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Demographic statistics

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, which was prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2023/325 and past practices, presents activities carried out by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat in the area of demographic statistics. It provides information on the implementation of the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda outlining activities carried out by members of its Task Force to support Member States in advancing progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals target 16.9. It also provides information on the collection of demographic statistics through the Demographic Yearbook questionnaires. It further provides information on activities related to capacity-building for the implementation of the methodology for delineating urban and rural areas for international and regional statistical purposes.

The Commission is invited to take note of the report.

* E/CN.3/2024/1.



I. Introduction

1. The present report, which was prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2023/325 and past practices, presents activities carried out by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat in the area of demographic statistics in the period from January to December 2023.

II. Implementation of the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda

2. At its fifty-first session, in March 2020, the Statistical Commission, in its decision 51/113, endorsed the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda as a holistic approach to civil registration, vital statistics and identity management and urged Member States to implement the Legal Identity Agenda as a matter of priority.

3. The United Nations Legal Identity Task Force was established to coordinate work at the level of the United Nations system and facilitate the implementation of the Legal Identity Agenda in the field. The Task Force is chaired by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and includes the International Organization for Migration, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the United Nations Population Fund, Global Pulse, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization.

4. The Task Force aims towards supporting Member States in developing a comprehensive, holistic, inclusive and country-owned approach to systems of civil registration, vital statistics and identity management from birth to death, recommending full, simultaneous interoperability among these functions in accordance with international standards and recommendations. In particular, the Task Force: (a) contributes to the development of a normative international framework and guidance built around legal identity, (b) provides technical and financial support to United Nations country teams and Member States, (c) coordinates activities of United Nations entities to ensure inter-agency coordination and alignment and (d) engages in communication and advocacy on these topics. The Task Force adopted its work programme for 2023 in January 2023 and meets once every two months to monitor the implementation of the work programme, with different members of the Task Force focusing on specific themes. The secretariat of the Task Force, consisting of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNICEF, UNDP and ECA, meets every week.

5. The United Nations Legal Identity Agenda builds on the methodological framework developed under the auspices of the International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems and expands it to ensure a holistic and interoperable approach for civil registration, vital statistics production and identity management. During this reporting period, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs finalized the following handbooks and guidelines in the series on civil registration, vital statistics and identity management systems, in French and Spanish alongside English, developed as companion volumes to *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3*:

(a) *Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems: Management, Operation and Maintenance, Revision 1* (English, French and Spanish);

(b) *Handbook on Civil Registration, Vital Statistics and Identity Management Systems: Communication for Development* (English, French and Spanish);

(c) *Guidelines on the Legislative Framework for Civil Registration, Vital Statistics and Identity Management Systems* (English, French, Spanish).

6. During the reporting period, the Task Force provided various types of comprehensive support to Member States through the coordinated efforts of its members. Assistance encompassed, inter alia, organizing capacity development workshops, business process improvements, digitalization, curriculum development for a legal identity e-course and reviews of legal frameworks. In addition to direct support to Member States, the Task Force initiated a webinar series to enhance the capability and knowledge of United Nations country teams, with a view to ensuring that the global policy framework and guidelines are incorporated into country programming and facilitating the exchange of good practices among United Nations country teams with ongoing legal identity projects. At the time of the writing of this report, seven webinars had been organized. Details are available on the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda web page.¹

7. The Task Force participated in several high-level events, expert group meetings, workshops and conferences, including side events on the margins of the fifty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission in 2023. The Task Force secretariat organized a high-level event on the margins of the Sustainable Development Goals Summit which focused on strategies for accelerated achievement of universal birth and death registration in six countries which collectively account for half of the global burden of unregistered children, namely, Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, India, Nigeria and Pakistan. The event provided a platform for sharing knowledge, fostering collaboration and promoting best practices to advance progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals target 16.9.

III. Demographic Yearbook

8. Every year, the Division collects, compiles and disseminates official demographic and social statistics for all countries and areas of the world. The data are collected through a set of annual and census questionnaires dispatched to national statistical offices. The data collected cover population distribution and composition by several characteristics, population of cities and urban agglomerations, fertility, mortality, nuptiality, annual migrations flows, migrant stock based on population censuses, household characteristics, housing characteristics, economic characteristics and education, among other topics. The traditional medium of dissemination is the Demographic Yearbook collection, published annually since 1948.²

9. The following overview updates the availability of vital statistics collected from national statistical offices, which refer to the main data sets available for each vital event published in the Demographic Yearbook 2022, the latest edition of the Yearbook.

