



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
18 December 2024

Original: English

Statistical Commission

Fifty-sixth session

New York, 4–7 March 2025

Item 3 (c) of the provisional agenda*

Items for discussion and decision

Working methods of the Statistical Commission

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2024/312 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Bureau of the Statistical Commission on the working methods of the Commission, which is submitted for discussion and decision.

* [E/CN.3/2025/1](#).



I. Introduction

1. At its fifty-third session, the Statistical Commission agreed on updated terms of reference, which address the broadening data landscape. In Economic and Social Council resolution [2022/3](#) of 8 June 2022, the Council reaffirmed the Commission as the primary body for the coordination of the global statistical programmes in general and of the United Nations statistical and data-related system. In that resolution, entitled “Ensuring that the work in the field of statistics and data is adaptive to the changing statistical and data ecosystem”, the Council called upon the United Nations statistical and data-related system to report on work on statistics and data within all domains to the Commission, to enable the Commission to fulfil its function as the primary body responsible for the management of statistical information and governance of statistics and data. The Council also requested the Commission to play the role as the apex forum for discussions, knowledge exchange and sharing of best practices on statistics and data across all domains, to develop and maintain international statistical standards and norms, tools and methodologies, to support and bolster the development of sustainable national statistical systems, to develop and build the capacity of national systems, to advocate for the professional community of official statistics and to ensure continued innovations to adapt to the changing statistical and data system. An underlying theme throughout the resolution is the importance of adherence to and upholding of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics by Member States and the specialized agencies, funds and programmes, the regional economic commissions of the United Nations system and other relevant programmes of the Secretariat and the United Nations development system and their work in supporting developing countries in strengthening their statistical and data systems.

2. At its fifty-fifth session, the Statistical Commission acknowledged the importance of the Commission being an inclusive representative body and the need to preserve the technical nature of the Commission, and adopted a draft resolution and recommended its adoption to the Economic and Social Council (see [E/2024/24–E/CN.3/2024/36](#)). The Commission commended the Bureau for its work to achieve an inclusive and representative Commission, specifically on the thorough, inclusive and participatory process undertaken to prepare the background note on a more representative and inclusive Commission, especially with regard to the widespread consultations, and supported the proposed six goals as outlined in the background note (see [E/CN.3/2024/3](#)).

3. Furthermore, the Statistical Commission called upon its Bureau to continue its work on analysis of the role of the Commission in the broadened data and statistical landscape, including by consulting the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System to determine the next steps and providing an overview of data governance as discussed in the Friday seminar on emerging issues: data governance with the aim of launching a process towards the development of common terminology and definitions for data governance, noted other initiatives within the scope of the Bureau, such as gender mainstreaming, and requested the Bureau to report back to the Commission in 2025.

4. In the present report, the Bureau outlines the latest developments and activities under the areas of implementing Economic and Social Council resolutions [2022/3](#) and [2024/2](#) of 5 June 2024 in defining the role of the Statistical Commission in the broadened mandate and the scoping and defining of data governance. In the report, the Bureau describes its intersessional work pursuant to decisions from its fifty-fifth session. The report is accompanied by two background notes: an analysis of the role of the Commission and an overview of data governance. The Commission is invited to reflect on its role in the data ecosystem and the implementation of Council

resolution [2022/3](#) and give guidance on its role in the area of data governance, as outlined in paragraph 21 below.

II. An inclusive and representative Statistical Commission

A. Adoption of Economic and Social Council resolution [2024/2](#)

5. The Statistical Commission took a historic decision by adopting and recommending to the Economic and Social Council the adoption of the resolution entitled “An inclusive and representative Statistical Commission to leave no one behind”, in which the membership of the Commission would be gradually expanded from 24 at present to 54 by 2028, while preserving its technical nature. On 5 June 2024, the text was adopted by the Economic and Social Council as resolution [2024/2](#), thereby increasing the number of Member States in the Commission over a three-year period. The election process is managed by the General Assembly and the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council Affairs Division of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management.

