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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**Advancing official statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: progress in implementing regional initiatives with respect to the collective vision and framework for action****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

The present document contains an outline of progress in regional capacity development initiatives under the purview of the Committee on Statistics to implement the commitments contained in the document entitled “Advancing official statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: a collective vision and framework for action by the Asia-Pacific statistical community”, endorsed by the Committee at its fifth session, and an outline of the work of the secretariat to support those initiatives. Progress and achievements are reported for each of the five action areas of the collective vision and framework for action.

The Committee may wish to comment on the progress made and provide further guidance to ensure the successful advancement of the shared ambition expressed in the collective vision and framework for action.

* ESCAP/CST/2020/L.1.

I. Introduction

1. At its fifth session, held in 2016, the Committee on Statistics endorsed the document entitled “Advancing official statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: a collective vision and framework for action by the Asia-Pacific statistical community”.¹ The collective vision and framework for action are focused on five action areas: engaging users and investing in statistics; assuring quality and instilling trust in statistics; using integrated statistics for integrated analysis; modernizing statistical business processes; and having the requisite skills set. The Asia-Pacific statistical community is committed to expanding and reinforcing global, regional and subregional partnerships and building on existing statistical capacity development initiatives in the region.

2. During the high-level segment of its sixth session,² the Committee on Statistics adopted the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind.³ The aim of the Declaration is to set in motion transformative processes required for national statistical systems to produce high-quality, timely, reliable and disaggregated statistics to close data gaps in order to deliver on national, regional and global development commitments. In 2019, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) endorsed the Declaration and called upon members and associate members to make every effort to fulfil the commitments contained therein.⁴

3. The Committee’s capacity development initiatives are overseen by the following six steering or technical groups comprising representatives from member States and international organizations:

- (a) The Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific;
- (b) The Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics;
- (c) The Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific;
- (d) The Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific (newly reconfigured as a technical working group);
- (e) The Regional Steering Committee for Asia and the Pacific for the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics;
- (f) The Network for the Coordination of Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific.

4. The present document contains an introduction to the work of these groups since the sixth session of the Committee on Statistics, held in 2018, and highlights of progress made in implementing the commitments contained in the collective vision and framework for action.⁵ The document also contains highlights of other initiatives of the secretariat to advance official statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the collective vision and framework for action, including efforts to mainstream gender in various statistical domains.

¹ E/ESCAP/CST(5)/1/Rev.1.

² See ESCAP/CST/2018/6.

³ ESCAP/75/4/Add.1.

⁴ See Commission resolution 75/9.

⁵ See ESCAP/CST/2018/1 and ESCAP/CST/2018/2 for information on progress made prior to the sixth session of the Committee on Statistics.

5. The work of the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific is presented in more detail under item 2 (c) of the provisional agenda in document ESCAP/76/23 and in information document ESCAP/CST/2020/INF/3.

II. Progress in implementing the commitments contained in the collective vision and framework for action by the Asia-Pacific statistical community, by action area

A. Engaging users and investing in statistics

6. Outreach, user engagement and investment in statistics are critical to the strengthening of national statistical systems. The increased engagement of users of statistics creates enhanced demand for statistics which, in turn, can increase investment in statistics.

7. Action area A has two objectives, to be met by 2030:

(a) National statistical systems are responsive to the needs of users, including those arising from the 2030 Agenda;

(b) Investments in national statistical systems match the requirements for meeting demands and needs of users.

1. Regional initiatives of the Committee

8. Activities related to economic statistics in the Asia-Pacific region are guided by the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, under the leadership of its Steering Group. The Regional Programme is the Committee's longest-running initiative, endorsed at its second session, held in 2010.⁶ It is currently in its third phase (2018–2020), and the Steering Group, on the recommendation of the Committee, has extended the programme to 2030 and aligned it with the 2030 Agenda and the collective vision and framework for action.

9. With the support of the secretariat, the Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific assessed progress made in producing the core set of economic statistics⁷ at the national level by conducting a region-wide capacity screening. The results of the capacity screening demonstrated the status of economic statistics in the region and helped to identify areas requiring further attention and investment in line with the key output areas of the Regional Programme, including advocacy, skills, statistical infrastructure and coordination. The secretariat produced country profiles for all responding countries, disseminated them to users and producers of economic statistics and made them available on an online platform.⁸

10. A Steering Group task force organized the Asia-Pacific Economic Statistics Week in 2018 and 2019 on annual themes reflecting demand for economic statistics arising from the 2030 Agenda. Statisticians from the region and beyond produced research papers that formed the basis for discussions at the Asia-Pacific Economic Statistics Week. First organized in 2016, the Week has

⁶ See E/ESCAP/67/12, decision 2/6.

⁷ See Commission resolution 67/10.

⁸ ESCAP, "Country overview of statistical capacity 2017". Available at <http://communities.unescap.org/asia-pacific-economic-statistics/country-overview-statistical-capacity-2017>.

become a recognized and appreciated regional platform for knowledge-sharing on diverse topics related to economic statistics. Renamed in 2020, the Asia-Pacific Statistics Week has been redesigned to cover other areas of statistics as an inclusive regional mechanism for implementing commitments contained in the collective vision and framework for action.

