In the period 2019–2020, following the outcomes of the dialogue on development indicators and the adoption by the Statistical Commission of the Cape Town Global Action Plan and relevant international statistical standards, the Statistics Division's capacity development efforts focused on two key areas: (a) strengthening the national statistical capacities to measure, monitor, assess and report on progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through the use of indicators; and (b) enhancing the modernization of national statistical systems, taking into account

<sup>2</sup> The groupings do not include the e-learning courses or other virtual events conducted by the Statistics Division.

<sup>3</sup> Established by the General Assembly in its resolution 58 (I) of 14 December 1946.

the recommendations of the Commission on the data revolution and the use of new technologies and big data for official statistics, including geospatial information and its integration with statistical data. Efforts related to those two areas included activities supporting the implementation of the 2020 round of population censuses, civil registration and vital statistics systems, the System of National Accounts (SNA), the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) and the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics, quality assurance and the *Handbook on Management and Organization of National Statistical Systems*, among others.

15. The most common capacity development activities funded by the regular programme of technical cooperation have been (a) the organization of regional and subregional training workshops and seminars by the Statistics Division alone or in partnership with the regional commissions and other international and regional partner organizations and specialized agencies; (b) the provision of advisory services by the Division's four interregional advisers (in the areas of census-taking, geospatial information management, statistical training and capacity development and the organization of the national statistical systems) and by short-term experts, both staff members and consultants, as resource persons and trainers; and (c) the provision of fellowships, short-term training sessions, study tours and on-the-job training for national statisticians and national geospatial information experts from developing countries to enable them to upgrade and strengthen their knowledge and skills in the areas of statistics and geographical information management and to establish regional and international networks.

16. The Statistics Division organized 14 physical workshops and seminars under the regular programme of technical cooperation in the period, while its staff members also contributed to the successful conduct of many other capacity development events, organized and funded by regional commissions and other entities, by acting as resource persons in their specific domains of expertise. In addition, more than 30 workshops and seminars were organized as virtual events. The descriptions below refer to events organized by the Division.

17. An international workshop on data disaggregation for the Sustainable Development Goals was organized by the Statistics Division in collaboration with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Children's Fund and the Asian Development Bank in Bangkok from 28 to 30 January 2019. The aim of the workshop was to strengthen the capacity of national statistical systems to address the needs for producing and using disaggregated data and to meet policy demands through the exchange between countries of best practices and experiences. The workshop was attended by 45 participants from a selected number of developing countries in Africa and Asia, as well as resource persons from the organizing entities and the World Health Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other organizations. Eight countries from the project of the Statistics Division and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (formerly the Department for International Development) of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland attended the workshop, with between two and three participants from each country representing different agencies of the national statistical system. Following the workshop, training materials and guidelines based on the workshop materials and country experiences shared will be further developed. The workshop serves as an input to the development of a toolkit for how to improve data and indicators on the most vulnerable groups and data disaggregation to inform the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the subnational, national and global levels. All materials, including tools and presentations, can be found at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/meetings/sdg-inter-workshop-jan-2019/>.

18. A workshop on data and statistics for evidence-based voluntary national reviews was organized by the Statistics Division in Vienna from 9 to 12 December 2019, hosted by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). The workshop brought together national statisticians and national focal points on voluntary national reviews from 17 countries that were planning their 2020 voluntary national reviews to discuss and share best practices on how data and statistics can support a data-driven and evidence-based review process. The workshop focused on the following themes: (a) national mechanisms and processes for monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals; (b) thematic sessions on measuring and assessing progress towards specific Goals and targets; (c) improving data disaggregation to “leave no one behind”; (d) using non-traditional data sources in the voluntary national reviews; and (e) how to use and present data in monitoring the Goals and in the voluntary national reviews, including national reporting platforms for the Goals. Resource persons and experts from international organizations (UNIDO, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and UN-Women), countries and civil society organizations provided training on monitoring of and tools for the Goals. The meeting materials and presentation can be found at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/meetings/vnr-workshop-dec2019/>.

