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**Items for discussion and decision: regional  
statistical development**

## **Report of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific on statistical development in Asia and the Pacific**

### **Note by the Secretary-General**

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2023/325 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific on statistical development in Asia and the Pacific, which is presented to the Commission for discussion and decision.

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\* [E/CN.3/2024/1](#).



# Report of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific on statistical development in Asia and the Pacific

## I. Introduction

1. Since the previous report of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) on regional statistical development in Asia and the Pacific (E/CN.3/2019/7), submitted to the Statistical Commission for consideration in March 2019, the world has undergone a period of great uncertainty and change. The region and the world are coping with climate change and responding to human-made disasters, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and military conflict.

2. In Asia and the Pacific, notwithstanding the challenges faced by this diverse region, home to 53 ESCAP members and 9 associate members,<sup>1</sup> spanning 11 time zones, this period has been marked by rapid innovation and increased collaboration and partnership. The region is home to 60 per cent of the world's population, and what happens here matters at the global level and also what happens here can be an example for other countries and regions to follow.

3. Since 2016, national statistical systems in the Asia-Pacific region have contributed to 66 voluntary national reviews to the high-level political forum on sustainable development. These contributions are part of countries' efforts towards implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Twenty-nine national statistical systems have contributed to their countries' second voluntary national reviews, often using improved data sources such as administrative data.

4. The present report covers statistical development activities being undertaken in Asia and the Pacific in support of strengthened national statistical systems, in line with 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" (E/ESCAP/CST(5)/1/Rev.1), the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind (ESCAP/CST/2018/7), and the Asian and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade, 2015–2024. The present report provides updates on progress made against these framework agreements and outlines challenges facing national statistical systems in Asia and the Pacific and some key initiatives taken to assist in strengthening them.

5. In the Asia-Pacific statistical community, groups and communities of practice have been established to support the above-mentioned framework agreements. A review is being conducted to ensure that the groups continue to serve the regional ambitions effectively. The emerging findings on the research and the future direction of the groups are presented in the present report.

6. In concluding, ESCAP proposes action to be taken by the Statistical Commission to facilitate global sharing of good practice regional initiatives, support coordinated, fit-for-purpose assistance to countries, promote added inclusiveness in the involvement of countries when testing statistical guidance and methodologies, and adopt more inclusive modalities for collaboration to facilitate enhanced engagement from all regions of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has 53 members and 9 associate members. Four member States are not located in the Asia-Pacific region.

## II. Summary of progress

7. In the Declaration, the critical role of reliable and timely statistics in evidence-based decision-making and promoting transparency, accountability and inclusive societies is emphasized. A commitment is reaffirmed in the Declaration to ensuring that official statistics are readily available, accessible and used for meaningful analysis and transparent decision-making, in line with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

8. In 2016, the Committee on Statistics adopted the collective vision and framework for action by the Asia-Pacific statistical community. Collaborative efforts in the collective vision and framework are focused on five action areas: engaging users and investing in statistics; assuring quality of and instilling trust in statistics; using integrated statistics for integrated analysis; modernizing statistical business processes; and developing requisite skill sets. With the collective vision and framework for action, the statistical community commits itself to expanding and reinforcing global, regional and subregional partnerships, building on existing statistical capacity development initiatives in Asia and the Pacific (see figure below).

Figure

### Statistical work programme of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind				
Recognize reliable and timely statistics as indispensable for evidence-based decision-making and of principal value for transparency, accountability and inclusive societies	Acknowledge official statistics as an indispensable element in the information system of a democratic society, serving Governments, the economy and the public with data on the economic, demographic, social and environmental situation	Emphasize transformative shifts in the production and use of official statistics as imperative for successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda	Reaffirm the responsibility to ensure official statistics are available, accessible and used for impactful analysis and transparent decision-making, consistent with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics	
Collective vision and regional framework for action <sup>a</sup>				
By 2030, national statistical systems are enabled and empowered to lead the development of and to deliver innovative, trusted and timely products and services for urgently needed and evolving statistical requirements of the 2023 Agenda				
Action areas				
Engaging users and investing in statistics	Assuring quality and instilling trust in statistics	Integrated statistics for integrated analysis	Modernizing statistical business processes	Developing requisite skill sets
Committee on Statistics				
Groups and communities of practice: Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics, technical working group on disaster-related statistics in Asia and the Pacific, data integration community of practice and network for the coordination of training activity				

<sup>a</sup> See E/ESCAP/CST(5)/1/Rev.1.

