



Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Committee on Statistics**Eighth session**

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Item 5 (b) of the provisional agenda*

Emerging issues**Data governance in a changing world****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

National statistical offices are operating in a complex setting. New global commitments, most notably the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the ambition to leave no one behind, have resulted in a significant increase in the demand for quality, timely and granular data. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has underscored the urgent need for timely and granular data while exposing the shortcomings of existing statistical production approaches. Huge opportunities exist owing to technological advancements and the availability of new data sources. Alongside these opportunities, there is growing concern about harmful uses of data that reduce the trust of the public in the value, use and impact of data for the public good. This expanding data ecosystem and the rapidly growing range of actors with diverse interests call for new rules and new capacities. This underscores the importance of establishing data governance mechanisms; however, there is insufficient capacity around data governance and data stewardship at both the global and the regional levels.

The present document contains information on data governance work at the global and regional levels where there are opportunities for the engagement and involvement of member States. The Committee on Statistics may wish to express its views on how regional collaboration on data governance may support national and global efforts and consider the opportunities for regional action on data governance outlined in the present document.

* ESCAP/CST/2022/L.1/Rev.1.

I. Introduction

1. National statistical offices are operating in a complex setting. New global commitments, most notably the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the ambition to leave no one behind, have resulted in a significant increase in the demand for quality, timely and granular data. Additionally, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has underscored the urgent need for timely and granular data while exposing the shortcomings of existing statistical production approaches. Huge opportunities exist owing to technological advancements and the availability of new data sources. This expanding data ecosystem and rapidly growing range of data actors with diverse interests call for new rules and new capacities. In response, the role of national statistical offices is evolving from data producers into data coordinators and, ultimately, data stewards.

2. Globally and regionally, considerable emphasis has been placed on strengthening statistical capacity, while data governance and data stewardship have received less attention despite being essential to underpin the evolving role of national statistical offices. Even though technological advancements and access to new data sources can significantly improve the ability to measure sustainable development, there is growing concern about harmful uses of data that reduce the trust of the public in the value, use and impact of data for the public good. The absence of well-established data governance mechanisms to ensure an inclusive data system can lead to power imbalances in the production, sharing and use of data and a dramatic increase in the risk of data abuse and misuse. There is insufficient capacity around data governance and data stewardship at both the global and the regional levels.

3. Asia and the Pacific has two overarching commitments for advancing official statistics: the document entitled “Advancing official statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: a collective vision and framework for action by the Asia-Pacific statistical community”,¹ endorsed by the Committee on Statistics at its fifth session, in 2016, and the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind, endorsed by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) at its seventy-fifth session, in 2019.²

4. The collective vision and framework for action is focused on strengthening national statistical systems to produce, disseminate and use official statistics, whereas the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind acknowledges the need for a whole-of-government approach to enable the implementation of the collective vision and framework for action, and outlines commitments to support national statistical systems through political, institutional and financial means.

5. Both the collective vision and framework for action and the Declaration include elements that relate to data governance and data stewardship. However, the documents do not elaborate on how the Asia-Pacific statistical community may incorporate data governance into its future work.

6. There are no globally agreed definitions of data governance or data stewardship. The concept of data governance has been interpreted in a variety of ways. In the present document, data governance is defined broadly to

¹ E/ESCAP/CST(5)/1/Rev.1.

² ESCAP/75/4/Add.1.

include the variety of actions and actors that together shape data management and use.³

A. Opportunities and challenges of the data revolution

7. Rapid technological advancements have resulted in a data revolution encompassing the open data movement, new information and communications technologies for data collection such as crowdsourcing or web scraping and the explosion in the availability of big data. This has been accompanied by the emergence of artificial intelligence and the Internet of things, both of which are already transforming society. Advances in computing and data science have enabled the processing and analysing of new sources of data in real time. There has been a seismic shift from data that are collected actively, such as through a census or household survey, to data that are collected passively, such as through daily interactions with digital products and services, including mobile phones, social media and digital government services (e-government), or through satellite imagery.