19. In support of the 2020 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses, the Statistics Division developed and issued in 2019 the *Guidelines on the Use of Electronic Data Collection Technologies in Population and Housing Censuses* and the *Handbook on Population and Housing Census Editing, Revision 2*, and planned to undertake workshops to train statisticians at the regional and subregional level. Together with the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries, the Division organized the regional workshop on the theme “2020 round of population and housing censuses: international standards and contemporary technologies”, which was held in Ankara from 12 to 15 March 2019 and at which 32 experts from 11 countries participated. A series of similar workshops was planned for 2020 in francophone Africa, following the translation of the methodological materials into French; however, these in-person events had to be cancelled owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, and their virtual replacement is currently being developed, since it requires interpretation services and adjustments to the curriculum.

20. After the adoption of the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda – a holistic approach to civil registration, vital statistics and identity management – by the Statistical Commission in March 2020, workshops were planned to be conducted in African countries to promote the United Nations-recommended approach. These events had to be cancelled as a consequence of the pandemic and were replaced by a series of webinars for countries of the Pacific, anglophone and francophone Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean.

21. A seminar on SNA for countries in Latin America and the Caribbean was organized as a virtual event in cooperation with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean in October 2020.

22. As part of the implementation programme for SEEA, a blended learning initiative on SEEA Energy was organized in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in December 2019 in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Europe and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. The blended learning initiative consisted of two phases: first, a mandatory online training course, and second, an in-person workshop in Almaty. The in-person workshop provided an opportunity for participants to explore the topics in more depth, complete hands-on exercises, understand the policy applications of SEEA Energy and formulate draft action plans

for SEEA implementation. In addition, the regular programme of technical cooperation facilitated the participation of officials from developing countries and the Statistics Division to attend and co-organize the fourth Forum on Natural Capital Accounting for Better Policy, a regional natural capital accounting policy forum for Africa and the Uganda SEEA national workshop, all of which were held back-to-back in Kampala in November 2019.

23. For the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics 2013 (FDES 2013), the Statistics Division organized a workshop on environment statistics and climate change statistics for the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) region in collaboration with the CARICOM secretariat, held in Saint George's from 4 to 8 November 2019. The workshop was hosted by the Central Statistical Office of Grenada. Several international, intergovernmental and regional organizations participated in the workshop, at which technical knowledge was offered to statisticians from national statistical offices and experts in the ministries of environment or equivalent institutions in countries of the region that had already embarked on the production of environment statistics and were ready to receive further and in-depth training on the latest methodologies in environment statistics. Building on previous collaborative regional work undertaken by the Division and CARICOM in environment statistics, the workshop was aimed at providing detailed knowledge and understanding of the subject, thus allowing participants to identify gaps in environmental data and contribute to the production of regular, accurate and reliable environment statistics that allow for the development of environmental indicators and accounts relevant to policymaking and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals.

24. The workshop was part of the regular programme of technical cooperation of the Statistics Division to support the implementation of FDES 2013 in Member States, following the endorsement by the Statistical Commission in its decision 44/105 of FDES 2013 as the framework for strengthening environment statistics programmes in countries. The workshop consisted of a series of expert presentations, sharing and discussion of lessons learned from country practices, and facilitated group discussions. The presentations by the Division covered, inter alia, the conceptual foundation and the structure of FDES 2013, strategic pillars and steps to implement it, and details of environment statistics particularly relevant for the region (on waste, water and climate change). Supporting materials for the implementation of FDES 2013, such as the Environment Statistics Self-Assessment Tool, were also presented and discussed. Resource persons from several organizations also provided substantive technical contributions on their respective subject matter. Participants appreciated the guidance received towards the implementation of FDES 2013 and the Environment Statistics Self-Assessment Tool in their countries. Climate change statistics and indicators were also discussed, given the request by the Statistical Commission in its decision 47/112 that the Division develop a global set of climate change statistics and indicators. The questionnaire on environment statistics of the Division and UNEP and the environment-related Sustainable Development Goal indicators were also addressed. Finally, participants discussed and adopted a key set of recommendations on the way forward.