6. This strengthening of the Statistical Commission will enable it to effectively fulfil the broader mandate given to it by the Economic and Social Council in resolution [2022/3](#), by which the Council shifted the Commission’s focus from solely covering official statistics to addressing the growing demands for statistics and data in the context of emerging issues, such as sustainable development, climate change, well-being, the handling of diverse new information systems, data protection and privacy, and technological innovations.

B. Assessment mechanism

7. Furthermore, intent on preserving the technical nature of the Statistical Commission, the Economic and Social Council, in resolution [2024/2](#), requested that the Bureau review, assess and report on the progress towards the achievement of the objectives of that resolution at the fifty-eighth session, including by making recommendations in that regard. Therefore, the Bureau, in consultation with Statistics Canada, has developed a proposal for an assessment framework for the achievement of the objectives in the resolution on enlargement of the Commission’s membership (see annex). The proposed framework will allow for a review and assessment of and reporting on the progress towards the achievement of the objectives of the resolution to the Commission at its fifty-eighth session.

III. Role of the Statistical Commission

8. Over the past year, the Bureau has met multiple times to discuss the Statistical Commission’s role in the broadened data and statistical landscape, in particular regarding the Commission’s new terms of reference. In the intersessional period, the Bureau engaged in conversations with various key stakeholders and developed a detailed background document which outlines a starting point for detailed discussions on the role of the Commission. In the background document entitled “United Nations Statistical Commission: implementing the 2022 terms of reference and remaining relevant in the United Nations system”, the Bureau presents information on the role and history of the Commission, various resolutions on its role and functions, and relevant discussions in other United Nations bodies on data-related topics.

9. Through an analysis of gaps in the current list of agenda topics included in the multi-year programme, the background paper describes relevant emerging issues that are discussed in the data and statistics communities at both the national and international levels. The paper contains suggestions on areas, such as data stewardship, artificial intelligence and measurements beyond gross domestic product that might merit deeper and more systematic consideration by the Statistical Commission. The paper also includes information on ways that the Commission might address these and other emerging issues.

10. Lastly, the background document provides an analysis of the place of the Statistical Commission within the United Nations system, and includes a suggestion that there is a need to focus on strengthening collaboration and coordination across the Economic and Social Council system as well as to focus on interactions within the wider United Nations system. One example of coordination that the Chair of the Commission has fostered during the intersessional period has been a series of informal discussions with the Chair of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development.

11. A global consultation on the background document was held in November and December 2024. More details on the consultation can be found in the annex to the background document. Furthermore, a webinar was held on 26 November 2024, in which the Bureau presented the groundwork for in-depth discussions during the fifty-sixth session in March 2025. The Bureau expects continued discourse over the future sessions of the Statistical Commission and hopes that this will lead to a common understanding on these questions among Member States and observers of the Commission.

IV. Role of the Statistical Commission in data governance

12. In response to paragraph (c) of Statistical Commission decision 55/102, in which the Commission called for an overview of data governance as discussed in the Friday seminar on emerging issues: data governance with the aim of launching a process towards the development of common terminology and definitions for data governance, the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat has developed a background document that maps ongoing initiatives related to data governance with the aim of creating a comprehensive overview that will enable the Commission to move toward this common terminology and definitions. Defining the scope of the subject matter will allow for better understanding of the role of the Commission.

13. The topic of data governance covers many elements that are often outside of official statistics. The landscape is shifting, and this is reflected in the revised terms of reference of the Statistical Commission that were adopted in 2022. (See sect. III for more discussions on adaptations to the revised mandate.) The 2022 update to the terms of reference includes an emphasis on the need for technological innovation, the promotion of practices for the generation of information aligned with principles that ensure coherence, comparability and data privacy, among other things, and the importance of building partnerships. This calls for a better, more thorough understanding of how the governance of data applies across the system.

14. At the international level, the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System developed the System-wide Road Map for Innovating United Nations Data and Statistics, which was endorsed by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). CEB also endorsed the paper entitled “International data governance: pathways to progress” ([CEB/2023/1/Add.2](#)), which outlines the rationale and a vision for global data governance. Bringing the focus to

national-level data governance is a cornerstone of the work being undertaken for discussion at the fifty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission.

