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A research prospectus for an integrated statistical framework for inclusive and sustainable wellbeing

Prepared by the United Nations Network of Economic Statisticians

The United Nations Network of Economic Statisticians

A Research Prospectus for an Integrated Statistical
Framework for Inclusive and Sustainable Wellbeing

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Preface

1. This research prospectus reports on the Network's Beyond GDP Sprint findings, taking account of further internal and external consultations during 2022. It is a background report to the Network's report to the 54th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission (2023) and was prepared to assist the Commission in endorsing the Network's proposal to explore the feasibility of a research agenda for a new integrated statistical framework for measuring inclusive and sustainable well-being, in accordance with the outcome of the "Beyond GDP" sprint.
2. The Network's Beyond GDP proposals made in this research prospectus, based on wide consultation, are within the Network mandate¹ to facilitate the global statistical system and, thereby, the regional and national statistical systems, to pivot towards producing better integrated socio-economic, environmental, and geospatial data and statistics.
3. In articulating the research proposals, this prospectus uses terminology that may not mean the same to everyone, or may not end up being the final selected names of the proposed manuals. These terminology issues are expected to be best addressed through multidisciplinary teams building on extensive statistical practices, including those undertaken by the 2008 SNA update.
4. The key question the Network has investigated relates to the scope of ambition relating to 'how far beyond GDP?' How far does Beyond GDP relate or overlap to other concepts such as well-being, and how far does it require data drawn from different statistical domains?
5. The Network's consultations have identified the need for a broad-based integrated framework for inclusion and sustainable well-being, building on and complementing existing standards on the **System of National Accounts** and the **System of Environmental-Economic Accounting**, through developing two new documents: a **System of Population and Social Accounts (SPSA)** and a **Central Framework for Inclusive and Sustainable Well-being (CFISW)**.
6. The Network proposes to use the principles of experimentation and testing, to develop and explore a research agenda based on these concepts. The Network looks to use its facilitation role to bring together interested parties and promote inclusive working methods, data solutions, and methodological frameworks with the objective of leaving no one behind.
7. The Network consultations have identified that this proposal need not be considered as large or as ambitious as it first sounds as we build on strong pre-existing foundations. Our reviews have identified well-established and high-quality social and demographic-economic accounting methodologies and practices that existed prior to the Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi Report (2009), which is often seen as a foundational text in this area. These documents, in particular: *the System of Social and Demographic Statistics (SSDS)* released in 1975² after extensive discussions at the United Nations Statistical Commission following the release of the *System of National Accounts* in 1968, could provide a foundation for the alignment of existing social and demographic accounting methodology written along the structure of the SNA and SEEA. The SSDS is accompanied by detailed preliminary guidelines

¹ Terms of reference of the Network of Economic Statisticians - https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/groups/NetEconStat/document/TOR_UN_Network_of_Economic_Statisticians.pdf.

² United Nations, Towards a System of Social and Demographic Statistics, Series F, No.18, 1975.

on social indicators organized in ten thematic areas of social concerns³ in a separate Statistical Commission report⁴, six of which were extensively taken on by the SNA in its 1993 and 2008 revisions. The prospectus also reports on the initial findings of extensive country and agency practices for the central framework on wellbeing indicators dashboards and wealth accounting for sustainability.

8. The Secretary General's report⁵ on social statistics mentions in paragraph 9 the agreement to welcome the report of the research agenda for the SPSA based on the review of the progress in the implementation of SSDS. The Network recognizes that further expert consultations are needed to clarify the proposed scope, purpose, and policy applications of both the proposed SPSA and that of the CFISW. The Network proposes this is best delivered by facilitating partnership working between the economic measurement community to support the Friends of the Chair Group on Social and Demographic Statistics to review the progress made in the ten thematic areas or sub-systems of SSDS⁶ as an entry point into meeting the ambition around the SPSA, accepting there may be new / changed priorities, and significant work which has taken place in the intervening years. This socio-demographic accounting review could complement the proposed mapping exercise and audit evaluation planned to be undertaken by the Friends of Chair Group of existing regional and global groups reporting on social and demographic statistics to the Statistical Commission and the regional intergovernmental statistical bodies of the United Nations. The socio-demographic accounting review could form the basis for the Friends of the Chair Group to reflect on the need, purpose, scope and policy applications of a system for sociodemographic accounting and its related social indicators.

9. The proposed reviews should clarify (a) the scope and detail of the uptake of the ten subsystems of socio-demographic accounting and their accompanying social indicators, (b) the data requirements, and (c) the policy applications. Exploring the SPSA research agenda should also clarify the value of social accounting for measuring social concerns across the socio-demographic community. In particular, evidence should be documented of ongoing practices on (a) the compilation of social indicators and accounts as joint statistical products allowing for data quality cross-checks; (b) the current uptake of social accounting for social policy making, including the horizontal integration of economic expenditure statistics and social statistics for indicators on the cost-effectiveness of social policies; (c) the additional resource requirement for the conceptualization and implementation of SPSA given the current progress in social accounting in the ten SSDS thematic areas of social concerns. This evidence should aid the Friends of the Chair Group in setting priorities for global social indicator program in support of the reporting on SDG indicators.

10. In parallel, the Network proposes, amongst its other activities, to continue to use its sprint model to research the development of the CFISW, focusing on further networking of the many statistical initiatives, including those taken forward by networks of experts and agencies that are currently not fully integrated with the official statistical community. More specifically, the Network will reach out to the SNA community and the socio-demographic community, which advanced the socio-demographic accounting more recently for the update of the 2008 SNA⁷ and the National

³ The ten thematic areas of the SSDS indicators were: (i) Population, (ii) Learning and educational services, (iii) Earning activities and employment services, (iv) Distribution of income, consumption, and wealth, (v) Social security and welfare services, (vi) Health and health services, (vii) Housing, (viii) Public order and security services, (ix) Allocation of time and leisure and (x) Social stratification and mobility.