11. In 2018, a policy-data integration tool entitled “Every policy is connected” (EPIC) was developed under the auspices of the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics to facilitate dialogue between users and producers of statistics with a view to developing a set of sustainable development indicators for use in national and sectoral policies and plans.⁹ The tool, which covers social, economic, environmental and institutional principles, can be used to assess policies, data and official statistics for inclusive development and to develop indicator sets relevant to policy priorities.

12. At its sixth session, the Committee endorsed the tool, recommended expanding its application to other sectors and tasked the secretariat with the development of guidelines and applications to make the tool more accessible to national statistical systems in the region. Since then, the secretariat has developed the tool into an online application and tested it in beta form on a range of sectors, including at a regional workshop and at a national workshop in Samoa, held in 2018. The tests served to identify further enhancements to the online application, and improvements are continually being made to maximize the tool’s potential to generate fit-for-purpose indicator sets in a comprehensive yet simple manner.

13. The tool was applied to gender equality policies at national workshops in Armenia and Viet Nam, with participation from a wide range of national stakeholders including national statistical offices, line ministries, national mechanisms for the advancement of women, national planning agencies and civil society organizations.¹⁰ These workshops yielded inputs for the development or refinement of a comprehensive indicator set on gender equality and women’s empowerment for use at the national level, as well as inputs for the refinement of existing policy documents to reflect population subgroups and related issues of interest in a more comprehensive manner.

14. The Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific strives to strengthen regional momentum with regard to civil registration and vital statistics systems. The secretariat has supported advocacy efforts, including monthly newsletters and side events at regional and global intergovernmental forums, to place civil registration and vital statistics systems at the centre of discussions on sustainable development and ensure that they benefit from related investments.

15. Pursuant to Commission resolution 74/8 on accelerating the implementation of the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, the secretariat is actively supporting the organization of the Second Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, to be held in 2021. The Second Ministerial Conference will bring together a wide range of stakeholders involved

⁹ See ESCAP/CST/2018/CRP.1. Available at www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/ESCAP.CST_.2018.CRP_.1_EPIC_a_generic_tool_for_policy-data_integration.pdf.

¹⁰ Information on the national workshops is available at www.unescap.org/events/technical-meeting-strengthen-gender-indicators-and-related-data-production-and-use-response and www.unescap.org/events/capacity-building-workshop-gender-policy-data-integration-armenia.

in the use and production of data, including national statistical offices, civil registration offices, a range of ministries beyond ministries of health, civil society organizations and local governments, to enhance the visibility of and investment in national civil registration and vital statistics systems and to discuss, among other matters, the economic and social costs and benefits of such systems, including with regard to pandemics such as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

16. The use of civil registration data disaggregated by sex and age is crucially important for public health programmes and targeted interventions. The secretariat is collaborating with the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific and other partners to support the use vital statistics from civil registration records to produce statistics disaggregated by sex. As part of efforts to advocate gender mainstreaming in civil registration and vital statistics systems, a session on using civil registration and vital statistics to understand and address gender inequalities in Asia and the Pacific will be held at the Second Ministerial Conference.

17. The sixth and final meeting of the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific was held in April 2019, with representation from 23 countries in the region. The Expert Group met to celebrate the significant results of the work it had carried out since its inception in 2015, most notably the Disaster-related Statistics Framework, which was recognized by the Statistical Commission in 2019 as a starting point for the development of global statistical standards for disaster-related statistics.¹¹ Yet rather than resting on their laurels, participants at the meeting took the opportunity to share country case studies, initiatives and good practices and to identify research, training and assistance needs as collaboration entered a new phase.¹²

18. The Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific has been transformed into a technical working group in accordance with the terms of reference approved by the Bureau of the Committee on Statistics in April 2019. The technical working group will focus on supporting the implementation of the Disaster-related Statistics Framework in the region, in close collaboration with complementary initiatives in other regions. Its first meeting is scheduled for September 2020. Normative work at the global level continues to be carried out by a newly formed inter-agency expert group on disaster-related statistics, which operates under the Statistical Commission and is co-chaired by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and ESCAP.

2. Work of the secretariat

19. The secretariat worked with the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century to conduct a review of the national statistical system in Sri Lanka at the request of the Department of Census and Statistics, which sought to formulate its first national strategy for the development of statistics. The review involved a wide range of national stakeholders and yielded insights on the quality of statistical outputs and institutional environments, including with regard to legislation, the implementation of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, codes of practice, human resources management, standard operating procedures, and policies on data production and dissemination.

¹¹ *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2019, Supplement No. 4* (E/2019/24-E/CN.3/2019/34), chap. I, sect. B, decision 50/116.

¹² See ESCAP/CST/2020/INF/6.

20. To address the lack of awareness about existing gender data, the insufficient dissemination of gender data and the disconnect between users and producers of such data, the secretariat initiated work on improving the communication of gender data in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals and beyond. A regional workshop on communicating gender data was held by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and ESCAP in June 2019.¹³ The workshop brought together users and producers of gender data from national statistical offices, line ministries, civil society, academia and the media and included topics such as basic statistical literacy, data visualization, designing gender data communication strategies and engaging the media. In 2020, ESCAP will work with UN-Women and the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific to follow up on the workshop by developing e-learning materials on the use of gender data for analysis, communications and policymaking.

