

Statistical Commission  
Fifty-second session  
1–3 and 5 March 2021  
Item 3(a) of the provisional agenda

Background document  
Available in English only

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

**Collaborative measures on improving knowledge on the use of administrative data for statistical purposes**

Prepared by Collaborative on administrative data

# Collaborative measures on improving knowledge on the use of administrative data for statistical purposes

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. There is an urgent need to strengthen the capacity of national statistical systems to leverage the use of administrative data for statistical purposes, in order to fill gaps in the data available to policy and decision makers to monitor progress and implement the 2030 Agenda, and to address the emerging challenges and crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Responding to this need, the United Nations Statistics Division and the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data jointly initiated a multi-stakeholder Collaborative in May 2020. It includes a number of countries as well as regional and international agencies.

## **Objective**

A key objective of the Collaborative is to strengthen the capacity of countries to use administrative data sources for statistical purposes across thematic areas and throughout the business process. The work of the Collaborative will build on work already carried out by its members, and other actors and groups.

It aims to be a platform for sharing resources, tools, best practices and experiences, and contribute to raise awareness among all members of national statistical systems about the benefits of sharing and combining administrative sources to enhance the quality, timeliness, coverage and level of disaggregation of statistical data.

Members of the Collaborative will work together in a coherent and cross-cutting manner to address both urgent and longer-term needs around the access and use of administrative data for statistical purposes, building on advances made in various sectors and by different partners.

The work of the Collaborative is also expected to inform regular updates and revisions of the Handbook on the Management and Organization of National Statistical Systems ([E/CN.3/2021/13](#))

## **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 2021, the Collaborative has members from over twenty National Statistical Offices (NSO), from a number of regional bodies, international agencies and a few non-governmental organizations. A full list of current members can be found in Annex 2 of this document. 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 owners of the administrative data in their countries.

## **Structure**

After an initial period where members discussed the overall aim and focus of the Collaborative, it was agreed to structure the work in three task teams with the following focus:

- 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 GPSSD 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 Namibia and Norway and task team 3 by Ecuador and Uruguay.

Task teams meet approximately once a month, while co-leads, GPSSD and UNSD meet more often to coordinate activities and plans.

## **Activities in 2020**

### *Initiation and survey*

The first meeting of the initial members of the Collaborative took place on May 27 2020. In this and subsequent meetings, the overall objective and focus of work were discussed. Members agreed that it would be key to work across different thematic areas and share experiences and learning, focusing on the process of increasing the use of administrative data overall. There were, however, many different suggestions on what to prioritize. It was therefore agreed to prepare a survey to get a better understanding of the priorities of each member. As members already had agreed that a key objective would be to share experiences and build on materials already available, the survey also asked members to specify key resources as well as concrete practical examples or case studies from their own countries.

### *Task teams*

The survey results showed that most areas listed were of interest, as almost all categories came back with 80 % or more having indicated that it was important to them. The agreement therefore became to rather split the focus of work into three task teams that would look at different stages in the process and with different focus of expertise. The work of the task teams is described in Annex 1 of this document. All members were asked to specify which task teams

they wanted to contribute to. Some have selected only one task team, while others have representatives in all task teams.

The task teams started meeting in September 2020 and have, on average, met once a month. The meetings have been used to further prioritize activities and potential materials to be developed. At the same time, the task team meetings have also provided an opportunity for exchange of experiences, where in most cases at least one or two countries have presented their approaches and learning for the topic prioritized.

### *Inventory of resources*

From the beginning, members agreed to build on what was already available, create learning across thematic areas (i.e. CRVS, business, education, health and other sectors) and avoid duplication. As many members only knew about materials for a specific thematic area or for a specific region, it was agreed that a key starting point for the development of new materials would be to create an inventory of resources relevant to the use of administrative data for statistical purposes available among members. The inventory was going to include international guidelines, regional and national reports, tools, courses and practical examples of implementation from countries.

The practical examples, or case studies, was an important feature as many countries expressed interest in learning from the experiences of others, seeing how they solved issues that they were working on themselves, while acknowledging that not all learning would be transferable across countries. An important reason for the interest in case studies, is that international recommendations and guidelines can be very theoretical and that countries therefore benefit from seeing how others have implemented the work. As the situations vary, and there in some cases would be situations where international recommendations could not be fully met due to resource constraints or other country specifics, it is specified that countries always take this into consideration and also check international recommendations and guidelines as reference as they are the official standards for implementation.

A few case studies were provided as part of the survey in the initial months of the Collaborative, while most countries needed more time and asked for a more detailed template to guide them in preparation of materials. Using the extended template, a majority of the members, including some of the regional and international agencies, provided case studies. The examples were spanning across thematic areas and showed progress in various stages of the process from data acquisition to processing. UNSD has since hired consultants to further support the development of the case studies to add detail and perspective where relevant.

A pilot version of the inventory of resources can be found here: <https://unstats.un.org/capacity-development/admin-data/resources/> More materials are expected to be added in the near future and suggestions for further additions are much appreciated to make the inventory as comprehensive as possible.

