
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Committee on Statistics

Eighth session

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Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda*

Regional initiatives and partnerships for strengthening national statistical systems for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: progress made in support of the collective vision and framework for action by groups responsible for regional initiatives of the Committee on Statistics and by the secretariat

Reports on the 10th and 11th meetings of the Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific**

Summary

The Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific was instated by the Committee on Statistics at its second session in 2010 with its scope and ambition level determined by the core set of economic statistics, endorsed by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific at its sixty-seventh session in 2011.

To ensure the continued relevance of the Programme, the Committee at its sixth session in 2018 recommended that the Regional Programme be aligned with the *Collective Vision and Framework for Action* and extended to 2030. The present information document contains the reports of the 10th and 11th meetings of the Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, held in 2021. The Steering Group at these meetings deliberated and decided on approaches and actions to implement the most recent decisions by the Committee.

The Committee is invited to take note of the reports of the meetings.

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

** The present document is being issued without formal editing.

I. Tenth meeting of the Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific

A. Participation

1. The 10th meeting of the Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific was held online on 28 January 2021. Steering Group members from the following countries were represented at the meeting: Bangladesh; Bhutan; Cambodia; China; Hong Kong, China; Islamic Republic of Iran; Malaysia; Maldives; Mongolia; Nepal; New Zealand; Pakistan; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Samoa; Singapore; Türkiye; and Viet Nam. Members from the following entities were also represented: Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Pacific Community. The Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific also participated in the meeting. Alternate members and other representatives from Bangladesh, China, Malaysia, Maldives, the Philippines, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka and Türkiye attended as observers.

2. The Steering Group elected Ms. Aishath Shahuda (Maldives), Ms. Nilima Lal (Pacific Community), Ms. Wai Yee Yen (Singapore) and Mr. Mohd Yazid Kasim (Malaysia) as Co-chairs, forming a collective leadership for the Group for the period 2021–2022.

B. Meeting objectives

3. The objectives of the meeting were as follows:

- (a) Elect new leadership of the Steering Group for the period 2021–2022;
- (b) Agree on the work plan for the period 2021–2023;
- (c) Agree on priority activities for the year 2021.

C. Expectations and experiences

1. Priorities

4. The Steering Group highlighted the following expectations and priorities for the work of the Group and the Regional Programme, and noted that:

- (a) The Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific continue to function as a platform for sharing knowledge in Asia and the Pacific;
- (b) There be continuous emphasis on creation of regional resources for public, free access, such as replication studies, promotional material, and recommended training packages;¹

¹ Additional information is available at <https://www.unescap.org/resources/official-statistics-101-learn-others>; <https://www.unescap.org/news/celebrating-ten-years-regional-programme-economic-statistics>; <https://www.unescap.org/blog/connecting-asia-pacific-region-data-we-can-trust>; <https://www.unsiap.or.jp/tot/index.html>.

(c) Priority be given to topics including big data, digital economy, integrated statistics, tourism satellite accounts and regional gross domestic product (GDP) in the future work of the regional programme;

(d) The Steering Group continue its advocacy work, promoting the use of economic statistics for evidence-based decisions;

(e) There is alignment and complementarity with sub-regional priorities and strategies, such as the Ten-Year Pacific Statistics Strategy.

D. Decisions

5. The Steering Group deliberated and made the following decisions:

(a) Endorsed the proposed work plan for 2021–2023, as contained in the Programme Matrix for 2021–2030,² with the following adjustments:

(i) Measurement of the economic impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic to be included as a priority topic;

(ii) Forums for sharing experiences and knowledge should also allow for technical level discussions.

(b) The Steering Group implement the following activities in 2021:

(i) The Steering Group operate as a community of practice with members actively using the electronic platform for discussions in-between meetings;

(ii) Review, update and expand existing training materials, including sharing experiences in the use of big data;

(iii) Outreach to training partners to offer e-learning on several topics, including statistical business registers;

(iv) Have in-depth technical forums to discuss topical issues;

(v) Participate in the update of the 2008 System of National Accounts by contributing directly to the global work and by contributing to regional experience and knowledge sharing.

II. Eleventh meeting of the Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific

A. Participation

6. The Steering Group convened its 11th meeting online on 2 and 3 November 2021. Steering Group members from the following countries were represented at the meeting: Afghanistan; Armenia; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Cambodia; China; Hong Kong, China; Islamic Republic of Iran; Malaysia; Maldives; Mongolia; Nepal; New Zealand; Pakistan; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Samoa; Singapore; Türkiye; and Viet Nam. Steering Group members from ADB and the Pacific Community also attended. Alternate members and other representatives from Bangladesh, China,

² Additional information is available at https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/02_Proposed_RPES_Programme_Matrix_9th_SGRPES_19Jun20.pdf.

Malaysia, Maldives, the Philippines, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, Türkiye and the Pacific Community also participated.