9. In 2019, ESCAP developed a single monitoring and evaluation framework for both the collective vision and the Declaration. The monitoring and evaluation framework includes a results diagram that provides the rationale for the framework and a results matrix that incorporates 20 performance indicators, together with baseline values and target values for 2030. The table below contains an update on the progress made by national statistical systems in Asia and the Pacific against the five action areas, based on the monitoring and evaluation framework.

Table

**Data on monitoring framework<sup>a</sup>**

<i>Action area and commitment</i>	<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Trend</i>	<i>Status</i>
<b>A: Engaging users and investing in statistics</b>			
4 (c) A high-level advisory board to national statistical systems to represent users	c.1 Existence of an agency/board/institution that advises the Chief Statistician on NSO activities (percentage of countries)	↗	Breakthrough needed
4 (g) Communication and statistical literacy	g.1 Whether the NSO issues press releases at least quarterly (percentage of countries)	→	Breakthrough needed
	g.2 Whether the NSO uses social media (Facebook and/or Twitter) to disseminate data and information (percentage of countries) <sup>b</sup>	↗	On track
	g.3 ODIN overall data openness score (average score; target = average top 5 countries)	↗	On track
4 (h) Statistical advocacy and awareness-raising	h.1 Whether the national statistical plan is fully funded (indicator 17.18.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals) (percentage of countries)	→	Off track
<b>B: Assuring quality and instilling trust in statistics</b>			
4 (a) Integrate statistics development with national development policies and plans	a.1 NSDS current status (score = 0 to 3; percentage of countries with a score of 0)	↘	Breakthrough needed
	a.2 Whether there is a national statistical plan under implementation (indicator 17.18.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals) (percentage of countries)	→	On track
4 (e) Empower heads of national statistical offices to assume lead role in national statistical system	e.1 Whether the national statistical legislation complies with Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (indicator 17.18.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals) (percentage of countries)	→	On track
4 (i) National strategies/policies aligned with commitments	i.1 Use of statistics index (average index score; target = average top 5 countries)	→	Off track
	i.2 Subscription to e-GDDS or SDDS - data dissemination standards (percentage of countries)		No data
<b>C: Integrated statistics for integrated analysis</b>			
4 (b) Develop national monitoring framework and	b.1 ODIN overall data coverage score (average standard score, 0-100; target = average top 5 countries)	→	On track

<i>Action area and commitment</i>	<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Trend</i>	<i>Status</i>
indicator set and integrate with budgeting	b.2 Existence of an official country-operated, dedicated online portal that can be used for reporting Sustainable Development Goals progress, detailed either on the government webpage or NSO website (percentage of countries)	↗	On track
	b.3 Data source pillar (pillar 4) of statistical performance indicators (average score; target = average top 5 countries)	→	Off track
<b>D: Modernizing statistical business processes</b>			
4 (d) Specify national statistical system roles and responsibilities and transform business processes	d.1 Data infrastructure pillar (pillar 5) of statistical performance indicators (average score; target = average top 5 countries)	↗	On track
4 (f) Take advantage of new, innovative technologies and build partnerships for data-sharing	f.1 Member of the Committee of Experts on Big Data and Data Science for Official Statistics (or its subgroups) and/or at least 1 big data project on the global platform	↗	Breakthrough needed
<b>E: Requisite skill set</b>			
4 (a) Integrate statistics development with national development policies and plans	a.3 Completion of a priority set of four guidelines/materials identified in the collective vision	↗	Breakthrough needed
	a.4 World Bank statistical performance indicators overall score (average score; target = average top 5 countries)	→	Breakthrough needed
<b>F. Partner commitments</b>			
5 (a) Provide coordinated technical, financial, technological and capacity-building assistance	p.1 Total support for development in statistics received each year (total annual commitments in constant millions of United States dollars; target = 10-year average) (indicator 17.19.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals)	→	Off track
5 (b) Consult national statistical office/national statistical system before conducting any statistical study or survey	p.2 Satisfactory consultation with NSOs by custodian agencies and providers of statistical support (percentage of countries interviewed with satisfactory consultation)		No data
5 (c) Continue to strengthen international statistical standards and provide technical support	p.3 Number of participants from Asia and the Pacific region in Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific training courses	→	Needs improvement

*Abbreviations:* e-GDDS, enhanced General Data Dissemination System; NSDS, national strategy for the development of statistics; NSO, National statistical organization; ODIN, Open Data Inventory; SDDS, Special Data Dissemination Standard.

