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

**Seventh session**

Bangkok, 26–28 August 2020

Item 2 (a) of the provisional agenda\*

**Soliciting whole-of-government support for  
official statistics in the context of the 2030**

**Agenda for Sustainable Development:**

**follow-up on decisions made at the sixth  
session of the Committee on Statistics**

**Report of the secretariat on the establishment of  
communities of practice\*\***

*Summary*

The present document contains a summary on establishment of a pilot community of practice as per the decision of the sixth session of the Committee on Statistics.

**I. Background**

1. The Committee, at its sixth session in October 2018, decided to establish communities of practice covering the dimensions of process, data, conceptual and disciplinary integration and requested the Bureau of the Committee, with support from the secretariat, to develop terms of reference for the communities of practice, with the modality of the communities being electronic only.
2. The Bureau of the Committee, with the support of the secretariat, discussed the Committee decision at its meeting of 11 December 2018. The Bureau noted funding to implement the Committee's decision had been sought by the secretariat, and agreed data integration, particularly integration of traditional sources (e.g. population estimates) with non-traditional sources (e.g. big data sources including mobile phone data, remote sensing data), should be the immediate priority area for establishing a community of practice.
3. The Bureau advised to pilot the community of practice with digitally connected and digitally challenged countries i.e. those who can connect digitally and those with poorer digital connectivity. The Bureau also advised continued attention to conceptual integration.

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\* ESCAP/CST/2020/L.1.

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

4. With the advice from the Bureau, the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics, at its second meeting in July 2019, deliberated on the Committee's decision to establish communities of practice.<sup>1</sup> The Regional Steering Group strongly supported a trial in order to enhance the functionality and efficiency of the Regional Steering Group. In this regard, the Regional Steering Group:

- (a) Decided on creating four communities of practice, as follows:
  - (i) Community of practice-A: Enable policy environment and maintain demand and support;
  - (ii) Community of practice-B: Improve availability and quality of disaggregated statistics;
  - (iii) Community of practice-C: Enhance data accessibility, analysis, interpretation and use; and
  - (iv) Community of practice-D: Population Census and Civil Registration and Vital Statistics innovations.
- (b) Agreed upon the initial focus of the community of practice-A and B to be application of policy-data integration tool (EPIC) and data integration, respectively;
- (c) Agreed upon the purpose of the community of practice to be learning, sharing of knowledge and experience, and technical collaboration and not a forum for decision making and/or financial collaboration;
- (d) Agreed upon the objective of the community of practice to be identify and share good practices, as well as identify challenges and lessons learned in addressing challenges;
- (e) Acknowledged the need for specific contribution from one or more moderator(s) per community of practice who:
  - (i) Should be a member of the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics and to the extent possible, be a country not a development partner;
  - (ii) Should champion the community of practice among all Asia-Pacific countries and development partners, who will in turn encourage, recognise and support their staff to participate and contribute to the community of practice;
  - (iii) Provide strategic direction and identify opportunities (e.g. speakers, projects) for the community of practice;
  - (iv) Support members to promote the community of practice to other interested parties through electronic communication channels;
  - (v) Participate in the community of practice activities, as appropriate.
- (f) Agreed that membership of the community of practice should be voluntary and open to all Asia-Pacific countries, development partners, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs);

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/RSG-PSS%20meeting%20report.pdf>.

- (g) Agreed that at country level, the National Statistical Office is the focal point and is responsible for intra-country coordination; and
- (h) Agreed upon operating arrangements of the community of practice to include:
  - (i) Interactive feature (e.g. feedback), repository feature, and easy access;
  - (ii) Formal online meetings every six months in addition to regular interactions;
  - (iii) Use of existing platforms and tools (e.g. WIKI, and SLACK).

## II. The pilot data integration community of practice

### Actions taken to establish communities of practice

5. To support decisions made by the Committee and the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics, the secretariat researched existing communities of practice, developed a design and implementation framework for a dynamic network of communities of practice, and established one pilot community of practice on data integration. A consultant was engaged to support the work and provide a formal evaluation report to the secretariat and Bureau of the Committee on Statistics in preparation for the 7th Session of the Committee on Statistics in August 2020.

6. The work included reviewing existing communities of practice used by ESCAP and the wider United Nations statistical community (the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statistics Division and Economic Commission for Europe Statistics Division). A design and implementation framework for a dynamic network of communities of practice under the auspices of the Committee on Statistics was then developed based on the findings of the review. The next step was to create a pilot community of practice on data integration, support and evaluate the pilot community; and conduct an evaluation and develop recommendations for the consideration of the secretariat and Bureau of the Committee on Statistics.

