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# Report of the Expert Group on the Integration of Statistical and Geospatial Information

## Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2020/211 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Expert Group on the Integration of Statistical and Geospatial Information, which is submitted to the Commission for information. In its report, the Expert Group summarizes the activities it has undertaken since the fifty-first session of the Statistical Commission, in accordance with Commission decision 51/123. The Expert Group has focused on the operationalization and implementation of the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework and the other items summarized in its workplan for the period 2020–2022 to support the wide range of implementation and adoption activities with respect to the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2020 round of population and housing censuses. The Commission is invited to take note of the report of the Expert Group and note the progress made by the Expert Group in the integration of statistical and geospatial information, including on its workplan for 2020–2022.

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# Report of the Expert Group on the Integration of Statistical and Geospatial Information

## I. Introduction

1. Pursuant to Statistical Commission decision 44/101, the Expert Group on the Integration of Statistical and Geospatial Information comprises members of both the professional statistical and geospatial communities of Member States and relevant international organizations. Since its establishment in 2013, the Expert Group has reported to both the Statistical Commission and the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management at each of their respective annual sessions.

2. The overall objectives and functions of the Expert Group are to pursue the implementation of the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework and to support regional and global agendas such as the 2020 round of population and housing censuses and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Furthermore, in its decision 48/108, the Commission strengthened the mandate of the Expert Group for it to become the overall coordination group for all activities in the area of the integration of statistical and geospatial information. In its decision 51/123, the Commission endorsed the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework,[1] as adopted by the Committee of Experts in its decision 9/106. Notably, both of the apex intergovernmental entities of the statistical and geospatial communities called for the implementation and operationalization of the Framework at the national and regional levels.

3. In the present report, the Expert Group summarizes the activities it has undertaken since the fifty-first session of the Commission and the decisions emanating from the tenth session of the Committee of Experts, convened virtually on 26 and 27 August and 4 September 2020, and discusses the impact of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on its workplan for the period 2020–2022. The Commission is invited to take note of the present report and note the progress made by the Expert Group in the integration of statistical and geospatial information, including on its workplan for 2020–2022.

## II. Implementation of the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework

### A. Supporting the 2020 round of population and housing censuses and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

4. The overarching need for geospatially enabled statistical data for both the 2020 round of population and housing censuses and the 2030 Agenda have guided the development of the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework. In particular, the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals are highly dependent on geospatially enabled statistical data, as statistical data alone is not sufficient to relate people to their location and place and measure “where” progress is or is not being made, particularly at “disaggregated” subnational and local levels.

5. Notably, while the COVID-19 pandemic has affected most countries globally, its cascading impacts have added further complexity and complications to the attainment of national priorities and global development agendas. These impacts include delay of the implementation of planned censuses and the inhibition of

[1] https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/51st-session/documents/The_GSGF-E.pdf.

progress towards the attainment of the 2030 Agenda. However, as noted in the *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020*, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals remained uneven, and the Goals were not on track to be met by 2030. The *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020* further highlights that one important area of innovation is the integration of geospatial and statistical information, both in supporting the response to COVID-19 and in supporting the acceleration of progress towards the Goals.

6. The urgent need for integrated geospatial and statistical information to respond to COVID-19 goes beyond a national response to the pandemic. Countries are therefore invited to adopt the Framework, if they have not yet done so. Guided by decision 51/123 of the Commission, the Expert Group has intensified its efforts to support the implementation and operationalization of the Framework in the intersessional period. This effort has involved both Member States and regional representatives of the Expert Group to promote and share experiences on implementing the Framework for national development priorities and global agendas, including the 2020 round of population and housing censuses and the 2030 Agenda.

### European Forum for Geography and Statistics

7. The European Forum for Geography and Statistics promotes the pan-European regional integration of statistical and geospatial information in national statistical offices and national geospatial information agencies to enable the 2020 round of population and housing censuses to be fully geocoded and to promote the 2030 Agenda. While primarily a European initiative, Forum members actively participate in many initiatives at both the regional and global levels. In emphasizing the importance of developing an equal partnership between national statistical offices and national geospatial information agencies, the Forum acts as a reference group for Eurostat and the project group for GEOSTAT projects, and is an observer to the Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for Europe.

