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Report of the Network of Economic Statisticians

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 Network of Economic Statisticians to the Statistical Commission for discussion. The report contains a description of the Network's completed and ongoing sprints and the activities and deliverables of its work programme for 2023. The Commission is invited to express its views on the progress made by the Network and in its sprints and to endorse the proposed activities and deliverables of the work programme for 2023 covering the organizational sprint (implementation of the regional and global consultations on shared statistical priorities and collaborative arrangements), the data access sprint (organization of industry-specific studies for global value chains using firm-level data to advance methods, data access, principles of data access, and capacity-building in close cooperation with the private sector), the "beyond gross domestic product" sprint (exploration of the feasibility of a research agenda for a new integrated statistical system for measuring inclusive and sustainable well-being) and the sprint for the measurement of owner-occupied housing inflation in the consumer price index (implementation of a research programme comprising non-binding recommendations to include the costs of services provided by owner-occupied housing in the consumer price index). Action to be taken by the Commission is set out in paragraph 25 of the report.

* E/CN.3/2023/1.



Report of the Network of Economic Statisticians

I. Introduction

1. At its fifty-third session, held online from 28 February to 2 March and on 4 March 2022, the Statistical Commission adopted decision 53/118 (see [E/2022/24](#), chap. I.C), in which it:

(a) Welcomed the first report of the Network of Economic Statisticians ([E/CN.3/2022/19](#)) and commended the Network for the progress achieved in developing its terms of reference and workplan and organizing the three sprints on organization, data access and beyond gross domestic product (GDP);

(b) Welcomed the proposal of the Network to adopt sprints as its preferred working method to increase its ability to be agile and expedite the formulation of statistical responses to fast-evolving and emerging socioeconomic and environmental circumstances in a short time frame;

(c) Commended the Network for enabling North-South and South-South collaboration and dialogue in its activities;

(d) Recognized the efforts of the Network to connect the work of existing committees of experts, for example, the current work of the data access sprint with the work of the Committee of Experts on Business and Trade Statistics in global value chains;

(e) Requested the data access sprint to actively communicate with the private sector and develop collaborative frameworks and strategies to enable access to privately held data;

(f) Requested the beyond GDP sprint to increase the analytical value of methodological guidance on integrated well-being indicators and the harmonization of economic statistics with sociodemographic and environmental statistics, for example, through related regional training workshops and seminars;

(g) Approved the terms of reference of the Network and supported the proposal to include in the report of the Network to the Commission in 2023 a synthesis note summarizing the reports of the Commission on economic statistics to promote dialogue with and between the relevant statistical committees to determine shared priorities and actions while avoiding duplication of efforts;

(h) Approved the proposed activities and deliverables of the work programme of the Network for 2022, including the Global Forum on Economic Statistics and the related series of regional consultation sessions with users and stakeholders of the system of economic statistics.

2. The present report, the second of the Network of Economic Statisticians, provides an overview of the activities of the Network from the end of the fifty-third session of the Statistical Commission to the end of November 2022. Section II contains information on the progress of the Network in implementing its work programme in 2022 and on its proposed work programme for 2023. Section III provides details of the action to be taken by the Commission.

II. Progress made in 2022 and the work programme for 2023

3. The activities of the Network build on the recommendations of the Friends of the Chair group on economic statistics with regard to an agile, collaborative and responsive system of economic statistics based on four thematic workstreams: (a) networking (collaboration and user consultation); (b) transforming and

challenging the system (statistical infrastructure and operations, and data solutions); (c) enabling (institutional arrangements and governance); and (d) experimenting, integrating and documenting (statistical framework and methods).

4. With the intent of establishing an agile, collaborative and highly impactful approach to improving the responsiveness of the system of economic statistics to swiftly evolving policy demands, the Network facilitates better cooperation and networking among national statistical offices of all Member States, in close consultation with international and regional statistical organizations and bodies. Better cooperation and networking, as further reinforced by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, will enable national statistical offices to reimagine their business models, develop innovative and coordinated statistical programmes and adopt best practices and working methods, in collaboration with other government agencies and representatives of academia and private and non-governmental organizations, to produce trusted and timely statistics catering to user demands.

5. Moreover, the Network, through its sprints, facilitates better understanding of existing data solutions through trusted services provided by global and regional statistical infrastructure, for data collection and access, the examination of existing statistical methods with a view to improving data quality and international comparison, and the development of proposals for measuring inclusive and sustainable well-being.

6. In addition, the Network has undertaken a series of user consultations and promoted communication and partnerships through regional webinars for the purpose of helping the system of economic statistics to identify emerging themes and common priorities and discover and address duplications and gaps in the work programmes of statistical groups and entities. It is expected that continued dialogue will enable the system to operate coherently, collaboratively and inclusively for the different actors involved.

