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Item 3 (c) of the provisional agenda*

**Items for discussion and decision: working methods
of the Statistical Commission**

Report of the Bureau on the working methods of the Statistical Commission: revising the terms of reference and reviewing other initiatives of the Bureau during the intersessional period

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2021/224 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Bureau on working methods of the Statistical Commission. In the report, the Bureau reassesses the terms of reference and reviews other initiatives of the Bureau during the intersessional period 2021–2022. The Bureau focuses on the revisions of the terms of reference of the Statistical Commission, explores the lessons learned from the virtual session of the fifty-second session and provides updates on other initiatives, including gender mainstreaming across the Commission's work. The Bureau also describes a scoping exercise of the categorization of the Commission's normative work, takes into consideration all existing normative work that has been adopted, endorsed or agreed by the Commission in the period from 2008 to 2021 and highlights the steps that have led to the development of materials and to adoption processes. The Commission will also have before it two background documents, namely the revised terms of reference and a document containing a detailed analysis of the scoping exercise. The Commission is invited to reflect on the revisions of the terms of reference, the scoping exercise and other initiatives undertaken by the Bureau. Action to be taken by the Commission is set out in paragraph 41 of the report.

* [E/CN.3/2022/1](#).



Report of the Bureau on the working methods of the Statistical Commission: revising the terms of reference and reviewing other initiatives of the Bureau during the intersessional period

I. Introduction

1. At the fifty-second session, by its decision 52/116 (see [E/2021/24-E/CN.3/2021/30](#)), the Statistical Commission requested the Bureau to carefully review which modalities for its virtual session (for example, side events and written statements) had worked well and could be employed in future sessions and, in that context, invited the Bureau to launch a transparent and participatory review process of the Commission's 50-year-old terms of reference and to elaborate possible proposals for how they could be updated and modernized.

2. At the fifty-first session, in decision 51/115, the Commission requested that a gender perspective be adopted and integrated into all the agenda items of the Commission, in line with, for example, the current practice in the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (see [E/2020/24-E/CN.3/2020/37](#)).

3. During the 2021–2022 intersessional period, the Bureau of the Commission held four online meetings to discuss the ongoing work. In the present report, the work of the Bureau is presented for consideration by the Commission. The report outlines the transparent and participatory review process of the Commission's 50-year-old terms of reference, launched by the Bureau in June 2021, describes the main lessons learned during the virtual session held in March 2021 and provides updates on other initiatives, including a scoping exercise of the normative work of the Commission, a review of methods to include gender mainstreaming across the Commission's work and initial planning for the review of the multi-year programme.

4. The Commission is invited to reflect on the revisions of the terms of reference, the scoping exercise on normative work and other initiatives undertaken by the Bureau.

II. Terms of reference of the Statistical Commission

A. Background

5. The Statistical Commission was established by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in 1947. As noted on the Commission's website,¹ it is the highest body of the global statistical system, bringing together the Chief Statisticians from Member States from around the world, and is the highest decision-making body for international statistical activities, with responsibility for the setting of statistical standards and the development of concepts and methods, including their implementation at the national and international levels.

6. The current terms of reference were laid down in Economic and Social Council resolution [1566 \(L\)](#) of 3 May 1971, in which reaffirmed its resolution [8 \(I\)](#) of 16 February 1946, as amended by resolution [8 \(II\)](#) of 21 June 1946. Under the terms of reference, the Commission shall assist the Council:

¹ See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/>.

- (a) In promoting the development of national statistics and the improvement of their comparability;
- (b) In the coordination of the statistical work of specialized agencies;
- (c) In the development of the central statistical services of the Secretariat;
- (d) In advising the organs of the United Nations on general questions relating to the collection, analysis and dissemination of statistical information; and
- (e) In promoting the improvement of statistics and statistical methods generally.

7. In resolution [1566 \(L\)](#), the Council stressed the importance of the Commission's coordination function and the need to achieve an integrated system in the collection, processing and dissemination of international statistics; recognized the interest of the Statistical Commission and the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat in matters related to the use of computers in the United Nations system; and requested the Secretary-General to undertake, in cooperation with the specialized agencies, concerted action to assist the developing countries in strengthening their statistical systems.