⁴ Statistical Commission, Report of the Secretary General, The System of Social and Demographic Statistics, Draft Guidelines on Social Indicators, Eighteenth Session, 1974.

⁵ https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/statcom/session_54/documents/2023-5-SocialStats-E.pdf.

⁶ Towards a System of Social and Demographic Statistics, United Nations Statistical Office, 1974.

⁷ The 2008 SNA update has 4 workstreams on wellbeing: a broader framework for wellbeing and sustainability; distribution of household income, consumption and wealth; unpaid household service work; labour, human

Transfer Accounts program, respectively⁸. The Network's proposal is to research how far existing methodologies and guidance exist to support the development of a framework of inclusive and sustainable wellbeing measurement, building upon the SNA, SEEA, and SPSA.

11. Moreover, the exploration of the research agenda will complement existing statistical initiatives. For example, the research agenda for the SPSA (as the revision of the SSDS) should be explored against the extensive documentation on the ten SSDS subsystems and their indicators released under the Statistical Commission.

12. Apart from expert consultations, the Network envisages continuing its practices of informing the countries in the Global South through regional webinars organized with the regional commissions. These regional consultations, which started in 2022, should ensure that the exploration of the research agenda for the proposed integrated statistical framework meets the statistical and user needs for measuring inclusive and sustainable wellbeing of the Global South.

Beyond GDP issue

13. Since before the System of National Accounts was first formalized in 1947, the debate of what it does and does not contain has been active⁹, and extensive. Whether it is Robert Kennedy's famous quote from 1968, that GDP '*measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile*'¹⁰, or the report delivered by Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi (2009)¹¹, the direction of travel has been consistent and clear: a well-articulated user need for measures which allow a deeper people or planet-centred perspective of aspects of the world beyond prosperity and the market, and the way they interact with each other, including capturing aspects such as peace, ethics and the rule of law.

14. The global response to Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi's report through conferences, conventions, and work-programmes has been unprecedented: the world's statistical institutions have delivered a range of high-level metrics and indicator frameworks, which look to capture the breadth and depth of the range of available data. Examples are the UN's Sustainable Development Goals¹² or alternative frameworks developed by a range of national and international institutions to serve a range of detailed purposes or provide viewpoints on poverty, deprivation, and quality of life. The challenge is to step back and re-test whether user needs are being met, and we consider the best route forward is to address the common measurement gaps of the shared priorities in an integrated statistical framework.

15. One critical requirement is the ability of a wide variety of countries, including the Global South, to compile the metrics and produce the source data cost-effectively to deliver Beyond GDP measures for monitoring inclusive and sustainable wellbeing and the effectiveness of related social policies. Another requirement is about how we can combine data in ways that allow a meaningful ability to observe inter-relationships and trade-offs between the measures. Yet, another condition is that the internationally agreed metrics and related integrated statistical framework allow for flexibility

capital and education; and indicators of health care in the system of national accounts (see <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/nationalaccount/snaupdate/wstt.asp>).

⁸ United Nations, National Transfer Accounts, Manual, October 2013.

⁹ See, for example, Coyle, D (2015): A Brief and Affectionate History of GDP.

¹⁰ University of Kansas speech 18th March 1968. Strictly Kennedy is debating Gross National Product, but the sentiment applies completely to GDP as well. <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/the-kennedy-family/robert-f-kennedy/robert-f-kennedy-speeches/remarks-at-the-university-of-kansas-march-18-1968>.

¹¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/8131721/8131772/Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi-Commission-report.pdf>.

¹² <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

to tailor the metrics to national requirements for measuring inclusive and sustainable wellbeing. A final requirement is that the integrated statistical framework is based on existing good practices and common standards.

16. The recently released UN Secretary General’s *‘Our Common Agenda’*¹³ explicitly refers to the need to take collective actions to meet the challenges of our time. An important aspect of this agenda is *“to bring together Member States, international financial institutions and statistical, science and policy experts, to identify a statistical 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, the process could 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.”*

17. The Network further proposes to seek coherence among the complementary measures by promoting and facilitating a system’s approach to deliver a wider integrated statistical framework, including the development of the system of population and social accounts as mentioned in the Secretary General’s *‘Our Common Agenda’*, and to communicate and consult on this around the wider statistical community.

Role and mission of the United Nations Network of Economic Statisticians

The aim of the Network is to:

- **Facilitate networking**, co-ordination and communication on new innovations, experiments, and best practices for the purpose of making progress on priorities to keep economic statistics relevant.
- Co-ordinate with statistical committees and groups, as appropriate, for the purpose of **measuring the multidimensional relationships between the economy, environment, and society of the 2030 Agenda.**

18. The fifty-second session of the United Nations Statistical Commission approved a recommendation of the existing Friends of the Chair Group on Economic Statistics to set up a new United Nations Network of Economic Statisticians¹⁴.

19. Informed by *‘Our Common Agenda’*, the Network initiated a recent series of *‘Sprint sessions’*¹⁵ which targeted consultations with countries and agencies to map and identify issues and opportunities in the *‘Beyond GDP’* space. The Network’s Beyond GDP Sprint sessions signposted the benefit of focused effort to highlight the need for a new statistical framework for inclusive and sustainable wellbeing, encompassing improved wellbeing dashboards of indicators and composite indexes, wider use of distributional and social cohesion metrics, and the measurement of inclusive wealth through a broad capitals framework allowing for both physical and monetary valuations. These monetary

¹³ <https://www.un.org/en/un75/common-agenda>.

¹⁴ <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/groups/NetEconStat/>.

¹⁵ See Annex A for a full description of these sessions.

valuations could be based on market accounting prices depending on the policy purpose they address. Moreover, not every indicator is to be drawn from a balanced account, to better inform a wider variety of users. This framework should be broad-based and take into account strong existing components, particularly the **System of National Accounts** and the **System of Environmental-Economic Accounting**, but expand to meet the wider ambition through developing two new documents: a **System of Population and Social Accounts (SPSA)** and a **Central Framework for Inclusive and Sustainable Well-being (CFISW)**.