8. The annual conference of the European Forum for Geography and Statistics was convened virtually in October 2020 by Statistics Poland. The conference was entirely focused on the five principles of the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework.[2] Importantly, while members of the Expert Group participated in the conference, both substantively and as observers, other countries that are not members of the Expert Group also shared their national experiences of implementing the Framework across Europe through a variety of examples. These national experiences not only highlighted how current implementation guidance is being applied within the European Statistical System, but also identified gaps within the guidance.

### Virtual Expert Group meeting on the theme “Access versus privacy: the special case of population data”

9. The United Nations Population Fund, in partnership with Ghana, the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, convened a virtual Expert Group meeting on the theme “Access versus privacy: the special case of population data” in October 2020. With a dedicated session on geospatial data and other innovations, the Expert Group significantly supported the meeting through presentations by France, Namibia, the United States of America and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), moderated by the Secretariat. Notably, France highlighted the work undertaken by the Expert Group’s task team on privacy and confidentiality, specifically its literature review to ground the work of the task team in addressing the implications of

[2] See www.efgs.info/efgs-2020-webinar/#programme.

geospatially enabled statistical data on privacy and confidentiality, with its conclusion that the lower the density of the data, the higher the scale of data and therefore the higher the disclosure risk.

### Expert Group meeting on the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* system

10. The Expert Group meeting on the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* system was convened virtually in November 2020. The meeting contained a dedicated session on the integration of statistical and geospatial information, through presentations by Expert Group members Belize, France, Ireland and South Africa, as well as the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE). Attendees were informed of how the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework (focusing on principles 1 and 2) can support the geocoding of population statistics at the national level; moreover, the meeting examined how the Framework can develop and support advanced planning for incorporating, collecting, geocoding and disseminating the *Demographic Yearbook* system. A further key point made by presenters regarded the potential to reuse geospatially integrated statistical data for different use cases, whether for producing demographic statistics or supporting insights that support the national COVID-19 response.

11. In its recommendations emanating from the meeting, the Expert Group noted that the *Demographic Yearbook* should closely monitor the production and availability of geocoded population statistics at the national level and develop advanced planning for incorporating, collecting and disseminating geocoded data, based on national and regional experiences, taking into full consideration the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics in terms of confidentiality of individual records.

## B. Implementation at the regional level

### Africa

12. The Global Statistical Geospatial Framework is being implemented regionally through the African-centred geospatial statistical framework, which considers national policies, institutional arrangements and available capacity to integrate statistical and geospatial information. Both national statistical offices and national geospatial information agencies can adapt, adopt and apply the Framework to their national contexts to: (a) geospatially enable national strategies for statistical development; (b) ensure effective collaboration between the statistical and geospatial communities; (c) build on the national implementation of the global fundamental geospatial data themes and the use of common specifications and standards; and (d) entrench geospatial analysis as a core competency within national statistical offices in the planning and execution of their national census.

13. Through ECA, the region is now engaging national statistical offices and national geospatial information agencies to encourage the integration of geospatial and statistical information to improve institutional coordination between these communities in the context of global agendas and the 2020 round of population and housing censuses, the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. [3] Currently, ECA and the Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for Africa are conducting an extensive survey to assess the current state of geospatial and statistical systems, existing policies and strategies,

[3] Agenda 2063 of the African Union is both a vision and an action plan for the African continent for the foreseeable future (see www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/agenda2063.pdf).

achievements in integrating statistical and geospatial information, and experiences and best practices in each of Africa's five subregions.

### The Americas and the Caribbean

14. The Global Statistical Geospatial Framework is implemented within the Americas and the Caribbean through the Statistical and Geospatial Framework for the Americas,[4] which is a tangible outcome that supports the realization of the declaration on the integration of geospatial and statistical information between the Statistical Conference of the Americas and the Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for the Americas,[5] adopted by the Statistical Conference of the Americas at its tenth meeting, in November 2019.

15. The initial outputs of the Statistical and Geospatial Framework for the Americas, which is led by the working group on the integration of statistical and geospatial information of the Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for the Americas (consisting of representatives from both the statistical and geospatial communities of Member States in the region) and is substantively supported by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), include population and demographic data, disaggregated by gender and housing unit and into three geographic levels (related to each country's administrative geography), and are disseminated on the Framework's website. In the intersessional period, the Framework has collated national experiences in the integration of statistical and geospatial information in line with established national practices, used to identify lessons learned and future opportunities for development. These opportunities include strengthening institutional coordination, building capacity and enabling the provision of services for access to information and the use of standards.

