United Nations ESCAP
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

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

Seventh session
Bangkok, 26–28 August 2020
Item 5 of the provisional agenda*
Consideration of the future focus of the subprogramme

Preparation of the draft programme of work**

Summary

>   The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) statistics subprogramme, comprising both the ESCAP Statistics Division and Statistics Institute for Asia and the Pacific, supports intergovernmental dialogue, capacity development and knowledge production in the area of statistics with the aim to empower and enable national statistical systems in Asia and the Pacific to meet urgent and evolving statistical requirements.
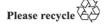
>   With the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic calling attention to the centrality of data and statistics in formulating evidence-based policies, the statistics subprogramme has an essential role in supporting national statistical systems in the region in this challenging time of uncertainties.

>   On an annual basis, the proposed programme plan for the upcoming year (e.g. 2021) and programme performance for the preceding year (e.g. 2019) are presented to the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

>   The present document transmits the 2021 programme plan for Subprogramme 7 – Statistics as endorsed by the Commission at its second plenary meeting on 21 May 2020 (ESCAP/76/25).

I.   Objective

1.   The objective, to which the statistics subprogramme contributes, is to improve the availability, accessibility and use of quality data and official statistics in support of sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific.

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*   ESCAP/CST/2020/L.1.

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

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II. Strategy

2.   To contribute to the improved availability, accessibility and use of quality data and official statistics in support of sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific, the subprogramme, including the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific, will provide technical assistance, training and capacity-building support to strengthen national statistical capacity to produce, disseminate and communicate statistical products and services, with a focus on modernizing national statistical systems and empowering national statistical offices in the region to benefit from the data sources generated by different components of national data ecosystems (including administrative data and big data produced and owned by other governmental agencies and the private sector). This work is expected to result in more detailed and timely data and statistics, accessible in a more efficient way. Data and statistics to inform strategies to sustainably recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting socioeconomic shocks will be given due attention.

3.   Past results in this area include enhanced capacity of member States in compiling environmental-economic accounts, including ocean accounts for Sustainable Development Goal 14, with support from ESCAP, and a training programme, supported by the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific, on innovations in the use of new data sources and methodologies for statistics on the Sustainable Development Goals.

4.   The subprogramme also plans to develop, deploy and expand the use of tools such as "Every policy is connected". This work is expected to result in the collective development of sustainable national indicator frameworks in line with universal guiding principles and frameworks and to lead to improved user engagement, stronger policy-data links for decision-making and supportive and well-coordinated policy environments for the improved production and use of quality data and official statistics. Stronger policy-data links will support member States in further refining their strategies to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and will support progress towards achieving the Goals. Past results in this area include indicator frameworks for several sectoral plans, such as transport in Samoa, and, in the Philippines, for the economic empowerment of women.

5.   Furthermore, the subprogramme will continue to provide statistical products and services, such as the *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report* and the Asia-Pacific Sustainable Development Goal Gateway, that make regional data and official statistics accessible and enable assessment of progress in the Asia-Pacific region towards the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, the subprogramme will continue to develop or support the production of knowledge products in the form of research papers, working papers, statistics briefs and blogs to raise awareness and share knowledge and experience around official statistics.

6.   The subprogramme will also continue to promote cooperation and facilitate consensus building among member States, regional entities and other partners working in data and statistics through regional and country-specific initiatives. This includes, among others, advancing the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind, in cooperation with member States and development partners, which will constitute the bedrock for enhanced statistical capacity in Asia and the Pacific.

III. Programme performance in 2019 against planned result

7.   A planned result for 2019, which is increased availability and use of quality and gender-sensitized statistical products and services for regional follow-up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as referred to in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019, was exceeded, as evidenced by 64 (compared to a target of 5) documents and statements prepared for the regional follow-up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda that refer to ESCAP statistical products and services, including in relation to gender issues.

IV. Programme performance in 2019: navigating policy with data to leave no one behind

8.   In 2018, Asia-Pacific countries agreed to strengthen national statistical systems and improve official statistics for the 2030 Agenda through the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind. The Declaration is the proposed solution for transforming national statistical systems in the region into stronger bodies that are enabled and empowered to lead the development of, and deliver innovative, trusted and timely, products and services for urgently needed and evolving statistical requirements of the 2030 Agenda.

9.   Throughout 2019, the subprogramme worked to advance the Declaration. For example, the subprogramme presented the Declaration at the fiftieth session of the Statistical Commission of the United Nations, in March 2019, during which further work was suggested with the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in order to communicate the global relevance of the Declaration at the United Nations World Data Forum in 2020. The Declaration was further endorsed by ESCAP at its seventy-fifth session, in May 2019.

