

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

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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

Report on the 3rd meeting of the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics **

Summary

The present information document contains the report on the 3rd meeting of the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics. The Committee on Statistics may wish to take note of the present report.

I. Background

1. At its fifth session in 2016, the Committee on Statistics endorsed the “Implementation Plan of the Regional Strategy to Improve Population and Social Statistics in Asia and the Pacific”.¹ The Committee also agreed to establish a Regional Steering Group to oversee the implementation of the Regional Strategy for ensuring progress towards the vision, “The countries of Asia and the Pacific have the capacity to produce, disseminate, and use the core set of population and social statistics by 2030,” as well as achieving the Regional Strategy’s three goals: (a) enable policy environment and maintain demand and support; (b) improve availability and quality of disaggregated statistics; and (c) enhance data accessibility, analysis, interpretation and use.

2. The Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics was established in 2017, and is composed of representatives with senior management and technical responsibilities in population and social statistics from 28 member States and 10 international agencies, as below:

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

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

¹ E/ESCAP/CST(5)/3.

(a) Member States: Afghanistan, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Japan, Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Russian Federation, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu, and Viet Nam.

(b) Member agencies: International Labour Organization, International Organization for Migration, Pacific Community, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-WOMEN), United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Statistics Division and World Bank.

3. The Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics first met in August 2017, reviewed its mandates, identified priority issues and specific modalities to advance implementation of the Regional Strategy, and formulated a work plan.² Successive efforts of the secretariat and several members of the Regional Steering Group resulted in the development, trial and implementation of the Every policy is connected (EPIC) tool that facilitates policy-data dialogue aiming to identify policy priorities and data needs.³ This contributed to advancing towards Goal 1 of the Regional Strategy.

4. At its second meeting in July 2019, the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics reviewed the progress of work, decided on two priority activities under each Goal and supported trialling the application of "communities of practice", as online learning platforms to enhance the functionality and efficiency of the Group.⁴ Successive efforts of the secretariat and a number of Regional Steering Group members, inter alia, resulted in the establishment of the data integration community of practice, the development of the Asia-Pacific Guidelines to Data Integration for Official Statistics, as well as further development of the Every policy is connected (EPIC) tool.

II. Third meeting of the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics

5. The 3rd meeting of the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics was held online due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on 7 and 8 September 2021. The meeting was chaired by Bhutan and attended by 17 member States⁵ and all 10 member agencies. In addition, representatives from Asian Development Bank (ADB), Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) Subregional Office for the Pacific, and Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific also participated.

6. The 3rd Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics meeting aimed to review the progress of work, its structure, functioning, and means of implementation and decide on the way forward.

² https://unescap.org/sites/default/files/PSS%20RSG%20meeting%20report_28-31Aug%202017.pdf.

³ <https://unescap.org/our-work/statistics/EPIC>.

⁴ https://unescap.org/sites/default/files/2nd_RSG-PSS_meeting_report_%28revised%29_17-19Jul2019.pdf.

⁵ Armenia, Bhutan, Cambodia, Georgia, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu.

7. The main objectives of the meeting were:
- (a) Review the progress of the Regional Strategy and decide on future priority areas and activities, including the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath;
 - (b) Review the terms of reference for the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics;
 - (c) Identify opportunities for knowledge and experience sharing through existing platforms (e.g. Asia-Pacific Stats Café Series and data integration community of practice);
 - (d) Identify existing initiatives and tools by development partners that may support the implementation of the Regional Strategy.
8. In order to tailor the agenda and organization of the meeting, a short questionnaire, “Call for inputs on meeting agenda,” was circulated to the member countries; the questionnaire received 16 responses.
9. In this meeting, the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics reviewed the progress of the Regional Strategy at the national and regional level, looked into the Regional Steering Group terms of reference and discussed and decided on a way forward.
10. The meeting also showcased relevant initiatives and tools by development partners, including the ADB, Pacific Community, Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific, UNICEF, United Nations Statistics Division, and World Bank.
11. Furthermore, the meeting benefitted from a panel discussion on the impact of COVID-19 on producing population and social statistics. Panellists from Armenia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Vanuatu briefly discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic had hindered the production of population and social statistics in their countries. They pointed out the challenges and solutions and indicated the opportunities created and lessons learned to improve production, dissemination and use of population and social statistics in future.
12. This report summarizes the discussions and results of the 3rd Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics meeting. Detailed information, including concept note, agenda, participants, presentations and background documents, are available at <https://unescap.org/events/2021/third-meeting-regional-steering-group-population-and-social-statistics>.