15. The recently adopted Global Digital Compact is aimed at addressing issues related to the digital space and contains a call for the establishment of a dedicated working group within the Commission on Science and Technology for Development. It is essential that the Statistical Commission, the Commission on Science and Technology for Development and the established working groups coordinate their work on data governance to strengthen the work programmes of each group to support Member States.

16. As noted in the annex of the background note on data governance, it is suggested that the Statistical Commission establish a working group of the Commission on data governance, with the aim of developing common terminology and definitions and supporting the working mechanism established under the Global Digital Compact as part of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, on the basis of the criteria outlined in the background note on data governance, and report back to the Commission at its fifty-seventh session, in 2026.

V. Indices

17. During the intersessional period, a number of indices, such as the multidimensional vulnerability index, have been brought to the attention of the Bureau (see [E/CN.3/2025/35](#)). At its June 2024 meeting, the Bureau discussed extensively the role the Statistical Commission plays in addressing such requests. The Bureau agreed that the Commission as a technical body can provide expertise; however, it is not in a position to develop or maintain any indices.

VI. Working methods

18. Supporting the call for an inclusive and representative Statistical Commission, during the intersessional period, the Bureau held a meeting and conducted a special seminar with the chairs of the United Nations regional statistical bodies from each regional commission. The size of the Bureau is fixed as per the rules and regulations of Economic and Social Council subsidiary bodies and was reiterated by the Council in paragraph 12 of its resolution [2024/2](#). Thus, it is suggested that, by including the chairs of the United Nations regional statistical bodies in selected meetings of the Bureau, where appropriate, a broader regional perspective can be brought into the meetings. Furthermore, collaboration and coordination across the statistical bodies supports the call to strengthen the role of the Commission as the apex forum for discussions, as outlined in the updated terms of reference from 2022.

VII. Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics

19. In paragraph (c) of decision 55/101, regarding an advisory board on the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, the Statistical Commission requested the Bureau to advance the terms of reference of the board, the composition of the board and the criteria for the selection of experts through a transparent and inclusive consultation process, and to report back to the Commission at its fifty-sixth session, in 2025. In response, the Bureau reviewed an initial refinement of the terms of reference and launched a global consultation in August and September 2024. Further details on the global consultation, including how its key outcomes were reflected in the revised terms of reference submitted to the Commission at its fifty-sixth session,

are provided in the report of the Secretary-General on the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics ([E/CN.3/2025/5](#)).

VIII. World Statistics Day

20. World Statistics Day 2025 will be held on 20 October. In 2024, the Bureau of the Statistical Commission and the Statistics Division consulted on modalities and possible themes for World Statistics Day in 2025. Further details can be found in the report of the Secretary-General on World Statistics Day ([E/CN.3/2025/23](#)).

IX. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission

21. The Statistical Commission is invited:

(a) To reflect on the Bureau's engagement with the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System and other relevant stakeholders on the role and functions of the Commission and support continued engagement;

(b) To consider ways to strengthen its outreach and exchange with the bureaux of the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies, especially on topics where expertise and competences potentially overlap, and to support the efforts of the Council to better deliver on its mandate according to the Charter of the United Nations;

(c) To reflect on how the Commission could fulfil the updated terms of reference adopted in Economic and Social Council resolution [2022/3](#), including by reflecting on the utilization of members in its work, efficient use of the time allocated to the Commission and best practices in addressing new emerging issues, among others, and to request the Bureau to develop options regarding these questions;

(d) To express its views on and approve the proposed framework, contained in the annex to the present document, for review, assessment and reporting on progress towards the achievement of the objectives of Economic and Social Council resolution [2024/2](#), as requested in that resolution, in view of the Bureau's report to be submitted to the Commission at its fifty-eighth session;

(e) To establish a working group of the Commission on data governance, with the aim of developing common terminology and definitions, and to support the working mechanism established under the Global Digital Compact as part of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, on the basis of the criteria outlined in the background note on data governance, and report back to the Commission at its fifty-seventh session, in 2026.

