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Items for discussion and decision: Data and indicators for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

**The Collaborative on the Use of Administrative Data for Statistics:
practical experience exchange and tool developments**
<u>Prepared by Collaborative on Administrative Data</u>

The Collaborative on the Use of Administrative Data for Statistics:

Practical experience exchange and tool developments

Overview

This background document provides an overview of the work of the Collaborative on the Use of Administrative Data for Statistics (Collaborative).

The document has three main parts:

1. A summary of key achievements in 2021, with an emphasis on tools and guidance materials that have been developed for the benefit of the statistical community
2. A more detailed overview of the work of the Collaborative, and related activities
3. A brief overview of preliminary plans for continued work in 2022

The homepage of the Collaborative provides general information and also contains many of the tools and guidance materials that are highlighted in this document. Please visit the page here: https://unstats.un.org/capacity-development/admin-data/. Some elements of the website is also available in Spanish.

> **Membership**
> The Collaborative is open to new members who want to participate in the experience exchange and learn from others. Interest can be expressed through written statements or by contacting the co-facilitating agencies, UN Statistics Division (UNSD, represented by Inter-Regional Adviser Vibeke O. Nielsen, vibeke.nielsen@un.org) or the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD, represented by Policy Manager Karen Bett, kbett@data4sdgs.org).

1. Key achievements

From the beginning of the Collaborative in June 2020, its members have agreed to focus the work on practical experience exchange and learning across countries and organizations, primarily focusing on cross-cutting and process-oriented challenges related to the use of administrative data sources for statistics production. The achievements of 2021 are the result of this approach. Below is a brief overview of the work, including practical tools and guidance materials that have been developed as part of the work of the Collaborative.

i. Active experience exchange and learning

Throughout the year, there have been numerous activities focusing on learning exchange. Members have actively participated in task team discussions, all member meetings and expert clinics and external events. They have contributed to the development of learning materials, country case studies and blogs. While the activity levels of the members differ, which can be linked to this informal collaboration-based and virtual format being a new one to many countries, there has been a positive increase in engagement. The development of Guiding

[Principles](#) has been helpful in the process of having a common understanding of the work. The engagement around the practical tools and guidance documents has been particularly high, which shows that need of many members for materials that can help more directly in their daily work.

ii.   Inventory of resources

The inventory of resources related to use of administrative data was created at the beginning of 2021. First as a response to member's request to get an overview of already available guidance materials before new ones were developed, and later also to help share experiences from countries and other partners. The inventory was updated with a new webpage structure in the first half of 2021, and it has different filters to easily select materials based on specific interest and needs (see filter categories to the right). Around 90 different resources are currently available, and more are in the process of being added.

A key category for many users is the type of resource, where they can choose between case study, e-learning/webinar, international guideline, report, seminar and workshops and tool. Other selection options include country or organization that developed the tool, statistical domain and language(s) the resource is available in.
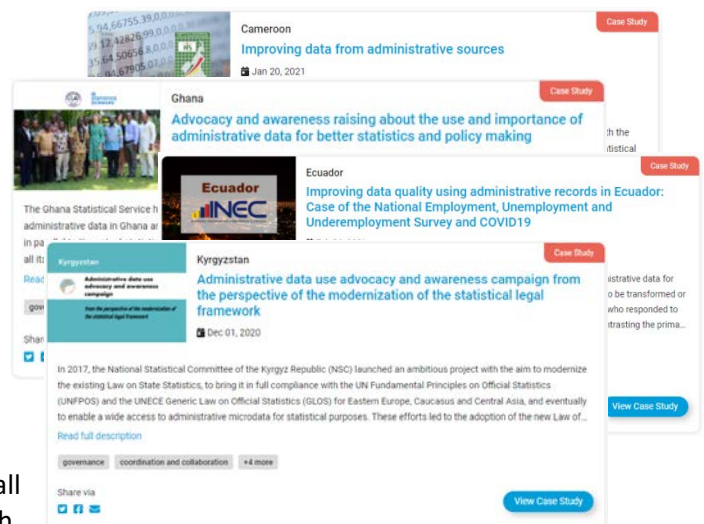
The materials have been provided by members through a collective approach and with support from consultants who have collected information and interviewed country representatives for the country case studies. You can access the inventory here: https://unstats.un.org/capacity-development/admin-data/Inventory