16. Future regional work includes the development of version 2.0 of the Statistical and Geospatial Framework for the Americas, which aims to identify new themes and geographical data that enable stakeholders to respond to regional issues; to identify the data needs of the Sustainable Development Goals; and to develop demographic data sets that include data emanating from household surveys and administrative records. This work will continue in a coordinated manner with national statistical and geospatial communities and other relevant regional stakeholders to strengthen the integration of statistical and geospatial information at both the national and regional levels.

17. The Statistics Division of ECLAC is continuing to provide technical assistance to member States in the region, with a focus on strengthening national capacities in geospatial information management, in particular the implementation and operationalization of the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework. In the context of these activities, representatives from both national statistical offices and national geospatial information agencies have been requested by the ECLAC secretariat and the Expert Group to initiate further discussions on how to advance the implementation of the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework at the national level.

18. Furthermore, the Expert Group takes note of the "Central America Project",[6] which is led by the Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for the Americas and financed by the Pan-American Institute of Geography and History with the national geospatial information agency of Spain, the National Centre for Geographic Information (CNIG), and provides

[4] See www.un-ggim-americas.org/en/assets/modulos/proyectos.html?proyecto=1.

[5] See https://cea.cepal.org/10/sites/cea10/files/cea.10-declaration-integration-geospatial-information.pdf.

[6] See www.un-ggim-americas.org/en/assets/modulos/proyectos.html?proyecto=4.

technical assistance to countries. Currently, countries receiving direct support through the Central America Project include Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama.

### Asia and the Pacific

19. Within the Asia-Pacific region, there is an increasing demand for data that are more granular, timely, accurate and reliable than what traditional sources of data can currently provide. The ever-increasing demand is pushing national statistical offices to transform themselves and embrace innovative and more efficient methods of collecting data, underpinned by the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework. This underscores the importance of using the Framework as a common framework for the consistent integration of statistical and geospatial information.

20. Regionally, technical assistance and advice is being provided by the secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) through webinars, technical development of analytical tools and detailed technical guidance. Moreover, several countries are conducting programmes integrating geospatial information and Earth observations with statistical data to support national statistical activities and the needs of the Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, ESCAP, as the secretariat for the Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for Asia and the Pacific, has initiated a series of initiatives to strengthen integration activities within its region, including:

(a) The establishment of working group 3 of the Regional Committee, which focuses on the integration of statistical and geospatial information and is chaired by Indonesia;

(b) The development of a set of resources that support the communication and promotion of the integration of statistical and geospatial information,[7] including practical step-by-step guides on producing land cover change maps and statistics,[8] and work to enable the visualization of ocean and land accounts;

(c) A 10-year initiative from 2020 to 2030 to provide member States with an Asia-Pacific geospatial information hub through the support of the Republic of Korea. The hub aims to promote the sharing and use of geospatial information services and products among member States and strengthen the capacity of the Regional Committee to share geospatially enabled statistics;

(d) A series of “Stats Café” webinars, which highlight good practice and technical innovation within the regional statistical and geospatial community.

### Western Asia

21. The Global Statistical Geospatial Framework is implemented regionally through the Arab Geospatial Statistical Framework, which was recommended by both the Statistical Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in 2019 at its thirteenth session (see E/ESCWA/C.1/2019/8/Report), and the Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for the Arab States at its seventh meeting, held in Algiers in February 2020.[9]

[7] See https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/ESCAP_Geospatial_Statistical_Offerings_in_Asia_and_the_Pacifc.pdf.

[8] See www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Producing_land_cover_change_maps_and_statistics.pdf.

[9] See http://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/10th-Session/documents/UN-GGIM-Arab-States-Report_2019-2020.pdf.