25. A similar regional workshop was planned to be held in Nepal in November 2020, but was postponed owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

26. With regard to energy statistics, as part of the ongoing implementation of the International Recommendations for Energy Statistics, in-person workshops were organized in Senegal in October 2019 with the International Atomic Energy Agency and the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (a subsidiary body of the Economic Commission for Africa) and in Peru in November 2019 with the Latin American Energy Organization and the International Energy Agency. In

addition, a virtual follow-up workshop was organized in July and August 2020 for the Latin American and Caribbean region in cooperation with the Latin American Energy Organization, at which countries of the region adopted the methodology of the International Recommendations for international energy statistics reporting.

27. Complementing the activities of the regular programme of technical cooperation, an advisory mission to Lebanon on energy statistics issues was carried out in 2019.

28. At its fiftieth session, in March 2019, the Statistical Commission adopted the United Nations national quality assurance frameworks manual for official statistics and the recommendations contained therein (see decision 50/106). The manual provides guidance for developing and implementing a national quality assurance framework and is aimed at addressing quality assurance in different circumstances and situations, thereby supporting countries in safeguarding the role of official statistics as a trusted source of information in a changing environment.

29. Within this context, the Statistics Division, in cooperation with the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA) and the African Centre for Statistics of the Economic Commission for Africa, organized a workshop on the implementation of a national quality assurance framework for official statistics in countries of the Africa region, which was held in Addis Ababa from 14 to 18 October 2019. At the workshop, participants from national statistical offices were trained on quality assurance and the development of a national quality assurance framework and its implementation throughout the national statistical system. A total of 23 participants from 16 developing countries and several representatives of regional organizations took part in the workshop.

30. The Statistics Division conducted a similar workshop in cooperation with the Economic Commission for Europe, the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS) and Eurostat for countries of the Eastern and Southern Europe and Central Asia region, held in Belgrade from 10 to 13 December 2019. A total of 22 participants from 16 countries and several participants from regional organizations attended the workshop. Both workshops introduced the United Nations recommendations on quality assurance and the United Nations national quality assurance frameworks manual for official statistics and covered basic and advanced topics of quality assurance based on country examples and the use of a quality assurance checklist.

31. As mandated by the Statistical Commission, a series of thematic conferences in support of the *Handbook on Management and Organization of National Statistical Systems* has been initiated by the Statistics Division in cooperation with partners. The regional thematic conferences are being organized to further understand and prioritize the emerging needs of statistical organizations to adapt and develop, as stressed in the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data and in the final report of the series of conferences on a transformative agenda for official statistics.

32. In 2019 and 2020, three regional thematic conferences were organized for anglophone African countries, in South Africa in October 2019, the Caribbean in November 2019 and Asian countries in February 2020. The conferences brought together 150 participants representing chief statisticians and senior managers from 20 national statistical offices and other agencies of national statistical systems.

33. The conferences were structured into strategic sessions on enabling the national statistical systems to take advantage of the ongoing digital and technological revolution; strengthening the national statistical system in terms of its institutional and organizational arrangements; ensuring quality in what is produced by the national statistical system; and the effective mobilization of the necessary financial resources, infrastructure and expertise to enable this transformation. These sessions were linked



to the 16 chapters of the next edition of the *Handbook on Management and Organization of National Statistical Systems* and were invaluable in identifying the key developmental issues for official statistics in the era of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, and in ensuring that the *Handbook* provides relevant and sufficiently detailed advice illustrated, where possible, by a variety of good practice examples.

34. Four additional conferences were planned in 2020 for South-Eastern and Eastern European, Caucasus and Central Asian countries, for countries of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, for francophone African countries and for Pacific island countries. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, those events have been postponed and the Statistics Division remains in contact with host countries and co-organizers.

35. With regard to the use of big data for official statistics, the Statistics Division organized two workshops and a seminar in 2019 and international conferences in 2019 and 2020.

36. Two parallel workshops were held as pre-events of the fifth International Conference on Big Data for Official Statistics, held in Kigali from 29 April to 3 May 2019, and were organized by the Statistics Division. Each workshop was attended by 30 technical-level experts from national statistical offices, mostly from African countries. The workshop on the use of mobile telephone data provided hands-on experience working with mobile telephone data handling, processing and analysis in the area of human mobility. The workshops on scanner data focused on the use of scanner data for consumer price indices and provided hands-on tutorials on compilation and analysis.