iii.   Case studies from countries

In the course of 2021, a number of additional case studies from countries have been added to the inventory of resources, with more than 25 case stu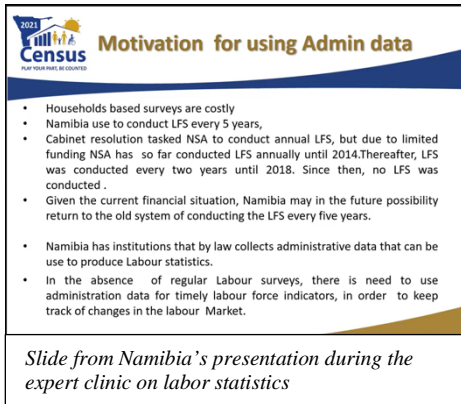dies currently available from all continents. They cover a variety of topics from advocacy and outreach work, legal arrangements, processing and linking of the data, data quality assessment and assurance, technical infrastructure work and other approaches related to the use of administrative data in statistics production. The case studies also provide a good variation in thematic areas of work, including labor, education, health and many others. The main descriptions of all the case studies are available in Spanish and English, but only those from Latin America are fully available in Spanish. It is an aim of the Collaborative to also make materials available in French.

iv.   Expert clinics and blogs

The expert clinics have two goals: experience sharing to the wider community, and informal exchange between the contributing countries and organizations. They cover a specific topic, often selected by a member of the Collaborative, with the first hour dedicated to presentation by each contributor of their experiences. These presentations are recorded, and the videos are later shared on the webpage of the Collaborative.

Slide from Namibia's presentation during the expert clinic on labor statistics

In the second hour, the contributors have an informal exchange, responding to questions from each other and sharing experiences. It is the aim that this can lead to informal follow ups between the participants after the clinic, creating a network of experts that can reach out to each other as needed.

So far, the collaborative has organized four expert clinics. One on use of administrative data sources used for labor statistics (Namibia, Denmark, Norway, Colombia, Uruguay and ILO contributed), one on data quality in administrative data use (Colombia, Canada, Cameroon, Norway and Slovenia shared their approaches), one on interoperability (Uruguay, Ecuador, Morocco and UK shared experiences) and one on the collaboration overall with administrative data owners (with contributions from Palestine, Ghana, Malaysia and Vanuatu). Two clinics can already be found on the webpages of the Collaborative and the other two will be uploaded in the first half of February 2022.

Another approach to experience sharing that has been explored are blogs. One blog was published in conjunction to the one-year anniversary of the Collaborative. A second blog was developed related to the expert clinic on data quality and a third is being prepared on the use of Data science to enhance the use of administrative data for statistical purposes. The blogs can/will be accessible from the main page of the website.

v.   Self-assessment tool of legal frameworks

Access to administrative data sources is a challenge to most countries and having a legal framework that facilitates access is important. As part of the discussions of task team 1 of the Collaborative that focuses on advocating for data access, it was proposed to develop a self-assessment tool that includes questions on current statistical legislation of a country regarding the access and use of administrative data for statistical purposes. The survey, at present structured in an Excel form, starts with a set of background questions regarding the law and a few aspects of the governance of the NSS, followed by questions