8. Over the years, two additional resolutions have strengthened the role of the Commission in the global statistical community. First, in its resolution [2020/5](#), the Council recognized that there was a need to strengthen coordination of the statistical programmes of the United Nations system, that such coordination required streamlining and improving in order to better support the efficiency of the United Nations statistical system and that the Statistical Commission remained the primary body for the coordination of the statistical programmes of the United Nations system.

9. In its resolution [2006/6](#), the Council had already encouraged the strengthening of statistical capacity of the relevant international agencies; called upon the United Nations system, including the Statistics Division and regional commissions and international agencies to support national efforts in building and strengthening national statistical capacity; urged all stakeholders to support developing countries and countries with economies in transition in strengthening statistical capacity in support of development; and called upon the international agencies under the coordination of the Statistics Division to improve the coverage, transparency and reporting on all indicators in order to enhance the database on all Millennium Development Goals.

10. Another essential element was the endorsement by the General Assembly of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, which set out the professional and scientific standards to which national statistical systems must adhere. Pursuant to the recommendation of the Council, the representative of Hungary, together with 48 co-sponsors, introduced a draft resolution on the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics at the sixty-eighth session of the Assembly, leading to the subsequent adoption of resolution [68/261](#).

11. The current review of and revisions to the 50-year-old terms of reference are aligned with the ongoing review of the Council and its subsidiary bodies, as called for in General Assembly resolution [75/290 A](#). The Bureau of the Commission is involved in the review of the Council's subsidiary bodies, which is being carried out by the Vice-President of the Council (Bulgaria). The revised terms of reference as contained in the background document are an important input into that process.

B. Process

12. By its decision [52/116](#) to review its terms of reference, the Commission recognized the need to reflect on how modernization could be incorporated within the

framework of its structure and working methods. In response to the invitation from the Commission for the Bureau to launch a transparent and participatory review process of the Commission's terms of reference and elaborate on possible proposals for how they could be updated and modernized, the Bureau initiated a process that included two rounds of global consultations with a view to incorporating a wide range of inputs from across the global statistical community.

13. The Bureau members agreed that the guiding principles of the review were that the revision and updates to the terms of reference should be robust to the changing needs of the data ecosystem and should better serve the needs of its parent body, the Council. The terms of reference were reviewed to include references to key statistical issues faced by national statistics offices and national statistical systems. The goal of the revision was to strengthen the Commission as an expert body on statistics and data, as well as its role in the global statistical systems. Furthermore, the modernization of systems, including the shift towards the role of data stewards, provides the Commission with the opportunity to ensure that its terms of reference are responsive to those shifts.

14. Based on an initial review prepared by the Secretariat, the first open consultation was held from 21 June to 9 July 2021 (see annex I). The purpose of the consultation was to allow the members of the Commission and all national statistical offices to provide their valuable inputs on how to address current and future statistical issues faced by national statistical systems for consideration in the review. Some main points addressed in the revision included: (a) updating references to reflect newer global policy frameworks, such as development strategies, incorporating major decisions of the Commission, including the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data, among others; (b) adding references to modern information technology infrastructure and analytical tools; and (c) addressing the needs of the changing data ecosystem.

15. During the open consultation, 34 countries provided input, of which 23 responded that the 1971 terms of reference did not address current statistical issues faced by their national statistical office or system; 7 that the 1971 terms of reference did address the current issues faced by the national statistical office and system; and 1 that the original terms of reference addressed the current issues faced by the national statistical office but not by the national statistical system. Three countries did not respond to those questions.

16. Twenty-nine countries provided detailed responses on areas not addressed by the 1971 terms of reference, which included: the changing data ecosystem, data confidentiality, new and alternative data sources, geospatial information, modernization of statistics and data stewardship.

17. A small ad hoc working group to discuss the revisions to the terms of reference was formed, led by the Vice-Chair of the Commission (Hungary) and comprising the members of the Bureau and the following nine areas that had expressed an interest in being part of the working group: Cameroon, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, Finland, Poland, South Africa and the State of Palestine.

18. The terms of reference were revised based on the inputs received during the first consultation, discussions with the small working group and further consultations between the Bureau and the Secretariat. The revised terms of reference were put to a second consultation in December 2021.

19. In early December, the Director of the Statistics Division sent a letter addressed to the heads of the national statistical offices requesting any further comments on the circulated draft, and the second consultation period was conducted from 8 December 2021 to 7 January 2022. Following the consultation, the Bureau reviewed the

comments and prepared another revision. Further information on the second consultation as well as on the revised terms of reference for the Commission's consideration are contained in a background document under the current agenda item.