37. In addition, in the context of the fifth International Conference on Big Data for Official Statistics, a seminar on data science campus activities was organized by the Statistics Division with support from the Data Science Campus of the Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom (ONS). Over 100 statisticians participated in the event, which demonstrated several data science applications that were running on the United Nations Global Platform and addressed the need for the development of new skills in the statistical offices.

38. The sixth International Conference on Big Data for Official Statistics was organized by the Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics and Statistics Korea. The Conference was originally planned to be held from 12 to 14 May 2020 in Seoul. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Conference was first postponed and then organized as a virtual event from 31 August to 2 September 2020. The main theme of the Conference became “How can big data help in the COVID-19 response?”, and the related themes were “How can big data support the monitoring of the progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals?” and “The need for global data collaboration on global emerging issues”. More than 1,700 participants registered for the Conference from all over the world. There was a live stream of the Conference in the morning and afternoon session, with active participation. Participants could also follow the recorded Conference sessions shortly after a session had concluded.

39. Traditionally, fellowships under the regular programme of technical cooperation are provided to national statisticians and national geospatial information experts from developing countries to enable them to attend regional and international meetings organized by partner organizations. In 2019, fellowships were provided to enable participation in meetings on national accounts for South-Eastern and Eastern European, Caucasus and Central Asian countries, a workshop on mobile telephone data for official statistics, the International Statistical Institute World Statistics Congress and the preceding symposium on data science and official statistics, the

seventh Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) Global Conference, a meeting of the Advisory Expert Group on National Accounts, the technical learning component on the data ecosystem for sustainable development of the International Workshop and Seminar on United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management, and the fourth Forum on Natural Capital Accounting for Better Policy.

40. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, no fellowships could be provided in 2020.

## **B. Development Account projects**

41. Resources under the regular programme can meet only a limited proportion of the demand of countries for technical assistance. The activities often entail the provision of initial assistance, which is subsequently augmented through projects financed from extrabudgetary resources, trust funds or the Development Account. The Development Account is a capacity development programme of the Secretariat aimed at enhancing the capacities of developing countries in the priority areas of the United Nations development agenda.

42. In the period 2019–2020, the Statistics Division continued three Development Account projects and launched one new project on environmental-economic accounting. The start of an additional project on time use data had to be postponed owing to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of human resources for a conversion to new formats.

43. The Programme on Statistics and Data, a Development Account project, was designed as a new and innovative approach bringing together the Statistics Division, all five regional commissions, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, UNEP, UNODC and UN-Habitat. The Programme capitalized on the individual technical capacities and comparative advantages of its 10 implementing entities and spanned the period from 2016 to 2019 with a total budget of \$10 million. The Programme was structured around four main pillars with specific outputs and expected accomplishments: means of implementation, environment statistics and indicators, social and demographic statistics and indicators, and economic statistics and indicators. On the basis of the findings of the midterm evaluation and the successful implementation rate achieved approximately two years after its inception, the Programme was granted a one-year extension with an additional \$1.4 million.

44. After March 2020, with the swift spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and strict limitations on travel between and sometimes even within countries, it became evident that “business as usual” was not an option any more, and the focal points of the 10 implementing entities decided on a wide programmatic reshuffling of the Programme. Eventually, all planned activities requiring the travel of staff members or participants were converted into either (a) COVID-19-resilient activities, such as webinars and the development and roll-out of e-learning courses, as well as the translation of important guidelines and materials in the six official languages of the United Nations; or (b) COVID-19 response activities, such as the development of collaborative data platforms, techniques and methodologies for the handling of innovative data sources to compile statistics and indicators as a response to the need for monitoring and mitigating the impact of the health crisis on people, societies and economies. The governance and coordination mechanisms in place for this innovative Programme allowed for a quick and effective programmatic response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and an exceptional extension to April 2021 was granted for the conclusion of the remaining activities.