8. New sources of data and new approaches have the potential to enable more agile, efficient and evidence-informed decision-making and to improve the measurement of progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. To realize the opportunities presented by big data, fundamental human rights must be safeguarded with respect to data privacy, ethics and respect for data sovereignty. Further steps should be taken to avoid an increase in inequality and bias caused by the exclusion of groups of the population from the new world of data and information.

9. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of timely and granular data, and accelerated the use of innovative approaches to meet urgent data demands. For example, Governments have used aggregated mobile phone location data to identify potential hotspots for transmission, to assess compliance with social distancing requirements and to model the spread of the virus. While using these data can help Governments to fill knowledge gaps, it also raises new ethical, legal, commercial and regulatory concerns for policymakers to contend with.

10. The higher frequency and intensity of natural hazards coupled with the pressure of climate change have also led to a large increase in the demand for timely and granular data and statistics. Traditional approaches to data collection are facing funding challenges and increased scepticism towards their continued utility within the changing data landscape. New opportunities offered by the advancement of technology have significantly raised the expectations of policymakers for real-time granular data. There is an urgent need to establish mechanisms that allow for the responsible use of new data sources in the production of official statistics while protecting the rights of individuals.

B. Impact on national statistical systems

11. New data sources have put more options at the disposal of official statisticians, who are faced with increasing and evolving demands. They have the potential to complement traditional data sources, such as censuses and

³ The Royal Society, “The UK data governance landscape”, Policy Briefing (London, 2020).

surveys, with more timely, granular and accurate data for monitoring sustainable development and meeting other national demands.

12. National statistical offices around the world are exploring the use of new sources of data to produce official statistics, including the following examples: (a) the use of scanner data to complement survey data for the compilation of the consumer price index; (b) the use of mobile location data to study population movements; and (c) the use of satellite imagery to complement survey or census data to generate more granular data on topics such as agriculture and poverty. However, the majority of this work is still at the experimental stage. The secretariat of the Committee has documented and made available some country experiences from Asia and the Pacific within multiple statistical domains, including economic statistics, population and social statistics, environment and agriculture statistics, and statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals.⁴

13. There are a variety of challenges in using new data sources for official statistics. From the methodological point of view, data from new sources should be investigated to ensure it is fit for the specific purpose. The coverage of the target population and the consistency of concepts and definitions should be thoroughly examined. New data sources, mainly human-sourced information, can be prone to measurement errors. These issues should be detected, analysed, addressed and documented along the way.

14. Other key challenges include data privacy, ethics, trust, legislation, coordination, partnerships and technical and technological capacity. There is often a need for new governance mechanisms to encompass the use of big data in producing official statistics while protecting privacy, ethics, statistical confidentiality and trust. Current statistical legislation in many countries only permits the use of and access to data held by government agencies, while most of the alternative data sources are owned by private sector companies. Thus, new models for coordination and partnership need to be developed. Many national statistical offices still lack the technical capacity to use non-traditional data sources.

15. National statistical offices are often more focused on the production of official statistics and less on the use of these statistics. The potential of data is unlocked only if they are used effectively to guide decision-making. The factors hindering the use of data by decision makers should be identified and addressed. Barriers that should be addressed include the lack of timely, relevant and easily accessible data and weak statistical literacy.

16. A growing concern is the disparity in access to and use of available data, which divides those who have data and know how to use it from those who do not. There is a need for data governance arrangements that support data generation and use that is ethical, equitable, safe and secure. A range of global and regional actions can help to address this need and narrow the gap between those who have data and know how to use it and those who do not.

⁴ Stats Briefs on use of big data for official statistics are available at www.unescap.org/kp?f%25B0%25D=field_series%253A9094&f%5B0%5D=kp_pogramme_of_work_facet%3A176.