10.   Furthermore, in line with the commitments of the Declaration, in order to improve the availability, accessibility and use of quality data and statistics in support of sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific, the subprogramme, in cooperation with development partners, provided technical and capacity-building assistance to member States. In 2019, the subprogramme organized 82 workshops, expert group meetings and trainings (35 by the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific and 47 by the ESCAP Statistics Division, 7 of which were organized with partners), involving participants from 48 member States and 6 associate members, and provided technical assistance on the review and modernization of national statistical systems in a few countries, including Sri Lanka. In addition to enhancing statistical capacities, these technical assistance and capacity-building activities were mostly focused on the areas in which there are data gaps for monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals.

Progress towards the attainment of the objective, and performance measure

11.   This work contributed to the improved availability, accessibility and use of quality data and official statistics in support of sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific, as demonstrated by the recognition and adoption by ESCAP at its seventy-fifth session, in May 2019, of the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind, as the regional solution to enable and empower national statistical systems to improve the availability,

accessibility and use of quality data and official statistics. At the seventy-fifth session, member States appreciated the efforts of the Asia-Pacific statistical community and acknowledged the indispensability of reliable and timely official statistics for evidence-based decision-making, transparency, accountability and inclusive societies.

Table 1
Performance measure

2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
N/A	N/A	N/A	Adoption by ESCAP member States of the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind at the sixth session of the Committee on Statistics	Endorsement of the Declaration by ESCAP at its seventy-fifth session; acknowledgment of the global relevance of the Declaration by the Statistical Commission of the United Nations at its fiftieth session

Abbreviation: N/A, not applicable.

V. Planned results for 2021

Result 1: stronger policy-data links for better decision-making (result carried over from 2020)

12.   The subprogramme will continue the work related to the improved availability, accessibility and use of quality data and official statistics in support of sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific, in line with its mandate, and will support countries in building their capacity to strengthen their national statistical systems, which is expected to be demonstrated by the performance measure for 2021 below. For 2020, a proxy performance measure is indicated, to reflect that the General Assembly, in its resolution 74/251, approved a programme narrative at the subprogramme level that is composed solely of the objectives.

Table 2
Performance measure

2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
N/A	Commitment to the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind, adopted by ESCAP member States in 2018	National implementation of the commitments contained in the Declaration	At least five countries demonstrating strengthened statistical systems in the account of progress prepared for the seventh session of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics, in 2020	Further national implementation of the commitments contained in the Declaration

Abbreviation: N/A, not applicable.

Result 2: Asia-Pacific countries take steps to transform their statistical systems: the case of Bhutan (new result)

13.   The subprogramme has been working in several countries to enhance national statistical capacity and to encourage and support the use of administrative data and new data sources to produce official statistics, which can lead to more granular and timely data and official statistics. These enhancements are in line with the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind and are geared towards supporting countries in the implementation of national commitments. The national statistical system of Bhutan is one that ESCAP is supporting substantially. Since 2018, ESCAP has been a signatory to the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2019–2023 of Bhutan, and has provided support in particular with respect to data and statistics. The desired outcome by 2023 is enhanced access to and use of reliable and timely data for inclusive and evidence-based policymaking and decision-making in the country. The workplan aims to strengthen the integration, monitoring and reporting of the country's five-year plans and progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and to produce disaggregated data on gender, vulnerable groups, multi-hazard preparedness and risk reduction and ensure that such data are used effectively.

14.   The subprogramme has shifted its approach and placed greater emphasis on strengthening national statistical systems to produce official statistics by using administrative data, such as through the harmonization of classifications used by government entities, in particular the International Standard Industrial Classification, and the use of civil registration data for producing vital statistics, instead of relying only on traditional data production methods such as censuses and surveys conducted by the national statistical office. As part of this shift, the subprogramme also strives to mainstream gender perspectives, for instance through the use of civil registration data, including marriage and divorce registration, disaggregated by sex and age, which is crucially important to the public health programme development and targeted interventions, including on gender-related issues.

Internal challenge and response

15.   The challenge for the subprogramme was to trigger and support the enhancement of the institutional strength, legislative frameworks and coordination mechanisms in place within the country for increased and improved use by the national statistical office of data sources generated by components of the national data system to produce official statistics. In response, the subprogramme will focus on working closely with the United Nations Resident Coordinator and the United Nations country team on institutional strengthening across the statistical system of Bhutan, supporting the chief statistician of Bhutan in his role as coordinator of the statistical system of Bhutan, developing and deploying opportunities to share regional knowledge and experience, and reaching out to development partners with the expertise and experience needed to support outcomes of the Cooperation Framework of Bhutan. In this regard, the subprogramme will support the Government of Bhutan in discussions to modernize statistical legislation.