45. As of December 2020, around 510 specific activities had been carried out since the launch of the Programme, with 133 concluded in 2019 and, despite the health crisis, about 115 in 2020. These activities have taken the form of country advisory

missions and seminars, the development of guidelines, e-learning courses, webinars and stocktaking events at the regional or interregional levels to promote the exchange between countries of good practices and lessons learned. During 2019 and 2020, the project activities covered more than 130 target countries, including 37 of the least developed countries.

46. The Development Account project “Collection and use of international migration data in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration” is currently under implementation. The project is being implemented by the Statistics Division in cooperation with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and UNODC.

47. Activities started in 2018, as reported previously to the Commission (see [E/CN.3/2019/28](#)), progressed well during 2019 and have been modified during 2020 given the ongoing pandemic. In the 2019–2020 period, four more needs assessments were carried out (for Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Thailand), a standard set of migration questions to be included in national censuses and surveys was developed, two regional workshops were carried out in Asia with a focus on the use of non-traditional data sources, country consultations were ongoing for the conduct of multiple systems estimation studies in order to estimate the number of victims of trafficking in persons (in Argentina, Colombia and Peru in Latin America as well as Malaysia in Asia), and one technical meeting on improving migration statistics was carried out.

48. In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, activities for this project were brought to a halt. However, the project has been able to forge ahead with selected activities. In particular, Mexico expressed interest in conducting the needs assessment in a virtual manner through a series of online meetings and asynchronous activities. Given the impossibility of travel, progress was focused on the production of technical materials. For instance, the assessment toolkit was translated into Spanish, was improved thanks to feedback received from participating countries, and was expanded with sections on the impacts of COVID-19 on migration data and statistics and the use of geospatial tools, among other sections. Moreover, the toolkit is being used to ascertain the availability of migration data in the Latin America and the Caribbean region in order to have an overall diagnostic on statistical capacity.

49. The Division will continue with the implementation of the capacity development project, deemed to run until December 2021, which, inter alia, will produce a range of technical and e-learning materials, based on a mix of methodological guidance and practical advice, to be used in future training activities. While for now just postponed, regional and national workshops will have to be cancelled or conducted in virtual format if travel restrictions continue. This may pose serious limitations for the participation of developing countries where the information technology infrastructure is weak.

50. The capacity and capability development efforts and activities undertaken under the Development Account project “Strengthening geospatial information management in developing countries towards implementing the 2030 Agenda”, complemented by the project funded by the Government of China on geospatial information management capacity development in China and other developing countries (see paras. 60–61 below), were primarily aimed at improving and strengthening national geospatial information management capacities in developing countries. The activities focused on leveraging the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework adopted by the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management as a mechanism towards strengthening national capacities to effectively

manage geospatial resources and to modernize national geospatial information arrangements in Member States, in particular in developing countries.

51. The Development Account project supported its six target countries to design and develop their country-level action plans to operationalize the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework. Country-level action plans (a) reference the specific guidance, options and actions provided through the Framework's Implementation Guide; (b) address each of the nine strategic pathways; (c) capture the strategic-to-operational needs of a country when implementing the Framework; and (d) articulate and demonstrate national leadership and the capacity to take positive steps towards modernizing national geospatial information arrangements and effectively managing national geospatial resources. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the need for nationally integrated geospatial information management to be agile, adaptive and able to respond adequately and in a timely manner to any emerging crisis. With the curtailment of travel and the inability to convene in-country physical capacity and capability development activities, the project continues to support the six target countries through remote modalities to sustain their efforts and momentum to carry out their assessment and analysis of their national circumstances, and then to design and develop their country-level action plans.

52. The three-year Development Account project "Environmental-economic accounting for evidence-based policy in Africa and Asia" started in 2020. Under the project, the Statistics Division will work with several countries to develop a number of outputs, including the development of national action plans for the implementation of SEEA and the compilation of pilot accounts. The project aims to address the technical and institutional barriers to the establishment of routinely produced environmental-economic accounts at the national level. The project is focusing on the implementation of SEEA in up to six countries in Africa and Asia. Initial discussions and scoping for the implementation of the project have been initiated with Kenya, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Namibia, the Philippines and Senegal. However, given the delays and restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the project is still in its initial stages.