II. Global initiatives

A. Working Group on Data Stewardship

17. At its fifty-second session, held in 2021, the Statistical Commission established the Working Group on Data Stewardship to explore ways forward to develop guidance for national statistical offices on approaches to data stewardship. The Working Group is composed of representatives from national statistical offices and stakeholders from other data communities, including international and regional organizations and civil society organizations. The five workstreams are: data governance; equity and inclusion; sharing and collaboration; data stewardship and the city data agenda; and the overall conceptual framework on data stewardship. Australia, Indonesia, the Netherlands and New Zealand are members of one or more of the workstreams and Bangladesh, China, India, Malaysia, Mongolia, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea and Viet Nam support the work.

18. Across all the workstreams there is a focus on compiling case studies that highlight the different approaches taken by countries in the area of data stewardship. These are being used to develop guidance that can be adapted to the varying levels of national capacity.

19. The workstreams are all at different stages but there are some clear emerging themes. Firstly, there are no globally agreed definitions of data governance or data stewardship, and these terms are used very differently in different countries, as well as across different organizations within the same country. Work has started on the creation of a glossary of data governance terms that would help to facilitate a better understanding of different data governance models and how they are used.

20. Secondly, data governance and data stewardship have proven to be highly contextual in the modern data world. The role of the national statistical offices needs to take into account the broader national data ecosystem, including any other data coordination bodies and other contextual issues such as whether there is a centralized or decentralized data ecosystem and the varying levels of capacity across national statistical offices. Some common elements were identified that should be included in the data stewardship framework, namely people (data collectors, analysers, users and managers of statistical systems), technology (technical infrastructure) and processes (governance, laws, policies and procedures) within a country's data ecosystem.

21. Thirdly, when considering data governance and stewardship there is a need to collaborate with a wide range of stakeholders across the whole data value chain.

B. World Development Report 2021: Data for Better Lives

22. The World Bank recognizes the importance of data governance and made this a focus of the *World Development Report 2021: Data for Better Lives*.⁵ It contains perspectives on how to harness the power of data for development, to ensure no one is left behind.

⁵ World Bank, *World Development Report 2021: Data for Better Lives* (Washington, D.C., 2021).

23. The *Report* serves to highlight the tremendous potential of data to create value by improving programmes and policies, driving economies and empowering citizens. Data accumulation can lead to a concentration of economic and political power, raising the possibility that data may be misused in ways that harm citizens. As data are reused, more and more value is created, but the risk of abuse also increases.

24. The *Report* contains a conceptual framework that links data to development through three pathways. The middle pathway is how Governments and institutions use data to inform policymaking. The top pathway is how civil society uses data to hold Governments accountable. The bottom pathway is how the private sector uses data to fuel economic growth. A key aspect of the framework is that, unlike with other forms of capital, using data once does not diminish its value. Data can be collected for one purpose and then be used and reused many times for different purposes without reducing their value.

25. As data are used and reused for different purposes there is an increase in both the potential benefits and the potential risks that the data will be misused. In response to this conundrum, it is recommended to implement a social contract for data that is founded on value, trust and equity.

26. A strong data governance framework is needed to develop an environment of trust that supports data use and reuse. This should include appropriate policies, laws, regulations and institutions, to ensure that the full value of data is realized and shared safely and equitably. The country context (history, culture, governance and political economy) is important in shaping appropriate frameworks; the role of technical capabilities for safely making the most of data; and the need for trust and more equitable sharing of the value of data. A well-designed data governance framework allows countries to capture the full economic and social value of data and is the tangible expression of a country's social contract around data.

27. The *Report* serves to highlight enablers that help Governments, businesses and individuals to maximize data use alongside the safeguards needed to ensure individual rights over personal data and data protection. The *Report* contains information on how countries around the world are navigating complex data governance choices, and establishing such frameworks is still very much a work in progress in countries across income groups.

C. Civil society engagement on data governance

28. Civil society organizations have been engaging in data governance in a range of ways, from conducting research to holding expert discussions. Some of the initiatives being led by civil society organizations in the area of data governance are listed below.