21. The secretariat's efforts to strengthen statisticians' ability to communicate their work and results included a writing workshop, held in March 2019, to help implementers of economic statistics projects from five countries to document their successful experiences with a view to facilitating national advocacy and international replication.¹⁴

B. Assuring quality and instilling trust in statistics

22. For official statistics to be used and sufficient resources to be secured, the quality of official statistics has to be trusted by the public. Legal frameworks that accord coordination authority and responsibility to national statistical offices as well as national strategies for the development of official statistics are transformative tools and prerequisites for improved coordination, system-wide quality assurance frameworks, efficient data flows and modernized statistical business processes.

23. Action area B has three objectives, to be met by 2030:

(a) National statistical systems have in place legal frameworks that accord appropriate coordination authority and responsibility to national statistical offices and that are fully in line with and facilitate adherence to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics;

(b) National statistical systems, as the national authorities on statistics, formulate and implement comprehensive, system-wide and transformative strategies for the development of statistics to monitor progress in the implementation of national development plans and the 2030 Agenda;

(c) National statistical systems have implemented a system-wide quality assurance framework.

1. Regional initiatives of the Committee

24. In December 2018, the first Action Plan of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics concluded. Launched in 2012, it was designed as a comprehensive framework for improving the availability and use of agricultural and rural data for evidence-based decision-making.

25. The first Action Plan of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics, which is overseen at the regional level by the Regional Steering

¹³ Information on the workshop is available at www.unescap.org/events/workshop-communicating-gender-data-promoting-better-use-and-delivering-impactful-messages.

¹⁴ Bhutan, Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Maldives and Myanmar.

Committee for Asia and the Pacific for the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics, included the implementation of a comprehensive technical assistance, training and research programme. Implementation in Asia and the Pacific was led by a dedicated regional office housed in the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Pacific Community.

26. The Regional Steering Committee for Asia and the Pacific for the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics met in June 2018 to discuss regional activities for the final six months of the first Action Plan. At the meeting, senior officials from member States and implementing partners, approved the following regional activities: five regional workshops, held by the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific and FAO, on the use of Geographic Information Systems, master sampling frames and cost-effective measurement approaches for Sustainable Development Goal indicators on women's access to agricultural land and food loss; an ADB-FAO open online course on the use of computer-assisted personal interviewing, with more than 650 registrants worldwide; and more than two dozen FAO-led national capacity development activities.

27. At its final meeting, held virtually in March 2019, the Regional Steering Committee for Asia and the Pacific for the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics reviewed and approved the final report of the regional office. The Regional Steering Committee has since disbanded. The region continues to benefit from the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics as cost-effective methodologies are mainstreamed into national agricultural and rural statistics programmes and FAO capacity development initiatives.

28. To address the excessive complexity of the governance structure of the first phase, a simplified governance model will be applied in the Second Global Action Plan of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics, comprising a single global steering committee, a global office and regional technical advisory boards. This model will also enable greater harmonization with other global initiatives, including the new FAO umbrella programme on measuring the Sustainable Development Goals and the "50 by 2030" initiative for implementing the Agricultural Integrated Survey programme on a large scale.

2. Work of the secretariat

29. To facilitate the monitoring of progress in the implementation of national development plans and the 2030 Agenda, the secretariat developed the Asia-Pacific SDG Gateway as a one-stop shop for all Sustainable Development Goal data and statistics, analytical resources and country-level assessments of data availability.¹⁵ The Asia-Pacific SDG Gateway is a resource for member States and development partners (including United Nations country teams) to understand regional and subregional progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, apply analytical tools and enhance dialogue on national and regional priorities for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. A key product of the Asia-Pacific SDG Gateway is the *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report*,¹⁶ one of the secretariat's annual flagship publications and its most popular product

¹⁵ <https://data.unescap.org>.

¹⁶ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.II.F.10.

according to download statistics. The report informs intergovernmental discussions at the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development.

30. Many countries in Asia and the Pacific have adopted national Sustainable Development Goal indicator frameworks to nationalize the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda and integrate them into policies, strategies and plans. In this process, Governments have determined which of the targets are relevant to their national circumstances and, on that basis, made decisions on their approach, whether it be to add national priority indicators not in the global framework, to adopt global indicators with minor changes and/or to select indicators as alternatives to global indicators.

31. The secretariat has supported countries in the region, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam, with regard to data and statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals. This support has included the services of a regional adviser for official statistics for the 2030 Agenda since February 2019; advisory and technical support to establish systems to exchange data and metadata between national statistical systems; the development of platforms for data dissemination and reporting, in particular in cases where technical assistance was linked to voluntary national reviews; the adaptation of the secretariat's methodology for assessing progress towards the Goals and targets in light of specific country situations; and the communication of data and progress assessments, including by visual means.

32. The secretariat has planned and delivered country-level technical assistance with regard to data and statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals in close collaboration and coordination with the relevant resident coordinators and United Nations country teams as well as other entities of the United Nations development system where relevant, such as the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat. In 2019, two regional workshops on the Sustainable Development Goal indicators prioritized by the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea were held for experts from ESCAP member States to exchange national experiences and learn from custodian agencies about the technical and procedural aspects of the selected indicators. The secretariat has also contributed to various country-level processes, including by participating in common country assessments and in the development of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.