on various aspects of the statistical law that, directly or indirectly, contribute to facilitate the access and use of administrative data.
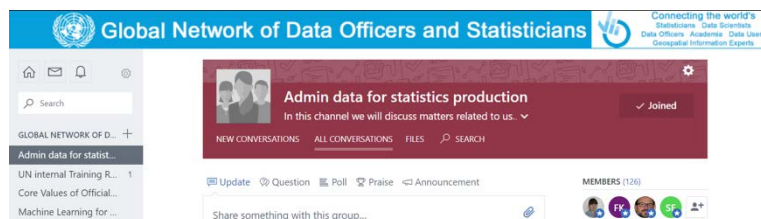
The self-assessment tool was piloted with 16 countries, most of which are members of the Collaborative. They provided inputs on areas to improve, but generally were very positive about the tool. While responses were sent back to the co-facilitators of the Collaborative, responses remain confidential. A guidance on how to self-assess responses was recently added to the tool, to make it less dependent on external feedback. The tool will become available on the webpages of the Collaborative in the first half of February 2022.

vi.   MoU guidance and template

Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) between the administrative data owner and the NSO also play an important role in facilitating access to administrative data sources, independently of the legal framework. MoUs can help formalize and structure the data transfer and will make the access less dependent on personal relations, which many countries presently rely on for the access to data. In discussions of the Collaborative, particularly the ones under task team 1, countries asked for examples and guidance on how to set up MoUs. Based on this, a guidance and template document was developed. It includes an overview of various elements to consider when agreeing on a MoU, including frequency and mode of data transfer, specification of variables and metadata and level of detail of the data and related concerns around confidentiality and security. The guidance is also accompanied by a template MoU that can be used as a starting point for conversations between NSOs and data owners. The MoU guidance and template will become available on the webpages of the Collaborative in the first half of February 2022.

vii.   Network of exchange on Yammer

To further facilitate informal exchange, the Collaborative also set up a sub-group on the Global Network of Data Officers and Statisticians on Yammer. It has over 100 members.

viii.   Other ongoing activities

In addition to the above, work is also underway on other topics. Task team 2 is currently focusing on experience exchange around standards, concepts and definitions and an initial note on some of these experiences is in progress. This is expected to be further developed into a guidance note in the course of 2022.

As many countries are looking to the Nordic countries because of their long experience with using administrative data for statistics production, a video is currently in its final stages of development that presents the Nordic register model, combining interviews with register experts, animation and storytelling from four of the countries: Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

An e-learning course on the use of administrative data for statistics production, primarily aimed towards staff working in ministries and agencies is also in development. The course will provide a general introduction to working with administrative data and cover the basics of cooperation agreements, mapping of data sources as well as assessment and assurance of quality and data linking. The course development is possible mainly thanks to a UNSD Development Account project that supports eight countries in improving the use of administrative data sources, and which also includes funding for the development of the e-learning course. More details about this project can be found in section two of this report.

2. Overview of the Collaborative and related project

Administrative data collected by governments and service providers in the course of their day-to-day operations is an increasingly important source for the production of official statistics. Many countries are, however, still encountering challenges in this process, from accessing the data, to processing and quality assuring the data, linking them with other sources and ensuring confidential and secure processes. Responding to this need to further improve processes and learning from others, the United Nations Statistics Division and the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data jointly initiated a multi-stakeholder Collaborative in May 2020. It includes more than 25 countries as well as roughly the same number of regional and international agencies. Objectives and guiding principles have been jointly formulated to guide the work.

Membership

To ensure that the guidance and training materials are readily applicable in a broad range of settings and national contexts, the Collaborative includes technical experts from developed and developing countries and draws on the expertise of UN regional and specialized agencies and other organizations and initiatives.

As of January 2022, the Collaborative has members from over twenty-five National Statistical Offices (NSO), from a number of regional bodies, international agencies and a few non-governmental organizations. Membership is open to other actors, particularly to countries who want to increase and improve their use of administrative data for statistical purposes. While the main representatives from countries are from NSOs, they are encouraged to, as much as possible, also involve and engage the Ministries, Departments and Agencies that own and use the administrative data in their countries.

