



# Economic and Social Council

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## Statistical Commission

### Fifty-fourth session

28 February–3 March 2023

Item 3 (l) of the provisional agenda\*

### Items for discussion and decision

## Working methods of the Statistical Commission

### Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2022/324 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Bureau of the Statistical Commission on the working methods of the Commission. In the report, the Bureau describes ongoing work on the review of Council resolution [2022/3](#), by which the Council updated the terms of reference of the Commission, and its applications to existing workstreams, and highlights areas for further work. The Bureau also highlights how the framework for groups adopted in 2020 is relevant to addressing the scope of the new terms of reference. The Bureau also provides a review of the multi-year programme of work in the light of the proposed revision to the Classification of Statistical Activities, originally developed by the Economic Commission for Europe (under agenda item 3 (j)), and presents a brief examination of the request to revisit the issue of equitable geographical distribution, pursuant to paragraph (g) of decision 53/105. The report also contains updates on other initiatives undertaken by the Bureau during the intersessional period in 2022 and 2023. The report is accompanied by a background document, containing a summary table of the mapping of the terms of reference. The Commission is invited to reflect on the review and its application to the work of the Commission. Action to be taken by the Commission is set out in section VI of the report.

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\* [E/CN.3/2023/1](#).



# Report of the Bureau on the working methods of the Statistical Commission: addressing the changing statistical and data ecosystem

## I. Introduction

1. The present report describes the work undertaken by the Bureau of the Statistical Commission pursuant to decision 53/105.
2. At its fifty-third session, the Statistical Commission supported the revision of the terms of reference of the Commission as a draft resolution to be recommended to the Economic and Social Council for adoption. On 8 June 2022, the Council adopted resolution [2022/3](#), entitled “Ensuring that the work in the field of statistics and data is adaptive to the changing statistical and data ecosystem”, by which it reaffirmed the Commission as the primary body for the coordination of the global statistical programmes in general and of the United Nations statistical and data-related system.
3. In its resolution [2022/3](#), the Economic and Social Council called upon the United Nations statistical and data-related system to report on work on statistics and data within all domains to the Statistical Commission, to enable the Commission to fulfil its function as the primary body responsible for the management of statistical information and governance of statistics and data. In the present report, the ongoing work on the review of the recently adopted resolution containing the updated terms of reference of the Commission, and its applications to existing workstreams, and highlighted areas for further work are expanded on. The report also highlights how the reference framework for groups under the Commission adopted in 2020 is relevant to addressing the scope of the new terms of reference.
4. The Commission periodically reviews its working methods, focusing on aspects of its structure and function as a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council. At the forty-ninth, fiftieth and fifty-first sessions of the Commission, the primary focus was on the city groups mechanism, including a comprehensive review of the structure and functions of all statistical groups, and on the endorsement of the reference framework for groups under the Commission.
5. Pursuant to paragraph (f) of decision 53/105 of the Commission, the Bureau revisited the review of the multi-year programme of work, which had been introduced at the thirty-first session of the Commission, in 2000, pursuant to Council resolution 1999/51, while taking into consideration the updated Classification of International Statistical Activities, presented under agenda item 3 (j) at the current session. The proposed revision to the multi-year programme of work is contained in the annex to the present report and, under agenda item 7, in document [E/CN.3/2023/32](#).
6. The present report includes a brief examination of the request to the Bureau to revisit the issue of equitable geographical distribution, pursuant to paragraph (g) of decision 53/105. The report also contains updates on other initiatives undertaken by the Bureau during the intersessional period.
7. The Commission is invited to reflect on the review and its application to the work of the Commission.

## II. Implementation of the terms of reference of the Commission

8. On 8 June 2022, the Economic and Social Council adopted resolution [2022/3](#), a significant milestone in reaffirming that the Commission is the primary body for the coordination of the global statistical programmes in general and of the United Nations

statistical and data-related system. Pursuant to that resolution, the Bureau initiated work on the implementation of the updated terms of reference.

9. As an initial step, a review of the resolution containing the updated terms of reference of the Commission and its applications against the existing workstreams was carried out by the Secretariat. The mapping was aimed at matching the scope of the updated terms of reference to the work of the Commission and the various groups operating under its auspices. Furthermore, the review highlighted the areas in which the work of the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat addressed the points raised in the updated terms of reference, and allowed the Bureau to make a few suggestions on ways to promote integration of the domains and innovative practices to address the changing needs of users of official statistics. Details of the mapping exercise are contained in a background document available on the Commission's website.