22. At the above-mentioned meetings, both the ESCWA Statistical Committee and the Regional Committee requested ESCWA to ensure effective collaboration between the statistical and geospatial communities in the field of population and housing censuses and for the global indicator framework of the Sustainable Development Goals. Moreover, the ESCWA Statistical Committee recommended that geospatial analysis become a core competency within national statistical offices and urged countries that were planning or undertaking their censuses to adopt technologies that enabled the integration of geospatial information at all stages of the census cycle. Regionally, it is recognized that further capacity development is needed to support the monitoring and reporting of geospatially-relevant Sustainable Development Goal indicators. A regional geospatial data hub will be launched in 2021 to support the management and dissemination of geospatially enabled statistical data.

**Europe**

23. The Global Statistical Geospatial Framework is implemented at the regional level within the European Statistical System through the GEOSTAT 4 project. Funded by the European Union, GEOSTAT 4 aims to foster the integration of statistical and geospatial information across the European Statistical System. It achieves this by developing guidance for the implementation of the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework, collating national examples of good practice and supporting the European Forum for Geography and Statistics as the regional community for statistics and geography.

24. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, various activities have been undertaken to enable the implementation and operationalization of the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework in the intersessional period. These included:

(a) The annual joint workshop of the Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for Europe, the European Statistical System and ECE on the integration of statistical and geospatial information, which was convened in March 2020 as a webinar and included an update from the secretariat of the Regional Committee on the status of implementation of the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework and the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework;

(b) A joint plenary session of the Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for Europe and the Conference of European Statisticians, which was convened virtually in June 2020 at the sixty-eighth session of the Conference. The joint plenary stressed the importance of interoperability, in particular with regard to statistical and geospatial standards. The joint plenary was provided with an overview of standards and initiatives relevant to the integration of statistical and geospatial information, including the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework, in a document prepared by ECE aimed at raising awareness of available resources that support the implementation of the Framework among senior managers of regional statistical and geospatial agencies (ECE/CES/2020/11). In the coming intersessional period, GEOSTAT 4 will focus on developing methodological guidance for the European Statistical System and proposing improvements to the System's quality framework. The Expert Group aims to keep informed of these developments and respond accordingly.

# III. Tenth session of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management

25. In its decision 10/106, adopted at its tenth session, the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management welcomed the report of the Expert Group, the many instances in which the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework had

been implemented in Member States and the increased focus on the exchange of knowledge and capacity-building. The Committee suggested that the Expert Group continue to collect national experiences relating to the integration of statistical and geospatial information to further guide Member States in the implementation and operationalization of the Framework.

26. Also in decision 10/106, the Committee of Experts requested the Expert Group to continue the development of key statistical standards and processes that would strengthen the integration of statistical and geospatial information, to provide practical guidance in the production and use of integrated geospatial information and to develop the interlinkages between the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework and the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework to further support the implementation and operationalization of both Frameworks, including through the regional commissions and the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management regional committees. Furthermore, the Committee urged Member States to continue efforts towards the adoption and implementation of the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework and to support institutional coordination and collaboration between national statistical offices, national geospatial information agencies and other relevant stakeholders to support the ongoing implementation of the Framework, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

# IV. Progress on the workplan for 2020–2022

27. At its sixth meeting, held in Manchester, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in October 2019, in order to make progress on the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework, the Expert Group established three task teams: (a) the task team on the principles of the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework, with three work streams that provide specific implementation guidance to cover geocoding, common geographies and interoperability; (b) the task team on capacity-building; and (c) the task team on privacy and confidentiality. Each of the task teams aimed to operate over an 18-month to two-year period, with their work being under review by the Expert Group. Each task team is led by a member of the Expert Group, with the task team on the principles of the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework composed of three work streams led by members of the Expert Group.

28. During the intersessional period, the Expert Group has diligently executed its work, primarily guided by its workplan for 2020–2022 and its overarching goal to develop guidance for countries to implement the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework (see sections A-C below); however, the Expert Group has also identified gaps and areas of potential future work (see section D below).

## A. Task team on the principles of the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework

### Work stream on geocoding

29. The work stream on geocoding aims to develop, in line with principle 2 of the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework, guidance, recommendations and case studies on the implementation of geocoding. Led by the United States, its members include Finland, New Zealand, South Africa, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

30. In its work, the work stream continues to develop good practices in geocoding, georeferencing and other associated operations, which are currently captured within a scoping paper on geocoding, provided as a background paper to the present report. The work stream, in line with principles 1 and 2 of the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework, urges that countries consider geocoding as a fundamental mechanism

that links statistical data to a geographic location, creating the bridge that facilitates the use of geospatially enabled statistics, which capture the data needs of national priorities and global agendas.

