

Taskforce on COVID-19 and household surveys  
19 June 2020

1. Rationale

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented itself as both a tremendous challenge and an opportunity to household survey programmes in countries.

The immediate challenge is related to the traditional face-to-face survey operations that may currently be difficult due to the social distancing and other restriction measures in many countries. Ensuring the continuity of survey programmes has been raised by many countries as one of the major challenges brought by the pandemic. In response to these disruptions, many national statistical offices have acted quickly to address both the continuity of existing data collection programmes as well as the new data needs to better respond to the pandemic, often adopting innovative approaches or resorting to alternative data sources. For many other countries, however, the COVID-19 pandemic has drawn attention to systemic constraints which, unless addressed including through support by the global community, could potentially result in widening gaps between the haves and have nots.

To address the immediate data needs deriving from the recent pandemic, countries may rely on modes of data collection and data sources requiring little or no face-to-face interaction with the respondents. Mostly among these alternative approaches has been the use of telephone interviews. The limitations posed by phone interview, combined with the high and growing demand for timely information by governments and international agencies, are putting NSOs, particularly the ones in low income countries, under strain. Thus, there is a need for the global community to facilitate coordination and reduce inefficiencies under the current arrangements.

And while alternative data collection modes and data sources are currently playing a crucial role in the current environment, they are likely to be more common fixtures as well under a post-pandemic “new normal”. How will the impact of COVID-19 and the response measures reshape household survey programmes in the future? How can we establish a sustainable household survey programme that is resilient and versatile to future shocks like the COVID-19? Addressing these questions provides an opportunity for the global community to jointly position themselves to help countries prepare for this new scenario in which face-to-face surveys will have to evolve and adjust to meet the challenges posed by the “new normal”.

The ISWGHS has a critical role to play in both enhancing coordination and improving efficiencies in the current data collection system as well as promoting and disseminating best practices and lessons learned and leading strategic thinking in these areas, to support countries in preparing and adjusting to a post-pandemic state of affairs. For this reason, a task force is being proposed to help coordinate this effort under the ISWGHS.

## 2. Objectives

The overall objectives of the Task Force are to (a) support the coordination of the COVID-19 impact surveys in countries; (b) provide guidance to countries both on maintaining the continuity of regular survey programmes and various methodological aspects of COVID-19 related surveys; and (c) establish a collective vision on the implications of COVID-19 for reshaping the national household survey programmes.

## 3. Tasks and outputs:

The following is a list of tasks that will be covered by the Task Force:

- a. Collect information on the COVID-19 impact surveys and other COVID-19 related surveys underway or being planned in countries, including sampling design, time period and frequency of data collection, geographical areas that are covered by the survey, target population, data collection mode, respondents to the survey, topics covered, weighting and communication strategies. (from mid June on)
- b. Establish and maintain a webpage sharing the information listed above (from mid-June on)
- c. Establish a calendar of the impact of COVID-19 surveys led by ISWGHS members for better coordination of the survey operations in countries (mid June)
- d. Consolidate experience and knowledge on various aspects of the COVID-19 related surveys and assemble and disseminate guidelines and training material (from June on)
- e. Establish a collective view on the future of household survey programmes and prepare a position paper (June – August)

Output of the Task Force include:

- Webpage with the information collected in items (a) and (b) above
- An online Calendar of the impact of COVID-19 surveys
- A brief summary of national practices on responses to COVID-19
- Guidelines and training materials on COVID-19 related household surveys, which may also be used in the future for similar shocks
- A position paper on the future of household survey programmes, highlighting areas that financial support for countries will be necessary.

All outputs will be reviewed by members of the Task Force followed by the ISWGHS members. The final product(s) will be submitted to the statistical Commission in 2021 for information.

## 4. Membership

The Task force will be led by UIS, UNSD and the World Bank. Members for the task force may include (a) members of ISWGHS that formally commit time and/or resources; and (b) external experts or organizations who can make substantive and/or financial contribution to the work.

All members are expected to contribute actively to the technical work by completing parts of the tasks listed above, as agreed by the members of the task force.