10. Broadly speaking, the availability of vital statistics, by topic, is as follows: live births by urban or rural residence, 72 per cent; deaths by urban or rural residence, 70 per cent; live births by age of mother and sex of child, and deaths by age of mother and sex of child, 63 per cent and 65 per cent, respectively; marriages by urban or rural

¹ <https://unstats.un.org/legal-identity-agenda/>.

² The issues of the Demographic Yearbook are available online at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/products/dyb/index.cshhtml>. Demographic data, especially data from population and housing censuses, are published incrementally online as well, through the medium of the UNdata portal, at <http://data.un.org/>.

residence, 60 per cent; marriages by age of groom and age of bride, 46 per cent; infant deaths by urban or rural residence, 61 per cent; infant deaths by age and sex, 48 per cent; divorces by urban or rural residence, 48 per cent; late fetal deaths by urban or rural residence, 39 per cent; live births by age of father, 38 per cent; legally induced abortions, 25 per cent; and legally induced abortions by age of woman, 20 per cent.

11. Approximately three quarters of the countries or areas of the world have submitted overall statistics on total births and deaths to the United Nations. However, the share decreases significantly with the introduction of additional variables, such as age, and with respect to other units of vital statistics enumeration, such as fetal deaths.

IV. Activities related to the methodology for delineation of urban and rural areas

12. At its fifty-first session, the Statistical Commission, in paragraph (i) of its decision 51/112, endorsed the methodology for delineation of cities and urban and rural areas for international and regional statistical comparison purposes, while emphasizing that the methodology was not intended to replace national definitions of urban and rural areas. The methodology classifies the entire territory of a country along the urban-rural continuum. Applying this methodology allows countries to produce more comparable indicators by type of area, which enables them to better identify the areas that are close to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals and the policies that are contributing to their success. In paragraph (j) of the same decision, the Commission urged the release of the technical report on the implementation of the methodology for delineation of cities and urban and rural areas as early as possible. In compliance with this decision, *Applying the Degree of Urbanisation: A Methodological Manual to Define Cities, Towns and Rural Areas for International Comparisons* was developed.³ This document was designed principally as a practical guide for data producers, suppliers and statisticians so that they would have the information necessary to implement the methodology and ensure coherence and consistency within their data collections and analyses.

13. The Division, in cooperation with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the European Commission and Eurostat, organized a second United Nations regional workshop on the implementation of the degree of urbanization methodology in the countries of Central Asia. That workshop was held in Almaty in the period from 8 to 12 May 2023, with the participation of experts from the national statistical offices and national geospatial agencies of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The report of the workshop is being submitted as a background paper for this report.⁴

14. During the reporting period, a virtual side event was organized on 31 January 2023 on the margins of the fifty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission under the theme “Applying the degree of urbanization: progress and next steps”. The major objective of the side event was to encourage more countries to apply this new method, with a view to facilitating better international and regional comparison and benchmarking. At the event, information was provided on the support and assistance offered to countries that were interested in applying the methodology. The event was moderated by Eurostat and presentations were delivered by the European Commission, the Statistics Division, KOSTAT (Statistics Korea) and the Kenya

³ Available at https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/statcom/session_52/documents/BG-4a-DEGURBA_Manual-E.pdf as a background document for the fifty-second session of the Commission.

⁴ The report of the workshop is available at <https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/statcom/documents/55>.

National Bureau of Statistics. Moreover, at the event, a brief overview was provided of the progress made since 2020 and national experiences from across the globe with respect to applying the methodology were showcased.

V. Activities carried out by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to support the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme

15. Information on the activities organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to build national capacity for census taking and promote the implementation of recommendations of the Statistical Commission are provided in the report of the Secretary-General on population and housing censuses (E/CN.3/2024/15), being submitted to the Commission at its fifty-fifth session in 2024.⁵

VI. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission

16. **The Statistical Commission is invited to take note of the present report.**

⁵ Details of the activities of the Division aimed at building national capacity for conducting censuses and assisting countries in implementing international standards and recommendations for population and housing censuses, including information on schedules and subject matter and information on participating countries and partners, will be posted regularly on the website of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme (<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/census/index.cshhtml>).