III. Discussions and decisions

13. The Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics reviewed and acknowledged the progress of the Regional Strategy at both regional and national levels. The information on national efforts was obtained from the responses to the questionnaire circulated in preparation for the Regional Steering Group meeting. A summary of the discussion is presented below.

Goal 1: Enable policy environment and maintain demand and support

14. A key achievement at the regional level is developing and expanding the use of the Every policy is connected (EPIC) tool that facilitates policy-data dialogue aiming to identify policy priorities and data needs. It integrates the

four dimensions of development (social, economic, environmental, and institutional) in every policy plan and develops a comprehensive indicator framework for policy monitoring. An online application, a user manual and e-learning has also been developed. Further information is available at <https://unescap.org/our-work/statistics/EPIC>.

At the national level:

(a) Many responding countries have developed or are considering developing and/or updating the National Strategy for Development of Statistics, with efforts being made to secure sufficient funds for its implementation;

(b) There is a growing interest in and demand for the use of the Every policy is connected (EPIC) tool;

(c) Many responding countries are facing increasing demand for timely and granular statistics for decision-making. There are ongoing efforts to enable a supportive policy environment and to strengthen collaboration with stakeholders;

(d) Countries are considering (i) review of the national legal framework to secure access to data for statistical purposes while protecting privacy; (ii) development of data-sharing and data-quality strategies; (iii) implementation of the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics; and (iv) aligning national development plans to the Sustainable Development Goals, including the streamlining and integration of reporting and data collection as well as linking national development indicators to those of the Goals.

Goal 2: Improve availability and quality of disaggregated statistics

15. Key achievements at the regional level include (i) establishment of the data integration community of practice;⁶ (ii) development of the Asia-Pacific Guidelines to Data Integration for Official Statistics;⁷ (iii) design and conduct of a Data Integration Capacity Assessment Survey; and (iv) two rounds of Regional Workshops on Implementing Data Integration in Asia and the Pacific.⁸ Furthermore, the Secretariat organized a series of webinars and expert group meetings on inequality assessment for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems⁹ and contributed to the ADB's Practical Guidebook on Data Disaggregation for the Sustainable Development Goals¹⁰ and the United Nations National Quality Assurance Frameworks Manual for Official Statistics.¹¹

⁶ <https://stat-confluence.escap.un.org/display/DICP/Data+Integration+Community+of+Practice>.

⁷ <https://unescap.org/kp/2021/asia-pacific-guidelines-data-integration-official-statistics>.

⁸ <https://unescap.org/events/regional-workshops-implementing-data-integration-asia-and-pacific-round-1>; and <https://unescap.org/events/regional-workshops-implementing-data-integration-asia-and-pacific-round-2>.

⁹ <https://getinthepicture.org/news/escap-kicking-three-part-webinar-series-assessing-inequality>.

¹⁰ <https://adb.org/publications/guidebook-data-disaggregation-sdgs>.

¹¹ <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/dataquality/references/1902216-UNNQAManual-WEB.pdf>.

At the national level:

(a) Several responding countries are taking steps to modernize the production of statistics;

(b) Many responding countries are using internationally agreed standards and classifications, although improvements are still needed;

(c) Countries are considering to (i) develop national quality assurance frameworks; (ii) build register-based statistical systems, including population registers; (iii) enhance use and integration of administrative data and new data sources; and (iv) launch new surveys and increase the use of alternative modes of data collection;

(d) There is a growing interest/demand for capacity building on data integration, big data, register-based census, new modes of data collection and implementation of Generic Statistical Business Process Model.