<sup>a</sup> See <https://data.unescap.org/data-analysis/national-statistical-systems-performance> for detailed information.

<sup>b</sup> See [www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/ESCAP.CST\\_2020.CRP\\_1.Rev\\_1\\_Monitoring\\_Framework.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/ESCAP.CST_2020.CRP_1.Rev_1_Monitoring_Framework.pdf).

### III. Collaboration and coordination

10. As member States in Asia and the Pacific continue to pursue the collective vision and the Declaration, the ESCAP secretariat has collaborated to develop several cutting-edge initiatives. These initiatives benefit countries in the region and hold the potential to serve as useful models for countries within and beyond Asia and the Pacific.

11. There are a number of areas where member States in Asia and the Pacific are developing new methodologies and new guidance materials. These are being tested and developed with countries in the Asia and the Pacific region and the insights are then incorporated into global guidance that accounts for the specific country contexts within the region, noting the diversity in size and capacity of national statistical offices across the region.

#### **Regional Collaborative Platform for Asia and the Pacific**

12. At the regional level, ESCAP leverages the Regional Collaborative Platform for Asia and the Pacific to promote a coordinated approach to enhancing statistical capacity among member States, primarily through a working group focused on data and statistics. The working group supports the call by member States in Asia and the Pacific for development partners within and beyond the region to provide coordinated capacity-building assistance to countries that is aligned with countries' own priorities and takes into account the specific country context.

13. In 2021, the working group launched a series of Sustainable Development Goals statistics clinics to enhance the capacity of resident coordinator offices and United Nations country teams to strengthen the capacity of national statistical systems. The introductory clinic, held in November 2021, focused on broad issues relating to monitoring progress towards achieving the Goals. Subsequent clinics encompassed topics such as decent work statistics, migration statistics, gender statistics, food and agriculture statistics and education statistics. In July 2023, the working group organized a three-day in-person training session for data officers at resident coordinator offices, addressing strategies for addressing gaps in Goals statistics.

#### **Sustainable Development Goals progress assessment**

14. The Asia-Pacific SDG Gateway<sup>2</sup> continues to be enhanced to serve as a comprehensive platform for data and analysis on the Sustainable Development Goals at the regional, subregional and country levels. Users can now explore country Goal profiles, visualizations depicting indicator trends and comparisons between countries, and information on Goal data availability and potential methods to address data gaps.<sup>3</sup> Resident coordinator offices and Governments are making increasing use of the Gateway in their work, in particular in support of common country analyses, the design of United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and informing national engagement on the Goals.

15. In 2023, ESCAP produced its seventh annual assessment of progress made in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the Asia and the Pacific region,<sup>4</sup> which is based on the global indicator framework for the 2030 Agenda. The progress assessment benefits from contributions from across the United Nations development system. The report provides an update on the status of progress towards achieving the Goals since 2015 and measures the anticipated progress gap in 2030 under the current

<sup>2</sup> See <https://data.unescap.org/home>.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://data.unescap.org/data-analysis/sdg-data-availability>.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://data.unescap.org/data-analysis/sdg-progress-report-2023>.

trajectory. It also showcases national success stories on taking transformative action to accelerate the achievement of the Goals.

16. The progress assessment methodology is being used by other regional commissions, which harmonizes Sustainable Development Goals monitoring across regions and allows for regional comparisons.

### **National SDG Tracker**

17. The seventh session of the Committee on Statistics highlighted the need for more consistency in reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals at the global and national levels, which led to the ESCAP secretariat developing the free online tool, National SDG Tracker.<sup>5</sup> The tool was launched in 2021 to assist member States in producing national progress assessments on the Goals.

18. To date, ESCAP has worked with 16 countries in the region on using the National SDG Tracker, with support from Governments and resident coordinator offices. Ten countries completed the progress assessment; of those, seven have used the results in their relevant voluntary national review.

19. Other countries within the Asia and the Pacific region and beyond may also want to consider adopting the National SDG Tracker tool to help them to produce national assessments of Sustainable Development Goals progress using national data and targets. The Tracker's implementation has also provided opportunities to enhance data coordination and sharing within countries regarding the Goals.

### **Data integration**

20. The Asia-Pacific Data Integration Community of Practice, launched in April 2020 as a response to the decision made by the Committee on Statistics at its sixth session, operates as a forum for online collaboration and sharing knowledge, experience and learning. Following a data integration capacity assessment survey conducted in 2020, a series of online regional workshops were held in collaboration with development partners to enhance awareness of and capacity for data integration within national statistical systems at the management and expert levels. ESCAP hosts monthly online meetings of the Asia-Pacific Data Integration Community of Practice, at which more than 80 country and international agency experiences relevant to data integration have been presented and discussed.