33. The secretariat has taken specific steps to address issues of data quality and trust in statistics by spearheading discussions on the importance of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics in the context of big data at regional and global events and publishing discussion papers on the topic.¹⁷ It also supported regional inputs for the global assessment of institutional readiness for the use of big data in official statistics conducted by the Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics task team on training, competencies and capacity development.

34. The secretariat also actively engaged with a global technical group, facilitated by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, to develop the *United Nations National Quality Assurance Framework*

¹⁷ ESCAP, "Big data = big ideas: Asia and the Pacific statistical community share their experiences in Malaysia at the 62nd International Statistics Institute World Statistics Congress", Stats Brief, No. 20 (October 2019); and ESCAP, "Can mobile phone data be used for official statistics? Asia and the Pacific says yes", Stats Brief, No. 18 (June 2019).

*Manual for Official Statistics: Including Recommendations, the Framework and Implementation Guidance.*¹⁸ The purpose of the manual is to support the development of system-wide quality assurance frameworks at the national level. The secretariat implemented the framework contained in the manual in its own operations to ensure the quality of the data and statistics used and disseminated in ESCAP analytical products.

35. The secretariat also served as a member of the advisory board tasked with the global revision of the newly renamed *Handbook on Management and Organization of National Statistical Systems*. The *Handbook* guides chief statisticians and senior managers of statistical organizations in developing and maintaining statistical capacity that is fit for purpose. Topics include legal frameworks that accord appropriate coordination authority and responsibility to the national statistical offices and that are fully in line with and facilitate adherence to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, and statistical quality assurance frameworks.

C. Integrated statistics for integrated analysis

36. To provide timely products and services that respond to the needs of users, national statistical systems need to accelerate efforts to improve their capacity to integrate data sources and establish integrated production and reporting systems. These efforts are central to meeting the need for integrated analysis of the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development, which call for innovative thinking, in particular on the use of data sources that are new to official statistics.

37. Action area C has two objectives, to be met by 2030:

(a) An integrated statistical measurement framework for the Sustainable Development Goals has been developed;

(b) National statistical systems integrate data from multiple sources in a coherent and consistent manner for the production of statistical products that support integrated analysis of sustainable development issues.

1. Regional initiatives of the Committee

38. At its second meeting, held in July 2019, the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics focused on issues related to integrated statistics. The Regional Steering Group acknowledged the importance of building an integrated system of population and social statistics in which various sources of data and statistics are harmonized, to the extent possible, and integrated to produce quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data. The Regional Steering Group also emphasized the importance of coordination between the national statistical offices and other national agencies on integrated statistics and highlighted the need to strengthen legal frameworks that facilitate access to data by national statistical offices and their leadership in the coordination of national statistical activities. In that regard, with a view to enhancing its own functionality and efficiency, the Regional Steering Group supported trialling the application of communities of practice, including on data integration, in the form of an online learning platform.

39. In the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, endorsed by the Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific in 2014, emphasis

¹⁸ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.XVII.4.

is placed on the importance of a coordinated approach to strengthening civil registration and vital statistics systems. Member States in the region have received encouragement and support in efforts to form national coordination mechanisms comprising all relevant stakeholders, to conduct standards-based comprehensive assessments and to develop comprehensive multisectoral national strategies.

40. As part of the midterm review of the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015–2024), 29 out of 40 member States reported having a national coordination mechanism comprising all relevant stakeholders. Moreover, 25 member States have conducted standards-based comprehensive assessments for the purpose of identifying gaps and making recommendations which will form the foundation of comprehensive multisectoral national strategies on civil registration and vital statistics. As of mid-May 2020, 17 member States reported having such strategies in place.

41. The Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific has stayed abreast of global statistical initiatives, in particular those of the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts and its Advisory Expert Group on National Accounts, and has contributed inputs to various topics currently being researched.

2. Work of the secretariat

42. The Committee at its sixth session supported a proposal by the secretariat to form communities of practice to cover four integration dimensions, namely process, data, conceptual and disciplinary integration, in support of action area C of the collective vision and framework for action. It recommended taking a stepwise approach, with the establishment of a community of practice on conceptual integration as a possible first step. The Bureau of the Committee, at its meeting on 11 December 2018, agreed that data integration, rather than conceptual integration, should be considered the immediate priority.¹⁹

43. To support decisions made by the Committee and the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics, the secretariat designed an implementation framework for a dynamic network of communities of practice and established a pilot community of practice on data integration. The evaluation of this first experience is presented in information document ESCAP/CST/2020/INF/2.

44. Terms of reference for the community of practice on data integration were approved by the Bureau of the Committee in May 2020 (following a virtual consultation with the Bureau in April 2020). The secretariat initiated the pilot community of practice in April 2020, with membership open to practitioners from the Asia-Pacific statistical community with expertise in data integration. This pilot community of practice will support the development of guidelines on data integration relevant to the region, building on existing guidelines developed for Europe by the Conference of European Statisticians.

45. To advance technical capacity on data integration, the secretariat supported the preparation of two case studies on the application of data integration methods to improve the availability of disaggregated data for inequality and poverty indicators in the context of women's empowerment issues. One of these studies involves the use of a non-traditional data source, namely geospatial data, to produce a more comprehensive image of variables

¹⁹ See ESCAP/CST/2020/INF/12.

related to poverty and inequality to facilitate more targeted decisions.²⁰ The other study demonstrates how the integration of household survey data provides a stronger base for producing disaggregated statistics.²¹ To assist member States with the integration of statistical and geospatial data and improve familiarity with related software, the secretariat is developing tools and guidance materials on the production of land cover change maps which can be used, for example, to include population hazard exposure considerations in land use planning.