Goal 3: Enhance data accessibility, analysis, interpretation and use

16. Key achievements at the regional level include (a) the development of Manual on Harnessing Time-Use Data for Evidence-based Policy, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Beijing Platform for Action;¹² (b) the development of e-learning modules on gender data use, analysis and communications and training of trainers;¹³ and (c) the development and implementation of the National SDG tracker.¹⁴ Furthermore, relevant Stats Briefs developed by the Secretariat contribute to this Goal.

At the national level:

(a) Many responding countries have developed or are considering developing their national statistics portals and/or Sustainable Development Goal reporting platforms;

(b) Some of responding countries are considering (i) release of microdata from household surveys and censuses; (ii) online user satisfaction surveys; (iii) interactive data portals; (iv) mobile applications to enhance data dissemination and use; and (v) building closer relationships with data users, including media, academia, governmental agencies.

17. The Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics is obliged to review its terms of reference every two years to ensure that it has the necessary mandates to effectively and efficiently perform its functions. The Regional Steering Group took note that its terms of reference had not been reviewed since endorsed by the Committee on Statistics at its fifth session in 2016 and supported a review. The revisions shall be subject to approval by the Committee on Statistics.

18. The Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics agreed upon the review of the terms of reference to take into account (a) prioritizing the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics strategic functions and delegating technical roles to virtual task forces; (b) meeting frequency; and (c) the use of online collaboration modality. The

¹² https://unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/knowledge-products/Harnessing_Time-Use_Data_ESCAP.pdf.

¹³ <https://data.unwomen.org/resources/gender-statistics-training-curriculum>.

¹⁴ <https://data.unescap.org/stories/national-sdg-tracker>.

Regional Steering Group noted that no amendment is required for the remainder of the terms of reference.¹⁵

19. The Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics decided on increasing the meeting frequency to annual meetings and creating an online collaboration space to enhance the communication, coordination and functionality of the Group.

20. The Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics agreed to use online regional platforms, including the Asia-Pacific Stats Café Series and the data integration community of practice, to share technical knowledge and experience.

21. The Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics listed the following as the priority areas of the Group:

- (a) Use of alternative data sources (administrative, big data, geospatial data);
- (b) Modernizing census-taking;
- (c) Population projections;
- (d) Small area estimation;
- (e) Migration statistics;
- (f) Innovative approaches to data collection in household surveys;
- (g) Enhancing data and statistical literacy for policy action.

22. The Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics also proposed the following regional-level activities under each Goal of the Regional Strategy:

Goal 1: Enable policy environment and maintain demand and support

- (a) Capacity building and in-country technical assistance on the implementation of the Every policy is connected (EPIC) tool;
- (b) Support on strengthening legislative provisions for the use of and access to alternative data sources by National Statistical Offices;
- (c) Support on development of National Statistical Development Strategies.

Goal 2: Improve availability and quality of disaggregated statistics

- (a) Support on register-based censuses, including developing relevant guidelines, providing training courses and workshops, providing an online space for sharing of knowledge and experience through establishing a new community of practice or using the capacity of the data integration community of practice;
- (b) Support on small area estimation, including providing training courses and providing an online space for sharing of knowledge and experience

¹⁵ The draft revised terms of reference is presented as annex to the document Advancing official statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: progress in implementing regional initiatives with respect to the collective vision and framework for action for consideration and endorsement by the Committee (see ESCAP/CST/2022/4).

through establishing a new community of practice or using the capacity of the data integration community of practice;

- (c) Capacity building on population projections;
- (d) Capacity building on implementation of the data integration guidelines.

Goal 3: Enhance data accessibility, analysis, interpretation and use

- (a) Support on enhancing data and statistical literacy, including developing relevant guidelines and providing training courses and workshops;
 - (b) Expansion of the eLearning module on gender data;
 - (c) Capacity building on the development of national data hubs;
 - (d) Capacity building on using geospatial data, mapping and geographic information system software.
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