21. ESCAP, with valuable contributions from the members of the Asia-Pacific Data Integration Community of Practice, developed the Asia-Pacific guidelines to data integration for official statistics,<sup>6</sup> which built on a similar guide by the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE). The guidelines have been translated into Russian. These guidelines provide a valuable resource for countries in the Asia and the Pacific region, as well as other countries.

### **Population and housing census**

22. To support countries in increasingly using administrative data in censuses, ESCAP has launched several initiatives. In December 2021, it published "Emerging trends in census approaches in Asia and the Pacific: with country examples",<sup>7</sup> which showcases how countries in the region have used administrative data in their censuses.

<sup>5</sup> See <https://data.unescap.org/stories/national-sdg-tracker>.

<sup>6</sup> See [www.unescap.org/kp/2021/asia-pacific-guidelines-data-integration-official-statistics](http://www.unescap.org/kp/2021/asia-pacific-guidelines-data-integration-official-statistics).

<sup>7</sup> See [www.unescap.org/kp/2021/emerging-trends-census-approaches-asia-and-pacific-country-examples](http://www.unescap.org/kp/2021/emerging-trends-census-approaches-asia-and-pacific-country-examples).

23. In June 2023, ESCAP organized a training workshop on the transition to register-based approaches for population and housing censuses,<sup>8</sup> in partnership with several entities, including ECE, the Economic Cooperation Organization, the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries, the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific, the United Nations Population Fund and the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, which targeted 12 countries from both the ESCAP and ECE regions.

24. ESCAP has developed and piloted a self-assessment tool<sup>9</sup> on the readiness of countries to use administrative data for census purposes, and it plans to enhance the tool in collaboration with its partners. The tool enables countries to identify areas of improvement for making the transition to a register-based census.

### **Open-source software**

25. ESCAP supports member States in developing data portals using the open source “.Stat Suite” platform, which is designed to facilitate the efficient and high-quality dissemination of statistical data. Technical assistance is focused on data modelling according to the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) standard to ensure the sustainability of the platform.

26. ESCAP has developed various guides,<sup>10</sup> including ones on how to process satellite data to produce maps and statistical tables using programmes such as Quantum Geographic Information System (QGIS) and RStudio. The guides highlight features of geospatially enabled programmes and provide details of various types of open-source data in line with users’ needs. The guides help users to develop statistics on topics on which geodata are useful and demonstrate the potential of using open-source software.

27. Other countries in the Asia and the Pacific region and beyond may also want to consider using open-source software such as the .Stat Suite platform, RStudio and QGIS.

### **Integrating policy and data to leave no one behind**

28. In response to the Declaration, ESCAP has developed a tool called Every Policy is Connected (EPiC)<sup>11</sup> for countries to enhance the monitoring of inclusive policies and their impact on various population groups. An open online training course is being used by countries in the region, and the tool is being implemented in more countries. Other countries within and beyond the region may also want to use this open-source tool to better align their indicators with policy priorities and enhance user-producer dialogue in national statistical systems.

### **Asia-Pacific Stats Cafés**

29. In 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, ESCAP started a series of Asia-Pacific Stats Cafés<sup>12</sup> to facilitate the exchange of practices and advice among United Nations entities and national statistical systems. Since inception, 82 cafés have been held, bringing together an audience of participants exploring a wide range of topics aligned to country priorities and requests for assistance. These included

<sup>8</sup> See [www.unescap.org/events/2023/regional-training-workshop-transition-register-based-approaches-population-and-housing](http://www.unescap.org/events/2023/regional-training-workshop-transition-register-based-approaches-population-and-housing).

<sup>9</sup> See [www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/Self-assessment-questionnaire-on-readiness-to-use-admin-data-for-census-purposes.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/Self-assessment-questionnaire-on-readiness-to-use-admin-data-for-census-purposes.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> See [www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/Use\\_of\\_satellite\\_data\\_in\\_statistical\\_institutions\\_Stats\\_Cafe\\_15Mar2021.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/Use_of_satellite_data_in_statistical_institutions_Stats_Cafe_15Mar2021.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> See [www.unescap.org/our-work/statistics/EPiC](http://www.unescap.org/our-work/statistics/EPiC).