III. Lessons learned from the fifty-second session of the Statistical Commission

A. Summary of virtual modalities

20. At its fifty-second session, by its decision 52/116, the Statistical Commission requested the Bureau to carefully review which modalities for the current virtual session (for example, side events and written statements) worked well and could be employed in future sessions. Owing to the global pandemic, the fifty-second session of the Commission was held as a series of virtual informal meetings from 1 to 3 and 5 March 2021. The informal meetings were held for two hours each day using a platform that allowed for interpretation into the six official languages of the United Nations.

21. One of the main achievements of the fifty-second session was the wide-scale attendance as a result of the session's virtual format. Over 1,000 delegates registered, including 800 delegates who registered through the official e-deleGATE channel and around 200 delegates from agencies who registered directly with the Statistical Division. Delegates represented 135 countries and 54 agencies.

22. As the virtual modality provided an opportunity for broader participation, the Director of the Statistics Division conducted a special outreach campaign targeting countries that infrequently attended or had never attended a session of the Commission, as well as the traditional outreach to newly appointed heads of offices. As a result of the outreach campaign, 18 of the 38 countries that infrequently attended the Commission's sessions were able to join the virtual informal meetings of the fifty-second session.

B. Written statements

23. A key decision taken by the Bureau of the Commission was to include a written statement process, allowing the heads of delegations, representatives or designated officials of Member States and agencies to submit their statements on specific agenda items prior to the session.

24. As the informal meetings were shorter than the usual in-person ones, written statements were the primary means through which delegations could contribute to the substantive discussions on the items of the agenda. All statements from Member States and agencies were uploaded to the Commission's website upon receipt. Almost 500 written statements were received on the items for discussion and decision, on the items for information and on the provisional agenda and dates for the fifty-third session. The agenda items that received the largest number of written statements were items 3 (a), concerning the report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators ([E/CN.3/2021/2](#)); 3 (f), concerning the report of the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting ([E/CN.3/2021/10](#)); and 3 (g), concerning the report of the Secretary-General on migration statistics ([E/CN.3/2021/11](#)).

25. The written statements allowed for a robust discussion – albeit in written form – and helped inform the summaries and draft decisions in a coherent manner. The Statistics Division welcomed the written statements as they provided access to a

lasting resource of detailed comments on specific work programmes. The Statistics Division and the many working groups of the Commission referred to the written statements throughout the year with a view to better informing their work.

26. Upon reflection, the Bureau members agreed that the written statements had been a great success and that they allowed for meaningful discussions and optimal utilization of the shortened meeting times. The Bureau acknowledged that the processing and review of the written statements by the Secretariat implied extra workload and that it was important to facilitate the submission of written statements at future sessions of the Commission.

27. The Secretariat also compiled a list of countries that expressed an interest in making an oral intervention and, over the three days of meetings, there were approximately 70 planned interventions.

C. Online side events

28. During the sessions of the Commission, side events convened on the margins of the formal meetings are an important tool through which the global statistical community can share information about ongoing work and hold informal in-depth discussions. The Bureau wanted to ensure that such informal meetings could be held, despite the ongoing pandemic, and decided that all side events for the fifty-second session would be held as online events in the weeks leading up to and after the fifty-second session of the Commission. A total of 63 side events² were held, including 50 open events and 13 closed meetings.

29. The Bureau played a key role in determining the scope and variety of the side events, each of which were related to an item on the agenda of the session. The Bureau was instrumental in ensuring the quality of the events and their contributions to the global conversation on key issues discussed at the session. One concern expressed by Bureau members was with regard to the fact that some online side events overlapped with others being held at the same time on the same day. In order to ensure the broadest participation in and richest conversations at the side events, the Bureau recommended that overlaps should be minimized to the extent possible and that additional guidance for organizers should be prepared.

IV. Other initiatives of the Bureau

A. Nomenclature of normative work

30. The Statistics Division, as the Secretariat of the Commission, prepared a scoping exercise on the normative work of the Commission in the period from 2008 to 2021, which included an initial examination of the processes leading to a decision by the Commission. The purpose of the exercise was to highlight the commonalities between the documentation and the processes that lead to the development of materials and the preparations for a decision by the Commission. It highlighted how language and terminology were used and how the different types of normative work were currently categorized. The detailed analysis is included in a background document to the present report.

