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STRATEGIC PLAN, 2015-2025

CONTENTS

| | <i>Page</i> |
|---|-------------|
| A. KEY CHALLENGES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN | 3 |
| 1. Current situation of national statistical systems in the region..... | 3 |
| 2. Statistical challenges relating to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals..... | 4 |
| 3. The data revolution as a challenge and an opportunity..... | 5 |
| 4. Strategies for responding to old and new challenges..... | 6 |
| B. PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN | 7 |
| C. VALUES, MISSION AND VISION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN..... | 9 |
| 1. Values | 9 |
| 2. Mission | 9 |
| 3. Vision for 2025 | 9 |
| D. STRATEGIC AND SPECIFIC GOALS..... | 10 |
| Strategic goal 1: To strengthen the organization and management practices of the national statistical offices and the integration and coordination of national statistical systems..... | 10 |
| Strategic goal 2: To foster the development of technical and methodological capacities in order to generate high-quality statistical information | 10 |
| Strategic goal 3: To foster coordination and cooperation between the member countries of the Statistical Conference of the Americas and subregional and international organizations..... | 10 |
| E. GUIDELINES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN | 11 |
| 1. Biennial programme of regional and international cooperation activities | 11 |
| 2. Regional projects that leverage the efforts of all Conference stakeholders in order to accomplish the goals of the strategic plan | 11 |
| 3. Mobilization of international resources in support of the priorities and projects of the strategic plan..... | 11 |
| 4. Continuous monitoring of the strategic plan..... | 12 |
| 5. Working groups of the Statistical Conference of the Americas..... | 12 |

A. KEY CHALLENGES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

1. Current situation of national statistical systems in the region

Latin America and the Caribbean has made significant progress on the economic, social and, to a lesser extent, environmental fronts in the past two decades. This progress has led to new demands for statistical information, in terms of coverage, higher levels of disaggregation and the need for data and indicators for emerging issues and for substantial improvements to the quality and timeliness of statistical information. These demands are now compounded by the challenges arising from the data revolution and the use of new technologies throughout the process of statistics production.

Countries in the region have taken steps to modernize and strengthen their national statistical systems, each at its own pace and to different extents, but the changes made have not always been sufficient to meet the demands for statistical information, resulting in significant gaps. The varying development levels of the national statistical systems in Latin America and the Caribbean must be taken into account when identifying the key elements of official statistics in the region and the challenges those systems face.¹

Although significant progress has been made on institution-building and the integration of national statistical systems, some statistical bodies still carry out their functions in a precarious institutional framework with outdated laws that fail to reflect current realities and needs relating to the production and dissemination of statistics.

Many offices are understaffed and have a high turnover of highly qualified personnel. They therefore lack a steady pool of professional and technical staff that can work towards improving the quality of official statistics. This results in a weakening of technical capacity in some critical areas for statistical offices in the region, including in particular demography, sample design and statistical analysis.

Some countries have not yet managed to secure the resources they need to finance basic statistical operations or the budget sustainability that is essential to developing and implementing medium- and long-term programmes.

In many countries it has not been possible to develop new statistical operations to generate a continuous flow of statistical data and measurements in new areas and with the level of sectoral and territorial breakdown required to formulate and evaluate public policies and programmes. This is the case in particular for statistics on the environment, information and communications technology, services, current issues and micro- and small enterprises, among other areas. Furthermore, in several cases the sampling frames or the base years of measurement—basic elements to ensure the quality of the statistical operations—are very outdated.

¹ United Nations, *Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean: development of official statistics in the region. Note by the Secretary-General* (E/CN.3/2010/16), New York, December 2009; and *Report of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean on statistical activities in Latin America and the Caribbean: recent achievements and next challenges Note by the Secretary-General* (E/CN.3/2015/19), New York, 2014.

Overcoming this set of challenges is all the more pressing given that in the period 2015-2025 the region will face the weighty, cross-cutting challenge of monitoring the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and implementing three major statistical processes:

- Conducting the 2020 census round, which for some countries will mean carrying out their census operation in 2016.
- Implementing the System of National Accounts 2008 (SNA 2008), a task that some countries have only recently begun, while others are now moving on to the more complex aspects of the process.
- Implementing in stages the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) and taking steps towards the execution of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (FDES), a task that is proving challenging for many countries.