1. Governing data for development

29. In 2020, the Center for Global Development set up a working group on governing data for development⁶ composed of experts from Government, civil society, development organizations and the data privacy community. The working group is exploring ways Governments can use data to support innovation, economic development and inclusive growth while protecting citizens and communities against harm. The group examined approaches to

⁶ www.cgdev.org/working-group/governing-data-for-development.

data protection and privacy, noting how effective data protection laws and regulations could help to build trust and protect citizens against the misuse of their personal data. Their work highlighted the catalytic effect of the European Union General Data Protection Regulation, which was enacted in 2016 and came into effect in 2018 and which has been influential in shaping data protection laws in more than 60 countries that have enacted new data protection laws over the past decade.

30. Their work highlighted the unique and important role of multilateral institutions in improving data governance. This includes supporting initiatives on greater transparency and accountability; helping to align global and regional cross-border data-sharing initiatives while steering attention towards long-term investments needed to maintain strong national statistical systems; and fostering community-led initiatives for data collection and use.

31. The working group has suggested the following lessons for policymakers trying to regulate data use while keeping up with fast-evolving digital practices: think local; do not localize data without good reason; invest in improving capacity; and foster approaches that move beyond consent as the primary basis for protecting personal data:

(a) Although the General Data Protection Regulation has had a huge global influence, data policy remains highly contextual, reflecting differences in local norms about data use, resharing and privacy;

(b) While many countries have taken data localization measures to store or process data within their jurisdiction, these measures can prevent the use of cheaper, higher quality and more secure data storage options than are offered by domestic providers;

(c) Insufficient digital literacy in the general population and among policymakers can be a major hurdle to the effective implementation of data governance and protection laws;

(d) The reliance on individual consent places an unreasonable and unworkable burden on individuals and, as data ecosystems become more complex, obtaining consent is not always possible.

2. Data Values Project

32. The Data Values Project,⁷ coordinated by the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, has set out to understand what principles should underpin the future of data for development to unlock their enormous potential. The future of data for development is envisioned as a world where people can be more equal players in the production and use of data that affect their lives.⁸ The recommendations arising from the project have focused on increasing personal and collective agency in data, accountability in data governance and evidence-based decision-making.

33. The focus of the Data Values Project is on how power and equity are related to data, rather than on technical issues. The findings from the project are aligned with the findings of the World Bank, that many data governance

⁷ For more information, see www.data4sdgs.org/datavaluesproject/blog.

⁸ The Data Values Project, “Reimagining data and power: A roadmap for putting values at the heart of data”, White Paper, July 2022.

solutions are top-down and do not allow space for people to engage on issues that affect them or to hold those in power accountable.⁹

34. Data do not provide an objective picture of the world. The data that Governments and others choose to collect reflect their own beliefs and values, and they can be used to reinforce or to challenge existing power relationships. Structural inequalities can be reinforced when the design of data collection, analysis and use is based on a top-down approach, and many marginalized groups are completely left out of data collections. However, a positive example of data use occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic when countries used data to identify those groups most in need as part of the design of an equitable vaccine allocation model.¹⁰

35. The Data Values Project highlights the features of inclusive approaches that may help people to engage directly in data production and to be part of a data co-creation process, which includes not just what data are collected but also how they are collected. The following are the features of an inclusive data system:

- (a) Representation through disaggregation is a prerequisite for true agency;
- (b) Co-creation, such that data are created with rather than for or about people;
- (c) Verification, which includes assessments of data gaps and biases.

36. Formal data laws and regulations are not enough to ensure accountability; rather, accountability should be embedded in all stages of data governance and should have broad participation across stakeholder groups. The Ada Lovelace Institute has created a useful model of participatory data stewardship, adapted from the ladder of citizen participation developed by Sherry Arnstein.¹¹ The following are included in the ladder of participation in data governance:

- (a) Inform: “We will keep you informed about how your data is being governed”;
- (b) Consult: “We will listen to, acknowledge, and provide feedback on concerns and aspirations for the governance of your data”;
- (c) Involve: “We will work with you to ensure that your concerns, and aspirations are directly reflected in data governance”;
- (d) Collaborate: “We will look to you for advice and innovation in the design of data governance models and incorporate your advice and recommendations where possible”;
- (e) Empower: “We will advise and assist in line with your decisions about your own data governance model”.