Proposed destination

20. The 2022 Network series of Sprint sessions indicated that the comprehensive framework of inclusive and sustainable wellbeing should be designed around a small number of key principles:

- The work underway for the SNA revision should be seen as supporting countries to produce the core dataset for economic policy, allowing further complementary work to explore the creation of new metrics and measures which can support the development of a framework delivering a coherent picture of inclusive and sustainable wellbeing. This needs to go beyond the SNA and the SEEA to cover a wider view of statistical standards and manuals, using these to develop a new standard for population and social accounting and a central framework covering wellbeing and social inclusion measures, and a broader framework of capitals for measuring sustainability.
- The comprehensive documentation contained on the SSDS constitutes a solid basis for the SPSA. The SPSA would rejuvenate the SSDS manual by providing a comprehensive and updated description of the stocks and flows of the various characteristics of individuals and population groupings. The SSDS describes ten main social concerns in various subsystems, for example for education, work, health, distributions of income, consumption, and wealth, allocation of time, with linkages within and between subsystems. In addition to individuals, the units of measure would also include the allocation of time and monetary values. These comprehensive descriptions of social subsystems already partially underpin the description of a number of extended accounts in the updated SNA.
- Complementary measures to GDP will be more valuable if they allow for international comparison, which means a need to promote, as far as possible, the use of existing data sources and indicators, such as those used in the SDG framework or existing satellite accounts to reduce the burden on national statistical agencies. Utilizing existing frameworks and classifications, as well as standard concepts and definitions, is critical to the possible delivery of Beyond GDP measures.
- There is a clear user demand for a more integrated view of development and progress that could be informed by new composite indices with appropriate objective weights to complement GDP and allow for a better understanding of (a) the flows of benefit received by citizens from the economy and wider world, including the environment and (b) people's wellbeing.
- Today's statistical advances in statistical infrastructure and operations have overcome historical barriers to adopting statistical methodology for integrated statistics and accounts. Data and compilation issues have previously been key barriers to data integration across economic, social, and environmental statistics. However, the revision of the SNA, technological progress, and recent research on data integration methods have proved that socio-demographic accounting should be re-explored in the statistical agenda

- Users can be confused by the sheer range of alternative wellbeing measures. A mapping exercise to determine the relationships between these and their optimal use for different policy questions is essential. Consolidation, whilst not simple, may also have advantages. Using a conceptual framework which recognizes that many measures target specific requirements and should not be seen as perfect substitutes for one another will help users. Providing a mapping of which measures to use for which purposes would be beneficial.
- Users require distributional measures and disaggregated accounts for the understanding of social inclusion in terms of equity and inequality, Similarly, there is a demand for other aspects of social cohesion like social mobility and social capital. The ability to disaggregate data by more than one variable (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, educational level, income level, etc.), is critical to the understanding of who is benefiting and who is not.
- For assessing wellbeing for everyone (domestic equality) and everywhere (international equality), here and later (sustainability), a comprehensive measurement of economic, natural, human, and social capitals is needed. While measures of these capitals exist in global databases of international agencies^{16, 17}, substantial progress is needed in the monetary valuation of the different forms of capital, in either market or accounting prices, requiring a review and harmonization of valuation methods.
- Before bringing data together there is a need to (a) support a wide variety of countries to be able to deliver the key data required for indicator dashboards or composite indices including the required level of distributional measures for measuring inclusion within and between countries and (b) ensure that economic, socio-demographic, and environment statistical domains are aligned closely enough in terms of measurement techniques to allow valid comparisons, building, when possible, on the SNA method of 'objective weights' (i.e., conversion into common money terms) rather than 'subjective (qualitative) weights'.

Research prospectus to deliver an integrated statistical framework proposal

21. The Network proposes to explore the feasibility of a research and testing agenda for a comprehensive statistical framework, which would comprise the existing standards of the SNA and SEEA alongside two main new components:

- a. an accounting system for socio-demographic priority areas of social concerns by revisiting the SSDS
- b. a central framework for inclusive and sustainable wellbeing, to bring together data from across the accounting systems and from indicator frameworks describing the economy, environment, and society.

22. The revision of the SSDS in the direction of a **System of Population and Social Accounts (SPSA)** systematizes the socio-demographic subsystems of priority areas of social concerns dealing with work, education, health, etc., their specific and common classifications, their linkages within and between the subsystems, their related statistics and indicators, and their policy applications. These socio-demographic accounts will also facilitate the linkages with the proposed extended accounts for the update of the SNA in the comprehensive description of these accounts in the SPSA. In the same way

¹⁶ World Bank Changing Wealth of Nations 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/changing-wealth-of-nations>.

¹⁷ UNEP, Inclusive Wealth Report 2018 <https://www.unep.org/resources/inclusive-wealth-report-2018>.

that the SNA and Balance of Payments Manual use common text and definitions, the same practice may be beneficial in these domains.