7. Furthermore, the Network will continue to facilitate a better and more responsive system of economic statistics that will pivot towards integrated economic statistics by extending the statistical framework in support of the measurement of the world's swiftly evolving economies and enabling experiments with the integration of the rapidly changing information demands of policymakers. This pivot should also allow the system of economic statistics to achieve improved granularity and timeliness, as well as better integration of the measures of the economy, society and the environment, to inform the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and address issues raised in the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Our Common Agenda" (A/75/982).

8. In that report, the Secretary-General makes explicit reference to the need to take collective action to meet current challenges, an important aspect of which is bringing together Member States, international financial institutions and statistical, science and policy experts to identify a complement or complements to GDP that will measure inclusive and sustainable growth and prosperity, building on the work of the Statistical Commission. In addition to identifying complementary measures, participants in the process would need to agree on pathways for national and global accounting systems to include additional measurements and to establish systems for regular reporting as part of official statistics.

9. The Network has been working towards bringing together that report and the recommendations of the Friends of the Chair group on economic statistics, as approved by the Statistical Commission. The Network will achieve the above-mentioned expected outcomes in multiple ways by better networking and establishing user-centred partnerships in the creation of global data assets; better challenging the system through use cases in co-production and co-investment; better enabling the system

through improved working methods among statistical groups; and better documenting the international conceptual and practical guidance on methodological standards and collective scaling of capacity-building and training programmes. These activities can be combined with early implementation through regular experimentation with and testing of statistical standards to meet rapidly evolving user demand.

10. The four workstreams are serving to address the following lessons learned from the three rounds of global COVID-19 surveys of national statistical offices:

(a) That low-income and lower-middle-income countries are ready to engage with international partners to meet emerging demands in terms of the use of new data sources, methods and technologies supported by appropriate assistance and funding to overcome their major impediments;

(b) That the majority of national statistical offices across all income groups see a need for co-investment in:

(i) The production of granular data through the linking of microdata from surveys and administrative sources through registers of people and businesses and the integration of statistical and geospatial data;

(ii) The production of high-frequency statistics and indicators through the use of big data and data science for high-frequency statistics.¹

11. With its focus on action to improve the system of economic statistics through networking and engagement with existing statistical groups and entities, rather than creating another layer of governance, the Network has used sprints as the most appropriate working method. Sprints have not only increased the speed of development of the system for shared priorities but also enhanced the Network's ability to act in an agile manner to formulate statistical responses to rapidly evolving socioeconomic and environmental circumstances by enabling the Network to undertake a set amount of work in a short time frame to deliver specific deliverables relating to shared priorities. The sprints have also facilitated the identification of emerging themes and priorities and enabled the discovery and addressing of duplication and gaps in the programmes of work of statistical groups and entities.

12. Four sprints had been completed successfully at the time of drafting the present report. The organizational sprint, led by Statistics Canada, took the work forward on workstream (a), "Networking (collaboration and user consultation)" and workstream (c), "Enabling (institutional arrangements and governance)". The data access sprint, led by Statistics Netherlands, advanced the work on workstream (b), "Transforming and challenging the system (statistical infrastructure and operations, and data solutions)", while the sprint dealing with work on "beyond GDP", led by the Bureau of Economic Analysis of the United States of America and the Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, as well as the sprint dealing with the measurement of owner-occupied housing inflation in the consumer price index, led by Statistics Canada, developed the work on workstream (d), "Experimenting, integrating and documenting (statistical framework and methods)".

¹ The survey of national statistical offices during the COVID-19 pandemic was conducted by the World Bank and the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, in coordination with the five regional commissions. Overall, 149 offices (76 per cent) participated in at least one of the three rounds of the survey in 2020. For more information, see <https://covid-19-response.unstatshub.org/statistical-programmes/covid19-nso-survey>.

A. Organizational sprint

13. The four meetings of the participants in the organizational sprint were held between November 2021 and February 2022. The essence of this sprint was the formal launch of the Network, the approval of its terms of reference and the establishment of its working methods. In addition, participants developed a two-year workplan in which they identified the thematic sprints to be implemented by the Network on the basis of recognized statistical priorities and planned a series of consultations to seek input from regional commissions regarding their pressing statistical matters. The three thematic sprints carried out were the data access sprint, the “beyond GDP” sprint and the sprint for the measurement of owner-occupied housing inflation in the consumer price index. Summaries of those sprints, with an emphasis on their outcomes, are provided below. Moreover, the Network organized its first formal meeting, on 1 November 2022, to continue the planning that had begun with the organizational sprint. The participants in the meeting reviewed the work carried out to date and discussed and approved the workplan for 2023. The workplan will serve as the basis for the next series of thematic sprints, regional and global consultations with expert groups, and other work projects targeting improved statistical collaboration and the development of new and better indicators that help to address emerging policy needs. The two-year rolling workplan will include the activities and outputs related to the three sprints and regional and global consultations held in 2022, the details of which are presented in section II.A–E. In addition, interest has been expressed in implementing a sprint on branding and communication to promote the Network to a wide audience by exploring ideas such as branding and the enabling of knowledge-sharing among national statistical offices regarding the structure, objectives and operations of their communications activities. Moreover, the Network will continue to monitor emerging areas of user demand to complement its work on inflation, global value and supply chains, and inclusive and sustainable well-being.