10. Previous reviews of the Commission's working methods, focusing on aspects of the structure and function of the subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council, provided a comprehensive review of the structure and functions of all statistical groups. The endorsed reference framework for groups under the Commission helped to align their functionality and work. In the review of the implementation of the resolution, the work of the groups under the auspices of the Commission provided most of the information. The review allowed an examination of the overlap between the workstreams of the Commission and the wider scope of the resolution, thus underscoring the importance and continued relevance of the past exercise.

11. Economic and Social Council resolution [2022/3](#) is furthermore aligned with the review of the Council and its subsidiary bodies, as called for in General Assembly resolution [75/290 A](#). The main purpose of the revision to the terms of reference of the Commission was to strengthen its role and ensure that it was responsive to the changing needs of the global statistical community.

12. As part of this workstream, the Bureau, with the Secretariat, is organizing a high-level side event on 18 January 2023 as part of the "road to the Commission". At the side event, implementation of the updated terms of reference will be examined, during which the following will be elaborated on:

(a) How the Commission can best carry out its role as the highest body of the global statistical system;

(b) Which areas need to be addressed and integrated in the work of the Commission;

(c) How the updated terms of reference can be applied to address the emerging issues of the changing statistical and data ecosystem, and how this is reflected in the multi-year programme of work;

(d) What makes a good Statistical Commission, including for the user.

13. The outcomes of the high-level side event on the implementation of the updated terms of reference will be presented to the Commission by the Chair and included in a background document.

### **III. Multi-year programme of work**

14. As is usual practice, the Bureau initiated a review of the multi-year programme of work as part of its preparations for the fifty-fourth session. As requested by the Commission in paragraph (f) of its decision 53/105, the Bureau reviewed the multi-year programme in the light of the proposed revision to the Classification of

Statistical Activities (under agenda item 3 (j)). The review allowed the Bureau to determine whether the current multi-year programme of work classification continued to adequately address the full scope of work undertaken by the Commission, especially given the newly adopted Council resolution [2022/3](#), which strengthens the work of the Commission.

15. The structure of the multi-year programme of work has been useful in organizing the workstreams of the Commission. In comparing its structure with the Classification of Statistical Activities (version 2.0) revision (see annex), the Bureau proposes an expansion from the current four main categories of agenda items to eight categories. As part of the proposed expansion, governance statistics, previously included under demographic and social statistics, was added as a separate category.

16. Within the update, data source items were included under domain 6 (business registers, population and housing censuses, household surveys, and civil registration and vital statistics) and not under one of the main pillars by subject. This reflects the changing statistical and data ecosystem in that data sources not only relate to the pillar under which they had previously been included but are also used for other topics. Furthermore, data sources, especially newer ones, are no longer topic- or subject-specific. This adjustment in the multi-year programme of work reflects the ongoing discussions regarding the horizontalization of data sources.

17. The expansion allows for greater distinction in the category “activities not classified by field” by placing the topics in one of three categories: cross-cutting domains; statistical infrastructure and methodology; and management and modernization of statistical systems. The final category would include topics that are specific to the Commission or to the work of the Division.

18. The list of agenda item categories is as follows:

- Demographic and social statistics
- Economic statistics
- Natural resources and environment statistics
- Governance statistics
- Cross-cutting domains
- Statistical infrastructure and methodology
- Management and modernization of statistical systems
- Statistical Commission/Statistics Division-specific items

19. The Bureau thanks the Classification of Statistical Activities task team and the Economic Commission for Europe for their work to update the Classification of International Statistical Activities.

## **IV. Working methods**

### **A. Agenda items for the fifty-fourth session of the Commission**

20. Traditionally, agenda items at the annual session of the Commission have been separated into agenda items “for discussion and decision” and agenda items “for information” only. For the fifty-fourth session, the Bureau will include a third category of documentation, “items for decision”. This new type of agenda item will allow more time to be allocated for discussion on agenda items under the “items for discussion and decision” category.

21. As is usual practice, agenda items listed under “items for discussion and decision” will be introduced individually. The Commission will debate the main elements of the work and decisions contained in the report and background documents for the agenda item, and it will consider a summary of the discussions on each report.

22. Agenda items listed as “for decision” only will include mainly reports related to the adoption of terms of reference of groups, endorsement of frameworks that have undergone global consultations within the global statistical community, and similar materials. They will be introduced individually, together with a summary, taking into consideration the written statements received prior to the intergovernmental session. Limited time will be allocated for interventions, as the Commission is not expected to further debate the agenda item.

23. As is usual practice, agenda items listed as “for information” will not be introduced, and the Commission is normally expected to take note of the information documents without further debate. Limited time will be allocated for interventions under the item. In the interest of time, and in accordance with past practice, the Commission will be invited to take note of the large number of information items en bloc.