31. The scoping exercise included 50 publications that had been discussed by the Commission in the period from 2008 to 2021 (see annex II). Each publication was placed into one of the following categories of normative work based on naming

² For further information, see <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/52nd-session/side-events/>.

conventions: (a) classification, (b) framework, (c) guidelines, (d) handbook, (e) manual, (f) principles and recommendations, and (g) standards.

32. An initial proposal for a common road map, contained in annex II, was developed to highlight the steps in the process for the adoption or endorsement of new or revised documents respectively, and the additional considerations that could be added to the baseline process.

33. The next steps in that work will be to further explore the road maps to adoption or endorsement in order to be able to differentiate the nuances between each type of normative work.

B. Gender mainstreaming across the Commission's work

34. At the fifty-first session, it was requested that a gender perspective be adopted and integrated into all the agenda items of the Commission, in line with, for example, the current practice of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (see [E/2020/24-E/CN.3/2020/37](#), decision 51/115).³

35. The secretariat of the Statistical Conference of the Americas produced a set of overall guidelines for gender mainstreaming,⁴ as well as targeted recommendations for each working group of the regional Conference to ensure that its work and final products incorporate a gender approach and contribute to gender equality.

36. In response to decision 51/115 and in support of the ongoing work of the Bureau, initial efforts at integrating a gender perspective into the work of the Commission were undertaken by the Statistics Division. To support the process and review, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics offered to take on the task of investigating how to integrate a gender perspective across the work of the Commission. At its meeting from 6 to 8 December 2021, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group brainstormed ideas on the way forward. The resulting proposal is contained in the background document to item 3 (h) of the agenda, on gender statistics.

C. Multi-year programme review

37. The Bureau initiated a review of the multi-year programme of work as part of its preparations for the fifty-third session. The purpose of the review was to address whether the current multi-year programme classification was adequate for addressing the full scope of work undertaken by the Commission. The Bureau noted that work being carried out by an Economic Commission for Europe task force, headed up by Mexico, to update the Classification of International Statistical Activities would provide the basis for a review of the multi-year programme of work. It was therefore agreed to postpone the review of the multi-year programme until the work to update the Classification of Statistical Activities had been completed.

³ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, "Report of the tenth meeting of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean" (LC/CEA.10/9). Available at: https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/45229/1/S2000149_en.pdf.

⁴ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, "Guidelines for gender mainstreaming in the working groups of the Statistical Conference of the Americas" (LC/CEA.11/9). Available at: https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/47477/1/S2100637_en.pdf.

D. Review of the social pillar

38. At the fifty-second session, the Commission, through decision 52/116 and in line with its decision 51/125 and the report of the Bureau on working methods (E/CN.3/2020/27, para. 64), tasked the Bureau with initiating a Friends of the Chair process to review the area of social and demographic statistics, similar to the process of the Friends of the Chair review of economic statistics for the period 2019–2021.

39. During the intersessional period, the Bureau discussed the task and agreed on its importance. Initial consultations on the leadership of the Group were held by the Director of the Statistics Division. However, due to the ongoing pandemic and other priorities, the Group has not yet been established.

E. Other business

40. In October 2021, Statistics Norway sent a letter on behalf of the Steering Committee of the Expert Group on Refugee, Internally Displaced Persons and Statelessness Statistics addressed to the Chair of the Commission formally requesting an update of the terms of reference covering the third phase of the Group's work. The requested revisions included incorporating statelessness statistics into the Group's scope of work and amending the Group's title to reflect that change. Following a thorough review, the Bureau agreed to the updated terms of reference (see E/CN.3/2022/10 for the updated terms of reference). On 30 November 2021, the Chair of the Statistical Commission wrote to the Director General of Statistics Norway informing him of the Bureau's agreement with regard to the revised terms.

V. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission

41. **The Statistical Commission is invited:**

- (a) **To take note of the present report on the work of the Bureau during the intersessional period;**
- (b) **To reflect on the revisions to its terms of reference and to adopt them;**
- (c) **To express its views on the analysis on the documentation; and**
- (d) **To express its views on the other initiatives undertaken by the Bureau.**

Annex I

Open consultation on the revision of the terms of reference of the Statistical Commission, 21 June to 9 July 2021

1. The purpose of this consultation is to allow the members of the Statistical Commission and all national statistical offices to provide their valuable inputs into this important review.