### **C. Donor-funded projects**

53. In the period 2019–2020, the Statistics Division continued the implementation of donor-funded projects on environmental-economic accounting, monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals and geospatial information management, among others.

54. The Natural Capital Accounting and Valuation of Ecosystem Services project was launched in 2017 by the Statistics Division together with UNEP, the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the European Union. The project, which is funded by the European Union, aims to assist the five participating partner countries, namely, Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa, to advance the knowledge agenda on environmental and ecosystem accounting. It has initiated pilot testing of SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting with a view to improving the management of natural biotic resources, ecosystems and their services at the national level and mainstreaming issues of biodiversity and ecosystems into policy planning and implementation.

55. The project consists of multiple work streams, and to date around 80 events have been organized or co-organized, including visits, country missions, technical meetings, conferences and workshops, outreach events and training activities. As part of the training/capacity-building work stream, international workshops were

organized in collaboration with national authorities and international agencies, for example, in South Africa in October 2019 and China in November 2019, bringing together statisticians and policymakers from multiple countries to discuss ecosystem accounting and policy mainstreaming. Leading up to these face-to-face workshops, e-learning courses were developed and webinar series organized. In addition, national training events and technical workshops have been organized in the participating countries. Capacity-building also took place during country missions and through the support provided for the implementation of project activities, both by United Nations staff and consultants. In 2020, webinars and a virtual expert forum were conducted instead of physical meetings.

56. The project “Monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals” was launched in 2017 by the Statistics Division with support from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (formerly the Department for International Development) of the United Kingdom to make the Sustainable Development Goal indicators available to the broadest possible audience and to strengthen the capacity of countries in the compilation and use of the indicators, covering 20 countries in Africa and Asia. Key activities include the establishment of national data and metadata platforms for the Goals, data modelling in line with the SDMX standard, the creation of national metadata relating to the Goals, data-sharing arrangements and user engagement activities on monitoring of the Goals. Ahead of the pandemic, a number of in-person training activities took place on these various activities.

57. Despite challenges linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, including a substantial reduction in funding, the project quickly adapted to remote work and also included a component on COVID-19 data. Several online webinars and trainings have been held to support the project countries in their work to increase the availability of data and metadata relating to the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as COVID-19-related data, and to make these available to the public. Key achievements include: (a) at least 15 project countries establishing national monitoring platforms for the Goals, several of which were featured in voluntary national reviews in 2020; (b) around half of the countries having a core set of national metadata prepared; (c) at least 15 countries having user engagement strategies in place; (d) at least 13 countries having shared data in line with the SDMX standard; and (e) a global Sustainable Development Goals lab being established that allows for comparison of national and global Goal indicators. Overall, the project has continued to perform well and received another “A” rating by the donor in its annual review in October 2020. The project will run until the end of July 2021.

58. The Data for Now initiative supports countries in the use of innovative sources, technologies and methods for the streamlined production and dissemination of better, more timely and disaggregated data on key areas related to specific Sustainable Development Goals. This initiative is co-led by the Statistics Division, the World Bank, the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, in close coordination with members of the national statistical systems in participating countries and partners from across the United Nations system, the private sector, academia, civil society and the development community at large. The initiative emphasizes country ownership, sustainability and scalability as the key principles guiding the design and execution of activities aimed at integrating new methods and sources into existing national statistical systems and explicitly seeks to avoid creating parallel data production processes at the country level.

59. An agreement was signed in June 2020 between the Statistics Division and the Government of Italy on the implementation of activities under the Data for Now initiative in Colombia and Senegal. The project supports the two countries in extending the use of innovative data sources to increase the timeliness and granularity

of data on the Sustainable Development Goal indicators. The countries have chosen their main areas of interest. For Colombia, this is poverty, education, Goal 16 and COVID-19. Senegal has chosen food security, land use, climate change, urbanization and COVID-19. The work is currently in its first phase, of running detailed assessments of the baseline situations and objectives of the work moving forward. On that basis, data and training that are needed to meet the objectives are also identified. The work is carried out in close collaboration with the two countries and key partners, including the core partners of the Data for Now initiative.