## **B. Request to revisit the issue of equitable geographical distribution**

24. At its fifty-third session, the Commission “noted the request to the Bureau made by Suriname on behalf of Caribbean Community countries to also revisit the issue of equitable geographical distribution used for the composition of the 24 members of the Commission, reckoning with proper subregional representation and/or representation of small island developing States and least developed countries” (decision 53/105, para. (g)). During the intersessional period, the Bureau discussed the issue and looked in particular into a possible expansion of the Commission membership, which would clearly help to address the issue of proper subregional representation. It is noted that, for all substantive discussions, the Commission has an established practice, that all countries can actively and equally participate, especially in the working groups, irrespective of their status as a member or observer of the Commission. However, in the (rare) case of formal decision-making (voting) and with respect to the election of the Bureau, the rules and procedures for functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council require membership. The Bureau noted that some functional commissions of the Council (e.g. the Commission on Population and Development) had, at some point in the past, increased their original membership from 24 members to 47. In fact, the Commission is one of the smallest subsidiary bodies of the Council. The Bureau recommends that the Commission consider a draft resolution requesting the Council to increase the Commission’s membership. This is also considered opportune, in the light of the extended mandate and importance of the Commission as reflected in its revised terms of reference. The Bureau is aware that an increase in membership will have budgetary implications (additional travel costs), and therefore invites all statistical delegates to bring this issue to the attention of the relevant colleagues in their respective permanent missions. With the support of the Secretariat, the Bureau will prepare a draft resolution for the Commission to consider at its forthcoming session.

## **V. Other initiatives of the Bureau during the intersessional period**

### **A. Mainstreaming a gender perspective into the work of the Commission**

25. The Commission, at its fifty-third session, in 2022, supported the proposal of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics to establish an advisory group on mainstreaming a gender perspective into the work of the Commission to develop a plan for the implementation and monitoring of paragraph (b) of decision 51/115, in collaboration with other relevant subject matter experts. To support this work, the Division facilitated and contributed to discussions among experts at the international level working on gender statistics, as well as on environment and on trade statistics, to identify synergies of relevant groups working under the auspices of the Commission.

26. The outcomes of the above-mentioned consultations were presented and discussed at the sixteenth meeting of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group, which took place virtually from 12 to 14 December 2022 and was attended by gender statisticians as well as by experts working in the areas of environment and trade statistics in selected countries. The outcomes of the meeting will guide the work of the advisory group in 2023 as it identifies a proposal for mainstreaming a gender perspective into the two initial target areas, environment and trade, to be submitted for discussion by the Commission at its fifty-fifth session, in 2024.

### **B. Friends of the Chair group on social and demographic statistics**

27. Under agenda item 3 (b), Social statistics, the report of the Secretary-General on social statistics contains a summary of work undertaken in 2022 to initiate a new Friends of the Chair group on social and demographic statistics to launch the review of the social and demographic statistics pillar, pursuant to decision 53/105. Draft terms of reference, including the proposed initial scope of work, activities, deliverables and timeline for the group, based on consultations with Member States, regional commissions and partner agencies, will be available as a background document.

### **C. Normative work**

28. During the intersessional period, owing to competing demands, the normative work of the Commission was paused. The Bureau suggested that the work be extended into the 2023–2024 intersessional period.

## **VI. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission**

29. **The Commission is invited:**

(a) **To take note of the present report on the work of the Bureau during the intersessional period;**

(b) **To express its views on the implementation of the updated terms of reference;**

(c) **To express its views on the other initiatives undertaken by the Bureau.**

## Annex

**Proposed revision of the multi-year programme of work: review of  
the multi-year programme of work and the Classification of  
Statistical Activities (version 2.0)**

<i>List of topics, proposed revision to the multi-year programme of work, 2023–2027</i>	<i>Previous list of topics, multi-year programme of work, 2022–2026 (E/CN.3/2022/40)</i>	<i>Classification of Statistical Activities (version 2.0)</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<b>1. Demographic and social statistics</b>			
(a) Social statistics	1 (e)	100	
(b) Population/demographic statistics	1 (a)	101; 199	
(c) Gender statistics	1 (f)	503	
(d) Disability statistics, including Washington Group on Disability Statistics	1 (d)	504	
(e) Ageing-related statistics and age-disaggregated data, including Titchfield Group on Ageing- Related Statistics and Age-Disaggregated Data	1 (q)	504	
(f) Migration statistics	1 (j)	102	
(g) Refugee statistics, including statistics on internally displaced persons and stateless persons	1 (k)	102; 504	102 (internally displaced persons); 504 (statelessness statistics)
(h) Work and employment statistics	1 (l)	103	
(i) Poverty statistics	1 (g)	505	
(j) Education statistics	1 (m)	104	
(k) Health statistics	1 (c)	105	
(l) Human settlements statistics	1 (b)	108	
(m) Culture statistics	1 (n)	109	
<b>2. Economic statistics</b>			
(a) Economic statistics	2 (q)	2	New
(b) National accounts	2 (a)	201	
(c) Informal economy statistics	2 (o)	20101	
(d) Finance statistics	2 (k)	20103 (government finance statistics)	
(e) Environmental-economic accounting, including London Group on Environmental Accounting	3 (b)	20105	