2. The Commission recognized the need to reflect on how modernization can be incorporated within the framework of the Commission's structure and working methods. The Bureau envisions that the updated terms of reference should be robust to the changing needs of the data ecosystem and should better serve the needs of the Economic and Social Council. The revision of the terms of reference is aimed at strengthening the Commission as an expert body on statistics and data and its role in the global statistical systems. The modernization of systems, including a shift toward the role of data stewards, requires that the Commission strive to be responsive and agile to these shifts.

3. As a first step, the Bureau has carried out an initial review. Some points that will be addressed in the revision include:

- Updating references to newer global policy frameworks, such as development strategies, incorporating major decisions of the Commission, such as the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data
- Adding references to modern information technology infrastructure and analytical tools
- Addressing the needs of the changing data ecosystem

4. The Bureau would like your input on the following questions.

1. Do you agree with the list of points to be addressed as referenced in the above paragraph?
2. If the answer is No to question 1, please provide your proposals.
3. Do the 1971 terms of reference address current statistical issues faced by your national statistical office?
4. Do the 1971 terms of reference address current statistical issues faced by your national statistical system?
5. What areas are not addressed by the 1971 terms of reference that should be included? Please share specific areas, domains, types of data, partnerships etc., that could be added to the mandate to address all needs and areas of work.
6. Over the coming months, a small drafting team will work on the review and the revision of the terms of reference. If you would like to be part of the drafting team, please inform the Secretariat.

Annex II**Publications included in the scoping exercise**

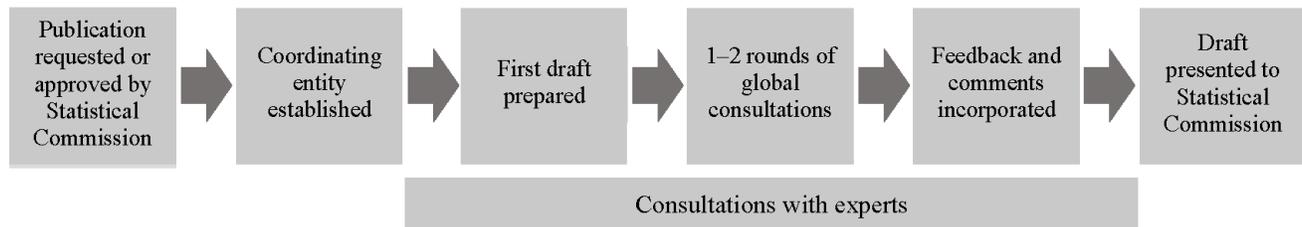
<i>Publication</i>	<i>Category</i>
Central Product Classification, Version 2.1	Classification
<i>International Standard Classification of Occupations</i>	Classification
<i>International Classification of Activities for Time-Use Statistics 2016</i>	Classification
<i>Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics</i>	Framework
<i>System of Environmental-Economic Accounting – Ecosystem Accounting</i>	Framework
<i>System of Environmental-Economic Accounting – Central Framework</i>	Framework
Global Statistical Geospatial Framework	Framework
International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Concepts and Definitions 2010	Concepts and Definition
<i>Guidelines for Producing Statistics on Asset Ownership from a Gender Perspective</i>	Guidelines
<i>Guidelines on the Use of Electronic Data Collection Technologies in Population and Housing Censuses</i>	Guidelines
<i>Guidelines for Producing Statistics on Violence against Women: Statistical Surveys</i>	Guidelines
<i>Guidelines on Integrated Economic Statistics</i>	Guidelines
<i>Designing Household Survey Samples: Practical Guidelines</i>	Guidelines
<i>Guidelines on Statistical Business Registers</i>	Guidelines
<i>Handbook on the Management of Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2</i>	Handbook
<i>Handbook on Population and Housing Census Editing, Revision 2</i>	Handbook
<i>Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems: Management, Operation and Maintenance, Revision 1</i>	Handbook
<i>Handbook of National Accounting: Financial Production, Flows and Stocks in the System of National Accounts</i>	Handbook
<i>Measuring the Economically Active in Population Censuses: a Handbook</i>	Handbook
<i>Handbook on Geospatial Infrastructure in Support of Census Activities</i>	Handbook
<i>Handbook on Governance Statistics</i>	Handbook
<i>Handbook on Management and Organization of National Statistical Systems</i>	Handbook
<i>Handbook on Accounting for Global Value Chains: Global Value Chain Satellite Accounts and Integrated Business Statistics</i>	Handbook
<i>Handbook on Data Template and Metadata for Short-Term Statistics</i>	Handbook
<i>Handbook on Supply and Use Tables and Input-Output Tables with Extensions and Applications</i>	Handbook
<i>Handbook of National Accounting: Satellite Account on Non-profit and Related Institutions and Volunteer Work</i>	Handbook