<sup>12</sup> See [www.unescap.org/our-work/statistics/stats-cafe](http://www.unescap.org/our-work/statistics/stats-cafe).



sessions on measuring the impact of the pandemic, disaster-related statistics, big data and the use of geospatial data. Its format has allowed for improved outreach to junior and mid-level staff in national statistical systems, engagement with a much larger number of countries than face-to-face events and ensuring that work can be shared very quickly across the region and beyond.

30. The Stats Cafés facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences on big data, geospatial information and statistical data integration through involvement in the sessions of various global groups and expert groups.

31. The highly successful Stats Café format has been extended to the African region, with the African Centre for Statistics of the Economic Commission for Africa successfully launching the Stats Talk-Africa webinar series.

### **Civil registration and vital statistics**

32. In Asia and the Pacific, there is a twin-track approach to improving civil registration and vital statistics, namely, working at the political level through the declaration of the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015–2024) and working at the technical level. This approach provides a good practice model, resulting in marked improvements in achieving universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems across the region.

33. Regional progress and challenges were highlighted in the “Getting every one in the picture” report presented at the Second Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, held in November 2021. ESCAP continues to build knowledge on civil registration and vital statistics through the production of technical papers such as those presented at the Ministerial Conference and other news and resources published on [www.getinthepicture.org](http://www.getinthepicture.org). In 2023, ESCAP organized the first Asia and the Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Research Forum, at which participants were offered opportunities to share research and information on civil registration and vital statistics and build capacity and networks in this field of work. ESCAP has also coordinated the establishment of civil registrars’ networks in the Pacific, South Asia and South-East Asia.

34. Assessing inequalities in civil registration and vital statistics systems is an increasing focus of ESCAP activities. Over recent years, ESCAP has developed guidance materials and helped to build the capacity of countries to undertake these assessments. These activities are intended to build capacities for demographic analysis and complement assistance for producing vital statistics on the basis of civil registration records.

35. ESCAP has supported activities on business process mapping and improvements for civil registration in six countries, in close collaboration with United Nations country teams and other development partners. Building on this work, ESCAP is also supporting countries in their digitalization efforts.

36. The Measuring Adult Mortality Community of Practice was introduced to enhance the accessibility and timeliness of adult mortality data in countries lacking a robust civil registration and vital statistics system. It promotes knowledge-sharing and peer-to-peer learning among experts interested in innovative methods for collecting and analysing data from household surveys and censuses or by employing integrated approaches that combine various data sources.

37. A regional steering group for civil registration and vital statistics in Asia and the Pacific and a partnership of development partners supports the region in meeting the shared vision of the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015–2024). The regional steering group has recommended an extension of the

Decade until 2030, which is to be decided during the Third Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, to be held in June 2025.

38. This initiative on civil registration and vital statistics shows the power of working in partnerships to deliver on the political commitment for inclusive and resilient civil registration and vital statistics systems that ensure that no one is left behind. This work is being coordinated with similar work being carried out at the Economic Commission for Africa.

### **Disaster-related statistics**

39. The technical working group on disaster-related statistics in Asia and the Pacific supports countries in the region in their efforts to implement the disaster-related statistics framework by providing training, sharing national practices and engaging in global standards development. This group also fosters dialogue among data users and producers. Several Governments in the region are applying the framework to meet demand for official statistics to support risk-informed policy and programme development.

40. In 2023, ESCAP hosted the third expert forum for producers and users of disaster-related statistics<sup>13</sup> in collaboration with the four other regional commissions, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Division.

41. The expert forum is intended to advance the production and use of disaster-related statistics for risk-informed development, aligning with the objectives of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics of the Statistical Commission. This was achieved by facilitating the exchange of country experiences in utilizing disaster-related statistics to monitor disaster risk reduction commitments and inform development, as well as sharing best practices and replication possibilities in producing such statistics.

42. The expert forums and the technical work undertaken by ESCAP and countries in Asia and the Pacific contribute to the efforts of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics to develop a common statistical framework on disaster-related statistics.

43. This modality of developing and testing new methodologies and guidance at the country and regional levels, which can then inform global normative work, is a good example that can be followed in other areas of statistical development.

### **Global Ocean Accounts Partnership**

44. The Global Ocean Accounts Partnership serves as a platform for the global ocean accounting community and is co-chaired by ESCAP and Fisheries and Oceans Canada, with members studying and piloting ocean accounting in various countries around the world. The Partnership brings together Governments, international institutions, research organizations and other stakeholders that have committed themselves to supporting the sustainable development of the ocean through improved organization, inter-connection and standardization of ocean-related data and statistics. ESCAP is a founding member of the Partnership and covered pre-establishment technical and organizational consultations financially and substantively. This makes the Partnership a prime example and best practice of a regional commission leading the initiative to establish a global knowledge resource and collaboration platform.