31. Noting that different national requirements and capacities may prevent the capture and linkage of precise x- and y- coordinates for each statistical unit record, the work stream is developing its practical guidance to be fully inclusive of other forms of geocoding, including street addresses, enumeration areas, grid cells and aggregate geographies (such as postal codes). However, the work stream wishes to reiterate the guidance provided by the Expert Group to the Statistical Commission at its forty-ninth session, in March 2018, that all statistical unit record data should be collected or associated with a location reference, and that ideally it should allow for geospatial coordinates with x- and y- values to be produced for each record (E/CN.3/2018/33, para. 12).

32. The next steps for the work stream include elaborating on the foundations of geocoding, currently captured within its scoping paper; developing technical implementation guidance on geocoding statistical data and how to select an appropriate geography based on national requirements and capacity to use that geography in geocoding statistical data; and supporting the efforts of the Expert Group in capturing case studies of national implementation.

### Work stream on common geographies

33. The work stream on common geographies aims to develop guidance that is consistent with principle 3 of the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework, on the development and implementation of common geographic areas for the display, storage, reporting and analysis of social, economic and environmental comparisons across statistical data sets from different sources. Led by Canada and Ireland, its members include New Zealand, Poland, the United Kingdom and the United States.

34. With the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework being the bridge between the statistical and geospatial communities, the keystone of the bridge is common geographies. In sum, a common geography simultaneously enables the national statistical system to disseminate geospatially enabled statistical data (principle 5 of the Framework) while enabling the use of fit-for-purpose, fundamental geospatial infrastructure (principle 1) and leveraging the output of geocoded statistical unit records within this data management environment (principle 2).

35. In its work, the work stream has initiated the drafting of a scoping paper on common geographies. Key elements of this early draft include the definition of what is meant by common geographies; the importance of common geographies to an integrated statistical data and geospatial framework to meet national and international commitments; and the basic requirements for implementing geographic areas within national, regional and international statistical and geospatial systems. In the coming intersessional period, the work stream is considering surveying the Expert Group to capture existing types of geographies currently in use (including administrative and gridded geographies); ongoing developments on new common geographies; and plans and timelines to implement new or emerging national, regional and international common geographies.

### Work stream on interoperability

36. The work stream on interoperability aims to investigate the mechanisms needed for the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework to proceed down a standards path, and to raise awareness of the importance of interoperable standards and the broader work of the international standards development organizations within national

statistical offices. Led by the United Kingdom, its members include Finland, Germany, New Zealand and the United States.

37. In the intersessional period, the work stream has made efforts to develop a workplan that identifies various elements (including the development of a glossary of terminology for the integration of statistical and geospatial information), and aims to continue this work in the coming period. The work stream has also supported the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange Technical Standards Working Group in integrating geospatial information within the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange standard (E/CN.3/2021/23, para. 8) and looks forward to supporting other complementary work of the Statistical Commission in the area of statistical and geospatial interoperability.

38. In the coming intersessional period, the work stream aims to provide resources and recommendations to enable the implementation of internationally-accepted interoperability frameworks and standards. Much of this work will be based on national experiences and good practices, and the work stream wishes to highlight the invaluable support of Finland in providing its national experiences and urges and invites other countries and relevant organizations to participate in the work stream to ensure that the guidance and recommendations are relevant of and inclusive of the needs of the Statistical Commission.

## B. Task team on capacity-building

39. The task team on capacity-building aims to develop guidance regarding the implementation and strengthening of statistical-geospatial capacity in countries through the coordination of capacity-building by carrying out a stocktaking of activities in statistical-geospatial integration, and to mitigate the potential for duplication (or divergence) of work. Led by Norway and Sweden, its members include Canada, Colombia, ECE, ECLAC and the United Nations Population Fund.