46. While population and housing censuses, surveys and administrative records are key sources of migration data, none of them can serve as a stand-alone source of accurate, timely and comprehensive information on migrants, their characteristics and their socioeconomic status in various countries. An integrated system of migration data that builds upon all relevant data sources is critical to the ambition of leaving no one behind as expressed in the 2030 Agenda. In this regard, the secretariat in partnership with the Statistics and Population Divisions of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs held a regional workshop on strengthening the collection and use of international migration data in the context of the 2030 Agenda in February 2019.²² The aim of the workshop was to enhance the capacity of participating member States to produce comprehensive national migration data that meet international standards and to enhance the understanding of the uses and limitations of migration data for policy purposes and for the 2030 Agenda. The workshop also provided an opportunity for member States to provide inputs to the most recent revision of the *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration*. The secretariat continues to contribute to discussions and the work of the United Nations Expert Group on Migration Statistics.

47. The secretariat also supported the exploitation of a range of data by national statistical offices, including administrative, scanner, mobile phone and geospatial data. Support efforts included co-organizing a symposium on big data for official statistics in conjunction with the sixty-second International Statistical Institute World Statistics Congress, held in Kuala Lumpur, and contributing to a special topic session on Asia-Pacific experiences with big data, held as a side event of the Congress. The session was chaired by Australia, with presentations from other countries in the region.²³ These efforts facilitated the exploration of the future role of ESCAP in expanding the use of big data for official statistics in the region, which is further elaborated upon in document ESCAP/CST/2020/4.

48. The secretariat has documented country experiences in using scanner, online and administrative data for consumer price indices (CPIs), with support from Australia, Japan and New Zealand, in a 2020 report entitled “Incorporating non-traditional data sources into official statistics: the case of consumer price

²⁰ Yichun Wang, “Report: DHS and geo-covariates data integration – case study on Bangladesh survey 2014”. Available at https://communities.unescap.org/system/files/report_dhs_and_geo-covariates_data_integration_bangladesh_survey_2014.pdf.

²¹ Gamini De Silva and others, “Improving data availability for economic empowerment of women in Sri Lanka: a study on data integration for monitoring the SDGs”. Available at http://communities.unescap.org/system/files/improving_data_availability_for_economic_empowerment_of_women_in_sri_lanka.pdf.

²² Information on the regional workshop is available at www.unescap.org/events/regional-workshop-strengthening-collection-and-use-international-migration-data-context-0.

²³ China, Nepal, the Philippines and Thailand.

indexes". The content of the report is drawn from the experience of three national statistical offices in the region that have successfully used data from non-traditional sources, namely scanner data, for CPI production. Lessons learned from their experience will help other national statistical offices in the region in their efforts to incorporate similar data sources into their CPIs or other price indices.

49. Following the Committee's endorsement, in its decision 4/5 of March 2015, of the modular and integration-focused approach to improve environment statistics in Asia and the Pacific, the secretariat has supported member States to increase institutional and technical capacity to produce, disseminate and communicate integrated environment statistics to inform nationally specific priorities as well as efforts related to the environmental Sustainable Development Goals, targets and indicators.

50. The secretariat conducted five subregional training and assessment workshops on environment statistics, in 2016 and 2017, to build technical capacity and provide institutional development support for strategic planning in the implementation of environment statistics at the national level using the ESCAP diagnostic tool.²⁴ The workshops contributed to a region-wide baseline assessment of national priorities and progress on environment statistics including the implementation of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics and the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA). They also resulted in the identification of four priority environmental topics of regional relevance, namely land, water, energy and solid waste. These topics guided the subsequent organization of regional expert workshops on land accounts (2017), water accounts (2018) and energy accounts and statistics (2019), which facilitated focused technical assistance and the sharing of knowledge and experiences.

51. Making effective and inclusive decisions about optimal interactions between the maintenance and improvement of ocean health and the use of ocean resources for human well-being and development requires the integration of ocean data from the domains of statistics, science and governance. However, much of the information and knowledge comes from scattered data sources and institutions, and there is no standard approach to integrate diverse data on the oceans, nor is there a forum for the regional exchange of information and best practices on integrated ocean statistics. This prevents effective implementation and monitoring of measures to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 14 and other ocean-related targets and indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals.²⁵

52. Taking an accounting approach, the secretariat initiated work in the area of ocean data and statistics integration in 2018 with the aim of enhancing partnerships, providing statistical guidance on ocean accounting and building national capacity to produce and apply ocean accounts.

53. In 2019, the secretariat and the University of New South Wales founded the Global Ocean Accounts Partnership to provide an international coordination and communication structure for the development, maintenance and ongoing use of ocean accounts in decision-making.²⁶ As of December 2019, the Global Ocean

²⁴ <http://communities.unescap.org/environment-statistics/tools/diagnostic-tool>.

²⁵ For more information on the work of the secretariat on ocean accounts, see ESCAP/76/24.

²⁶ See www.oceanaccounts.org.