37. The Data Values Project has a focus on the use and impact of data. Too often data are not fully used by policymakers for a variety of reasons, including insufficient levels of data literacy, declining levels of trust and a lack of

⁹ *World Development Report 2021: Data for Better Lives*.

¹⁰ Fraym, “Mapping populations for vaccine equity: case studies”. Available at <https://fraym.io/mapping-vaccine-equity/> (accessed on 18 May 2022).

¹¹ Ada Lovelace Institute, *Participatory Data Stewardship* (London, 2021).

interoperability. Effective data use needs human interoperability with people working together across silos and across different communities to share and use data.

3. Data landscaping studies

38. As part of its work on leaving no one behind, Development Initiatives Poverty Research has developed a data landscaping approach¹² that looks at how countries can strengthen their data ecosystems to increase the collection, sharing and use of data. Their work highlighted the changing role of national statistical offices as they move from relying on surveys and censuses to working more closely with administrative data from line ministries, as well as with big data such as mobile phone data and satellite imagery, which are owned by private sector companies. To take on a leading role in coordinating the broader data ecosystem, national statistical offices need the following four things:

- (a) Revised legal powers to ensure national statistical offices govern, access and use relevant data;
- (b) Political authority to lead and coordinate a wide range of stakeholders;
- (c) The capacity and culture to engage constructively with all producers and users of data, both official and unofficial;
- (d) A clear road map to implement this transition.

III. Regional initiatives

A. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

39. In the collective vision and framework for action, members and associate members expressed their commitment that “by 2030, national statistical systems are enabled and empowered to lead development of and to deliver innovative, trusted and timely products and services for urgently needed and evolving statistical requirements of 2030 Agenda” and called for collective actions around five action areas to accelerate the needed transformation of the organizations, processes and people comprising national statistical systems. The action areas are: (a) engaging users and investing in statistics; (b) assuring quality of and instilling trust in statistics; (c) using integrated statistics for integrated analysis; (d) modernizing statistical business processes; and (e) developing requisite skill sets.

40. Having endorsed the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind in its resolution 75/9, ESCAP affirmed that the realization of the collective vision and framework for action transcended the capabilities of national statistical systems and required a whole-of-government approach. The Declaration encompasses commitments to enable the implementation of the collective vision and framework for action with collaborative and integrated efforts between policymakers and statistics producers.

¹² Bill Anderson, Bernard Sabiti and Sam Wozniak, “The data side of leaving no one behind: lessons from landscaping”, Discussion Paper (Bristol, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Development Initiatives Poverty Research, 2021).

41. Both the collective vision and framework for action and the Declaration include elements that relate to data governance and data stewardship. They have also inspired the following initiatives:

(a) Reviews of national statistical systems, including statistical legislation;

(b) Development of the tool “Every policy is connected” (EPIC), to facilitate policy-data dialogue aiming to identify policy priorities and data needs;

(c) Development of the Asia-Pacific SDG Gateway and its analytical products, which enhance consistency across data on development and increase the use of statistics in decision-making at regional and national levels;

(d) Development of the Sustainable Development Goals tracker, which allows national statistical systems to use national data, indicators and targets to produce a progress assessment on the Sustainable Development Goals at the national level;

(e) Projects aimed at improving national civil registration and vital statistics systems, conducting inequality assessments and promoting dialogue with policymakers that all contribute significantly to progress towards leaving no one behind;

(f) Projects aimed at strengthening environment statistics and applying the standardized diagnostic tool to ensure statistics priorities are guided by policy demand and to ensure the required inter-agency and user-producer dialogues take place.¹³

42. Furthermore, sessions of the Asia-Pacific Stats Cafe series have been held to raise awareness and foster regional dialogue on these initiatives and other relevant topics, such as unlocking the value of data for all, demand-driven data planning tools, harnessing new data sources, enhancing data and statistical literacy for policy action, innovations in data dissemination, inclusive data and inclusive policies. Moreover, governance aspects were also at the centre of the expert group meeting series on big data organized by the secretariat in 2021.