2. Statistical challenges relating to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals

New, exacting demands will be made of official statistics with respect to monitoring the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This Agenda represents a vision of development that reflects national priorities and, therefore, many of the challenges associated with the development of good-quality official statistics in the region will arise from the need for data and indicators to monitor it.

The international community has come together through the United Nations system to define the core content of an ambitious new development agenda framed by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. The aim of this Agenda is to end extreme poverty in all its forms in the context of sustainable development and to have in place the building blocks of sustained prosperity for all. The Agenda is designed to address the universal challenges of the twenty-first century: promoting sustainable development, supporting job-creating growth, protecting the environment and providing peace, security, justice, freedom and equity at all levels.²

According to the discussions carried out to date, the challenges arising from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will include the following:³

- Large volumes of complex data will have to be collected for the indicators as the 2030 Agenda has significantly more goals and targets than the Millennium Development Goals. The goals and targets cover the three dimensions of sustainable development —economic, social and environmental— in addition to cross-cutting issues, such as governance, human rights, the empowerment of women and equality. Furthermore, the indicators will have to be duly disaggregated by age, sex, geographical location, socioeconomic status, disability and other factors, for many statistical areas.

² United Nations, “Communiqué from the Meeting of the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda in Monrovia, Liberia”, Monrovia Communiqué of the High-Level Panel 1 February 2013.

³ United Nations, *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development. The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda*, New York, 2013 [online] http://www.un.org/sg/management/pdf/HLP_P2015_Report.pdf.

- Progress will be required in underdeveloped areas, while others will need to be consolidated, for example, environmental statistics.⁴ Internationally comparable indicators will have to be defined on topics such as food security, sustainable agriculture, well-being, quality of education, lifelong learning opportunities, energy, inclusive and resilient cities, patterns of consumption and production, climate change, biodiversity, peaceful and inclusive societies and governance.

Monitoring the commitments of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will require a steady flow of good-quality, up-to-date, reliable and accessible data for the ongoing measurement of the indicators of progress towards the new goals and targets at the national, regional and global levels. The 2030 Agenda therefore poses a tremendous challenge even for the most advanced statistical systems.

3. The data revolution as a challenge and an opportunity

The data revolution and the application of information technologies in the most diverse fields of economic, social and political life, in State and government administrations, in the education, health and recreation sectors, among many other areas, offer an invaluable opportunity to obtain timely data, which—once verified and deemed to be of suitably high quality—can be used to generate statistics in support of evidence-based decision-making processes. New technologies have led to an exponential increase in the volume and types of data available, from both traditional and non-traditional sources, and have created unprecedented opportunities; however, to date these possibilities have not been sufficiently exploited in the field of official statistics.

According to the international statistics community, meeting the modern demands on statistics, while fulfilling time-frame and quality requirements, calls for a data revolution, that is, transforming the way that data are generated and used to drive development. One facet of such a data revolution consists in a sharp increase in the volume of data, the speed with which they are produced, the number of producers, the dissemination of data and the range of issues covered, with data being gathered primarily using new technologies, such as mobile telephones and the Internet of Things.⁵ Furthermore, a data revolution means leveraging information sources, including administrative records, citizen-generated data and data on subjective perceptions, for statistical purposes, as well as increasing dissemination and access to information and fostering a culture of statistics in societies.

The various expressions of the data revolution are linked to the uneven progress made in that process in the countries of the region. While these new realities are a part of daily life in some places, many countries, governments, institutions and civil society organizations are excluded or have difficulty accessing or using data owing to a lack of resources or expertise.

These new opportunities for the mass-scale, efficient use of data through technologies opened up by the data revolution, will require new tools and methods to capture, manage, process and disseminate statistical information, as well as a legal framework to build the institutions needed for the use of those data in decision-making and the resources required to develop the corresponding capacities. It will also be necessary to establish mechanisms to share technologies and best practices and to develop and promote a

⁴ The broad range of topics covered in this area is defined in the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (FDES) and provides basic statistics for a large number of indicators for follow-up to the Sustainable Development Goals.

⁵ United Nations, *A World that Counts. Mobilising the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development*, November 2014 [online] <http://www.undatarevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/A-World-That-Counts2.pdf>.

global consensus on principles and standards to generate timely, good-quality statistical information, identifying and distinguishing between official and non-official data.

