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

Seventh session

Bangkok, 26–28 August 2020

Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*

Advancing official statistics for the 2030

Agenda for Sustainable Development:

**progress made in support of the collective
vision and framework for action by groups
responsible for regional initiatives of the
Committee on Statistics and by the
secretariat**

**Report of the 2nd meeting of the Regional Steering Group on
Population and Social Statistics****

Summary

The Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics was established as per decision of the Committee on Statistics at its fifth session in December 2016, to be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the regional strategy to improve population and social statistics in Asia and the Pacific to realize its vision, “By 2030, the countries of Asia and the Pacific have the capacity to produce, disseminate and use the core set of population and social statistics” and to achieve its three Goals, i.e. (1) Enabled policy environment and maintain demand and support, (2) Improved availability and quality of disaggregated statistics, (3) Enhanced data accessibility, analysis, interpretation and use.

The Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics first met in August 2017, reviewed its mandates, identified priority issues and specific modalities to advance implementation of the Regional Strategy, and formulated a work plan. Successive efforts of the Secretariat and a number of members of the Group, resulted in development and implementation of a tool, Every Policy is Connected (EPIC), which contributed to advancing towards Goal 1.

At its 2nd meeting in July 2019, the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics reviewed progress of work, decided on two priority activities under each Goal, and supported trialing the application of Communities of Practice, as on-line learning platforms, to enhance the functionality and efficiency of the Group.

The present document is the report of the 2nd meeting of the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics.

* ESCAP/CST/2020/L.1.

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

I. 2nd meeting of the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics

1. The 2nd meeting of the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics was held in Bangkok, Thailand, from 17 to 19 July 2019. The meeting was chaired by Bhutan and attended by 23 member States¹ and eight member agencies. In addition, representatives from, Open Data Watch, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific also attended.

2. The aim of the second Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics meeting was to review its work and how it can best address the needs of member States of the region. The main objectives of the meeting were:

(a) To identify critical challenges where regional initiatives can support countries to develop an integrated system of population and social statistics and ensure they are properly used to monitor global and national Sustainable Development Goals; and

(b) To review organization, activities and outputs of the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics to effectively meet the needs of national statistical systems and in line with the Collective Vision and Framework for Action by the Asia-Pacific statistical community.

3. In order to better tailor the agenda and organization of the meeting, the Secretariat gathered feedback and suggestions from all 28 member States through a short questionnaire “Call for inputs on meeting agenda”. The results of the questionnaire were used for developing the meeting agenda.

4. The meeting benefited from sharing of knowledge, experience and progress around the three Goals of the Regional strategy to improve population and social statistics in Asia and the Pacific. Also, in light of the agreement by the Committee on Statistics to establish Communities of Practice and the interest expressed by member States on improving the functionality and efficiency of the Group, enhancing coordination and follow-up mechanisms, Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics discussed modalities and decided on a way forward. This report summarizes the discussions and results of the second Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics. Detailed information on the meeting, including concept note, agenda, participants, presentations and background documents is available from: <https://www.unescap.org/events/second-meeting-regional-steering-group-population-and-social-statistics>.

II. Discussions and decisions on the way forward

5. The Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics decided the goals and targets of the regional strategy to improve population and social statistics in Asia and the Pacific, as endorsed by the Committee on Statistics of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, remain relevant.

6. The Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics discussed the concept of Community of Practice as an on-line learning platform and strongly supported trial of the Community of Practice in order to enhance the functionality and efficiency of the Group. In this regard, the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics:

¹ Including 12 female and 11 male participants.

- (a) Decided on creating four Communities of Practices, 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;
 - (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 Community of Practice-B to be “application of Every Policy is Connected (EPIC) tool” 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 to identify and share good practices, as well as identify challenges and lessons learned in addressing challenges;

- (e) Acknowledged the need for specific contributions from one or more moderator(s) per Community of Practice who should:
 - (i) Be a member of Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics and to the extent possible, be a country not a development partner;
 - (ii) 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;

- (g) Agreed that, at country level, the national statistical office is the focal point and is responsible for intra-country coordination;

- (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 or Slack).

7. The Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics discussed the future workplan of the group and decided on two priority activities per Goal, as below. The Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics agreed on the need for a concept note or implementation plan for each priority activity which should be drafted by the Secretariat and finalized by the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics electronically. The Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics also agreed on delivery of output/outcome per goal by a smaller group among Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics members and sharing of outputs/outcomes through the Communities of Practices.

- (a) Goal 1: Enabled policy environment and maintain demand and support;
 - (i) Develop case studies of countries applying Every Policy is Connected (EPIC) and undertake outreach activities to other interested countries;
 - (ii) Stocktaking of innovative Population Census practices and roles/responsibilities ;
- (b) Goal 2: Improved availability and quality of disaggregated statistics
 - (i) Develop generic guidelines on data integration;
 - (ii) Develop and conduct training courses on data integration;
- (c) Goal 3: Enhanced data accessibility, analysis, interpretation and use
 - (i) Hands on training on data and indicators with users and producers;
 - (ii) Develop easily accessible repository of metadata and guidelines on use and analysis of data.

III. Discussions and decisions on the three goals of the regional strategy to improve population and social statistics in Asia and the Pacific

8. The Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics acknowledged the importance of building integrated system of population and social statistics where different sources of data and statistics are harmonized to the extent possible and are integrated to produce quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data. In this regard the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics:

- (a) Strongly encouraged national statistical systems in the region to adopt integrated multi-purpose surveys instead of standalone surveys, despite technical challenges that it may pose;
- (b) Emphasized the importance of protecting confidentiality and privacy of data and recommended the national statistical offices to take the leadership role in all data integration activities related to official statistics given their expertise and experience in managing confidentiality;
- (c) Noted that the use of common sampling frame in different surveys can facilitate integration of data despite the difference in sampling designs;

(d) Recognized education statistics as a challenging yet worthy area to start integration of administrative data with census and survey data;

(e) Emphasized the importance of coordination between national statistical office and other national agencies regarding integrated statistics and supported the strengthening legal frameworks that facilitate national statistical office's access to data and national statistical office's leadership in coordinating national statistical activities;

(f) Discussed the importance of data ownership regarding Statistical Population Register where one may exist, and whilst ownership of any administrative data source, including Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, belongs to relevant administrative agencies, access to these administrative data sources should be provided to national statistical office to build and update Statistical Population Register and/or to support statistical production;

(g) Emphasized the role of national personal identity numbers and other unique numbers in facilitating national administrative procedures and data integration;

(h) Noted the importance of modernizing population censuses and stressed the role they play in facilitating data integration.

9. The Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics acknowledged Every Policy is Connected tool (EPIC) and emphasized opportunities to engage with policy makers and other users at the country level. In this regard, the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics:

(a) Emphasized the role of Every Policy is Connected (EPIC) tool in facilitating the dialogue between policymakers and data producers and acknowledged the request from the Committee on Statistics for its extension to other countries;

(b) Highlighted national coordination and technical capacity as two challenges in Sustainable Development Goals localization.

10. The Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics acknowledged data accessibility and data communication are essential elements of a responsive national statistical system, and in this regard:

(a) Welcomed the contribution from United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) on sharing experiences on communicating gender-related statistics;

(b) Welcomed developments by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in making Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys data open and accessible, noting roles and responsibilities around access to countries Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys data by protecting confidentiality;

(c) Noted the importance of open data and the role of national statistical offices in supporting open data at the country level.

11. Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics welcomed special sessions on international migration, gender, and crime and criminal justice statistics, noting these are areas where technical support including manuals and guidelines are particularly important for countries.