23. The new **Central Framework for Inclusive and Sustainable Wellbeing (CFISW)** has three main strands:

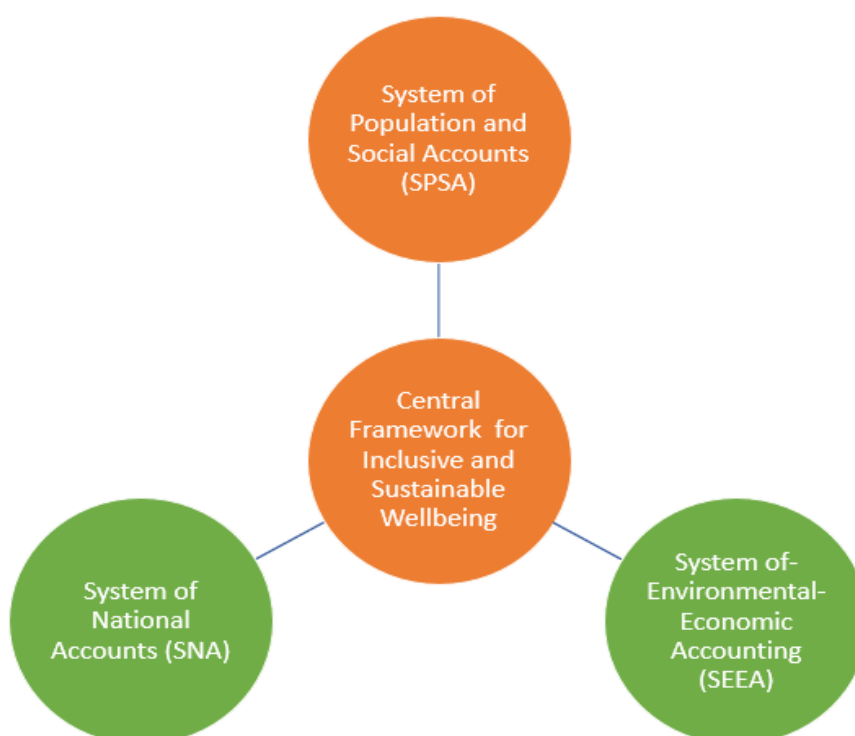
- a. Wellbeing – developing a comprehensive dashboard, linked to the SDGs, of core indicators and potentially new composite indices. The Network has identified key partners to approach and consider this topic, including Statistics Netherlands, Statistics Canada, UK ONS, UNDP HDO, OECD WISE, and UN Statistics Division
- b. Inclusion – developing measures of social cohesion, social mobility, and social capital, building on improvements in disaggregated accounting and supplementary indicators. The Network has identified key partners to approach and consider this topic, including US BEA, UK ONS, Paris School, NTA Network, INSEE, UNDP, OECD, UN Population Division and UN Statistics Division
- c. Sustainability – bringing together wellbeing indicators in both physical and monetary terms and comprehensive and inclusive wealth accounting and considering a wider landscape of capitals than those considered in the SNA. This strand focuses on consistency of measurement for the derivation of ‘objective’ composite indices to provide a fuller landscape of the trade-offs involved in achieving economic welfare. The Network has identified potential key partners we would be keen to approach to consider this topic, including UK ONS, US BEA, OECD and UN, World Bank, and UNEP / Cambridge University.

The integrated statistical framework for inclusive and sustainable wellbeing, in brief

24. The integrated statistical framework for inclusive and sustainable wellbeing comprises the Central Framework for Inclusive and Sustainable Wellbeing (CFISW) which integrates indicators from the System of National Accounts, the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, and the proposed new System of Population and Social Accounts (SPSA). The integrated statistical framework also includes the SNA, SEEA, and SPSA to support the coordination between the various communities by design on matters related to inclusive and sustainable wellbeing. The SNA represents the main accounts, indicators and statistics for the measurement of the economy, the SEEA for the environment, the SPSA for society, and the Central Framework provides a forum to correlate these to measure inclusive and sustainable well-being. The SPSA and Central Framework will be briefly described in turn.

25. A visualization of the integrated statistical framework is provided below, of which the green colour reflects existing accounting standards and the amber colour the newly proposed standards.

Integrated Statistical Framework for Inclusive and Sustainable Wellbeing



System of Population and Social Accounts

26. The revision of the SSDS towards a System of Population and Social Accounts (SPSA) would describe a statistical system that brings together economic and socio-demographic information into a common statistical framework for measuring the impact of the economy on social and demographic events, for instance through expenditures on education, health, social protection, and other social services broken down into common and specific population groupings of interest such as older persons, youth, persons with disabilities, international migrants, women, and people living in the urban or rural areas. The system would also measure the individual's economic contributions, including through their paid and unpaid work, expressed in monetary terms and in time allocated. The System would build on existing socio-demographic accounts, including population accounts of stocks and flows by common and specific classifications, unpaid household service work accounts, as well as the link with the proposed extended accounts for the update of the 2008 SNA. The System would describe and promote internationally agreed concepts, definitions, classifications, accounting rules, and tables of socio-demographic statistics, to produce coherent and consistent set of internationally comparable socio-demographic accounts, statistics, and indicators for inclusive and sustainable wellbeing. Once established and adopted, the proposed would be equivalent to the SNA and SEEA.

27. The System would facilitate better informed decision-making by describing the interlinkages within and between the socio-demographic subsystems of social concerns related to work, education, health, social transfers, and household structure and their relationships with economy. The System would be a holistic multi-purpose information system that can generate a wide range of accounts, statistics and indicators, including aggregates on economic welfare, with varying potential analytical applications complementing the macroeconomic aggregates of SNA and SEEA.

28. Because the SSDS was designed along the same accounting structure and principles which have been applied to the SNA and the SEEA and use concepts, definitions, and classifications consistent with the SNA and the SEEA, the SPSA would facilitate the integration of socio-demographic, economic and environment accounts, and statistics. By doing so, the System will allow us to develop indicators and conduct analysis on the economy-society-environment nexus. Whilst this sounds an ambitious objective, because the SNA incorporated in 1993 / 2008 six of the ten domains (to a partial or complete perspective), in combination with the SEEA now being fully ratified, the potential to build on this foundation, either by gap-filling or extending existing methodologies where necessary presents a strong opportunity to make significant advances without requiring the scale of effort which ultimately stymied attempts to implement the SSDS in the 1970s.