4. Strategies for responding to old and new challenges

The persistent weakness of the national statistical systems and offices of several countries —outdated legal frameworks, a severe lack of trained staff and insufficient, unreliable financial resources— foregrounds the pressing need to urge governments in the region to build the institutional frameworks required for national statistical systems to comply fully with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics of the United Nations

It bears repeating that official statistics are a highly valuable public good, necessary for evidence-based decision-making and safeguarding the accountability and transparency of public administration. The institutional and economic responsibility for ensuring that statistical production and distribution processes match the needs of society and citizens therefore rests with the State.

At the same time, joint action must be taken by the international organizations to support the process of creating and strengthening the capacities of national statistical systems, especially in the areas with the greatest weaknesses or gaps.

The advent of new technologies has led to a greater variety of information-gathering mechanisms and sources, but there remain unresolved challenges regarding the use of unofficial data for producing official statistics. Huge efforts are still required to harmonize and verify the reliability of the large volumes of information being generated in order to ensure that the statistics produced comply with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

The region's statistical community must therefore examine, on the one hand, the possibilities, potential risks and best ways for using the data revolution and applying new technologies to transform all stages of statistics production to improve the quality and coverage of official statistics. On the other hand, consideration must also be given to the usefulness and quality of unofficial statistics from alternative big data sources.

One very important aspect of the data revolution and the use of data for producing official statistics is accessibility to sources of information. In this connection, it would be of great interest to the region to support open data initiatives, which explicitly recognize the social value as a public good of making data available to the public and to statistical offices, on the premise that they can be used, reused and redistributed freely by anyone, following certain standards. This is vitally important, especially for Latin America and the Caribbean, given that in this region the data revolution must be connected with the production of statistics from administrative records, combined with data collected through surveys, censuses and other statistical instruments. Supporting accessibility could thus be a very useful path to take in response to the enormous demands for information and the statistical indicators that will be established for monitoring the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals.

A central challenge for statistical offices is to transform their processes to embrace a new production model that allows for the intensive use of data from administrative records and new sources associated with the data revolution. This new model poses its own considerable challenges with respect to introducing and furthering the application of modern methods of results-based management. The new production model must also link statistical production in a systemic, comprehensive and permanent

manner with geography through geo-referencing, geostatistical frameworks and other geoscience instruments and methods.

The aforementioned challenges can be addressed only by creating synergies between actors in the statistical system in order to help strengthen the countries' capacities in this field with a view to achieving institutionally robust and sustainable national statistical systems with appropriate governance mechanisms for official and unofficial statistics.

In order to strengthen basic statistics and develop the measurement of emerging issues, strategies for statistical development will have to be formulated and implemented in various areas and must be included as part of each country's national development strategy. Creating such a virtuous link will promote the comprehensive strengthening of national statistical systems, providing sufficient resources to ensure that they are sustainable and hence have the capacity to generate the statistical information that the countries require. A key part of this strategy must be to broaden national statistical culture and encourage the use of existing data.

The national statistical systems, led by national statistical offices and with the support and close cooperation of international organizations, should steer the national, regional and global follow-up process with a view to collecting, analysing and exchanging the statistical data required to monitor the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Decision makers and, more generally, public and private actors in each country, must be made aware that taking full advantage of the possibilities offered by the data revolution requires significant and sustained public investment in strengthening national statistical capacity, as well as a strong spirit of cooperation and coordination effort between the different actors in the statistical system, in the technical and institutional spheres, in order to increase the coverage, quality, disaggregation and frequency of data under a model that is sustainable over time.

To this end, information and advocacy measures are needed to persuade governments in the region of the importance of statistics for the formulation and monitoring of public policies and to sensitize them to the need to maintain a steady and increasing flow of financing for the operation of national statistical systems in general and statistical offices in particular.

B. PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The purpose of the strategic plan 2015-2025 is to guide the activities of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in support of the development of official statistics in the region, in accordance with the objectives established in United Nations Economic and Social Council resolution 2000/7 of 25 July 2000.⁶ In accordance with the provisions of the resolution that establishes it, the Statistical Conference of the Americas, in its capacity as a subsidiary body of ECLAC, has the following objectives:⁷

⁶ Establishing the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (E/2000/INF/2/Add.2).