Accounts Partnership had eight formal members covering various regions of the world.²⁷

54. One of the early achievements of the Global Ocean Accounts Partnership was the development of draft technical guidance on ocean accounting for sustainable development for preliminary consultation purposes. The draft technical guidance includes a description of a statistical framework for compiling ocean-related data, statistics and indicators in a spatially consistent, comparable and coherent manner and of how to produce ocean accounts that are compatible with the System of National Accounts, the SEEA Central Framework and the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting, as well as policy use cases on ocean accounts.

55. The draft technical guidance incorporated feedback from national pilot studies, global experts and the review and deliberations at the Global Dialogue on Ocean Accounting held in Sydney, Australia, in November 2019. It was submitted to the Statistical Commission at its fifty-first session, held in 2020, for review and guidance on further development, testing, experimentation and finalization.²⁸ Following the positive reception of the draft technical guidance by the Statistical Commission, a dedicated ocean accounting group is being formed to ensure relevant parts are included in the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting revision process.²⁹

56. The 2030 Agenda includes a call for a better and sustainable future for all, making it explicit that development cannot progress without addressing inequality, discrimination and exclusion affecting women and men in all spheres, including in relation to the environment. One example of the secretariat's efforts with regard to integrated statistics and gender mainstreaming is its collaboration with UN-Women, the United Nations Environment Programme and the International Union for Conservation of Nature on drafting a working paper on a proposed indicator set that would address the environment-gender nexus in Asia and the Pacific, for use by member States according to their needs.³⁰ The proposed set includes indicators from the global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other relevant global and regional frameworks, and captures issues of particular relevance to the region.

57. An expert meeting on statistics related to gender and the environment in Asia and the Pacific, held by the above-mentioned partners in September 2019, brought together national statisticians, officials from environment ministries, disaster management authorities, civil society organizations and academic

²⁷ Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security; Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa; ESCAP; Fisheries and Oceans Canada; Institute of Strategy and Policy on Natural Resources and Environment, Viet Nam; Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; University of New South Wales; and the University of Ottawa; with the World Bank and several additional institutions on track to become formal members of the Partnership after the relevant procedures are completed.

²⁸ The draft technical guidance, national pilot studies, ocean accounts training materials, related workshops and contributing research studies are available online from the ESCAP Regional Ocean Accounts Platform.

²⁹ *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2020, Supplement No. 4 (E/2020/24-E/CN.3/2020/37)*, chap. I, sect. C, decision 51/110.

³⁰ Sharita Serrao and others, "Mainstreaming gender in environment statistics for the SDGs and beyond: identifying priorities in Asia and the Pacific", Statistics Division Working Paper Series, No. SD/WP/10/October (Bangkok, ESCAP, 2019).

institutions.³¹ In addition to reviewing the proposed indicator set, participants at the expert meeting identified key priority thematic areas for assessing the connections between environment and gender issues in Asia-Pacific countries. Feedback at the expert meeting served to identify additional priority areas to be captured in the proposed indicator set and priority areas in need of further research. The proposed indicator set was revised to reflect the feedback. Details are captured in information document ESCAP/CST/2020/INF/10.

D. Modernizing statistical business processes

58. The modernization of statistical business processes encompassing data and information management as well as underlying statistical and technological infrastructure is foundational for the facilitation of quality management and the integration of data sources and for managing data confidentiality issues, including with regard to microdata. This places statistical business processes at the core of transforming national statistical systems for the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda and renders their modernization critical to the successful implementation of the action areas of the collective vision and framework for action.

59. Action area D has two objectives, to be met by 2030:

(a) National statistical systems have used the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (or the Generic Activity Model for Statistical Organizations) to map their current business processes and have used the resulting findings to identify opportunities and priorities for change;

(b) National statistical systems have implemented modernization tools and concepts, such as the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange, for strengthened quality, efficiency and effectiveness of statistical information management and exchange.

60. The secretariat provided technical assistance on the compilation of priority statistics and indicators, such as trade indices, tourism statistics, national accounts and energy balances, and on the improvement of statistical infrastructure such as statistical business registers in a number of countries in the region. The support was made possible with funds from the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom and enabled the production of required statistics using recommended international practices in Bhutan, Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Maldives, Myanmar and Viet Nam.

61. The successful efforts in the above-mentioned countries were documented by the technical staff of the respective national statistical offices and are being shared as models for potential replication in order to promote knowledge-sharing and the development of technical resources to improve the quality of statistics.³²

62. The secretariat is implementing a project supported by funds from the Russian Federation to strengthen the institutional capacity to integrate geospatial and statistical data, with a focus on land accounts, and to foster institutional partnerships between national statistical offices and national geospatial agencies in Central Asia. A regional inception workshop held in Tashkent in November

³¹ Information on the expert meeting is available at www.unescap.org/events/expert-meeting-statistics-gender-and-environment-asia-and-pacific.

³² See <https://communities.unescap.org/asia-pacific-economic-statistics/replication-studies>.

2019 was attended by participants from seven countries in the subregion.³³ A working paper will be prepared on the current state of land statistics and relevant challenges in leveraging geospatial data in Central Asia and will include an assessment of the readiness of countries in the subregion to integrate geospatial and statistical information.

63. The secretariat is also currently developing step-by-step guidance materials for analysing land cover change, population density and other relevant social and demographic characteristics for the assessment of sources of pollution and exposure to hazards using geospatial tools.