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<sup>13</sup> See [www.unescap.org/events/2023/third-expert-forum-producers-and-users-disaster-related-statistics](http://www.unescap.org/events/2023/third-expert-forum-producers-and-users-disaster-related-statistics).

45. Membership in the Global Oceans Accounts Partnership is free and open to national Governments, intergovernmental institutions, representative bodies of the private sector and research-intensive institutions (that have been granted formal not-for-profit status in their country of origin) that seek to ensure that the diverse values of the ocean are recognized in all decision-making relating to social and economic development. Countries within and beyond the region, as well as international institutions, may want to consider joining the Partnership to share knowledge, challenges and good practices on ocean accounting.

#### **Measuring illicit financial flows**

46. ESCAP has collaborated with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and countries in the region to measure illicit financial flows in the Asia-Pacific region and to enhance countries' ability to measure and apply these estimates for policymaking purposes. Within the region, countries are actively engaged in this initiative, which includes the testing and application of the methodological guidelines created by the custodian agencies, namely, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Furthermore, these countries are working on formulating policy responses aimed at reducing the prevalence of illicit financial flows. New guidelines are being developed and tested by countries in Asia and the Pacific to ensure that global guidelines take into account country contexts in this region.

## **IV. Ways of working**

47. The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on all operational aspects of member States and the ESCAP secretariat. Capacity-building efforts required a change to operating solely through virtual mechanisms, with minimum travel undertaken from 2020 to 2022. This transition to virtual modalities occurred throughout work at the national, regional and global levels. Expert groups, technical working groups and both formal and informal working groups changed to operating virtually, presenting opportunities for countries across all regions to participate without the time or cost constraints of travel. However, this opportunity is somewhat theoretical because time differences pose challenges for the practical participation of many countries in the Asia and the Pacific region.

48. Huge opportunities exist owing to technological advancements and the availability of new data sources. This expanding data system and the rapidly growing range of actors with diverse interests call for new rules and new capacities. This underscores the importance of establishing appropriate structures that support the Asia-Pacific statistical community in the service of the collective vision and framework.

49. At the eighth session of the Committee on Statistics, it was decided that "its Bureau shall, with the support of the secretariat, conduct a review of the groups and communities of practice supporting the Committee's work and propose recommendations to that end for consideration by the Committee to streamline, consolidate and improve those groups and communities to ensure that they continue to be fit for purpose".<sup>14</sup> This could include moving towards less formal collaboration mechanisms, as appropriate, and be better suited to the complex world in which national statistical offices now operate, while acknowledging the leading role played by these offices. Specific attention should be directed towards establishing

<sup>14</sup> See [www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/ESCAP.CST\\_.2022.8\\_Report\\_EN.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/ESCAP.CST_.2022.8_Report_EN.pdf) (decision 5).

arrangements and mechanisms that support statistical offices in meeting the growing demand for climate change-related statistics and navigating complex decisions regarding data governance.

50. The Asia-Pacific statistical community has emphasized the importance of deeper engagement with global groups, ensuring that they consider the specific context of countries in Asia and the Pacific. The growing number of global groups supporting the Statistical Commission, alongside regional and national-level groups and communities of practice, can pose challenges for member States aiming to actively participate in all of them. Given the growing agenda in thematic areas and the growing complexity within specific domains, such as national accounts, member States will inevitably need to prioritize their engagement. To support this prioritization, the ESCAP region recommends focusing on engagement at the global level and avoiding the replication of regional groups and communities supporting national statistical systems.

51. In facilitating the increased engagement of Asia and the Pacific countries in global groups, there should be further consideration for inclusive working mechanisms. The member countries in the Asia-Pacific region span 11 time zones, underscoring the importance of adopting new working methods.

52. Scheduling meetings at times convenient for countries in the region is crucial to enhance effective engagement. If scheduling a single meeting at a convenient time for all countries is not feasible, additional meetings, possibly involving regional commissions, should be organized. Consideration should also be given to informal consultations held at convenient times, which can inform global groups.

## V. Future plans and priorities

53. The Committee on Statistics identifies future plans and priorities for statistical development in Asia and the Pacific. The priorities below reflect recent discussions at the Committee.

### **Data integration**

54. The importance of data integration was identified by the Committee on Statistics at its sixth session, in 2018, when it was agreed to establish the Asia-Pacific Data Integration Community of Practice. The Community of Practice and the importance of this work continue to grow.