29. The System would present the subsystems such as the population accounts measuring population stocks and flows by various socio-economic attributes such as age, sex, region of residence, marital status, employment status and health status. Another subsystem on distribution of income, consumption, and wealth could include the well-established National Transfer Accounts (NTA)¹⁸ that provides a disaggregation of economic flows of income, consumption, saving and assets by age representing the economic life cycle and age reallocations through intergenerational transfers and assets. These age-based accounts use the individual instead of the household as the units of measurement providing a life cycle perspective and permitting long-run forecasts of the economic and fiscal impacts of population change. National Time Transfer Accounts (NTTA) add the measure of economic transfers between individuals in units of time rather than money and include unpaid care work as a central feature of the accounts. Both accounts can further be disaggregated by sex and other socio-economic characteristics to better understand economic inequality. Furthermore, time use accounts and statistics contribute to: (a) the measurement and analysis of quality of life or general wellbeing; (b) a more comprehensive measurement of all forms of work in extended labor accounts, including unpaid work and non-market production, and the development of household production accounts; and (c) the production of data for gender analysis and related public policies.

Central Framework for Inclusive and Sustainable Wellbeing

30. One of the most difficult challenges faced by statisticians and users today, is sifting through a plethora of available statistical information and deciding which information is best suited for what specific purpose. The Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Report stated that the wellbeing of the present generation should be regarded separately from the wellbeing of future generations (measured in terms of resources or capitals). Moreover, in line with the Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations on the wellbeing monitor for measuring sustainable development¹⁹, ample attention should be paid to distributional issues (i.e. the distribution of wellbeing *within* as well as *between* countries) or the ways in which the wellbeing of one country impacts the wellbeing elsewhere, that is in other countries or regions of the rest of the world.

31. The Central Framework would encompass the most common statistical indicators available today in the economic, social, environmental, and demographic domains, mainly building on existing SDG indicators. Subsequently, it would enable the development of a wellbeing indicator dashboard, identifying their best fit for use, as well as their complementarity to other indicators. This wellbeing dashboard of the Central Framework should bring together metrics from the SNA, SEEA, and the future

¹⁸ United Nations, DESA (2013), "National Transfer Account Manual: Measuring and Analysing the Generational Economy." UN Sales Number E.13.XIII.6.

¹⁹ https://unece.org/DAM/stats/publications/2013/CES_SD_web.pdf.

SPSA, enabling both the development of new metrics and the re-use and comparability of existing measures, drawing upon the SNA, SEEA and SPSA.

32. This Central Framework for Inclusive and Sustainable Wellbeing can be described by its three main thematic components: wellbeing, inclusion, and sustainability. Each will be described in turn.

Wellbeing

33. Key to this strand is identifying indicators on the quality of life or human well-being of individuals, particularly from those within the SDGs. In addition, composite indices should be explored based on objective weights to ensure any such composite is viewed as a legitimate measure. These indices can be aggregated based on monetisation, even though for indicators addressing the social or environmental aspects of wellbeing, non-economic methods of aggregation should also be considered. Such indicators and indices could be seen as a first layer of the framework, supporting a wider dashboard, drawn together with a solid conceptual basis, which is also relevant for policy makers, through the application of themes.

34. The themes of wellbeing indicators should be of a universal nature, to be globally relevant, whereas the indicators could (and sometimes should) be region or nation specific. Moreover, flexibility should be introduced to allow for sub-indicators to tailor the headline wellbeing indicators to specific country requirements. For example, the theme “Food” is relevant for all countries. However, for high-income countries this theme can be measured in terms of “obesity,” whereas for countries faced with elevated levels of poverty, “malnourishment” would be a more meaningful metric. When constructing the dashboard, ample attention should be paid to the countries of the Global South by (a) ensuring the concept of wellbeing is operationalized in a way that it also addresses the most important quality of life themes of the Global South and (b) measuring the cross countries’ impact of wellbeing on the wellbeing of specific countries and regions, for instance the Global South. The UN regional commissions should be consulted to arrive at a statistical framework that truly addresses wellbeing in a way in which the Global North, as well as the Global South, recognise themselves.

Inclusion

35. Inclusion is about the quality of life or human wellbeing among different sub-population groups, by looking at the distribution and disaggregation of key measures across groups as well as at the connection and relationships between individuals and population groups.

36. In addition, considerable progress has been made with measures of social mobility, measured either as an intergenerational change in economic and social status (between parents and children) or intra-generational change during a person’s life cycle. Social mobility matters for economic growth and prospects, life satisfaction, and civic engagement. Social capital, another important dimension of social cohesion, reflects on the social norms, shared values and institutional arrangements that foster cooperation among population groups. Substantial progress has been made with the measures of social capital indicators on volunteering through organizations, trust in others and institutions, government stakeholder engagement, corruption etc. In 2020, the Statistical Commission endorsed the Handbook on governance statistics, which covers the conceptualization, measurement methodology and dissemination of statistics on eight dimensions of governance, namely non-discrimination and equality, participation, openness, access to and quality of justice, responsiveness, absence of corruption, trust, and safety and security.

Sustainability

37. Sustainability is about the quality of life, or human wellbeing in the future and considering coherent and consistent physical and monetary values of natural, social, human, and economic resources or capitals using market and accounting prices. Measures of sustainability and economic welfare both rely on consistent and comprehensive measures of economic (including intangible), natural, human, and social capital. There is a clear need for further research into the various monetary and physical measures of the capitals. Whilst within the market sector the sum of costs presents a feasible mechanism to produce estimates, the clear risk with both cultural and intangibles assets is that such an approach is inevitably downwards biased as current expenditure could be materially different from future resulting revenues. As non-market assets, such as natural assets, are considered where costs are neither clearly visible nor necessarily existent, this approach becomes weaker and may prevent us achieving sensible composite measures.

38. This is not to imply that other methods are without their faults: the perpetual inventory model, or discounted sum of benefit models rely on varied assumptions around asset lives and depreciation rates which equally need vigorous testing and research.

39. Before the methods of valuation can be considered, a full agreement on the complete landscape of investment and assets is required. Some of the questions for which consensus has to be pursued are: is education and health spending investment into human capital? Is organizational capital a form of social capital? Should social capital be considered as a fourth capital beside the economic, natural, and human; or is it simply a form of human capital not embodied in the individual but embodied in society?