B. Data access sprint

14. In early 2022, a sprint regarding access to privately held data was organized by the joint task team on the global facilitation of access to privately held data, for which the task team reported to both the Network of Economic Statisticians and the Committee of Experts on Big Data and Data Science for Official Statistics. The team is led by Statistics Netherlands. The main objective of the sprint was to explore user needs, relevant data providers and relevant partnerships, which would help to gain greater insight into certain global value chains. This included taking steps towards developing a negotiation strategy with private data holders that leads to the successful use of new data sources for official statistical purposes. In other words, the strategy entailed starting from an economic statistics information need and moving, via the identification of potential privately held data sources and the articulation of specific data needs in close cooperation with private data holders, to concrete requests for relevant data. The sprint attracted a wide audience in terms of disciplines (e.g. economics, data science and managerial), expertise and nationalities, with more than 100 participants representing 57 countries (from the global South and North) and 13 international organizations.

15. Five specific use cases were identified for pursuing the process of building a relationship with private data holders: (a) a tourism industry use case, led by Maldives; (b) a semiconductor industry use case, led by the Netherlands, (c) an e-commerce use case, led by the United Kingdom; (d) a retail industries use case, led by the United Arab Emirates; and (e) a horticultural industry use case, led by Colombia. Since their identification, good progress has been made on the formulation

of a workplan for the use cases. The workplans are based on an agreed template with four pillars, in order to articulate clearly what is expected from the use cases in terms of outcomes on the basis of data access, methodology, user needs and capacity-building. The use cases show that building a win-win relationship with private data providers requires time, perseverance and sustained effort to create trust and establish collaborative processes.

16. In 2023, the Network will continue to support the joint task team to build on the results of the use cases. In addition, in collaboration with the task team on training, competencies and capacity development of the Committee of Experts on Big Data and Data Science for Official Statistics and with the Committee of Experts on Business and Trade Statistics, the group will further explore best practices for sharing the knowledge acquired through the sprint and the use cases with the statistical community. Moreover, the Network will work with the leads of the use cases to make progress on their specific workplans.

C. “Beyond gross domestic product” sprint

17. While traditional measures of economic performance will always have a place, there is a gap between the information contained in aggregate GDP and what is important for the general public’s well-being and the contributions and conditions of nature. Given that GDP is not a measure of well-being, this implies a need to work towards the development of a statistical system that complements measures of market activity with measures centred on key aspects of people’s well-being, including inclusiveness and sustainability. The “beyond GDP” sprint served to identify numerous approaches, frameworks and specific measures that have been put forward within and beyond the economic and social statistics domains, such as the human development index, inclusive wealth, National Transfer Accounts, comprehensive wealth and the multidimensional vulnerability index for small island developing States. The broad aim of the sprint was to scope the work carried out in these domains internationally, identify best practices and propose areas of high priority for research on measures for inclusive and sustainable well-being. The sprint comprised six meetings held between March and May 2022 and brought together a large and varied group of participants, including representatives from national statistical offices around the world and international organizations as well as independent scholars. It is proposed that, once initiatives and priorities have been mapped, existing work on the multidimensional framework for integrated statistics would be amplified and specific, contained research areas would be articulated in subsequent sprints from which internationally coordinated work would produce substantial additional value in closing the gaps in the measurement of inclusive and sustainable well-being.

18. While the theme of “beyond GDP” had a broad scope, the Network has summarized the findings of the six sprint meetings and made concrete proposals in a prospectus (available as background document) for further work with designated partners on two missing components of a proposed integrated statistical system for inclusive and sustainable well-being; a new System of Population and Social Accounts to complement the System of National Accounts and the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, and a Central Framework for Inclusive and Sustainable Well-being.

19. The proposals documented in the “beyond GDP” prospectus were reviewed by the full membership at the first Network meeting, held on 1 November 2022, and presented for discussion and feedback at an informal Network meeting, held on 9 November 2022, in Brussels, as well as at the Global Conference on Macroeconomic Statistics for the Future, held on 11 November 2022, also in Brussels. In addition, the proposed integrated statistical system for inclusive and sustainable

well-being was the subject of the regional consultations on regional statistical priorities and “beyond GDP” initiatives scheduled in October and November 2022 (see section II.E below). The outcomes of the global and regional “beyond GDP” consultations are contained in a background document.