Expected progress towards the attainment of the objective, and performance measure

16.   This work is expected to contribute to the improved availability, accessibility and use of quality data and official statistics in support of sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific, which would be demonstrated

by the further implementation of the national commitments contained in the Declaration. In the case of Bhutan, this would include increased and improved use by the National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan of data sources generated by components of the data ecosystem of Bhutan to produce official statistics, following the adoption of modernized statistical legislation and the further use of administrative data and new sources of data to produce official statistics in support of the five-year plan and for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Table 3
Performance measure

2017	*2018*	*2019*	*2020*	*2021*
N/A	The Government of Bhutan adopts the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind at the sixth session of the Committee on Statistics of ESCAP	The Government endorses the Declaration at the seventy-fifth session of the ESCAP	At least five countries, including Bhutan, demonstrating strengthened statistical systems in the account of progress on the implementation of the commitments contained in the Declaration prepared for the seventh session of the Committee on Statistics	Further implementation of the national commitments contained in the Declaration

Abbreviation: N/A, not applicable.

V. Legislative mandates

17. The list below provides all mandates entrusted to the subprogramme.

General Assembly resolutions

68/261	Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics
71/313	Work of the Statistical Commission pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Economic and Social Council resolutions and decisions

2006/6	Strengthening statistical capacity
2011/15	Revision of the statute of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific
2013/21	Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics
2017/7	Work of the Statistical Commission pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific resolutions

246 (XLII)	Statistical services in Asia and the Pacific
65/2	Regional technical cooperation and capacity-building in statistics development in Asia and the Pacific
67/10	A core set of economic statistics to guide the improvement of basic economic statistics in Asia and the Pacific
67/11	Strengthening statistical capacity in Asia and the Pacific
67/12	Improvement of civil registration and vital statistics in Asia and the Pacific
69/15	Implementing the outcome of the High-level Meeting on the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific
69/16	A core set of population and social statistics to guide national capacity development in Asia and the Pacific
71/14	Asian and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade, 2015–2024
73/5	Strengthening Asia-Pacific's support for the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14
74/6	Advancing disaster-related statistics in Asia and the Pacific
74/8	Accelerating the implementation of the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific
75/9	Implementation of the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind

VI.   Deliverables

18.   Table 4 lists all deliverables, by category and subcategory, for the period 2019–2021 that contributed and are expected to contribute to the attainment of the objective stated above.

Table 4
Subprogramme 7: deliverables for the period 2019–2021, by category and subcategory

Category and subcategory	*2019 planned*	*2019 actual*	*2020 planned*	*2021 planned*
A. Facilitation of the intergovernmental process and expert bodies				
Parliamentary documentation (number of documents)	**1**	**1**	**4**	**1**
1. Reports for ESCAP	1	1	2	1
2. Report for the Committee on Statistics	-	-	1	-
3. Report for the Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific	-	-	1	-

Category and subcategory	2019 planned	2019 actual	2020 planned	2021 planned
Substantive services for meetings (number of three-hour meetings)	**21**	**17**	**45**	**15**
4. Meetings of the Committee on Statistics	-	-	6	-
5. Meetings of the Governing Council of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific	3	3	3	3
6. Meetings of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia Project Working Group on Statistics	6	2	6	-
7. Expert group meetings on the use of non-traditional and complementary data sources in official statistics	-	-	6	6
8. Meetings of the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific	6	6	6	6
9. Expert group meetings on strengthening national statistical systems for enhanced quality and trust in official statistics	-	-	6	-
10. Meetings of the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific	6	6	6	-
11. Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific	-	-	6	-
B. Generation and transfer of knowledge				
Field and technical cooperation projects (number of projects)	**5**	**5**	**5**	**5**
12. Capacity-building projects on statistics	5	5	5	5
Publications (number of publications)	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
13. *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report*	1	1	1	1
Technical materials (number of materials)	**1**	**2**	**2**	**2**
14. Statistical briefs and working papers	1	2	2	2

C. Substantive deliverables

Consultation, advice and advocacy: advisory support to networks of statistics such as those of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Pacific Community and the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia.

Databases and substantive digital materials: ESCAP statistical database; database on statistical training materials and resources; substantive blog posts for ESCAP website.

D. Communication deliverables

Outreach programmes, special events and information materials: press interviews for major publications and events.

External and media relations: press releases and op-ed articles on the work and activities of the subprogramme.

Digital platforms and multimedia content: updating and maintenance of web pages of the subprogramme for the ESCAP website; inputs for ESCAP social media platforms.