60. The geospatial information management project funded by the Government of China was extended for a further five years to cover the period from 2018 to 2022. The project will continue to provide support and capacity development to developing countries for their national geospatial and statistical systems. During the period 2019–2020, the project sponsored capacity-building activities in the area of geospatial information management, including two international technical seminars on the data ecosystem for sustainable development, one technical learning event and one technical briefing and visit on the Sustainable Development Goals profile of Deqing, China, held in Deqing in October 2019. The project also organized five study visits for representatives from the Ministry of Natural Resources of China and from other developing countries to attend international conferences and meetings in Amsterdam, Hanoi, Tokyo, New York and Canberra.

61. The project focuses on increasing awareness and understanding of the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework and other agreed frameworks, principles and guides developed and adopted by the United Nations Initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management and primarily supports national geospatial information authorities and agencies from developing countries to improve their awareness and understanding of internationally agreed frameworks, principles and guides and develop implementation strategies and plans to improve and strengthen their technical capabilities and capacities to collect, produce and disseminate timely and reliable geospatial information. In 2019, the project launched a capacity and capability development initiative with the events mentioned above, which considered the data ecosystem for sustainable development that delivers the evidence on “where” people interact with their place, events, activities and environment, and enabled participants to deliver timely and reliable geospatially enabled data necessary for communities, businesses, organizations and governments to take accountable action and make evidenced-based decisions. The COVID-19 pandemic has curtailed the convening of physical events under this initiative in 2020.

62. The Statistics Division continues the implementation of the statistical capacity-building project for China and other developing countries funded by the Government of China. During the period 2019–2020, the Division, in collaboration with the National Bureau of Statistics of China (NBS), conducted three international workshops and seminars in Shanghai in June 2019, Hangzhou in October 2019 and Beijing in November 2019, with the training areas including economic statistics, big data, environmental-economic accounting and Sustainable Development Goal indicators, which resulted in the training of over 280 statisticians worldwide (primarily from the Asia-Pacific region).

63. Moreover, the project funded representatives from NBS to attend group trainings at the National University of Singapore in August 2019 and the University of California, Berkeley, United States of America, in December 2019. The Project also organized two study visits for six representatives from NBS to attend international conferences and events in New York in April 2019 and Addis Ababa in October 2019.

64. In response to the need for the strategic professional development of national statisticians, the project carried out technical advisory missions, sponsored the short-term work of national statisticians in international organizations and awarded fellowships to attend international seminars and conferences. The project has greatly supported the efforts of countries, primarily in the Asia-Pacific region, to strengthen their national statistical capacity so as to better respond to the data challenges in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

65. A fund for building the statistical capacity of developing countries to measure, monitor and report on the Sustainable Development Goals has been made available to the Statistics Division by the Government of Japan since 2018. In 2019–2020, this fund supported the organization of the ninth and tenth meetings of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators. The objective of the meetings was to continue the work of the Group on implementing a global indicator framework for the follow-up and review of the Goals. The ninth meeting was hosted by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia in Beirut from 25 to 28 March 2019. The tenth meeting was hosted by the Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa from 21 to 24 October 2019. At those two meetings, the Group reviewed progress made on the methodological development of tier III indicators and reviewed and updated the tier classification; discussed the process of the 2020 comprehensive review and the specific proposals for replacement, revision, addition, deletion and refinement that were under consideration; discussed ongoing work on data disaggregation and its future workplan; discussed how new data sources can be used to facilitate the monitoring of the 2030 Agenda, including integrating geospatial information with statistics for monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals; reviewed the work of the three working groups; and shared experiences and best practices relating to Sustainable Development Goal implementation and reporting at the national, regional, global and thematic levels.

66. In May 2019, the Division contributed to a workshop on the quality of statistics for Sustainable Development Goal indicators organized by the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific in cooperation with the Statistics Department of the International Monetary Fund and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications of the Government of Japan, which was held in Chiba, Japan, and in which 17 countries participated.

67. A collaborative on the use of administrative data for statistical purposes was initiated in May 2020 as a response to the urgent need for more timely and disaggregated data to inform the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as well as to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and its socioeconomic effects. A key objective of the collaborative is to address both urgent and longer-term needs to access and use administrative data for statistical purposes in a coherent and cross-cutting manner, building on advances made in various sectors and by different partners. The collaborative is co-convened by the Statistics Division and the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data and has members from over 20 countries and regional and international agencies.