B. Economic Commission for Europe

43. The Economic Commission for Europe conducted an expert meeting on modernizing statistical legislation in November 2021, that had a focus on the following four areas:

(a) The role of legislation in accessing privately held data, which highlighted the importance of having a solid legal basis for obtaining such data for statistical purposes and the need for flexibility to allow faster access to the data and at a more granular level, which was particularly pertinent during the COVID-19 pandemic;

(b) Different approaches used worldwide to assess ethical considerations during the production of official statistics;

(c) Ensuring agile and adaptive legislation that defines the basic principles and protects human rights;

(d) Experiences in implementing the Generic Law on Official Statistics, which was endorsed by the Conference of European Statisticians in 2016 and has since been used by countries around the world and has been

¹³ For more information on tools, see <https://stat-confluence.escap.un.org/display/RPOES/Tools>.

adapted to meet specific regional needs by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

44. This work is continuing, and another expert meeting is planned for late 2022.

C. Association of Southeast Asian Nations

45. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Framework on Digital Data Governance serves to highlight the importance of coordinating policy and regulatory approaches and contains an outline of guiding principles. The overarching recommendation is the promotion of an interoperable data governance system that is key to strengthening the digital economy and data ecosystem of ASEAN.

46. The work of ASEAN has supported the promotion of a risk-based approach towards the data classification framework. Data classification would help to ensure data are managed and protected appropriately. There is a need for a clear definition of and distinction between national security data and commercial data. Industry could be encouraged to adopt similar data classifications, and Governments could look for compliance with global or internationally recognized standards to determine which companies have effective data management policies. If companies can verify that they can ensure data privacy, security and accessibility, then data should be allowed to flow across international borders.

47. The Association has recommended aligning data protection and privacy regulations with international best practices and improving coordination between ministries responsible for information and communications technology and other ministries and agencies. ASEAN has called for adopting a flexible approach that promotes industry self-regulation and empowers companies to take charge of data privacy protection while keeping up with the speed of digitalization.

D. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

48. In October 2021, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development adopted the Recommendation on Enhancing Access to and Sharing of Data, which is the first internationally agreed upon set of principles and policy guidance on how Governments can maximize the benefits of all types of data while protecting the rights of individuals and organizations.

49. The Recommendation is intended to help Governments to develop coherent data governance policies and frameworks to unlock the potential benefits of data across and within sectors, countries, organizations and communities. It aims to reinforce trust across the data ecosystem, stimulate investment in data, incentivize data access and sharing, and foster effective and responsible data access, sharing and use across sectors and jurisdictions.

IV. National initiatives

50. As a product of the World Data Report 2021, the World Bank developed a mapping of data governance legal frameworks around the world.¹⁴

¹⁴ Rong Chen, “Mapping data governance legal frameworks around the world”, Policy Research Working Paper, No. 9615 (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2021).

It looked at how data regulation can shape trust in the data economy. The mapping contains a detailed assessment of domestic laws, regulations and administrative requirements in 80 countries. It took note of the spectrum of approaches to data regulation from the European Union, where the right to individual data privacy is secured under the General Data Protection Regulation, to the United States of America, where the approach relies on voluntary private sector standards.

51. The authors also conducted a detailed survey alongside desk research focused on seven dimensions of regulatory practice on data governance, which were designated as either enablers or safeguards:

- (a) Enablers for e-commerce/ e-transactions;
- (b) Enablers for public intent data;
- (c) Enablers for private intent data;
- (d) Safeguards for personal data;
- (e) Safeguards for non-personal data;
- (f) Safeguards for cybersecurity and cybercrime;
- (g) Safeguards for cross-border data transfers.