Annex

Assessment framework prepared by the Secretariat of the United Nations and Statistics Canada for the achievement of the objectives in Economic and Social Council resolution 2024/2 on enlargement of the Statistical Commission's membership

8 August 2024

1. Within the discussion on the expansion of the membership in the Statistical Commission at its fifty-fifth session, in 2024, concerns were raised about how to assess whether the objectives of a more inclusive and representative Commission were met. In its resolution 2024/2, the Economic and Social Council requested the Bureau of the Statistical Commission to “review, assess and report on the progress towards the achievement of the objectives [of the expansion of membership from 24 to 54 members over three years]...at its fifty-eighth session, including by making recommendations in this regard, while preserving the technical nature of the Commission”.

2. In a background document prepared for the Statistical Commission's fifty-fifth session, the Bureau, with support from the substantive secretariat, the Statistics Division, proposed the following set of six goals to ensure that the Commission is and remains inclusive and representative today and in the future:

- (a) The Commission should remain a technical body;
- (b) The inclusion of relevant actors is guaranteed;
- (c) The representation in the Commission reflects the present time;
- (d) Membership in the Commission means more investment from the members;
- (e) The adopted regulations and standards are accepted by all stakeholders;
- (f) The Commission plays an active role in discussions on data and statistics.

3. The background document contained a set of measures to assess the goals. These measures were reviewed, and alternative measures were proposed within that document. The assessment framework will allow for a review and assessment of and reporting on the progress towards the achievement of the objectives to the Statistical Commission at its fifty-eighth session. The below proposal contains elements proposed by Statistics Canada and updates made by the Secretariat for the Commission's consideration.

Assessment framework for the achievement of the objectives in the 2024 resolution enlargement of the Statistical Commission's membership

<i>Goal</i>	<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Description</i>
1	1-1	Percentage of Statistical Commission members (and country observers) who come from national statistical offices
2	2-1	Number of times the Statistical Commission has had to call for a vote in each of the intervals between expansion steps
	2-2	Percentage of agreed-upon standards that underwent open consultations that included all relevant stakeholders
3	3-1	Subregional distribution of members of the Statistical Commission (used to determine if subregional representation has increased)

Goal	Indicator	Description
	3-2	Percentage of members of the Statistical Commission that come from least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States
4	4-1	The role and participation of Statistical Commission members in various groups and subgroups
5	5-1	Percentage of standards and methodologies that are proposed to the Statistical Commission and accepted or adopted by the Commission
6	6-1	Number of intersessional activities undertaken by the Bureau (such as representing the Statistical Commission at meetings of other Economic and Social Council subsidiary bodies or engagement in other meetings) related to the mandate of the Commission and related decisions

Goal 1

The Commission should remain as technical as possible

Current measure 1 (contained the background paper): Representatives to the Statistical Commission (and observers) are experts who have methodological independence as described in the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

Aspects that need to be defined in the current measure contained the background paper:

- Delegations contain multiple actors. Does this mean the designated official is from the national statistical office?
- How is the methodological independence of experts measured?
- What defines an expert?

Proposed measure for assessment goal 1: The percentage of representatives of Statistical Commission members (and observers) who come from national statistical offices.

Note on measurement: The list of delegations from Member States is currently derived from the registration in the eDelegate system. The permanent missions in New York need to register their delegation in order to be included in the list of delegations. Often, the list is incomplete, despite the announcements made by the representative of the Secretariat calling for corrections. Prior to 2020, the lists were compiled from responses to the Statistical Division's secretariat, and often were not complete, as countries were not required to register.

Goal 2

The inclusion of relevant actors is guaranteed

Current measure 2 (contained the background paper): Relevant stakeholders may have access to the Statistical Commission as observers and voice their views about statistical methods and technical aspects of official statistics.

Aspects that need to be defined in the current measure contained the background paper:

- Who are relevant stakeholders?
- What does "access to the Statistical Commission" mean? Are stakeholders allowed in the room as observers?

- How are views to be voiced? How are views to be voiced in global consultations?

Proposed measure 1 for assessment goal 2: The number of times the Statistical Commission has had to call for a vote in each of the intervals between expansion steps.