20. In 2023, further work on the proposed integrated statistical system is needed. The Network considers it essential that the Friends of the Chair group on social and demographic statistics, in close consultation with the sociodemographic statistics community, reflect on the wider need for renewed investigation of the purpose, scope and policy applications of the proposed new system for sociodemographic accounting. The Network could offer active support to the group by facilitating access to the results of the considerable progress made on the various subsystems of the accounts and data sets produced by agencies, countries and expert networks in the economic statistics domain when the group performs a mapping exercise and audit evaluation of what the statistical community is doing in the area of social and demographic statistics. In addition, the Network could support the group in formulating a work programme to develop sociodemographic accounts and statistics for measures for inclusive and sustainable well-being, in partnership with the Statistics Division, the Population Division and specialized custodian agencies of specific subsystems of the proposed new system. Similarly, the Network proposes to take forward the work on the proposed Central Framework for Inclusive and Sustainable Well-being in the three thematic areas of well-being, social inclusion and sustainability with identified leads, partner agencies and countries, which have been vital in advancing the envisaged scope, purpose and policy applications of the Framework.

21. Being a global multidimensional group, the Network considers it vital that the proposed integrated statistical system for inclusive and sustainable well-being become a shared project jointly developed with the economic, sociodemographic and environmental statistics communities of the global South and North. Therefore, in 2023, the Network proposes to work in partnership with key experts from all three communities, given the multidimensional nature of the integrated statistical system.

D. Sprint for the measurement of owner-occupied housing inflation in the consumer price index

22. The sprint for the measurement of owner-occupied housing inflation in the consumer price index, which consisted of three meetings in the second, third and fourth quarters of 2022, explored the various approaches used by national statistical offices in this context, as well as the challenges associated with each method. The first and second meetings provided an opportunity for various national statistical offices to present their experience with owner-occupied housing inflation in the consumer price index while bringing in the perspective of users such as the Bank of Canada and the European Central Bank. The third and final meeting was a corollary to the discussion that was aimed at drawing high-level conclusions as well as putting forth practical next steps for improving the quality and comparability of consumer price indices with the inclusion of owner-occupied housing inflation. Participants endorsed the proposed next step of having the Ottawa Group on Price Indices and the Intersecretariat Working Group on Price Statistics work jointly to explore a harmonized method for measuring owner-occupied housing inflation in the consumer price index. In addition, the same groups are entrusted with further refinement of existing methods described in the Consumer Price Index Manual for the treatment of owner-occupied housing inflation, as clarity is needed to guide practitioners.

E. Global and regional consultations

23. User consultation and communication with the statistical and policy community are an essential Network workstream for ensuring that the workplan for 2023 meets the priorities of national statistical systems, including the priorities of the global South. The consultation process consisted of a series of Network webinars organized jointly with regional commissions to determine the priorities for their regional statistical systems. Webinars were held in 2022 with the Economic Commission for Europe, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, and a joint session was held with the Economic Commission for Europe and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. In addition, Network members were invited to present the findings of the Network's "beyond GDP" sprint in dedicated sessions and events organized by the regional commissions. The webinars, sessions and events covered the regional "beyond GDP" initiatives in detail and allowed for the provision of feedback on the Network's findings and proposals.

24. In 2023, the Network will continue the regional consultations through dedicated regional Network events, the participation of Network members in events organized by regional commissions or agencies and the participation of regional experts in future Network sprints. Moreover, the Network will intensify its global consultations with steering groups, committees and other expert groups in seeking networking, co-production and co-investment opportunities for organizing and participating in global events. The global and regional consultations will extend beyond the scope of economic statistics, given the priority of advancing the integrated statistical system for inclusion and sustainable well-being, with its multidisciplinary and multidimensional nature. A synthesis note summarizing the reports of the Commission on economic and other statistics in order to facilitate these consultations has been prepared as a background document.

III. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission

25. **The Commission is invited:**

(a) **To express its views on the progress made by the Network and its sprints;**

(b) **To endorse the work programme of the Network for 2023 covering the following workstreams:**

(i) **Implementation of data access use cases of industry-specific studies of global value chains using privately held data to advance methods and principles of data access in close cooperation with the private sector;**

(ii) **Exploration of the feasibility of a research agenda for a new integrated statistical system for measuring inclusive and sustainable well-being, in accordance with the outcome of the "beyond GDP" sprint;**

(iii) **Implementation of the recommendations of a research programme focused on including the costs of services provided by owner-occupied housing in the consumer price index and the joint exploration by the Ottawa Group on Price Indices and the Intersecretariat Working Group on Price Statistics of a harmonized method for measuring owner-occupied housing service costs in the consumer price index;**

(iv) Continuation of the regional and global consultations on shared statistical priorities and collaborative arrangements, and the synthesis note on the reports of the Commission on economic and other statistics.