52. Overall, they found that the adoption rate of good regulatory practices pertaining to enablers was higher than that of safeguards, across regions, as shown in the figure below.

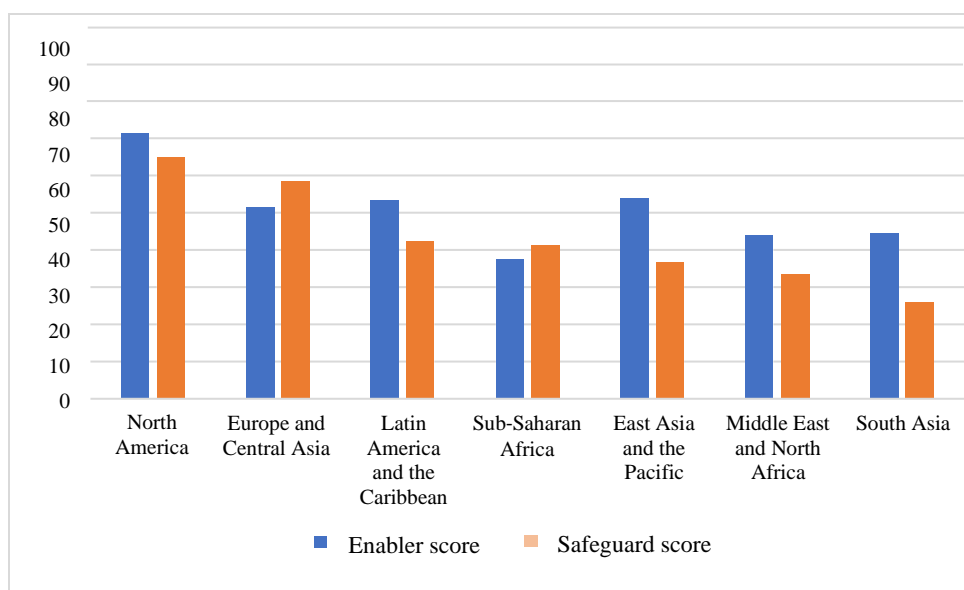
53. Only Estonia was found to have developed an advanced legal and regulatory framework. More than 60 per cent of countries had reached an evolving or basic level of regulatory framework to safeguard rights of participants involved in data economy activities.

54. The research showed a high correlation between good data governance and the wider regulatory quality index from the world governance indicators of the World Bank. Citizens of countries that had more robust data regulatory frameworks tended to feel more empowered in terms of both voice and accountability. This was reflected in their perceived ability to participate in selecting their Government, along with freedom of expression, freedom of association and a free media. The correlation did not necessarily mean there was causation.

55. The existence of legislation, as well as its robustness and completeness, was considered in the research. The assessment showed that countries were typically far more advanced in having passed overarching legislation, but were less advanced in the robustness of legislation and administrative measures to support its implementation. The enforcement of data governance frameworks was identified as an area for future research.

Enabler and safeguard scores by region

(Percentage)



Source: Rong Chen, “Mapping data governance legal frameworks around the world”, Policy Research Working Paper, No. 9615 (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2021).

56. The research showed the importance of data governance for all national statistical offices. Although many countries had established various data regulations, there was still much more potential to align with good regulatory practices and more potential to support the implementation of legislation.

57. The global, regional and national initiatives highlight a few important issues for countries to consider as they develop new data governance arrangements. National initiatives should be context specific, comprehensive, inclusive, balanced, agile and adaptive:

(a) The role that national statistical offices play needs to consider the broader context of the national data ecosystem, as well as broader factors, including the history, culture, governance and political economy of the country;

(b) The statistical legislation needs to consider the whole of the data value chain from the data collection to analysis and use, and other legal issues such as intellectual property rights, trade secrets, cyber security and data protection, and the governance framework needs to cover all aspects – formal laws, policies, regulations, institutions and procedures;

(c) The governance framework should allow countries to capture the full economic and social value of data, and the process for developing the governance framework should be inclusive of all groups and stakeholders across the whole value chain, ensuring that the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups are understood and reflected in any legislation, as in the case of gender mainstreaming;¹⁵

¹⁵ A classic example is gender mainstreaming, in which the gender perspective is incorporated into policy formulation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation in order to promote gender equality and combat discrimination.

