Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
11 June 2020

English only

Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of European Statisticians

Sixty-eighth plenary session
Geneva, 22-24 June 2020
Item 5 of the revised provisional agenda
Programme of work of the Statistics subprogramme of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

The establishment of a Regional United Nations Coordination Group on Data and Statistics for Europe and Central Asia

Prepared by the Secretariat

Summary

This document informs the Conference about the establishment of a new Regional United Nations Coordination Group on Data and Statistics for Europe and Central Asia, which aims to coordinate the data and statistics activities of the various United Nations agencies active in the region. This group will provide annual reports on its work to the Conference.

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I. Background

1.   The Regional United Nations Coordination Group on Data and Statistics for Europe and Central Asia was established in response to Recommendation 4 of the UN Secretary-General's report on the "Implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, 2019"[1]. That recommendation was to:

> "*launch a region-by-region change management process that will seek to consolidate existing capacities with regard to data and statistics, as well as other relevant analytical functions that may be currently duplicative. This exercise will have to be unique to each region and will be detailed and fleshed out in full consultation with each regional commission and respective regional team of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group*".

2.   Following extensive consultation within the UNECE region, the various United Nations agencies active in the field of data and statistics proposed to respond to this recommendation by re-configuring the existing Issue-Based Coalition on SDG Data and Monitoring, led by UNICEF, into a higher level coordination group, which would take the form of a regional version of the Committee of Chief Statisticians of the United Nations (CCS-UN). This approach received political support from the UNECE Executive Committee at its meeting of 14 October 2019.

3.   The new regional coordination group met for the first time on 16 January 2020, when it approved its terms of reference (see the annex). The group is co-chaired by UNECE and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). It will meet quarterly and report every June to the Conference of European Statisticians.

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[1] A/74/73 – E/2019/4

Annex

Terms of Reference for the Regional United Nations Coordination Group on Data and Statistics for Europe and Central Asia

I. Background

1.   The establishment of a UN data coordination group at the regional level in Europe and Central Asia region was proposed by the Regional Directors Team at the Regional Coordination Mechanism meeting on 11-12 May 2017. The resulting "Issue-Based Coalition on SDG Data and Monitoring" was established by the end of 2017. In 2018 and 2019 the group contributed actively to a number of important initiatives including participating in joint UN missions to support governments in the region to mainstream the SDGs (so-called MAPS missions), co-chairing a dedicated statistics session at the first Regional Development Forum (Geneva, March 2019), establishing a regional database of UN statistical activities, hosting a series of webinars on statistical topics, and preparing a guidance note for UNCTs on mainstreaming SDG 17.18 (statistical capacity building target) in new UNSDCFs. Members of the IBC SDG Data and Monitoring participated in technical working groups of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) and provided case studies to the CES Roadmap on Statistics for the SDGs.

2.   In 2019 an independent review of UN presence at regional level was initiated by the UN Secretary General. The subsequent SG's report to ECOSOC made 5 recommendations with respect to UN collaborative platforms, knowledge management, transparency and results-based management, back office functions, and **consolidating data and statistical capacities at regional level.**

3.   Issue-based Coalitions in the Europe and Central Asia region were identified as good practice and the IBC SDG Data and Monitoring a good example of such practice. A number of actions were identified towards making the effectiveness of the mechanism even stronger – actions that are reflected in these new Terms of Reference.

II. Objectives

4.   The Regional UN Coordination Group on Data and Statistics (R/CGDS) is created to promote coherence and integrated system-wide action amongst regional actors from the UN system and beyond - with the ultimate aim of improved national statistics with respect to the collection, analysis, and dissemination of accurate, reliable and comparable data, disaggregated by sex, age, migration status and other characteristics towards better monitoring of national policies and priorities, including those related to the SDGs.

5.   The main objectives of the R/CGDS are:

- • Coordinated statistical work of the different agencies, towards ensuring coherence and synergies at the country level, as well as with the priorities and work carried out by the main intergovernmental body, the Conference of European Statisticians, and the activities of other international organisations, including Eurostat, EFTA and CIS-Stat.

- • Adherence to statistical norms and standards in modernized national statistical systems (in line with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics) towards high quality, comparable, timely data for decision-making.

6.   The R/CGDS work will be demand-driven, responding both to common challenges across the region (17 UN programme countries) as well as country specific requests (from UN country teams/UNCTs or Governments) for technical assistance. The R/CGDS recognizes the specific comparative advantage of each UN agency while seeking to maximize synergies within the modest regional resources for available for statistics.

7.   The R/CGDS will work within the framework of provisions and recommendations of the global groups, working on statistics, monitoring of the SDGs and beyond, including: UN Committee of Chief Statisticians, HLG-PCCB (High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development); IAEG-SDGs (Inter-agency Expert Group on SDG Indicators) and its sub-groups; and the High-level Group for the Modernisation of Official Statistics.

III.   Membership

8.   The R/CGDS is co-chaired by the UNECE Statistical Division and another UN agency that is engaged in activities in at least 50% of the programme countries in the region, on a rotational basis. The second co-chair is elected by the R/CGDS for a two-year period and is eligible for re-election for a second two-year period, though preference is given to new agencies willing to step into the role.

9.   The co-chairs will prepare draft agendas, organize the meetings, ensure written summaries of meetings, and the maintenance of a shared virtual workspace for the R/CGDS. The co-chairs may represent the Coordination Group in strategic meetings or discussions whenever its members consider it necessary. The secretariat of the R/CGDS is the UNECE Statistical Division.

10.   R/CGDS membership is open to all UN funds, agencies and programmes working in the area of data and statistics in the Europe and Central Asia region. Other entities working at the regional level on statistics may be invited. Their membership will be determined case by case every year based on specific needs or joint activities included in the annual work plan. Observers may be invited on a case-by-case basis as necessary and when relevant.

11.   Each member agency will designate a focal point, ideally a statistician, to represent their respective office. Representation is expected at senior technical level, preferably P4/P5. Any cost of participation will be met by each participating member agency.

12.   The focal points represent their agency and are responsible for providing an update on their organization's statistical activities and plans. The focal point is also responsible for keeping colleagues in their respective agencies informed on the activities of the R/CGDS.

IV.   Meetings, deliverables and reporting

13.   Members will meet quarterly either face to face or in virtual meetings. Additional ad-hoc meetings may be convened, if deemed necessary, by the members. Opportunities for face-to-face meetings will be used e.g. in the margins of relevant CES meetings.

14.   Typical joint activities include but are not limited to:

  • Joint needs assessments in the area of statistics (capacity gaps, data gaps, etc.)

  • Developing joint action plans, products and messaging (guidance notes, position papers, analytical publications)

  • Contributing to annual regional SDG events and reports

  • Participation in CES expert task forces and working groups

  • Responding to specific technical assistance requests from UNCTs and National Statistical Offices/Institutes (joint missions and/or missions on behalf of the CGDS)

  • Joint advocacy.

15.   The R/CGDS will prepare an annual workplan. The R/CGDS reports formally to the UN Regional Directors Team and will brief both the RDT and CES on annual UN achievements and contributions to national system strengthening in the area of statistics.