7. The Bureau of the Committee on Statistics discussed and endorsed the terms of the reference of the pilot community of practice at its meeting of May 2020 following prior consultation on the draft terms of reference in April 2020.

8. The pilot data integration community of practice<sup>2</sup> was launched on 23rd April 2020 using Confluence as the technology platform. The ESCAP secretariat widely distributed invitations to the Asia-Pacific statistical community to join the group. As of June 2020, over 110 experts have joined the community of practice on a volunteer basis representing 19 member States and associate members, and 10 regional and international bodies.

### Actions by the pilot data integration community of practice

9. During the nine-week pilot period between April and June 2020, the data integration community of practice generated over 30 pages of content, the site had been viewed almost 4,000 times and more than 120 comments have been added by community members. Seven meetings were convened bringing people

<sup>2</sup> <https://stat-confluence.escap.un.org/display/DICP/Data+Integration+Community+of+Practice>.

together for an hour each time using Microsoft Teams as the platform. On average, the meetings attracted 40 members.

10. The pilot data integration community of practice initially focused on developing regional guidelines on data integration. Existing guidelines developed for Europe through the Conference of European Statisticians were used as the basis of the regional guidelines, with adjustments and examples to make them relevant to the Asia-Pacific region.

11. The pilot data integration community of practice provides its members the opportunity to share knowledge and experience around data integration. Besides providing an online platform to review, discuss and edit the guidelines, the community of practice was used to present and discuss relevant experiences and to learn from each other.

12. To enhance discussions around data integration in Asia and the Pacific, the members of the pilot data integration community of practice strongly supported conducting of an online survey to assess capacity of national statistical systems. This would be based on a similar survey conducted by the Economic Commission for Europe in 2017. The results will reveal progress, challenges and opportunities and establish a baseline for future capacity building activities to support data integration in the region.

### **III. Evaluation of the pilot data integration community of practice**

13. An evaluation of the pilot community was conducted during June 2020. Feedback and suggestions were gathered through an online evaluation survey distributed to all community members (26 responses received), 10 one-on-one interviews with representative community members and secretariat staff, and analysis of activity on the Confluence platform.

14. The feedback from community members has been overwhelmingly positive. Many see the community as a convenient and innovative complement to expert groups. Some highlighted that it has been vital for collaboration during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Many reflected that the community has been a useful way to come together and share ideas and provides an active and effective learning environment. All stakeholders interviewed emphasised that they want to see the community continue in the future and that it provides a cost-saving and environmentally friendly alternative to physical meetings.

15. Members have most appreciated the stimulating presentations, discussions, and frequent exchange of views via the weekly meetings. It was noted that both the live meetings and the Confluence platform provide a forum for a wider group of practitioners that can usually be involved in small expert groups and in face-to-face meetings. The increased frequency of communications amongst international peers has provided an easy way to ask questions and receive quick and reliable responses. The weekly meetings have helped keep participants engaged and the online platform could be easily accessed from anywhere at any time.

16. The high frequency of meetings (weekly) and the demands this placed on their time was a challenge for most members. Also, time zone differences were problematic for some in the east of the region who must participate well outside their regular working hours. Some noted that community members have wide-ranging levels of experience and different interests in data integration, sometimes hampering the group's ability to constructively explore the issues.

17. The pilot has established an active and lively community, but this has not happened passively. Members noted that much of the success has been due to the efforts of the secretariat to facilitate participation. Staff leading the work have spent time encouraging members to join the community and to join the regular meetings. They have contacted members to invite them to present their work at meetings, share resources, and to be actively involved in reviewing the guidelines, commenting and suggesting edits.

18. There have been valuable suggestions for developing the community in the future. Some suggested the work be split into smaller groups according to specific interests to encourage an increase the number of members who share their views and feedback. Many suggested that holding fortnightly or monthly would improve efficiency and encourage more participation. It was suggested that discussions focus on more country-specific and practical case studies and experiences. Bringing in guest speakers from other parts of the national statistical systems, academia and the private sector could provide valuable insights for practitioners. Suggestions were made to improve the flow and intuitiveness of the Confluence platform by simplifying the structure and focusing the content on sub-topics within data integration.

19. The evaluation found that the community of practice:

(a) Can be applied as a modality of collaboration to support task groups holding purpose, mandates and/or high enthusiasm which ensures satisfactory engagement of members;

(b) Should have a clear purpose aligned to a particular project or output rather than solely a platform for the exchange of information;

(c) Can provide cost-effective get-togethers and strengthen connections among national, regional and international experts in a specific area

(d) Provides a cost-effective opportunity to share knowledge and experience and learn from each other at the regional level;

(e) Does not fully replace but complements conventional ways of communication and collaboration, such as emails and face to face meetings;

(f) Shifts secretariat staff time allocated to administrative activities related to face-to-face meetings to activities related to reaching out to members and keeping them involved;

(g) Focusing on a specific area of expertise, as the pilot data integration community of practice, is likely to attract technical staff and fewer in high-level management positions.