64. At the same time, ESCAP made efforts to promote the sharing and exchange of data and metadata in the region. The secretariat partnered with the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UN-Women to hold a regional workshop on the topic in December 2018. The workshop covered data modelling and the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange information model and included hands-on sessions on tools for data and metadata exchange. It was also an opportunity for participants to discuss the draft principles of Sustainable Development Goal indicator reporting and dissemination platforms and guidelines for their application,³⁴ and to seek inputs for an updated version of the draft principles and guidelines.

65. Taking inspiration from the Generic Statistical Business Process Model, ESCAP drafted an end-to-end process framework for national implementation of efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. To guide national-level implementation, the proposed framework covers five phases: getting started; agenda-setting; analysis and intervention; implementation; and follow-up and review. Within each phase, steps in the implementation process are identified. Those requiring national statistical offices to take a lead role to strengthen their coordination role within national statistical systems and facilitate partnerships are highlighted. The proposed framework was presented at a regional workshop held in Bangkok in September 2019.³⁵

E. Having requisite skills set

66. National statistical offices consistently place issues related to human resources at the top of the list of major challenges they face. In addition to the lack of staff and the challenges of attracting and retaining talent, there is a need to diversify the traditional skills base in statistical organizations to include expertise in management, communication, coordination, information and communications technology and data mining, as emphasized in the transformative 2030 Agenda. Add to this the need for multidisciplinary expertise in recognition of the current inability to produce statistics for integrated policy analysis. The human resources challenges involved in implementing the 2030 Agenda can only be sustainably addressed by national statistical systems that

³³ Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

³⁴ The Statistical Commission endorsed the draft principles and guidelines, except for the references to the principle of “open by default”. See United Nations, “Principles of Sustainable Development Goal indicator reporting and dissemination platforms and guidelines for their application”, background document for the fiftieth session of the Statistical Commission (2019). Available at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/50th-session/documents/BG-Item3a-Principles-guidelines-SDG-Monitoring-Reporting-Platforms-E.pdf>.

³⁵ Information on the regional workshop is available at www.unescap.org/events/regional-workshop-national-sdg-reporting-mechanism-end-end-process-framework.

have evolved into learning organizations that foster innovation and continuous modernization and transformation.

67. Action Area E has two objectives, to be met by 2030:

(a) Statistical requirements for the 2030 Agenda are supported by appropriate guidance materials and training;

(b) The combined skill set of the staff of national statistical systems together with capable management and sufficiency of human resources enable the continuous generation of statistical products and services required for monitoring of national development plans and the 2030 Agenda.

1. Regional initiatives of the Committee

68. The Network for the Coordination of Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific is a collaborative effort consisting of training partners in the region, with the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific serving as its secretariat. The Network focuses on the production and use of resources to ensure transformational efforts for implementation of the 2030 Agenda including skills-building and innovation in human resources management. The Network focuses on the following priority areas: (a) the identification of training gaps in understanding, measuring and monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals; (b) the development of a database of training resources compiled and accessed by Network members; and (c) the development of common curricula for priority statistical training in agricultural and rural statistics, gender statistics and economic statistics.

69. In 2018, the Network approved the establishment of a subgroup on gender statistics, with UN-Women serving as the secretariat, tasked with generating a repository of training experts and a training curriculum on gender statistics, and promoting the implementation and quality of training on gender statistics across the region. This subgroup complements the work of the Network's existing working groups on agricultural and economic statistics.

2. Work of the secretariat

70. In 2019, the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific organized 19 training courses, workshops and seminars attended by more than 1,200 participants from 58 countries and territories. These activities covered various basic and advanced technical subjects in social, economic, agricultural and environment statistics. The training programmes were focused on principles and practices for monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals. More specifically, they covered advanced statistical methods including small area statistics to develop disaggregated indicators for the Goals with a view to leaving no one behind, as well as statistical methods and data collection in the context of compiling indicators for the Goals. Courses were also focused on tools and methods for the use of big data for official statistics, data visualization and building statistical registers to improve the use of administrative data to produce official statistics.

71. The Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific also delivered management-level capacity-building programmes in statistical leadership for new heads of national statistical offices and training on the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics. These courses were delivered face-to-face or as e-learning and blended programmes.

72. While most of the work of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific contributes to action area E of the collective vision and framework for action,

certain training programmes also contribute to various other action areas, including the following examples:

(a) The data visualization training programme, conducted annually since 2019 in collaboration with the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century to encourage users to engage with data produced by national statistical systems, contributes to action area A;

(b) The workshop on the quality of statistics, conducted annually since 2018 in collaboration with the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the International Monetary Fund and the Government of Japan, contributes to action area B;

(c) Long-term training programmes on the integration of statistical information with geographical information contribute to action area C;

(d) The training programme on big data for sustainable development, conducted annually since 2018 in collaboration with the Government of the Republic of Korea, in addition to long-term training programmes on the use of modern statistical tools including computer-assisted personal interviewing, Geographic Information Systems and the latest analytical software including Stata and programming language R, contribute to action area D.

73. Seminars organized by the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific were focused on institutional issues including the future of economic statistics and the utilization of information and communications technology for official statistics.