Structure

The Collaborative is co-facilitated by UNSD and GPSDD. Much of the work since its initiation has been structured under three task teams:
- Task team 1: Institutional framework, coordination and partnerships
- Task team 2: Data management and standardization
- Task team 3: Technical interoperability and linking

The work in the task teams is led by staff of UNSD and GPSDD jointly with two or three country co-leads. At present, task team 1 is co-led by Chile, Denmark and Kyrgyzstan, task team 2 by Bhutan, Namibia and Norway and task team 3 by Ecuador and Uruguay. The country co-leads meet once a month to exchange information on ongoing work and to provide feedback and input to the co-facilitators on more general strategic development work including outreach work and planning ahead.

Funding

Much of the work has been carried out through pro-bono contributions from the co-facilitating and member countries and organizations. UNSD has, however, been able to secure some funds for consultancies and contracting to help upgrade the website and develop some of the materials highlighted above. These are funds that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) makes available for capacity development work. UNSD is one of several divisions under DESA. The funding was split between the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation and the UN Development Account Tenth tranche on Statistics and Data. The latter is an innovative Programme implemented jointly by ten UN secretariat organizations capitalizing on their technical capacities and comparative advantages

Development Account 13: Administrative data for disaggregated Sustainable Development Goals indicators in Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America

UNSD applied for funding under the Development Accounts structure of DESA before the Collaborative was established, but with very much of the same aim: to support countries in a cross-cutting and process-oriented manner in increasing the use of administrative data sources for statistics production.

The project started in April 2021 and will run until June 2024. It has a total budget of around 600 000 USD and is implemented by UNSD with active contributions from UN regional commissions and UN Resident Coordinator Offices (UN RCOs). In 2021, most of the time was spent to initiate the work and identify priorities together with the eight project countries.

While the main aim is to focus on the processes overall, a small number of thematic areas have been selected jointly with each country: Cameroon (SDG16 and refugees), Namibia (agriculture, environment and labor) and Tanzania (CRVS) in Africa; Bhutan (education and health) and Sri Lanka (businesses) in Asia; and Chile (population register), Dominican Republic (environment and disaster risk reduction) and Ecuador (stunting) in Latin America. While focused on administrative data, the project is in many ways following the Data for Now approach.

Through the initiation conversations, it has been confirmed that many of the countries have similar challenges and much of the implementation is and will be focusing primarily on the cross-cutting and process-oriented work, including: advocacy and legal frameworks, quality assessment and assurance, data linking and IT infrastructure and security.

In addition to the country work, a key output of the project is the development of an e-learning course on administrative data sources for statistics. Through the engagement both in the Collaborative and with project countries, it has been highlighted that there is a need for a course

that is primarily targeted towards staff in the ministries and agencies that collect, process and use the administrative data. The course is currently in initial stages of development and is planned to contain 8 modules. It is aimed to complement a more technically focused e-learning course on administrative data aimed at statisticians currently under development by the Inter-American Development Bank.

Having such a project in parallel to the work of the Collaborative provides useful input and enable synergies. The project benefits from the experience exchange and learning materials of the Collaborative and the Collaborative benefits from the materials that are being developed as part of the project.

3. Plans for 2022

Several of the activities presented above will continue in 2022.

UNSD, GPSDD and the co-leads are also in the process of developing a workplan for the coming one to two years to make the work more predictable to members. Members will also be asked to provide input and engage in the further detailing and prioritization of the workplan. The level of activity will be guided by the availability of resources, both in terms of focal points from the member organizations and of the funding that can be secured.

While it is expected that the task teams will remain, the implementation of activities may be structured more along temporary workstreams that are established for each tool or guidance material specifically, and once finalized, the workstream is closed and another one established instead, based on priorities set. The aim of this approach is to bring active engagement from the thematic area expert around the concrete topic of discussion. Some workstreams may be cutting across the task teams, such as a proposed workstream on the e-learning course, others may be more specifically linked to the scope of one task team. It will be a collective decision how to prioritize which workstreams to initiate.