⁷ Ibid.

- To promote the development and improvement of national statistics and work to ensure that they are comparable internationally, bearing in mind the recommendations of the United Nations Statistical Commission, the specialized agencies and other relevant organizations.
- To promote international, regional and bilateral cooperation among national offices and international and regional agencies.
- To draw up a biennial programme of regional and international cooperation activities, to meet the demands of the countries of the region, subject to the availability of resources.

In consideration of the above, the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC is resolved to give impetus to the fulfilment of its mandate to be “a subsidiary body of the Commission that shall contribute to the progress of policies on statistics and statistical activities in the countries of the region” (resolution 2000/7). The members of the Statistical Conference of the Americas are the member countries of ECLAC, represented by directors or chiefs of the national statistical offices, accompanied by high-level authorities of the public institutions that produce and disseminate the country’s official statistics.

This document takes into account the main priorities raised by members of the Conference at its previous meetings and the trends emerging from various studies on the principal challenges facing the region’s national statistical systems. These priorities and trends have been analysed in preparing this proposed strategic plan, which sets out the values, mission, vision, strategic goals, specific goals and main lines of action, providing a focus for the Conference’s efforts at its meetings to be held from 2015 to 2025. It also identifies some broad guidelines to help implement this strategic plan.

A document of this nature with a medium- to long-term vision for the development of official statistics in the region is both necessary and useful since new demands for information are emerging continuously from the transformation of economic and social structure that is part of the development process of the region’s countries and from the challenges of globalization, new technologies and the data revolution. In addition, the challenges deriving from monitoring the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will also have to be tackled in the period under consideration. Moreover, the region’s statistical products must meet the most rigorous standards in terms of quality, timeliness and completeness.

Therefore, in view of the development level of statistical production and the importance of the processes of harmonization and regional integration in Latin America and the Caribbean, the region should set targets that aspire to international best practices and the development and use of common tools and systems. This strategic plan aims to outline those targets.

The 10-year time frame chosen for the strategic vision allows for the fact that national statistical systems in all countries of the region will have to address some major challenges by 2025, including the development of a statistical information system to monitor the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda; the preparation and execution of the 2020 round of population censuses; and the implementation of SNA 2008, SEEA and FDES, in accordance with the priorities and circumstances of each country.

The Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC acknowledges that the diversity of situations in the member countries of the region means that convergence towards that goal of regional excellence will take place in stages and highlights that there is a huge potential for making use of the experiences and progress achieved in each of the countries of the region. The Conference should therefore encourage countries and the different stakeholders in national statistical systems to participate and cooperate in its work.

Accordingly, the main commitments of the Statistical Conference of the Americas, as set forth in this strategic plan, is to strengthen national statistical systems, taking into account the heterogeneity of among the countries of the region, as well as national agendas and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2030, in three key areas: more robust institutional and governing role for national statistical offices; the development of human resources and statistical production in order to ensure quality; and regional and international coordination and cooperation.

C. VALUES, MISSION AND VISION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

1. Values

The Statistical Conference of the Americas will be guided by the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission,⁸ and by the Code of Good Practice in Statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean, adopted by the Conference at its sixth meeting held in Bávaro, Dominican Republic, from 16 to 18 November 2011.⁹

2. Mission

The mission of the Statistical Conference of the Americas is to be the intergovernmental body that coordinates statistical activities in Latin America and the Caribbean with a view to improving the official statistics of each country and their international comparability.

3. Vision for 2025

The Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC will consolidate its position as the main forum for regional and international cooperation and coordination on official statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean, especially with regard to developing the capacities of national statistical systems to respond effectively to the challenges of modernizing and strengthening their legal and management frameworks, to close the gaps in coverage and quality that persist in various thematic fields and to prepare the statistics that will be required for monitoring the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

⁸ United Nations, Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (A/RES/68/261) [online] <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/dnss/gp/fundprinciples.aspx>.

⁹ Proposal for a Code of Good Practice in Statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean and Implementation Plan for 2012-2013 (LC/L.3384(CEA.6/12) [online] <http://www.cepal.org/publicaciones/xml/3/44893/LCL3384i.pdf>.

D. STRATEGIC AND SPECIFIC GOALS

The strategic and specific goals of the strategic plan are presented below.