40. As for the asset valuations, what prices to use in valuing the assets? Further research should narrow down how to account for externalities, and what impact this would have on existing market prices where some components of externalities can be internalized. Can we explore the use of agreed accounting prices (e.g., correcting for externalities) for asset valuations in addition to market prices?

41. Finally for the Central Framework wellbeing indicator dashboard, the wellbeing indicators for the future (denoted sustainability wellbeing indicators) could be measured in both physical and monetary terms.

Road Map

42. A research agenda of this magnitude requires extensive resources which could be achieved through collaborations of various NSOs, academia, and international organizations and with the support of the donor community. The Network sees a clear need to bring together multi-disciplinary voices to better inform a future Beyond GDP framework, which reflects population, and social conditions, as well as the economy and environment for both the Global North and the Global South. The Network and its partners are uniquely well-placed to develop and facilitate the research agenda as it has forged links with academic, policy, and statistical organizations and networks who might not consider themselves as part of the Beyond GDP landscape, but whose contribution is vital in terms of bringing together a variety of statistical domains to create a statistical framework to provide the framework within which to contrast data sources and metrics to better explain the trade-offs between different statistical and policy domains and meet the demands articulated in *Our Common Agenda*.

43. The CFISW could be similarly instrumental in forging closer institutional collaboration among socio-demographic statisticians, national accountants, economic-environmental accounting statisticians, economists, and policymakers. The Network recognizes that it is essential to collaborate

with and support the proposed Friends of the Chair Group on Social and Demographic Statistics of the Statistical Commission to develop a System of Population and Social Accounts and seek advice from the statistical community, as well as other existing collaborative mechanisms, in developing the Central Framework for Inclusive and Sustainable Wellbeing.

44. For example, the Network's aim is to neither duplicate the work of the 2008 SNA update, nor the range of efforts and data produced under the SDG framework. The 2008 SNA update is likely to significantly contribute to the Beyond GDP agenda from an economic perspective on inclusive and sustainable wellbeing in recommending various extended social accounts. However, in a world of rapid technological, environmental, demographic, and social change, the research agenda set in the 2010s for the 2008 SNA revision is unlikely to tackle all the key statistical and policy questions which have since emerged. Finding models to work in tandem, whilst reflecting the time pressures presented by the SNA is going to be a key component in developing these proposals.

45. The Network envisages that its proposed integrated statistical framework meets the policy needs and related updates on statistical reporting standards on inclusive and sustainable wellbeing. The Network's value-adding proposition should ideally be supported by a roadmap for developing an integrated statistical framework for inclusive and sustainable wellbeing for discussion in March 2025 at the Statistical Commission when the update of the SNA, BPM, international trade statistics, and international classifications manuals are expected to be delivered.

Timeline

46. To deliver on the proposed new standard on socio-demographic accounting and the central framework on inclusive and sustainable wellbeing, the Network proposes the following ambitious timetable in two stages, up to 2025 and thereafter:

- a. 2023-2025 - the economic statistics community concludes its SNA, BPM, trade manuals, and ISIC/CPC updates, while the socio-demographic statistics community is consulted and agrees to take ownership through their Friends of the Chair Group or other mechanism for the formulation of the System of Population and Social Accounts (SPSA) as a revision of the SSDS; and the Network and its partners develop a research agenda and undertake supportive research on components of the Central Framework and the SPSA through dedicated workstreams
- b. 2025 onwards – the socio-demographic statistics community promotes the implementation of subsystems of the SPSA based on country priorities and joint efforts with existing accounting communities and practices and the Network, and its partners consider a collaboration mechanism between the three communities (economic, environmental and social) to integrate their respective data and populate the Central Framework

Concluding remarks

47. This prospectus describes a program of complexity and depth. It argues that this work programme will be worthwhile and deliver value. Meanwhile, the Network is fundamentally grounded in the lived experience of national statistical offices (NSOs). Budgets are often constrained or optimized in delivering core requirements for official statistics and only a handful of additional topics for experimentation and testing.

48. The Network's Beyond GDP Sprint sessions, for which UNSD invitations were extended globally to all national statistical offices and showed high attendance, were vital in highlighting five key developments which suggest this is precisely the time to set ambitious targets:

- Many countries and organizations have made great strides. In many cases, they consider the greater part of the costs, collecting and analyzing data, to have already been invested. The question is how well they can re-use data and data investments in an integrated data compilation strategy to be more than the sum of the parts and better meet user needs
- Users are not satisfied. Challenging decisions need good data, but all too often data is partial and not consistent making trade-offs between socio-economic and environmental benefits and costs not explicit for decision making. . Time is running out. Understanding inclusive and sustainable wellbeing will not wait for another fifteen-year revision cycle for international statistical standards for economic statistics. The steps forward to 2025 should be comprehensive for completing the integrated statistical framework of inclusive and sustainable wellbeing with a standard for social and demographic accounting and a central framework for inclusive and sustainable wellbeing
- Collaboration and capacity building requires countries that can blaze a trail to move quickly and push out the frontier, whilst working closely with others who can benefit from that learning. Only by testing, exploring, advancing, and in some instances failing, can we all make the journey.
- The UN Network of Economic Statisticians and the international and regional networks of expert groups are ready to demonstrate their capacity in co-production and co-investment.

Annex A: The Beyond GDP Sprint Series

Our sprint series

The Sprint sessions organized by the Network from February to June 2022 reviewed this landscape, through the following thematic sessions:

*Sprint 1 – Measuring Modern Capital*²⁰ Capital is an increasingly important part of how goods and services are produced, but measurement occurs under different statistical domains and standards²¹. To help us understand the key challenges statisticians face in assembling consistent and coherent estimates the following speakers presented:

- Richard Heys (ONS) – background and issues
- Jonathan Haskel (Bank of England / Imperial College, London) – intangible assets
- John Mitchell (OECD) – Data as an Asset
- Sean Crick (ABS) – Data as an Asset
- Bram Edens (UN) – Natural Capital
- Gueorguie Vassilev (ONS) – Human Capital

The sprint identified the need to encourage the use of net measures which reflect depreciation, the challenges around measuring different capitals, particularly those outside the market, and the impact of assumptions in using flows of benefits to value the forward-looking component of methods to value different capitals. The need to ensure our perspective on capitals is inclusive and up to date is particularly reflected in intangible assets and the need to ensure the changing nature of the drivers of economic growth is reflected.