<i>List of topics, proposed revision to the multi-year programme of work, 2023–2027</i>	<i>Previous list of topics, multi-year programme of work, 2022–2026 (E/CN.3/2022/40)</i>	<i>Classification of Statistical Activities (version 2.0)</i>	<i>Comments</i>
(f) Industrial statistics	2 (c)	202	
(g) Service statistics, including Voorburg Group on Service Statistics	2 (h)	202	
(h) Agricultural and rural statistics	2 (b)	20301; 507	20301 (agricultural statistics); 507 (rural statistics)
(i) Energy statistics, including Oslo Group on Energy Statistics	2 (e)	20302	
(j) Tourism statistics	2 (j)	20305	
(k) Business and trade statistics	2 (f)	204	
(l) International Comparison Programme	2 (l)	205	
(m) Price statistics, including Ottawa Group on Price Indices and Intersecretariat Working Group on Price Statistics	2 (m)	205	
(n) Statistics on science, technology and innovation	2 (n)	206	
<b>3. Natural resources and environment statistics</b>			
(a) Environment statistics	3 (a)	3	
(b) Disaster-related statistics	3 (d)	304	
<b>4. Governance statistics</b>			New
(a) Governance, peace and security statistics, including Praia Group on Governance Statistics	4 (q)	4	
(b) Crime and criminal justice statistics	1 (i)	40801	
(c) Statistics on drugs and drug use	1 (h)	40899	
<b>5. Cross-cutting domains</b>			
(a) Development indicators/Sustainable Development Goals	4 (i)	501 (sustainable development)	
(b) Statistics of human development	4 (b)	505	
(c) Climate change statistics	3 (c)	506	
(d) Digital trade and e-commerce statistics	2 (g)	508	
(e) Information and communications technology statistics	2 (i)	508	
<b>6. Statistical infrastructure and methodology</b>			
(a) Presentation of statistical data and metadata	4 (f)	601	



<i>List of topics, proposed revision to the multi-year programme of work, 2023–2027</i>	<i>Previous list of topics, multi-year programme of work, 2022–2026 (E/CN.3/2022/40)</i>	<i>Classification of Statistical Activities (version 2.0)</i>	<i>Comments</i>
(b) International statistical classifications	4 (d)	602	
(c) Business registers, including Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers	2 (d)	60301	
(d) Civil registration and vital statistics	1 (p)	60302 (registers of population)	
(e) Population and housing censuses	1 (a)	60401	
(f) Household surveys	1 (o)	60403	
(g) Common open standards for the exchange and sharing of data and metadata	4 (e)	605	
(h) Data science, including big data	4 (n)	607 (data science)	
(i) Integration of statistical and geospatial information	3 (m)	608	
(j) Open data	4 (r)	610 (data dissemination and communication)	
<b>7. Management and modernization of statistical systems</b>			
(a) Management and modernization of statistical systems	4 (s)	7	
(b) Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and principles governing international statistical activities	4 (c)	701	
(c) Data stewardship	4 (u)	701	
(d) Coordination of statistical programmes	4 (a)	707; 702	707 (international); 702 (national)
(e) National quality assurance frameworks	4 (l)	703 (quality management)	
(f) Statistical capacity development	4 (g)	708	
<b>8. Statistical Commission/Statistics Division-specific items</b>			
(a) Dissemination of statistics through the Statistics Division and its publications	4 (h)	–	
(b) Follow-up to the policy decisions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council	4 (j)	–	

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<i>List of topics, proposed revision to the multi-year programme of work, 2023–2027</i>	<i>Previous list of topics, multi-year programme of work, 2022–2026 (E/CN.3/2022/40)</i>	<i>Classification of Statistical Activities (version 2.0)</i>	<i>Comments</i>
(c) Working methods of the Statistical Commission	4 (k)	—	
(d) World Statistics Day	4 (o)	—	
(e) Regional statistical development	4 (p)	—	
(f) Programme questions (Statistics Division)	4 (t)	—	

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