74. Recognizing the importance of investing in skills, the secretariat developed a training package on economic statistics in collaboration with the Network for the Coordination of Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific and the Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific. The training package was successfully piloted in 2019 in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Maldives and Nepal, with national experts from statistical agencies and universities acting as trainers. The training package was then finalized and is now available as a free resource on the website of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific.³⁶

75. Prior to piloting the training package, selected future trainers from the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Maldives and Nepal received training to build their own training delivery skills in the field of economic statistics. The extension of the highly successful training-of-trainers programme to other countries is planned for late 2020. The aim of these efforts is to expand national training as a cost-effective modality for staff development.

76. Regional and national technical training sessions on statistical business registers, trade statistics, the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities, tourism statistics and national accounts were organized for 10 countries in South and South-East Asia.

77. The systematic use of civil registration for vital statistics is still not institutionalized in all countries in Asia and the Pacific. One of the three goals of the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific pertains to the production and dissemination of vital statistics based on registration records. To support this endeavour, the secretariat and partners have developed a set of guidelines and a template for a vital statistics report. Technical support in the form of workshops or longer-term

³⁶ www.unsiap.or.jp/tot/index.html.

projects was provided in 31 countries on the use of civil registration for vital statistics. This involved capacity-building for every step of developing a vital statistics report, including analysis of civil registration data and its completeness, calculation of key indicators, report writing, and communication and dissemination of vital statistics data. Twenty-seven member States reported disseminating vital statistics from civil registration as part of the midterm review of the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015–2024), and since 2015 at least 23 member States have started developing their first vital statistics reports.³⁷

78. The secretariat has initiated the development and piloting of e-learning courses and materials on monitoring national and international indicators related to disasters. The efforts are guided by the Disaster-related Statistics Framework which the Committee endorsed at its sixth session as appropriate for use in the production of harmonized statistics in support of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and the 2030 Agenda. A pilot training session on disaster-related statistics was hosted by the Government of Indonesia in December 2019 with participation from seven countries.³⁸ A special session on the Disaster-related Statistics Framework was also included in a Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific training on environment statistics and SEEA in September 2019 with participation from 10 countries from the region.³⁹ Feedback from both of these efforts is being used in the improvement of the training materials and their conversion to an e-learning format.

79. The secretariat has provided targeted technical assistance and advice to 25 member States covering topics and accounts of national importance, for example water, land, energy, solid waste, forest, air emissions and ecosystems. The support has resulted in the initiation or improvement of priority SEEA accounts that were immediately relevant to informing national policy priorities.

80. To support continuous learning on environment statistics including their policy applications and data sources, materials for self-learning have been developed on the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics, the SEEA Central Framework, SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting and SEEA for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. The materials for self-learning and related activities, tools, outputs and reference materials are available on the ESCAP Resource Platform on Environment Statistics.⁴⁰

81. The secretariat also facilitated the testing and application of ocean accounts in pilot studies in five countries in the region.⁴¹ The national pilot studies demonstrated how the framework could strengthen partnerships among key stakeholders and guide the harmonization and integration of ocean-related data to inform national policy priorities.

82. The secretariat organized a face-to-face training workshop for 10 member States in collaboration with Statistics Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik-Indonesia) and the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs focused on the use of mobile phone positioning data for the production of official statistics. The workshop yielded inputs for a draft

³⁷ As of 11 May 2020.

³⁸ Fiji, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines and Vanuatu.

³⁹ Azerbaijan, Bhutan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Uzbekistan and Vanuatu.

⁴⁰ <http://communities.unescap.org/environment-statistics>.

⁴¹ China, Malaysia, Samoa, Thailand and Viet Nam.

handbook on the topic,⁴² which ESCAP supported in collaboration with the Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics task team on mobile phone data and the Statistics Division.

83. The secretariat is collaborating with the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation and the Higher School of Economics of the National Research University in Moscow on the development and delivery of face-to-face and distance training programmes in the Russian language to meet the needs of Central Asian countries. The Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific has been supporting the activities by sharing its e-learning programmes, which are translated into the Russian language and used for delivery of training in Russian-speaking countries.

III. Issues for consideration by the Committee

84. The Committee may wish to take the following actions:

(a) Express its views on the progress and successes of its initiatives in line with the collective vision and framework for action, including the five action areas;

(b) Express its views on the secretariat's support in the implementation of the commitments contained in the collective vision and framework for action;

(c) Express its views on the effectiveness and appropriateness of chosen modalities for the various regional initiatives, including types of activities or mechanisms to fulfil the collective vision and framework for action, and identify any gaps that need to be addressed;

(d) Express its views on the secretariat's gender mainstreaming efforts and provide further guidance on how these could be expanded to other statistical domains;

(e) Provide guidance and support to the newly reconfigured technical working group focused on supporting the implementation of the Disaster-related Statistics Framework as a tool that national statistical offices and disaster management agencies in the region can use to produce statistics required for international reporting and to make informed decisions for planning and monitoring of efforts to reduce disaster risk and increase disaster resilience;

(f) Express its views on the role and composition of the regional technical advisory boards as described in the Second Global Action Plan of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics;

(g) Support the work of the Global Ocean Accounts Partnership as a mechanism for implementing the collective vision and framework for action with regard to sustainable management and ocean use and encourage member States to join the Partnership.

⁴² Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics, "Handbook on the use of mobile phone data for official statistics: draft" (2019).