55. There are significant opportunities for improving data coverage, bridging data gaps and producing detailed granular statistics with increased timeliness and frequency. Data integration also reduces the need for additional data collection, thereby reducing costs and alleviating the response burden. However, integrating data presents numerous challenges. Many countries still lack the high-quality administrative data sources essential for the process. Integrating data necessitates public approval and a legal basis, with the crucial requirement of maintaining trust in official statistics.

56. Challenges also exist in terms of building staff capacity and establishing new collaborative mechanisms, whether within various government sectors or with private sector data providers. Addressing these challenges will be a focus of future efforts, aiming to assist national statistical offices. This assistance will include examining key enablers of data integration, such as the adoption of standardized and open formats, protocols, taxonomies and interfaces. These elements can contribute to improved consistency and integration across various systems, facilitating both effective data

collaboration and sharing, as well as simplifying the compilation and harvesting of data from across multiple sources.

### **Mainstreaming gender**

57. At its seventh session, the Committee on Statistics decided to advance the mainstreaming of gender into its work. As part of this commitment, the promotion of gender equality within national statistical offices holds significant importance, especially in decision-making roles. Recognizing the unique challenges faced by women heads of national statistical offices, who may lack a robust support system, an informal peer support network has been established. This network is intended to foster peer support for women's leadership and facilitate the development, compilation and enhancement of information resources to strengthen women's leadership and professional networks.

58. The peer support network will identify and address any gaps in management and leadership skills within the group. A similar network already exists in Latin America and the Caribbean; therefore, opportunities will be sought to link up the networks.

59. ESCAP was invited by the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21), Data2x and Open Data Watch to collaborate to expand the gender data network to the Asia-Pacific region. This expansion will build on the insights and successes of the work in Africa and will facilitate knowledge-sharing among members and advance interregional engagement and peer learning relating to gender data and statistics. More than 20 Asia-Pacific countries have expressed an interest in joining the network. The next step will be to develop plans for engaging the network.

### **Big data and data science tools and techniques**

60. Big data and other non-traditional data sources were identified at the sixth session of the Committee on Statistics as a potential solution to address the growing demand for more timely and granular data. This topic was discussed in a 2021 expert group meeting on the uses of big data for official statistics and continues to frame discussions at the regional and global levels. Such discussions have led ESCAP to produce material on the use of big data, including a guide entitled "Using big data for official statistics: key considerations when using mobile phone data".<sup>15</sup> The guide adds to ESCAP support for national statistical offices that are actively exploring ways of incorporating big data into the statistical production process. The use of big data sources remains a priority for member States, and further work is needed to support countries as they seek to use alternative data sources and to manage the challenges that this presents.

61. ESCAP has also contributed to the dissemination of use cases and good practices through the development of e-learning courses on big data, including awareness-raising courses and a MasterClass for leaders and on big data sources, such as the use of scanner data and mobile phone data, on the United Nations Global Platform learning management system on big data.<sup>16</sup>

62. To assist national statistical offices in building big data and data science skills, four regional hubs on big data and data science were established during 2020 and 2021, including one in China. These hubs bring the community of official statisticians together at the regional level, helping to build capacity in big data and data science and to share knowledge and experiences.

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<sup>15</sup> See [www.unescap.org/kp/2022/using-big-data-official-statistics-key-considerations-when-using-mobile-phone-data](http://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/using-big-data-official-statistics-key-considerations-when-using-mobile-phone-data).

<sup>16</sup> See <https://learning.officialstatistics.org/>.

63. In 2023, the hub in China made the transition from a regional to a global hub (as was noted in Statistical Commission decision 54/116) with specialization in remote sensing for agriculture statistics and the measurement and analysis of e-commerce. The China hub played a pivotal role in the preparation of the fourth United Nations World Data Forum, held in Hangzhou, China, in April 2023.

64. In November 2023 a new regional hub for big data and data science, aimed at assisting countries in Asia and the Pacific, was established to provide additional support for using emerging data sources and applying data science tools and techniques to generate credible and insightful statistics. The creation of this regional hub was endorsed at the fifty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission, and it is expected to be fully operational by the end of 2024.

65. Further efforts are still required to assist national statistical offices in harnessing the potential offered by big data sources, and this will remain a priority in the coming years.

