

**Fifteenth Management Seminar (Webinar) for the Heads of National Statistical Offices in Asia and the Pacific**

National statistical systems: responding to the COVID 19 crisis and building better for the future

3-4 December 2020, Online

**CONCEPT NOTE**

**Collaborating agencies:** United Nations Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (**SIAP**); Statistics Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (**SD ESCAP**); United Nations Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (**UNSD**); The Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (**PARIS21**).

**1. Background**

As with all public services, national statistical systems have been greatly impacted by the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic. 65% of NSOs responding to a recent survey by UNSD and the World Bank have either fully or partially closed their headquarters<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, almost all NSOs have either fully or partially stopped conducting face to face surveys.

The current crisis has led to an increase in data demands while at the same time hindered the ability of NSO to produce data (including data that are part of regular production) due to lack of preparedness, insufficient capacity and resource constraints. Most countries are facing serious difficulties in administering regular surveys which provide significant data for official statistics. Under COVID-19, various new data such as number of infections and number of patients as well as highly disaggregated population data are required by policy makers, analysts in government, private sector, journalists and the public at large. Such data also need to be made available at high frequency and disaggregated by several factors including severity of infections, sex, age and location.

The COVID-19 crisis has propelled data and statistics into the spotlight. The importance of accurate, reliable and timely data in understanding and managing the crisis has become more apparent by the day, as decision-makers across the world have had to make quick and unprecedented decisions affecting millions of people spread across the globe. In parallel, the international official statistics community has had to react at lightning speed to meet the urgent demands for new types of data to support potentially

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<sup>1</sup> <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/covid19-response/covid19-nso-survey-report.pdf>

See also "How COVID-19 is changing the world: a statistical perspective"  
<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ccsa/documents/covid19-report-ccsa.pdf>

critical lifesaving decisions. Furthermore, the work of the NSS, and the chief statistician, is not complete once data has been compiled. A relevant component of the response to the pandemic is the need to increase statistical literacy, in particular among journalists and the public at large, to ensure that data is properly understood and not misused.

In this context, chief statisticians as leaders of the NSS have a particularly important role to play in laying out the vision for the national statistical systems and implementing that vision when adopting and responding to crisis. Some guidance to chief statisticians is available from the Handbook on Management and Organization of National Statistical Systems<sup>2</sup>. Further elaborations and sharing of experiences are required in order to provide chief statisticians more tools to respond to the current crises' environment.

## **2. Objectives**

The main objective of the seminar is to determine effective approaches to statistical activities, including capacity building, and the role of chief statisticians in implementing these new approaches in the context of unforeseen crises such as the current pandemic. Participants will share their views on approaches, including methodologies to be adopted, for development of statistical capacity keeping in view the responsibility to produce statistics that are part of regular production including those need for monitoring the sustainable development goals in times of crisis. The seminar shall focus on the role of the Chief Statistician and specifically address the following issues:

- New activities and outputs that the national statistical system produces as a direct response to data needs in the crisis, including building statistical literacy.
- Legal and regulatory framework updates necessary to respond to the new demands and working environment
- Issues around adaptation of working methods in a crisis to ensure the continuation of the work programme of the national statistical system in a crisis situation including development of and training in new methods (i.e. less reliance on traditional surveys and censuses and shifting towards using administrative data, big data, geospatial data and others)
- Ensuring sustainable and long-term capacity development in times of crisis
- Discussion on how countries have adapted their capacity development strategies during the CoVID-19 pandemic

## **3. Annotated agenda**

**Day 1: Overall impact and response to COVID-19 crises by NSS (Three hours)**

***Session 1: Experience sharing about the Statistical Activities during COVID-19 Crisis (Two hours)***

Session 1 A: Sharing of experiences by countries on the continuation of regular activities, adoption of new activities and adaptation of existing activities due to COVID-19 Crisis and lessons learnt (2 hours)

Panel of 5 countries- presentation of 10 minutes each followed by discussion and Q/A

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://unstats.un.org/wiki/display/HSO/Handbook+Statistical+Organization>. For more details on managing the statistical response to Covid-19 please see <https://covid-19-response.unstatshub.org/>

Session 1 B: Information sharing by the UNSD, SD ESCAP, PARIS21, SIAP on statistical activities undertaken by the countries (1 hour)- globally and in the region (One hour)

**Day 2: Capacity development during the current crises and future planning (Three hours)**

***Session 2: Capacity development to meet future Crisis***

Session 2 A: Role played by Chief Statisticians in communication of data and improved statistical literacy during the Crisis (1 hour)

Panel Discussion of 4 Chief Statisticians (5 minutes each)

Session 2 B: Capacity development activities undertaken by NSS and National Training Institutions to address the problems arising from the Crisis, especially need for developing data science skills including skills to handle big data (1 hour)

Presentation by 4 countries/ training institutions (5 minutes each) followed by discussion and Q/A

**Concluding Session**

Recommendations

**4. Target Participants**

The seminar is designed for Heads of NSOs in the Asia-Pacific region.

**5. Expected Output of the Seminar**

The management seminar will be to:

- a) Identify good practices of leadership under the crisis
- b) Identify future steps that should be taken to lead to sustained capacity development in response and during crisis