### *Making the work of the Collaborative known*

In July 2020, a first webinar was held to make its establishment known to a wider set of actors and to link the work to the current urgent need for alternative approaches to data collection

due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The webinar created much interest and had over 500 registered participants of which nearly 300 attended. The recording of the webinar can be found [here](#).

A second opportunity to present the work of the Collaborative came at the UN World Data Forum. With the title *Uncovering Opportunity in Unusual Places: How countries are helping each other leverage administrative data for the SDGs*, UNSD, GPSDD and partners presented some of the ongoing work. The recording can be found [here](#)

In the initial phase, however, the focus of work was not on outreach activities as members first needed to agree on the scope and focus of work and on producing initial results. This has now been overcome and the UN Statistical Commission and related side-events will mark a change towards more active and wide engagement.

### **Planned next steps**

The Collaborative will continue working in the three task teams following the agreed priorities. The work on the inventory of resources will continue, aiming to include as much relevant materials as possible. An overall vision for the Collaborative is to foster more interactive exchange among countries and agencies based on the material in the inventory, creating learning and exchange through webinars, peer-to-peer pairing/exchange between countries, micro learning and other relevant approaches. Where feasible and materials don't already exist, the task teams will aim to provide new materials and tools to facilitate increased use of administrative data for statistical purposes where feasible.

The members of the Collaborative are also working on more concrete workplans for the task teams. These will feed into an overall longer-term strategy which will tentatively cover a 2-year period and include concrete milestones for what the Collaborative wants to achieve.

The Collaborative will also aim at reaching out to a wider audience to make its work known to more actors.

## *Annex 1: Scope of the work of the task teams*

### *Scope of work for task team 1: Institutional framework, coordination and partnerships*

This task team covers two main topics:

- Coordination, collaboration and partnership
- Legal and institutional frameworks

This includes aspects such as:

- Accessing administrative data for National Statistical Offices (NSOs)
- Building trust between NSOs and owners of administrative data
- Raising awareness of benefits of sharing data with the National Statistical Offices, as well as in working jointly on data processing and data quality considerations
- Developing communication and feedback mechanisms on data quality
- Strengthening legal and regulatory frameworks, and their practical implementation and enforcement
- Privacy and confidentiality considerations
- Formal and informal working arrangements
- National catalog of administrative data systems

### *Scope of work for task team 2: Data management and standardization*

This task team covers two main topics:

- Data management
- Harmonizing and standardizing concepts, standards and definitions

Aspects to be covered in organized/prioritized structure:

1. Assessing the overall availability and quality of administrative records, including their representativeness, coverage and completeness.
2. Developing and agreeing on metadata
3. Standardizing and harmonizing concepts, standards and definitions
  - a. within the NSO and use this to guide administrative data owners where possible
  - b. across administrative data owners and NSOs as far as possible
4. Unique identification, also linking back to point 3.
5. Structuring statistical registers, also linked to above points
6. Supporting the development of skills of administrative data owners in statistics and data management standards

### *Scope of work for task team 3: Technical interoperability and linking*

This task team covers two main topics:

- Interoperability related to information technology
- Data linkage

Aspects covered are:

- Integrated data architecture for core statistical registers
- Skills in information technology among NSO staff
- Development and maintenance of well-structured electronic database systems for the storage and management of administrative data
- Standards for electronic exchange of data
- Developing and implementing standard procedures for statistical, deterministic and probabilistic record-linking techniques
- Developing and maintaining statistical registers to enable linking and cross-checking of administrative sources, statistical surveys and other data sources
- Establishing clear rules for choosing/prioritizing among multiple potential sources of administrative sources

## *Annex 2: List of current members*

### **Countries**

Bhutan (National Statistics Bureau),  
Cameroun (Institut National de la Statistique),  
Chile (National Statistics Institute),  
Colombia (National Administrative Department of Statistics),  
Denmark (Statistics Denmark),  
Ecuador (National Institute of Statistics and Census),  
Estonia (Statistics Estonia),  
Ghana (Ghana Statistical Service),  
Kyrgyz Republic (National Statistical Committee),  
Mexico (National Institute of Statistics and Geography),  
Mongolia (National Statistics Office),  
Myanmar (Central Statistical Organization),  
Namibia (Namibia Statistics Agency),  
Norway (Statistics Norway),  
Slovenia (Statistics Office of the Republic of Slovenia),  
State of Palestine (Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics),  
Sweden (Statistics Sweden),  
Tanzania and Zanzibar (Tanzania National Bureau of Statistics and Zanzibar Office of Chief Government Statistician),  
Ukraine (State Statistical Service of Ukraine)  
United Kingdom (Office of National Statistics)  
Uruguay

### **Agencies**

African Development Bank (AfDB),  
Asian Development Bank (ADB),  
Development Gateway,  
Demographic and Health Information Systems (DHIS2),  
Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD),  
Inter-American Development Bank (IADB),  
International Labor Organization (ILO),  
President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR),  
UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA),  
UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE),  
UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC),  
UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP),  
UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO),  
UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA),  
UN Population Fund (UNFPA),  
UN Children's Fund (UNICEF),



UN Statistics Division (UNSD),  
UN Women,  
World Bank (WB),  
World Health Organization (WHO)