(d) The data governance framework needs to balance data use and data privacy, that is the enablers and the safeguards;

(e) The world of data continues to evolve rapidly, and as we consider new data sources and new tools alongside new demands for real-time granular data, the data governance frameworks need to be agile and adaptive to respond to these changes.

V. Opportunities for regional action

A. Sharing experiences to learn from each other and shape global guidance

58. Data governance is highly contextual, as demonstrated in global, regional and national initiatives. Global guidance and standards with regard to data governance are under discussion. This provides a unique opportunity for countries to share their experiences which will help them to learn from each other and contribute to shaping global guidance and standards. Sharing experiences will help to highlight different perspectives and define the building blocks for a shared vision of good data governance. Asia-Pacific countries may share their experiences with the Statistical Commission Working Group on Data Stewardship and may consider joining this group or any of its workstreams. They may also share their experiences through regional forums such as the Asia-Pacific Stats Cafe series as well as at international events such as the United Nations World Data Forum planned to take place in April 2023 in Hangzhou, China.

59. The success of the Asia-Pacific Stats Cafe series and the communities of practice on data integration and on disaster statistics highlights the demand for regional forums where statisticians can present their research and exchange experiences. It also demonstrates the value of informal mechanisms to advance statistics in the region. New agile mechanisms, such as technical sprints, may provide a way to galvanize action around a key issue and quickly move from abstract to concrete action. Informal high-level expert dialogues may provide a way to convene experts to identify common data governance concerns and share ideas and devise solutions.

B. Developing regional principles and approaches

60. The development of regional principles and/or approaches with regard to data governance may be beneficial in a range of areas. The Statistical Commission Working Group on Data Stewardship has noted the importance of developing a common understanding of the data ecosystem. The Group has suggested that it may be possible for high-level principles to emerge from an analysis of country practices and that, with effort, regional adaptations may be standardized and more broadly understood and adopted, including in formal legislation. The Generic Law on Official Statistics, which was endorsed by the Conference of European Statisticians in 2016, could be adapted for the particular regional needs of Asia-Pacific countries. Data ethics is a key part of data governance, and there may be a benefit in developing a regional approach. Good practice principles for data ethics that guide the appropriate use of data in the public sector could help to better protect data and to build trust in official statistics.

61. The workstream on data and collaboration within the Working Group on Data Stewardship is focused on ways to improve data sharing and collaboration. For example, data sharing and collaboration may be improved

by using international standards, defining legal frameworks and expanding data literacy programmes.

VI. Issues for consideration by the Committee

62. The Committee may wish to consider how countries can share experiences to learn lessons and to shape global guidance.

63. The Committee may also wish to express its views on how regional collaboration on data governance issues may best support and strengthen national efforts and how data governance may feature in its future work.

64. The Committee may further wish to note the link to discussions under agenda item 4 (a), which include a review of the groups and communities of practices supporting the work of the Committee, and provide recommendations for streamlining, consolidation and improvement to ensure these continue to be fit for purpose. This could include moving towards less formal collaboration mechanisms that may be better suited to the complex world in which national statistical offices now operate. The Committee may wish to recommend that such a review could pay particular attention to arrangements and mechanisms to support statistical offices to navigate complex data governance choices. The Committee may wish to express its views on whether to develop regional principles and approaches in the area of data governance. These could include adapting the Generic Law on Official Statistics, developing good practice principles for data ethics, defining legal frameworks for official statistics or expanding data literacy programmes.