B. Meeting objectives

7. The meeting was convened to:
 - (a) Share information on economic statistics development in the region;
 - (b) Review progress in implementing the Steering Group 2021 work plan and agree on the work plan for 2022;
 - (c) Discuss potential for collaboration between the Steering Group on Economic Statistics and the Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics to advance integrated statistics (action area A of the Collective Vision and Framework for Action);
 - (d) Discuss the Steering Group on Economic Statistics' participation in global statistical community activities.

C. Updates on successes, challenges, and key initiatives

8. Steering Group members provided updates on developments since the previous Steering Group meeting held in January 2021.³ Summary highlights were as follows:

9. **Rebasing exercises.** Several members updated the meeting of rebasing exercises conducted in their respective countries focusing on annual GDP, Quantum Index of Industrial Production, and Consumer Price Index (CPI).

10. **Use of big data.** Several members spoke of exploring the use of alternative sources of data to supplement production of economic statistics with many initiatives motivated by the challenges to traditional data collection posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

11. **Publishing.** Several members published quarterly national accounts and wage indices, price indices and unit value indices, as well as revised securities and banking statistics. Additionally, some reported publishing of online retail sales statistics considering the increasing popularity of online shopping during the COVID-19 pandemic.

12. **Capacity building and experience sharing.** Members shared experiences on capacity building, and partnerships with development partners including engagement in regional activities such as the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) Stats Café Series and bilateral exchanges.

13. **Engagement with the global statistical community.** Some members shared information about their participation in consultations on global statistical matters such as the 2008 System of National Accounts and the sixth edition of the Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual revisions.

14. **COVID-19 pandemic.** Several members mentioned challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, including in data collection and timely release of

³ <https://www.unescap.org/events/2021/10th-meeting-steering-group-regional-programme-improvement-economic-statistics-asia-and>.

statistics complicated by remote working arrangements and constrained budget.

15. Select updates on specific country initiatives included:

(a) Development of the Bhutan Standard Industrial Classification supported by ESCAP;

(b) Initiatives in Malaysia to improve timeliness of economic statistics during the pandemic such as use of mobile phone data,

(c) Mongolia pilot work on crop statistics using satellite imagery and machine learning;

(d) Pacific Community work on alternative data sources if spurred on by the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic;

(e) The Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific updated on recent online trainings on economic statistics delivered by the Institute in collaboration with ESCAP, ADB and the United Nations Statistics Division, and on efforts to make the trainings as interactive as possible.

D. Integrated statistics towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

16. Members of the Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific participated in a panel discussion with members of the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics to discuss integrated statistics and how they can undertake its related activities that support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in line with the collective vision and framework for action.

17. Panelists shared benefits and challenges of deepened collaboration across the social and economic statistics domains. Benefits include strengthening data support towards completing common and specific goals, sharing resources, expertise and technical knowledge across domains, field operation work and mutual collaboration in task forces and technical working groups. Participants noted that the major challenge remains limited resources that eventually limits innovation and productivity across domains. Only the basic needs of end users can be met, with little time and resources left for more complex or innovative products.

18. Drawing from the benefits, and discussing the ways to navigate the challenges, members of the Steering Group made recommendations on how the two Steering Groups could collaborate on future activities. These include the following:

(a) To enlist support from development partners to build capacity for concrete collaboration on statistical products that are in high demand;

(b) To map sustainable development goals that cut across domains and collaborate on production of statistical indicators within the work programmes of the two Steering Groups;

(c) To address demand for multi-domain features in topics such as climate statistics, disaster statistics, ocean accounting and statistics, poverty indices, labour market statistics, housing and rental market, gender mainstreaming and food security, and consult with key stakeholders to produce high demand statistical products;

(d) To incorporate new and alternative types of data towards producing in demand statistical products;

(e) To collaborate on dissemination of statistical products to ensure users are aware of data and its interlinkages;

(f) To determine governance structures that are useful for collaboration across domains and apply those structures;

(g) To make use of existing integration platforms such as the ESCAP Data Integration Community of Practice.⁴

E. Decisions

19. The Steering Group made the following decisions:

(a) The Steering Group agreed for the work plan for 2022 to prioritize the following thematic areas: statistical business registers, informal sector, new methods of data collection, production of data series to monitor effects of COVID-19, machine learning, artificial intelligence, business surveys, multi-domain statistics, censuses, and production of guidance notes on GDP and CPI rebasing in 2022;

(b) To actively use the recently established economic statistics community of practice to share knowledge and experience;

(c) To undertake joint activities in 2022 with the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics to advance integrated statistics in line with the Collective Vision and Framework for Action after a review of high in demand statistical products that cut across domains by the respective groups;

(d) To contribute to the global statistical community in the update of the 2008 System of National Accounts and the Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual, sixth edition, and other areas of economic statistics as they emerge.

⁴ Information on the Data Integration Community of Practice is available at <https://stat-confluence.escap.un.org/pages/viewinfo.action?pageId=7701265>.