<i>Publication</i>	<i>Category</i>
<i>Handbook on Cyclical Composite Indicators</i>	Handbook
<i>Handbook on Rapid Estimates</i>	Handbook
<i>Handbook on Economic Tendency Surveys</i>	Handbook
<i>Integrating a Gender Perspective into Statistics</i>	Manual
<i>International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Compilers Manual, Revision 1</i>	Manual
<i>Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services 2010</i>	Manual
<i>United Nations National Quality Assurance Frameworks Manual for Official Statistics</i>	Manual
<i>Consumer Price Index Manual</i>	Manual
<i>Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services Compiler's Guide 2010</i>	Manual
<i>Energy Statistics Compilers Manual</i>	Manual
Revised preamble of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics	Principles
<i>Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 3</i>	Principles and Recommendations
<i>Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3</i>	Principles and Recommendations
<i>International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics</i>	Recommendations
<i>International Recommendations for Water Statistics</i>	Recommendations
<i>International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics 2008</i>	Recommendations
<i>International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008</i>	Recommendations
<i>International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics 2008</i>	Recommendations
<i>International Recommendations for Energy Statistics</i>	Recommendations
<i>International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities, Revision 4</i>	Standard
<i>System of National Accounts 2008</i>	Standard
<i>International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Supplement to the Compilers Manual</i>	Supplement
<i>Technical Report on Statistics of Internally Displaced Persons: Current Practice and Recommendations for Improvement</i>	Technical report

Annex III

Common road maps to adoption

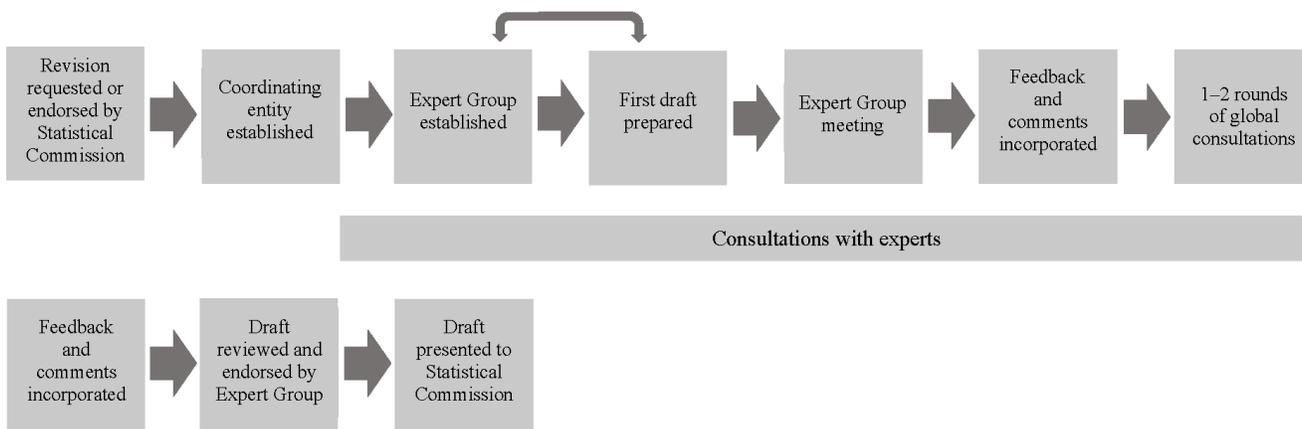
Figure I
Common road map to adoption (non-revision)



Additional considerations:

- Workshops
- Technical meetings and discussions
- Possibility of multiple rounds of drafts circulated for further comments and suggestions
- Draft discussed at one or multiple Expert Group meetings or meetings of experts
- Hiring of consultants
- Pilot tests
- Draft posted to Statistics Division website for global comments

Figure II
Common road map to adoption (revision)



Additional considerations:

- Workshops
- Possibility of multiple rounds of drafts circulated for comments and suggestions
- Hiring of consultants
- Pilot tests