Strategic goal 1: To strengthen the organization and management practices of the national statistical offices and the integration and coordination of national statistical systems.

Specific goal 1: To encourage the adoption of international best practices regarding the integration and coordination of national statistical systems by national statistical offices.

Specific goal 2: To promote the dissemination and implementation of international standards and best practices for the management of national statistical offices.

Specific goal 3: To promote greater effectiveness and efficiency in the processes of production and dissemination of statistics through the use of new data sources and modernization of the production function, especially by taking advantage of administrative records for statistical purposes and the opportunities offered by the data revolution.

Specific goal 4: To promote systemic linkages between and the integration of statistical production and geography.

Specific goal 5: To broaden statistical culture and encourage the use of existing data to help strengthen national statistical systems and support evidence-based decision-making in public policies.

Strategic goal 2: To foster the development of technical and methodological capacities in order to generate high-quality statistical information.

Specific goal 1: To promote continuous training and learning for staff at statistical offices and other organizations responsible for producing official statistics to establish sustainable institutional capacities.

Specific goal 2: To promote the exchange of information and best practices between the members of the regional statistical community.

Specific goal 3: To develop a framework for ensuring the quality of statistical data and promote regional, subregional and multilateral initiatives for applying it in national statistical systems.

Specific goal 4: To encourage the development of conceptual and methodological innovations in the generation of official statistics.

Strategic goal 3: To foster coordination and cooperation between the member countries of the Statistical Conference of the Americas and subregional and international organizations.

Specific goal 1: To promote horizontal cooperation among the member countries of the Conference.

Specific goal 2: To promote coordination and cooperation between the Conference and the other subsidiary bodies of ECLAC, such as the Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean and the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Specific goal 3: To work to align the work programmes of subregional, international and multilateral agencies and bodies with the goals of this strategic plan and with the biennial programme of activities of the Conference.

E. GUIDELINES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The strategic plan will be implemented through the following channels.

1. Biennial programme of regional and international cooperation activities

The biennial programme is a key element in attaining the goals of the strategic plan. The programme sums up the specific aims for a two-year period, which should be consistent with one or more of the three strategic goals of the plan and contain clear guidelines to provide direction and stimulate concrete action by countries, international, regional and subregional organizations and the different coordination and cooperation bodies created for these purposes (for example, working groups and expert committees).

2. Regional projects that leverage the efforts of all Conference stakeholders in order to accomplish the goals of the strategic plan

In keeping with the purposes of the strategic plan, projects with a regional or subregional scope and impact should be identified and developed for joint action by the member countries of the Conference, international and subregional organizations or for implementation through horizontal cooperation. The aim is to focus the efforts and limited resources of the regional statistical community on a few high-impact projects that will lead to significant improvements in national statistical systems, in particular by updating and strengthening institutional legal frameworks, ensuring the availability of a sufficient number of qualified staff and continuously upgrading the quality, efficiency and public credibility of the statistics produced.

3. Mobilization of international resources in support of the priorities and projects of the strategic plan

The Executive Committee of the Conference will take the necessary action to ensure that its strategic plan allows multilateral and subregional organizations to coordinate their activities in the region in the best way possible. This coordination will focus on objectives and activities that clearly reflect the identified priorities.

4. Continuous monitoring of the strategic plan

Given the plan's long time frame, it was decided that a mechanism should be established to provide for a detailed, ongoing assessment of the progress made towards achieving the objectives set out in the plan. It is the responsibility of the Executive Committee of the Conference to take the necessary steps to ensure that a quantitative and qualitative baseline for the implementation of the strategic plan is established, intermediary reports are prepared every biennium (that is, every two years) and a final report is prepared at the end of the 10-year period. This measure aims to reassess the specific priorities of each strategic goal, propose measures to increase the participation of all stakeholders in working towards the goals of the strategic plan and review possible changes and new challenges as they arise during the implementation period.

5. Working groups of the Statistical Conference of the Americas

The member countries of the Statistical Conference of the Americas set up working groups as a way to jointly tackle problems or issues relating to the goals of the strategic plan. The criteria for the establishment and operation of the working groups are set out in the document *Operational guidelines for the working groups of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC*, which will be submitted for the consideration of the Statistical Conference of the Americas at its eighth meeting.