40. In its work, the task team has developed a global survey to diagnose readiness at the country level for implementing the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework, in order to assess the general awareness of that Framework and the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework and how countries consider their usefulness. The survey builds on previous work to assess the European implementation of the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework within the region, requesting responses from both the statistical and geospatial communities. The task team invites the Statistical Commission to complete the survey to ensure that the voice of the statistical community is fully captured. The survey is provided as a background paper to the present report. Preliminary results are intended to be included in the report of the Expert Group at the eleventh session of the Committee of Experts, in August 2021, with a full discussion of results, implications and recommendations to be presented to the Commission at its fifty-third session, in March 2022.

41. In its future work, alongside the analysis of the global survey, the task team aims to support the broader coordination efforts of the Expert Group. In this regard, the task team notes that efforts to build statistical-geospatial capacity are conducted through different development programmes and initiatives by international agencies and bilateral partnerships between countries. To strengthen the coordinating role of the Expert Group, the task team aims to consider how to establish an overview of stakeholders engaged in capacity-building and foster regional efforts to identify how, where and by whom capacity-building efforts are conducted. Furthermore, the task team aims to support ECE and other regional efforts in establishing maturity models as a tool to assess capacity and progress.

## C. Task team on privacy and confidentiality

42. The task team on privacy and confidentiality aims to develop, in line with principle 5 of the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework, guidance and recommendations that consider emergent statistical and geospatial privacy and confidentiality issues. Led by France, its members include Finland, Germany, Mexico, Namibia, New Zealand and the United States.

43. In its work, the task team has acknowledged the importance of the nine strategic pathways of the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework and intends to provide its forthcoming recommendations and guidance in line with them. Through this approach, the task team also aims to strengthen the interlinkages between the two Frameworks. Furthermore, the task team has conducted a literature review to identify specific characteristics of geospatial information that are relevant to the management of privacy and confidentiality within national statistical offices, national geospatial information agencies and other relevant implementing agencies. This work has also benefited from rich existing literature on the topic of privacy and confidentiality of geospatial information, which has been further augmented by the national experiences of the task team.

44. The next steps for the task team include summarizing collected literature and national experiences, developing a survey to assess national practices and identify potential gaps and weaknesses, and providing recommendations that guide countries in strengthening aspects of privacy and confidentiality. In addition, the task team has established relationships with regional European initiatives, including the GEOSTAT 4 project and the Centre of Excellence on Statistical Disclosure Control of the European Commission.

## D. Towards the fifty-third session of the Statistical Commission

### Situating the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework

45. The efforts of the Expert Group in the intersessional period following the endorsement of the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework have enabled the Expert Group to examine the broader landscape in which the Framework now finds itself. In its report to the Committee of Experts at its tenth session, in August 2020 (see E/C.20/2020/28), the Expert Group examined the role of the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework [10] as an enabling framework for the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework. Furthermore, in its decision 10/106, the Committee of Experts requested the Expert Group to further develop the interlinkages between the Frameworks.

46. Through the sharing by its members of national experiences of implementing both the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework and the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework, the Expert Group has further identified the interlinked and interconnected nature of both Frameworks, noting that each fosters an enabling environment for the other.

47. Furthermore, strategic pathway 4, data, of the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework, one of its nine strategic pathways, is underpinned by the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework. With the focus of the Expert Group now on developing guidance for the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework, the Implementation Guide of the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework (part 2 of the Framework) offers practical guidance for Member States to develop their

[10] See https://igif.un.org and E/C.20/2018/16.

geospatial capacity. Accordingly, guided by its overarching role as the coordination group for all activities in the area of the integration of statistical and geospatial information, the Expert Group welcomes the ongoing development of the Implementation Guide, which simultaneously enables the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework to be implemented more easily while providing the Expert Group with a basis to build on.

48. The scoping papers illustrate how the Expert Group is taking steps to build on existing complementary work within both the statistical and geospatial communities, while providing practical guidance to Member States. Furthermore, through the survey developed by the task team on capacity-building, the awareness of both the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework and the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework will be assessed, and the future work of the task team on privacy and confidentiality will be guided and structured by the nine strategic pathways of the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework.

