

Summary report
First (Virtual) Organizational Sprint Meeting of the United Nations Network
of Economic Statisticians

Virtual Meeting, 3 November 2021

Introduction

1. The First (Virtual) Organizational Sprint Meeting of the United Nations Network of Economic Statisticians (Network) was organized on 3 November 2021. Besides officially launching the Network, the meeting discussed the terms of reference of the Network and the working methods of the Organizational Sprint. It also discussed the preparation of the workplan of the Network for 2022 and the end of this Organization Sprint, and the feasibility of organizing other thematic sprints, including the Global Facilitation of Access to Privately Held Data for Official Statistics and Beyond GDP, Well Being, and Inclusive Wealth. The meeting was attended by around 50 senior representatives from countries, and international and regional organizations.
2. Mr. Stefan Schweinfest, Director of the United Nations Statistics Division, and Mr. Greg Peterson, Assistant Chief Statistician of Statistics Canada, provided the opening remarks. Mr. Schweinfest highlighted that the meeting was the first step towards transforming the system of economic statistics by implementing the recommendations of the Friends of the Chair Group on Economic Statistics following their endorsement by the Statistical Commission in 2021. Mr. Peterson elaborated on the proposed operational mechanism of the Network, which involves setting up thematic task teams, which will work in sprints of short duration to design recommendations and solutions for identified priority issues for the system of economic statistics. Both stressed the need for the Network to provide the global platform for continuous dialogue on and response to fast-evolving issues (like the COVID pandemic) while ensuring diversity to facilitate the exchange of a broad spectrum of shared ideas, experiences, and priority setting for global action.
3. The following is a summary of the discussions and the conclusions.

Summary report

Review of the recommendations of the Friends of the Chair group on economic statistics report

4. Mr. Greg Peterson, Assistant Chief Statistician, Statistics Canada, presented the recommendations of the Friends of the Chair Group on Economic Statistics (FOCG) aiming at better outcomes for the system of economic statistics, organized around four major themes:
 - Networking: collaboration and user consultation
 - Transforming and challenging the system: statistical infrastructure and operations, and data solutions
 - Enabling: institutional arrangements and governance
 - Experimenting, integrating, and documenting: statistical framework and methods
5. The recommendations were approved by the 52nd session of the Statistical Commission, which also included the formation of a United Nations Network of Economic Statisticians with the intent to create an agile, collaborative and highly impactful approach for improving the responsiveness of the system

of economic statistics to fast evolving policy demands. He noted that these recommendations will be reviewed and progress against them will be reported to the Statistical Commission.

6. Participants welcomed the initiative to operationalize the recommendations of the FOCG. They noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had revealed the widening gap between national statistical systems in developed and developing economies in the compilation of economic statistics to monitor the effects of the pandemic. At the same time, they noticed that developing countries have been actively exploring alternative data solutions to meet the demands for high frequency statistics and integrated multi-dimensional statistics. They also stressed that the implementation of the recommendations should avoid duplication with the work of other workstreams. In addition, they highlighted the need to adopt a light and agile approach with less emphasis on governance when implementing the recommendations.

Terms of Reference for the Network

7. Ms. Daniela Ravindra of Statistics Canada presented the draft term of reference of the Network. The presentation noted that the Network will form Task Teams which will operate in sprints of two-to-three-month periods to complete short-term projects on specific but shared priority issues. These projects will develop an initial strategy or a minimal viable product, that may then be provided to other existing statistical bodies (working groups, committees, etc.) to be fully developed, tested or implemented.
8. Participants welcomed the concept of using sprints as a horizontal mechanism to address emerging and urgent issues like the COVID-19 pandemic. They suggested that the terms of reference could be nuanced to specify the specific strategic direction of the Network and the type of users to engage. They also suggested inviting additional high-level economic statisticians from the less developed economies to join the Network to ensure diversity in the exchange of issues and solutions. Additional invitations should be made in consultation with the regional commissions and agencies. Furthermore, they advised that the work of the Network should complement and amplify rather than duplicate the work of existing groups which are working in similar domains. Moreover, they proposed organizing thematic regional and global forums to promote the activities of the Network.

Action: Participants will provide more written comments on the terms of reference to UNSD by 22 November 2021. UNSD will identify and invite high-level economic statisticians from the less developed economies to join the Network.

Introduction to the Network Task Teams

9. Mr. Richard Heys of the United Kingdom Office for National Statistics presented the objectives of the *Beyond GDP* sprint, while Ms. Lianne Ippel of Statistics Netherlands presented the objectives of the *Global Facilitation of Access to Privately held Data for Official Statistics* sprint.
10. Participants welcomed both initiatives and expressed strong interest in participating in the proposed Sprints, as both reflected in their country's priorities. On the Beyond GDP sprint, they agreed with the objectives to initially scope the work undertaken in this domain internationally to identify best practices. They also suggested that the sprint coordinate its work with the European Commission task team working on business statistics. On the access to privately held data sprint, they noted the need to develop global initiatives on access to data for all countries to enhance their capacity to access and use such data. Given the objective of leaving no country behind, the Network should ensure appropriate representation for a shared and coordinated global effort to request the data. Also, the work of the sprint should leverage on existing initiatives such as those by the European Commission and the IMF-FSB led G20 initiative of the Inter-agency Group on Data Gaps.

Next steps

11. The proposal to organize the next meeting on 24 November 2021 was agreed with an agenda to seek sign off on the terms of reference of the Network and initiate the discussion on the modalities of user consultations, including the country consultation through national, regional, and global user seminar/forums, and the consultation with statistical bodies under the Statistical Commission and other statistical agencies such as Eurostat, IMF, OECD, and WB. The third meeting (tentatively set for 15 December 2021) will seek a conclusion on the actions for the user consultations and initiate the discussion on the priorities for the workplan for 2022. The fourth meeting (in January 2022) will conclude on the topics of the Organizational Sprint with the outcomes to be reported in a background paper to the Statistical Commission.
12. Mr. Peterson also informed participants that Statistics Canada in consultation with UNSD will be preparing the first report of the Network, which will be presented at the 53rd session of the Statistical Commission. The draft report will be circulated to the members of the Network for written comments.