66. Alongside the use of big data and alternative data sources, national statistical offices are increasingly using data science tools and techniques. Within the region, some countries have employed open-source software to automate business processes for generating statistics, which eliminates manual steps, reduces the risk of errors and incorporates automated quality assurance, significantly reducing the time required to produce statistics. For example, one national statistical office reduced the time taken to produce its monthly international merchandise trade statistics from 40 to 5 days. A related lesson from assisting countries in the region is that the promotion and application of open-source solutions are important considerations and ingredients for development results to be sustained beyond a project or period of external support.

67. Given that the use of big data and data science tools and techniques remains a priority for member States, it will also be a priority for ESCAP. The Commission will collaborate with the new regional big data hub in Indonesia and support national statistical offices in the adoption of big data and alternative new data sources and data science tools and techniques. This support extends to the automation of business processes and to making the transition from proprietary software to the increased use of open-source software, such as the R language and environment for statistical computing and graphics. ESCAP intends to integrate these efforts with global initiatives, including collaboration with the Committee of Experts on Big Data and Data Science for Official Statistics, which includes other regional big data hubs<sup>17</sup> in Brazil, Rwanda and the United Arab Emirates.

### **Data governance**

68. As countries incorporate new data sources and engage with additional stakeholders, a key challenge lies in ensuring that their data governance arrangements are appropriate to address these evolving demands. Recognizing this, at the eighth session of the Committee on Statistics, it was decided “to feature data governance in its future work with an emphasis on sharing country experiences and facilitating the provision of technical assistance”. To achieve this objective, ESCAP is developing a compendium of country data governance practices, informed by insights from an expert group convened in 2023. The compendium will provide a resource for countries across the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, assisting them in adapting and establishing new data governance arrangements that align with the increasing complexity faced by national statistical offices. Other regions and countries may wish to learn from this country compendium of data governance practices, potentially considering its framework for the development of their own country profiles.

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<sup>17</sup> See <https://unstats.un.org/bigdata/regional-hubs.cshtml>.

### **Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific**

69. The Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific is a professional statistics training centre for government officials and others working in national statistical offices and is a regional training centre of ESCAP. Since the adoption of its strategic plan for the period 2020–2024, there have been considerable changes at the global, regional and national levels. The Institute will thus be developing a new strategic plan for the period 2025 to 2029 to respond to these changes.

70. The Institute will continue to play a key role in designing and delivering training in priority areas of work identified by the Committee on Statistics in collaboration and partnership with international and regional organizations. Post COVID-19, the delivery of courses will be a combination of face-to-face, blended and hybrid formats, depending on resources available and the topic of the course. Noting that Asia and the Pacific is a vast and diverse region with national statistical systems facing distinct challenges and at various levels of development, the Institute will consider which training needs can be most effectively addressed at the regional, sub-regional or country level.

## **VI. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission**

71. **The Statistical Commission is invited:**

(a) **To take note of the good practice initiatives being undertaken in the Asia and the Pacific region and to comment on how these can be extended to more countries within and beyond the Asia and the Pacific region, including:**

(i) **The promotion and adoption of open-source solutions, including tools such as the .Stat Suite platform, the National SDG Tracker and the Every Policy is Connected tool;**

(ii) **Broadening engagement in cross-country and cross-regional knowledge-sharing through participation at events such as the Asia-Pacific Stats Café series and through joining partnerships such as the Global Oceans Accounts Partnership;**

(iii) **The adoption of the Asia-Pacific data governance framework by countries within and beyond the Asia-Pacific region, while considering the use of the framework to produce individual summaries of data governance practices. These summaries can, in turn, contribute to the extension of the Asia-Pacific data governance compendium to encompass other countries and regions, thus providing a resource for countries to share knowledge and exchange their experiences in the realm of data governance;**

(b) **To support the call by member States in Asia and the Pacific for development partners within and beyond the region to provide coordinated technical, financial, technological and capacity-building assistance to countries, which leverages the Regional Collaborative Platform for Asia and the Pacific and is aligned with countries' own priorities and takes into account the specific country context;**

(c) **To support the call by member States in Asia and the Pacific for development partners within and beyond the region to continue to develop and strengthen international statistical standards and provide technical support for their implementation, being mindful of the need for guidance and methodologies to be tested at the country level and to reflect differing country contexts and various levels of capacity and needs across member States;**

**(d) To support the call by member States to facilitate increased engagement of Asia and the Pacific countries in global groups and for the Statistical Commission to adopt inclusive approaches for engaging with member States and regional groups, through:**

- (i) Closer collaboration with regional commissions to hold meetings in multiple time zones;**
  - (ii) Making increased use of informal consultations to ensure contributions from countries across the Asia-Pacific region.**
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