*Sprint 2 – Distributional and Wellbeing Initiatives associated with the Update of the System of National Accounts*²²

Macroeconomic statistics such as Gross Domestic Product, employment and unemployment, inflation, national income, and corporate profits are among the featured economic statistics reported by national statistical offices (NSOs) and central banks for purposes of understanding the current state of national economies to draw inferences about the economic outlook. Yet, these aggregated statistics are unable to shed light on how distinct groups of households are affected by these economic phenomena. Thus, the ability to know how equal or unequal residents of an economy benefit from, or are better off, because of the performance of headline indicators is invisible to policy makers, business analysts, and individuals.

Fortunately, major efforts are underway to better understand wellbeing through the next update the System of National Accounts (SNA), drawing on work that was once largely academic research on distributional measures that has transformed into priority, mainstream initiatives at NSOs, international organizations, and central banks. Additionally, other efforts are underway to extend the wellbeing agenda to include measures first pioneered by the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission and its extensions that go beyond GDP and the core SNA framework. Moreover, this wellbeing agenda has

²⁰ All papers are available at

<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/groups/NetEconStat/GDPSprintFirstMeeting/>.

²¹ Productive capital is measured via the System of National Accounts

(<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/nationalaccount/sna.asp>). Natural Capital is measured via the System of Environmental-Economic Accounts (<https://seea.un.org/>), and Human Capital stocks are measured via the UNECE Human Capital Manual (https://unece.org/DAM/stats/publications/2016/ECECESSTAT20166_E.pdf).

²² All papers available at

<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/groups/NetEconStat/GDPSprintSecondMeeting/>.

also expanded to consider the intersection of distributions of national accounts to that of the environment and other elements on society.

The aim of the first session on distributions and wellbeing was to share ideas, strategies, and examples from the ongoing work that is central to the SNA research agenda on distributional accounts. To help us understand the key work that is central to distributional initiatives on the SNA wellbeing agenda we heard from several expert speakers from NSOs, central banks, and international organizations:

- Peter van de Ven (Lead Editor SNA Update) – SNA Update and Broader Framework for Sustainability and Wellbeing
- Jorrit Zwijnenburg (OECD) – OECD/Eurostat Expert Group on Disparities in National Accounts
- Pierre Sola (ECB) – ECB Expert Group on Distributional Financial Accounts
- Marina Gindelsky (BEA) – Distributions of Personal Income for the United States
- Gabriela Saborío Muñoz & Henry Vargas Campos – Distributional National Accounts for Costa Rica
- Jean-Marc Germain (INSEE) -- Measuring Market Inequality and Redistribution Accounting

The focus of the broader framework for the SNA update is to take a pragmatic view by prioritizing extensions to areas for which guidance on wellbeing and sustainability has already been developed. Important aspects for monitoring wellbeing include housing, income, jobs, education, and satisfaction, among others. Extensions that fit well within this include developing satellite accounts for unpaid household work, health and social conditions, labor, education, and human capital, and environmental economic accounting.

In addition, it was clear from the focus on distribution accounts that there is wide user demand for distributional measures for individual and household measures of income, consumption, and wealth. Each case study demonstrated uniqueness of country or region involved. There was a range of source data and assumptions described across each presentation highlighting the need to better understand the contextual factors impacting household experiences across the distribution. The presentations also highlighted the many challenges, including: macro-micro data gaps; timing and availability of data sets to support a thorough analysis; the totally unique nature of each country and regional exercise where there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution; and that different assumptions matter and that there is a need for transparency to understand each impact along the way.

Sprint 3 – Distributional and Wellbeing Initiatives associated with the System of National Accounts²³

The aim of the second session on distributions and wellbeing initiatives was to push the discussion beyond the core framework on distributional national accounts to the frontier: to learn and amplify efforts that are taking place in the academic community, international organizations, and statistical offices on broader wellbeing work. This session also focused on specific examples off the value of unpaid household work and the development of household production satellite accounts to inform a more nuanced view of population, society, and the economy. Experts in the field spoke on behalf of the following topics:

- Fabrice Murtin (OECD) – Multi-dimensional Measures of Living Standards and their Policy Use
- Martin Weale (King’s College and UK ESCoE) – Measuring National Income Growth Democratically
- Jon Samuels (BEA) – Measuring Wellbeing through the “Level of Living”

²³ Papers available at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/groups/NetEconStat/GDPSprintThirdMeeting/>.

- Francesca Grum (UNSD) – Modernizing Time Use Surveys to Better Measuring Wellbeing
- Francisco Guillen and Raul Figueroa (INEGI) – Measuring Unpaid Household Work in Mexico
- Gueorguie Vassilev (ONS) – Modernizing Time Use Survey to Measure Household Work in the UK

The first part of the session’s focus was on three distinct examples where National Accounts data can be used to draw new insights on wellbeing through aggregate measures. The UK example distributed national income to households and re-aggregated national income using corresponding consumer prices across the household distribution. The US example overviewed the “level of living” approach to aggregate wellbeing measurement which yields a quantity index of welfare generated from current and future consumption in proportion to the effort required in the form of supply of labor and capital services. The OECD example demonstrated that a multi-dimensional index can be computed to “go beyond” GDP to also include life expectancy and (un)employment with proper weights. The value of each approach to aggregate wellbeing measurement was its grounding in economy theory.