Justification: Proposed measure 1 is included under goal 2 to measure how often an exclusion action (i.e. voting) is taken. However, if the focus is only on voting (which seldom happens), how can one be certain that the relevant actors have access and are able to voice their views? For that reason, measure 2 below is proposed.

Proposed measure 2 for assessment goal 2: Percentage of agreed-upon standards that underwent open consultations that included all relevant stakeholders.

Justification: Global consultations provide an arena for all relevant stakeholders to offer their views about statistical methods and technical aspects of official statistics and work that is coming before an annual session.

Goal 3

The representation in the Commission reflects the present time

Current measure 3 (contained the background paper): Representation in the Statistical Commission is adjusted so that it is distributed. Increased membership would present opportunities for countries to raise their voices on those occasions of formal decision-making, which is conditioned on membership in the Commission. However, subregional representation is a matter of the United Nations regional groups and is not discussed within the Commission.

Proposed measure 1 for assessment goal 3: Subregional distribution of members of the Statistical Commission (used to determine if subregional representation has increased).

Proposed measure 2 for assessment goal 3: Percentage of members of the Statistical Commission that come from least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States.

Goal 4

Membership in the Commission means more investment from the members

Measure 4 (contained the background paper): Members of the Statistical Commission are taking on leadership roles in subgroups to foster the development of official statistics globally, and they actively participate in the preparation of and follow-up to the topics discussed. It is proposed that a model be developed, such as the one implemented by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, whereby members of the Group represent other countries within their region, and the total number of members is thus limited. In a similar system, the views and concerns of more countries would be included in the groups. Also, through this type of representation, countries can focus on areas where their priorities lie and be active members in those areas. Countries might be more likely to put effort and resources into the work of these groups, making important contributions, as opposed to situations in which countries deem it necessary to have a wide reach, and membership, across several groups but with little depth of contribution.

Aspects that need to be defined (in the measures contained the background paper):

- Is this implying that members should be leaders of subgroups?
- This implies a model whereby members represent other countries within their United Nations regional group.

Proposed measure for assessment goal 4: The role and participation of the Statistical Commission members in various groups and subgroups.

Justification: This measure is aimed at examining the role (namely, leadership or member) and the level of participation within groups.

Note: “Engagement/participation” during each annual session of the Statistical Commission was considered, but it was determined that caution should be exercised when examining the number of oral interventions during a session. The goal and intention is not to artificially increase engagement. Furthermore, the number of written comments was also considered. If oral interventions and written comments were included as indicators, it might have a negative impact on the participation and possibly increase the number of speakers taking the floor, especially in situations in which regional interventions are being made.

Goal 5

The adopted regulations and standards (such guidelines and recommendations) are accepted by all stakeholders (such as Member States and United Nations agencies)

Current measure 5 (contained the background paper): The added value of a common frame of reference is communicated so that acceptance increases.

Aspects that need to be defined (in the measures contained the background paper):

- What does “accepted by all stakeholders” mean?
- How does one define “added value”?
- To whom should this be “communicated”?
- How should “acceptance increases” be measured? What is the baseline? How should the baseline be measured?

Proposed measure for assessment goal 5: Percentage of standards and methodologies that are proposed to the Statistical Commission and accepted or adopted by the Commission.

Note: It is not recommended (or feasible) to monitor the implementation of standards.

Goal 6

The Commission plays an active role in discussions on data and statistics

Current measure 6 (contained the background paper): The Statistical Commission positions itself on these issues within the United Nations system and actively works with other commissions and bodies, as well as private actors.

Aspects that need to be defined (in the measures contained the background paper):

- What is the scope of “these issues”?
- How does the Statistical Commission position itself? Does this mean having a dialogue with the other Economic and Social Council subsidiary bodies? Currently, this is logged under intersessional activities.¹

Proposed measure for assessment goal 6: Number of intersessional activities undertaken by the Bureau (such as representing the Statistical Commission at meetings of other Economic and Social Council subsidiary bodies or engagement in other meetings) related to the mandate of the Commission and related decisions.

¹ See <https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/statcom/inter-session-activities>.