#### **IV. Recommendations on the way forward**

20. The pilot data integration community of practice has been successful and should continue with another review point in early 2021. The lessons learned from this pilot and its continuation can be used to inform development of the other planned communities of practice.

21. The pilot community of practice would benefit from a member States being in the roles of the Chair (Moderator) and facilitators to play an active role in leading and contributing to the work.

22. Country-level focal points who would represent the national statistical office in the data integration community of practice, facilitate and coordinate relevant activities within the country, would be welcome.

## Annex

### Terms of reference of the pilot data integration community of practice

#### Background

1. ESCAP provides the Asia-Pacific statistical community with opportunities to meet and exchange ideas, and to develop standards and good practices across all fields of official statistics. In 2016, the ESCAP Committee on Statistics endorsed a collective vision and framework for action by the Asia-Pacific statistical community<sup>1</sup> that "... by 2030, national statistical systems are enabled and empowered to lead development of and to deliver innovative, trusted and timely products and services for urgently needed and evolving statistical requirements of Agenda 2030." The five agreed action areas are Action A: Engaging users and investing in statistics; Action B: Assuring quality and instilling trust in statistics; Action C: Integrated statistics for integrated analysis; Action D: Modernizing statistical business processes; and Action E: Having requisite skills set.
2. In 2018, the Committee on Statistics at its sixth session supported a proposal by the secretariat to form communities of practice to cover the four integration dimensions (including process, data, conceptual and disciplinary integration) under Action Area C. It recommended taking a stepwise approach with the establishment of a community of practice on conceptual integration as a possible first step.<sup>2</sup> Later, the Bureau of the Committee on Statistics in its meeting on 11 December 2018, agreed data integration rather than conceptual integration should be considered as the immediate priority.
3. In the meantime, the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics, which was established in 2017 to oversee the implementation of the Regional Strategy to Improve Population and Social Statistics in Asia and the Pacific,<sup>3</sup> at its second meeting in 2019, guided by the decision of the Committee on Statistics, discussed changing the modality of its working groups into communities of practice.<sup>4</sup>
4. Research was conducted in late 2019 and early 2020 on existing communities of practice to inform development of a design and implementation framework for an initial community of practice in Asia-Pacific on data integration.
5. The following terms of reference have been developed to guide establishment and piloting of the data integration community of practice during March – June 2020. Drafting data integration guidelines is the priority activity identified for the Community with the piloting of a suitable online environment a by-product.

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

<sup>2</sup> See ESCAP/CST/2018/6.

<sup>3</sup> See E/ESCAP/CST(5)/3.

<sup>4</sup> See ESCAP/CST/2020/INF/5.

## Purpose

6. Generically, communities of practice are established as an online space for sharing of knowledge and experience, technical collaboration and learning. It is not a forum for decision making and/or financial collaboration. communities of practice:

- (a) Aim to facilitate sharing of knowledge and experience;
- (b) Strengthen coordination and follow-up mechanisms;
- (c) Provide cost-effective get-togethers by use of electronic forums;
- (d) Facilitate South-South technical collaboration.

7. The data integration community of practice will be used to further work in Asia-Pacific on data integration. It will be the platform to bring experts in the statistical community to develop generic guidelines on data integration relevant to the Asia-Pacific region, building on existing guidelines developed for Europe through the Conference of European Statisticians (of which many Asia-Pacific countries are also a member).

8. Once the Asia-Pacific guidelines are developed, they will provide the basis for developing a training course on data integration, which can be a second product of the community of practice should it prove successful. The future establishment of other communities of practice will be informed by the lessons learned from this pilot exercise.

## Objectives

9. Objectives of the data integration community of practice includes:

- (a) Provide a closed space for virtual meetings and collaboration between members of a data integration community of practice and a common location for sharing information and documenting the work of the group; and
- (b) Piloting and evaluating the approach of online communities of practice and their effectiveness for the Asia-Pacific statistical community.

## Task and timelines

10. The data integration community of practice is tasked with drafting generic guidelines on data integration for submission to relevant regional mechanisms, including the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics, Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, and Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific and eventual publication as a product to be endorsed by the ESCAP Committee on Statistics.

11. The data integration community of practice will exist for the duration of 2020 with critical review points in August 2020 following evaluation of the initial pilot and at the end of the 2020 calendar year.