68. The collaborative has discussed key areas of focus and agreed to take a cross-cutting approach. To help to ensure that the work does not overlap with other, more thematically focused work, an inventory of resources was created that provides a variety of materials, including recommendations, guidelines, courses, tools and practical case studies from countries. The collaborative is also organizing webinars on selected topics. The inventory and the webinars can be found on the homepage of the collaborative (<https://unstats.un.org/capacity-development/admin-data/>).

69. More detailed information on the collaborative is given in the report of the Secretary-General on work for the review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals ([E/CN.3/2021/3](#)).

70. Within the context of these donor-funded projects, the Statistics Division expresses its gratitude to the Governments of China, Japan and the United Kingdom, and to its partner organizations, the European Commission, Eurostat, the World Bank, UNEP, UN-Women and others, for their support of its capacity development programmes, and is looking forward to strong support and collaboration in the years to come.

## **IV. Other coordination efforts for capacity development**

### **A. Global Network of Institutions for Statistical Training**

71. The Global Network of Institutions for Statistical Training, established to address the data demands of the 2030 Agenda and the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals, has continued its work to foster training in key areas of official statistics. At its third annual meeting, held on 4 March 2020 on the margins of the fifty-first session of the Statistical Commission, the founding and advisory group members discussed the way forward and welcomed additional members. There are currently 25 members, including two regional training institutes from the African region, as requested by the Commission at its fifty-first session. The Network is managed by a board consisting of the Network's Chair, the three task team leaders and the secretariat. In addition, a Stakeholder Advisory Group provides input and guidance on the direction and focus of work. The membership of the Group was expanded from 8 to 12 countries in 2020 to better reflect the interests and training needs of low- and middle-income countries.

72. A more detailed description of the activities of the Global Network is provided in the report of the Secretary-General on work for the review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals ([E/CN.3/2021/3](#)) and the associated background document.

### **B. Coordination with regional commissions**

73. The Statistics Division maintains close contact with the regional commissions as a strong partner in the implementation of its capacity development programme. Regularly scheduled phone calls with the regional Commissions ensure that activities of the Statistics Division at Headquarters and the statistics divisions of the regional commissions are coordinated in an efficient manner. Activities of the Statistics Division in member countries are carried out in coordination with and with the participation of the statistics division of the respective regional commission, ensuring an open information flow and better alignment of work methods to achieve the capacity-building objectives of all entities involved.

74. Collaboration and coordination with the regional commissions is steadily increasing and is manifested in a wide variety of joint or coordinated events, such as coordinated projects of the Programme on Statistics and Data, carried out under the tenth tranche of the United Nations Development Account, jointly organized thematic conferences on managing a statistical organization in times of change, the participation of the regional commissions in activities of the Division's task team on capacity development and the participation of the Division in the regional Statistical Commission events.



### C. Global Network of Data Officers and Statisticians

75. To help national Governments to build resilient and sustainable national data and information systems, a new Global Network of Data Officers and Statisticians that connects data experts around the world was launched by the Statistics Division at the United Nations World Data Forum in October 2020.

76. The Network aims to improve the availability of basic national health, social and economic data by supporting national Governments as they establish national data and information systems for the full implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals through collaboration, coordination, knowledge-sharing, networking and technical support.

77. To achieve this goal, the Network brings together statisticians, data experts and scientists, geospatial information experts and data management and results reporting officers and economists in United Nations country teams from around the world. The Network is expected to increase collaboration among national statistical offices and systems, United Nations resident coordinator offices and regional and international organizations; to share knowledge and best practices on the production and dissemination of data and official statistics for the implementation and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals; to build new partnerships and foster synergies in data development to support the production and dissemination of data and official statistics for the implementation and monitoring of and reporting on the Goals; and to facilitate the provision of support from a pool of experts on different topics and from different statistical domains related to data and statistics for the implementation and monitoring of and reporting on the Goals.

78. It is expected that the Network will also serve as a tool for coordinating and directing capacity development efforts.

---