**Responding to the evolving dynamics of Member States**

49. Through the discussions that have emanated from the virtual meetings of the Expert Group, a variety of future needs have been identified and will be incorporated into the workplans of the task teams, as follows:

(a) Provision of guidance and recommendations on how the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework, in the dissemination of data from the censuses, can foster integration with non-official statistics and other forms of data, such as those from civil society. Potentially, this closer integration could be achieved through the use of common geographies;

(b) Promotion of the use of common standards and methodologies for the integration of statistical and geospatial information, which could include the collation of national examples of how the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework has been implemented;

(c) Support for regions to promote the implementation and operationalization of the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework in support of national development priorities and global agendas. The Expert Group intends to focus its efforts on supporting those who are currently being left behind, by encouraging the use of geospatial information in the production of geospatially enabled statistical data, including collating national experiences of how the Framework has been implemented.

# V. The impact of COVID-19

## A. The response of the Expert Group

50. 2020 was supposed to usher in a new decade of optimism and global progress. Notwithstanding the fact that global progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals remained uneven and the Goals were not on track to be met by 2030, the transformational opportunity of technological innovation to enable statistical and geospatial integration provided cautious optimism. Starting with the 2020 round of population and housing censuses and ending with the 2030 Agenda, the need for integrated statistical and geospatial information in this decade was clear, although not universally prioritized. However, with the emergence of COVID-19, the need for integrated statistical and geospatial information has now been articulated to the highest political levels, providing an opportunity for national statistical offices and national geospatial information agencies to collaborate to meet this demand.

51. The requirements of COVID-19 can include visual applications that record and report the spread of the virus, identifying hotspots or illustrating where resources are currently, or will be, needed. Demand for resources includes those for geospatially enabled statistical data; for greater resolution and common and small area geographies to provide precise location information; and for the provision of recommendations that ensure the privacy of individuals, in line with prevailing national and globally agreed guidelines. As the bridge between the statistical and geospatial communities, the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework can offer a mechanism that can enable and support national decision-making, irrespective of the fact that the mechanism has been developed to support the national response to global agendas, and not a global pandemic.

52. In the intersessional period, the Expert Group has taken steps to reflect on the new context provided by COVID-19, continuously learning from the implementation of the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework and by the many responses received from communication and promotion activities. This reflection has reaffirmed that the priorities and activities detailed within the workplan of the Expert Group are relevant to the immediate need of COVID-19 and to overarching national development priorities and global agendas.

53. Furthermore, through the sharing of experiences of the national response to COVID-19, the differing impacts of the response on national statistical offices and national geospatial information agencies has been discussed. Some countries have provided national statistical offices and national geospatial information agencies with improved financial and human resources to respond to COVID-19; others noted that resources had been allocated away from national statistical offices and national geospatial information agencies; and still others noted that unprecedented demand on resources has significantly stressed an “at capacity” statistical system.

54. Nonetheless, the Expert Group urges national statistical offices and national geospatial information agencies to articulate the importance of integrated statistical and geospatial information and to advocate for resources to implement the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework.

### B. The ongoing working modalities of the Expert Group in the light of COVID-19

55. Before COVID-19, the Expert Group convened plenary meetings on an approximately annual basis, augmented by regular quarterly meetings. Since March 2020, the Expert Group has continued its virtual quarterly meetings, with its task teams convening virtually when appropriate. For the coming intersessional period, these working arrangements will continue, as the Expert Group has an agreed workplan through to the following session of the Commission.

## VI. Summary

56. At the fifty-second session of the Statistical Commission, the need for integrated statistical and geospatial information is greater and more pressing than ever before. While an immediate focus is COVID-19, the current situation will be a temporary one. However, even without the global impact of COVID-19, progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals remained uneven, and the Goals were not on track to be met by 2030. Geospatially enabled statistical data can be transformational, not just for the response to COVID-19, but also to facilitate data-driven and evidence-based decision-making, supporting national development priorities, the 2020 round of population and housing censuses and the 2030 Agenda.

57. The Expert Group appreciates the considerable efforts already undertaken by countries and regions to implement and operationalize the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework and welcomes the support of countries, regional bodies and other relevant organizations from both the statistical and geospatial communities in its work. The Expert Group remains focused on developing guidance for countries to support the adoption and implementation of the Framework and invites the Commission to participate further in its work.

# VII. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission

58. **The Commission is invited to take note of the present report and note the progress made by the Expert Group in the integration of statistical and geospatial information, including on its workplan for 2020–2022.**