## Roles and responsibilities

12. Members will be representatives of National Statistical Offices and lead agencies in the National Statistical System, international and regional organizations active in supporting statistical capacity building and relevant NGOs. Membership should be voluntary and open to all Asia-Pacific countries. There is also a possibility for members to nominate other individuals with relevant expertise.

13. Roles will be allocated to the data integration community of practice members and ESCAP Statistics Division staff as the secretariat to encourage meaningful participation and ensure it has the best chance of success.

<i>Role</i>	<i>Responsibilities</i>
Leaders	<p>High-level decision makers and influencers in the Asia-Pacific statistical community who can show active support to the community of practice which may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Championing the community of practice among Asia-Pacific countries and development partners, who will in turn encourage, recognise and support their staff to participate and contribute to the Community;</li> <li>(b) Providing strategic direction and identifying opportunities for the community of practice;</li> <li>(c) Advocating for the community of practice model as a valuable mode of communication and collaboration;</li> <li>(d) Providing suggestions and advice to enhance communities of practice and increase their effectiveness.</li> </ul>
Facilitators	<p>Individuals tasked with facilitating work via the community of practice. Their responsibilities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Initiating meetings and communication between community of practice members;</li> <li>(b) Developing and adding content to the online space;</li> <li>(c) Encouraging communication and collaboration within the community of practice.</li> </ul>



<i>Role</i>	<i>Responsibilities</i>
Moderators	<p>There will be one or more moderator who should be a member of relevant regional mechanisms and to the extent possible, a country not a development partner. Their responsibilities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Support members to promote the community of practice to other interested parties through electronic communication channels;</li> <li>(b) Participate in the community of practice activities, as appropriate;</li> <li>(c) Providing suggestions and advice to the ESCAP Statistics Division as the secretariat to enhance communities of practice and increase their effectiveness.</li> </ul>
Members	<p>Practitioners from the Asia-Pacific statistical community who have expertise in the areas being discussed and will actively contribute to the purpose and objectives of the Community.</p> <p>An account will be set up by the ESCAP Statistics Division as the secretariat to give access to the community of practice and members will need to log in to interact in the online space.</p>

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### **Code of conduct**

14. Communication and work through the online community of practice must adhere to the following rules:

- (a) All communication will be respectful and that under no circumstances will personal or professional attacks be tolerated;
- (b) Privacy and confidentiality to be maintained within the Community to encourage free and open discussion;
- (c) Members are responsible for ensuring that the information they share or discuss is accurate, and not confidential;
- (d) Views expressed are to be respected as those of individual members and not to be attributed to the group as a whole until the work reaches a point ready for review and publication and members endorse the collective contributions as representing the product of the group;
- (e) All members should be encouraged to contribute, and an environment should be maintained that supports contributions from all participants;
- (f) The default operating language of the Community is English. This is not the mother tongue of many members and a respectful environment that allows these members to contribute fully should be maintained;

(g) Using the community of practice for unsolicited or unauthorized advertising, promotional materials, "junk mail," "spam," "chain letters," "pyramid schemes," or any other form of solicitation is prohibited:

(h) Members must not solicit anyone to buy or sell products;

(i) No donations of any kind;

(j) If a Member is found to be in breach of the Code of Conduct, they will be warned and/or removed from the community of practice.

### **Anticipated benefits of the community of practice**

15. The data integration community of practice will:

(a) Provide a basis for building a knowledge management system for official statistics in Asia and the Pacific;

(b) Shift working group communication from email – where information is only available to the sender and recipient of the email – to a common space that provides a record of interaction and a place where every group member can contribute;

(c) Improve the functionality of working groups, enhancing coordination, streamlining information sharing, and making their work more efficient;

(d) Increase the transparency and cohesiveness of work done by the Asia-Pacific statistical community and its shared vision and work methods;

(e) Provide a private space for sharing and working together that is appropriate for early discussions and product development, which, being closed, will be easier for the ESCAP Statistics Division as the secretariat to manage;

(f) Allow publication ready content to be moved across to the public domain when appropriate at the click of a button, allowing a combination of closed and open webpages;

(g) Allow participants see the shared history of group work making it easier to welcome new members and manage turnover in expert working groups.

### **Evaluation**

16. The pilot exercise will be evaluated based on information gathered throughout the process:

(a) Participants in the data integration community of practice will be asked to complete a short survey on their experience and expectations at the beginning and again at the end of the pilot exercise. This will provide baseline and endpoint data to assess their perceptions of the success of the exercise;

(b) The process, lessons learned, and recommendations will be documented by the lead consultant throughout the pilot exercise;

(c) In-depth interviews with key stakeholders and members of the data integration community of practice to evaluate the challenges and benefits of the modality and develop recommendations for the future.