The second part of the session presentations underscored the importance of time-use surveys to inform social and economic policies: for example, quality of life, work-life balance, and general wellbeing; and gender equality and gender analysis. The presentations also made clear the concerted effort through the UN and country level to modernize and develop innovative and more effective ways to collect time-use information, including using online platforms. Finally, the session documented the many challenges associated with measuring time-use and the value of unpaid household work, which include access to data as well as measurement approaches, with distinct stages of development at the country level, including relating to household production satellite accounts.

Key takeaways from the sprint sessions demonstrate the importance of activities associated with the SNA update on wellbeing and sustainability. The emphasis on wellbeing and sustainability is becoming increasingly core to macroeconomic statistics, which is especially important. There is a need for a wider uptake on distributional accounts. Household production accounts also emerge as a priority area for broader expansion.

There is also a clear need to pursue research and experimentation on aggregate measures of welfare or wellbeing. Many participants argued it is time to elevate social welfare accounting alongside economic welfare –GDP - accounting, as a compliment, not to compete with, other approaches that are aimed at bringing better visibility to wellbeing, including using new composite metrics, multiple indicators, and dashboard approaches alongside existing national accounts and wider data.

Sprint 4 – The socio-demographic disaggregation of national accounts²⁴

Disaggregation of national accounts by socio-demographic groups is an essential element within the ‘Beyond GDP’ landscape, addressing two key issues: inclusion (*‘beyond averages’*) and fiscal sustainability (*‘beyond today’*). This sprint reported on a demographic-economic accounting system, National Transfer Accounts (NTA)²⁵, designed to link population and economy, in much the same way that System of Environmental-Economic Accounts (SEEA) links environment and economy. One of the chief motivations of this work is the need to understand, anticipate, and adapt to the economic and fiscal changes brought by population ageing. These accounts are supported by the NTA Network, an NGO of 200+ researchers and government officials from 62 countries. and present disaggregation of national accounts by age, by age and gender, by age and socio-economic group:

²⁴ Papers available at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/groups/NetEconStat/GDPSprintFourthMeeting/>.

²⁵ <https://ntaccounts.org/web/nta/show/>.

- Nicole Mun Sim Lai and Tim Miller, United Nations Population Division - Disaggregation of national account by age: National Transfer Accounts in different world regions.
- Juan Daniel Oviedo, National Administrative Department of Statistics (Colombia) – The adoption of National Transfer Accounts as part of Colombia’s official statistics.
- Gretchen Donehower, Counting Women’s Work Project – Disaggregation of national accounts by age and gender: National Time Transfer Accounts.
- Cássio Turra, Center for Development and Regional Planning (Brazil) – Disaggregation of national accounts by age and socio-economic group in Brazil and Chile.
- Alexia Fürnkranz-Prskawetz, Vienna Institute of Demography – Capturing wellbeing by disaggregating National Transfer Accounts and National Time Transfer Accounts.
- Ronald Lee, University of California – How the disaggregated National Transfer Accounts combine for a richer picture of the economy.

Sprint 5 – Beyond GDP Indexes, Indicator Frameworks, Wealth, and Health Approaches²⁶

This session completed the mapping of the variety of approaches which have been developed, addressing the range of uses and strengths of the different metrics, with each method addressed by an appropriate expert following a scene-setting presentation by Stefan Schweinfest:

- Stefan Schweinfest, United Nations Statistics Division - UN Secretary General's Beyond GDP initiative
- Rikke Munk Hansen, Director, Statistics Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific - Global trends and the SDG framework
- Anya Thomas and Laurent Wagner, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) - Possible Development and Uses of Multidimensional Vulnerability Indices
- Jan Pieter Smits, Statistics Netherlands, and University of Eindhoven - The Dutch Monitor of Wellbeing and the SDG's
- Pedro Conceição Director, Human Development Report Office - Inequality, uncertainties, opportunities, and the Human Development Index
- Grzegorz Peszko and James Cust, World Bank - The Changing Wealth of Nations 2021
- Sir Partha Dasgupta, Cambridge University - Inclusive Wealth
- Richard Heys, UK Office for National Statistics - Flow Measures on a consistent basis to Inclusive wealth
- Steve MacFeely, World Health Organisation - Towards the 2025 SNA: a WHO perspective

Sprint 6 – Summaries and Conclusions²⁷

This session provided speakers from the first five sessions an opportunity to reflect on the discussions and presentations given and identify research that complemented the existing work on SNA and SEEA with a focus on accounting for population and social conditions in a new System for Population and Social Accounts (SPSA) as well as a central framework for wellbeing, social cohesion, and sustainability which brings together aggregate welfare measures, capitals and wellbeing dashboard of indicators and composite indexes. Collectively, a people-centered statistical framework for economic and social welfare needs to be developed that consists of the existing systems of the SNA and the SEEA together with a new SPSA and central framework for wellbeing, social inclusion, and sustainability.

²⁶ Papers available at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/groups/NetEconStat/GDPSprintFifthMeeting/>.

²⁷ Agenda available at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/groups/NetEconStat/GDPSprintSixthMeeting/>.

The speakers were:

- Ehsan Masood, author of 'The Great Invention: The Story of GDP and the Making and Unmaking of the Modern World' - The Beyond GDP problem
- Rutger Hoekstra, author of 'Replacing GDP by 2030' - The Beyond GDP landscape
- Josh Martin, Bank of England - Modern capitals
- Fabrice Murtin, OECD WISE, and Pedro Conceição, UNDP HDO - Composite indexes
- Martin Weale, Kings College and Jon Samuels, US BEA - Disaggregated national accounts (by age, gender, income, wellbeing, and other socio-economic characteristics)
- Jan Pieter Smits. Statistics Netherlands and Eindhoven University Multidimensional indicator frameworks
- Grzegorz Peszko and Jim Cust, World Bank - Inclusive and comprehensive wealth
- Francesca Grum, UNSD - Time-use surveys
- Ritu Sadana, Maksym Obrizan and Steve McFeely, WHO - Health-related measures
- Anu Peltola, UNCTAD - SG's Our Common Agenda: