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Integration of geospatial, statistical and other related information

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Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The present paper contains the report of the Expert Group on the Integration of Statistical and Geospatial Information for consideration by the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management.

At its ninth session, held in New York from 7 to 9 August 2019, the Committee of Experts adopted decision 9/106, in which it adopted the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework, which enables a range of data to be integrated from both the geospatial and statistical communities and which, through the application of its five principles and supporting key elements, permits the production of harmonized, standardized and integrated geospatially enabled statistical data to facilitate data-driven decision-making. The decision was subsequently endorsed by the Statistical Commission at its fifty-first session, held in New York from 3 to 6 March 2020, in its decision 51/123. The Committee noted the proposal of the Expert Group to continue its work to develop guidance on and support the promotion, awareness-raising and implementation of the Framework and its work on statistical geospatial integration and coordination, in particular with regard to the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2020 round of population censuses, and encouraged Member States and other stakeholders to participate in, and contribute to, these important elements. In this present report, the Expert Group provides information on its recent activities, including the main outcomes of its sixth meeting held in Manchester, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in October 2019, and details of its efforts to develop guidance and support the promotion, awareness-raising and implementation of the Framework, through the formation of task teams. It also addresses overall progress in operationalizing the Framework to support the 2020 round of population censuses and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

* E/C.20/2020/20

I. Introduction

1. In making decision 9/106 at its ninth session in August 2019, the Committee of Experts adopted the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework (GSGF) as an important bridge that enables a range of data to be integrated from both the geospatial and statistical communities and that, through the application of its five principles and supporting key elements, permits the production of harmonised, standardised and integrated, geospatially enabled statistical data to facilitate data-driven decision-making. The Committee also noted the proposal of the Expert Group to continue its work to develop guidance on, and support the promotion, awareness-raising and implementation of, the GSGF, and its work on statistical geospatial integration and coordination, in particular with regard to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2020 round of population censuses, and encouraged Member States and other stakeholders to participate in, and contribute to, these important elements.

2. This present report informs the Committee of Experts on the Expert Group's activities and progress since the ninth session. This includes summarising the main outcomes of its sixth meeting in October 2019 and detailing its efforts to develop guidance and support the promotion, awareness-raising and implementation of the GSGF to support the 2020 round of population censuses and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This report also discusses the background documents provided with this report, including the Expert Group's revised terms of reference, and its work plan for 2020 – 2022 as a mechanism to guide the implementation of the GSGF and the Expert Group's future work. The Committee is invited to take note of the progress made by the Expert Group in the area of statistical and geospatial integration.

II. Sixth meeting of the Expert Group

3. The sixth meeting of the Expert Group was convened in Manchester, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, on 8 and 9 October 2019, and hosted by the Government of the United Kingdom through the Office for National Statistics and the Ordnance Survey. The meeting was attended by 27 participants from 14 Member States (Australia, Canada, Germany, Finland, France, Ireland, Kuwait, Mexico, Namibia, Norway, Poland, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States of America), regional and international organizations (International Cartographic Association and Eurostat) and the Secretariat.

4. Chaired by Australia and Mexico, the meeting enabled the Expert Group to discuss the adoption of the GSGF by the Committee of Experts, develop a work plan for 2020 – 2022, review its ongoing modalities, including initiating discussions on revising its terms of reference, appointing new co-chairs (Germany and Namibia), and discussed the Expert Group's efforts with regard to the 2020 round of population and housing censuses and the 2030 Agenda. A detailed report of the sixth meeting is available on the website of the Expert Group¹.

5. With the leadership of the Expert Group passed to Germany and Namibia, the Expert Group thanked Australia and Mexico for their continued support and commitment since its establishment in 2013. The Expert Group noted that the leadership of Australia and Mexico enabled the Expert Group to establish a substantial body of work, including guiding the development of the GSGF and helping strengthen the interlinkages between the global statistical and geospatial communities.

¹ <http://ggim.un.org/UNGGIM-expert-group/>

III. Fifty-first Session of the UN Statistical Commission

6. At its fifty-first session, held in New York from 3 to 6 March 2020, the United Nations Statistical Commission welcomed the report² of the Expert Group. The Commission commended the Expert Group on its significant body of work to advance the development and completion of a Global Statistical Geospatial Framework so that there is increased information available to support social, economic and environmental policy and decision-making, including at the regional, national and sub-national levels.

7. In making decision 51/123, the Commission endorsed the GSGF, as adopted by the Committee in its decision 9/106, and welcomed its adoption and implementation by Member States as a result of a broad and inclusive global consultation process. The Commission encouraged Member States to continue to implement the GSGF and, in that regard, called for increased institutional coordination and collaboration between national statistical and geospatial agencies and other relevant stakeholders, especially in developing countries, to ensure more targeted interventions on, and informed understanding of, socio-economic data within a geospatial context. The Commission also noted the revised terms of reference of the Expert Group and that it was developing its work plan for the period 2020 – 2022, and welcomed the Expert Group’s continuing efforts to provide guidance to Member States to support the adoption and implementation of the GSGF, including continuing the development of key statistical standards and processes to strengthen the integration of statistical and geospatial information.

8. On the margins of the fifty-first session, the Expert Group convened a side event entitled ‘Integrating Statistical and Geospatial Information’³, alongside the Working Group on Geospatial Information of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on the Sustainable Development Goals Indicators (IAEG-SDGs). The side event consisted of presentations from Namibia, as co-Chair of the Expert Group, Mexico as co-Chair of the Working Group, France, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). Attended by over 80 participants, the side event, provided an opportunity to socialize the GSGF to the statistical community following its adoption by the Committee of Experts; demonstrate advancements within the realm of disaggregation and integrating statistical and geospatial information; and, to highlight the application of geospatial information, particularly for the visualisation, dissemination, and monitoring of the SDGs.

IV. Developing the Work of the Expert Group

A. Revising the Modalities of the Expert Group

9. Following its sixth meeting, the Expert Group undertook a process to revise and update its terms of reference to ensure its continued alignment with the work programmes of both the Statistical Commission and the Committee of Experts. Presented as a background document to the fifty-first Statistical Commission, the Expert Group’s new terms of reference⁴ recognize that through the adoption of the GSGF by the Committee, and endorsement by the Statistical Commission, the overall objectives detailed within the initial terms of reference of the Expert Group⁵ were broadly completed. Accordingly, the new terms of reference revise the Expert Group’s objectives, functions, and modalities to better align with the emerging needs of both the statistical and geospatial communities, the 2030 Agenda

² E/CN.3/2020/25

³ <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/51st-session/side-events/20200305-1L-Integrating-Statistical-and-Geospatial-Information/>

⁴ <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/51st-session/documents/BG-item-3u-EG-ISGI-Terms-of-Reference-E.pdf>

⁵ Annex 3, E/CN.3/2014/31 <https://undocs.org/E/CN.3/2014/31>

and the 2020 round of population censuses. The revised terms of reference are provided as a background document to this present report for the information of the Committee of Experts.

B. Current Status of the Work Plan and Development of a Communication Strategy

10. At its fifty-first session, the Statistical Commission noted the Expert Group's work plan for 2020 – 2022, contained within its report⁶. For the information of the Committee, the Expert Group has updated its work plan to reposition itself towards the development of awareness-raising, promotion, and implementation materials as key guidance for countries to support their work towards the operationalization and implementation of the GSGF. The aim of the work plan is to enable countries to more effectively produce geospatially enabled statistical data for national to global decision-making. Key activities include: supporting the development of the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework (IGIF); developing a communication strategy; the establishment of task teams (described in sub-section C below); considering mechanisms to raise the engagement and participation of Member States in the work programme of the Expert Group; and demonstrating case studies and examples of good practice in the adoption of the GSGF. This work plan for 2020 – 2022 is provided as a background document to this present report for noting by the Committee of Experts.

11. To strengthen its promotion, awareness-raising and implementation efforts, the Expert Group has developed a draft communication strategy, with the vision to inform and promote the GSGF and its broader work for both the statistical and geospatial information communities. Proposed elements of the communication strategy include: identifying the need for shared and open presentation materials to promote the GSGF; documentation to foster the GSGF's implementation at the national and regional level; and working papers that provide insight into emerging areas of the Expert Group's work. The Expert Group would also like to express its appreciation regarding the development of the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework, which informed the structure of the communication strategy, specifically Strategic Pathway 9: Communication and Engagement and its appendices.

C. Formation and the Current Progress of the Task Teams

12. To deliver its updated work plan for 2020 - 2022, to support the operationalization and implementation of the GSGF, and to strengthen the integration of statistical and geospatial information, the Expert Group has formed three task teams: Capacity Building; Privacy and Confidentiality; and, Principles of the GSGF (which is composed of three work streams on Geocoding, Common Geographies and Interoperability). Since their formation, each of the task teams and work streams has convened virtual meetings, under the leadership of either its leads or the co-Chairs of the Expert Group. The Expert Group urges and welcomes the participation of additional Member States in these important fora.

Task Team on Capacity Building

13. The task team on Capacity Building⁷, led by Norway and Sweden, aims to develop guidance regarding the implementation and strengthening of statistical-geospatial capacity in countries through fostering the coordination of capacity building activities. The task team is currently focusing on diagnosing the readiness for implementing the GSGF at the country-level through a stocktaking of national activities in statistical-geospatial integration. The 'Global survey on preparedness on the implementation of the GSGF' aims to provide a global

⁶ E/CN.3/2020/25 <https://undocs.org/E/CN.3/2020/25>

⁷ <https://unstats.un.org/wiki/display/ISGI/TT+Capacity+Building>

assessment on the preparedness for countries to implement the GSGF and identify challenges that prevent its implementation. It is anticipated that the results and analysis of this survey will be presented for consideration by the Statistical Commission at its fifty-second session in March 2021, and thereafter the eleventh session of the Committee of Experts in August 2021, with initial results aimed to be provided in the intersessional period on the wiki of the Expert Group.

14. To support the identification of how, where and by whom capacity-building efforts are conducted, the task team is seeking to engage with capacity development organizations within the statistical and geospatial communities. So far, this has included discussions with PARIS21, UNFPA and others. These discussions aim to contribute to the broader efforts of the Expert Group, to foster collaboration, and to prevent any potential duplication of capacity development efforts. Moreover, the task team welcomes the contribution of the respective Working Groups on the Integration of Statistical and Geospatial Information within the regional committees of UN-GGIM.

15. Following its initial work, the task team then aims to examine the potential of the Modernization Maturity Model developed by the High-Level Group for the Modernization of Official Statistics, to further the implementation of the GSGF globally.

Task Team on Privacy and Confidentiality

16. The task team on Privacy and Confidentiality⁸, led by France, aims to provide guidance and recommendations for the management of privacy and confidentiality issues when using, sharing or releasing geospatial data within national statistical organizations. The task team is currently identifying the issues relevant to Privacy and Confidentiality through organizing and collating existing material and literature. This work aims to develop and frame the theoretical and technical considerations needed to advance its work. It has also received contributions from Member States which illustrate national experiences of how the privacy and confidentiality of geospatially-enabled statistical data are currently managed.

17. Following its initial work, the task team aims to develop guidance and recommendations for national statistical organizations to produce geospatially-enabled statistical data.

Task Team on the Principles of the GSGF

18. The task team on the Principles of the GSGF is composed of three work streams, each aimed to support the development of guidance to support the operationalization and implementation of the GSGF:

- (a) **The work stream on Geocoding**⁹, currently under the guidance of the co-Chairs, aims to review options for geocoding and develop guidance and case studies on issues pertaining to geocoding;
- (b) **The work stream on Common Geographies**¹⁰, led by Canada, aims to review options for common geographies and to develop guidance and recommendation for a common geography; and
- (c) **The work stream on Interoperability**¹¹, led by the United Kingdom, aims to provide guidance to Member States to enable the continuing development of

⁸ <https://unstats.un.org/wiki/display/ISGI/TT+Privacy+and+Confidentiality>

⁹ <https://unstats.un.org/wiki/display/ISGI/WS+Geocoding>

¹⁰ <https://unstats.un.org/wiki/display/ISGI/WS+Common+Geographies>

¹¹ <https://unstats.un.org/wiki/display/ISGI/WS+Interoperability>

key statistical standards and processes to strengthen the integration of statistical and geospatial information.

V. Contributing to the 2030 Agenda and the 2020 Round of Population Censuses

19. The Expert Group considers the adoption and endorsement of the GSGF as a substantial milestone in the realm of statistical-geospatial integration, and one which can foster and deepen the existing interlinkages between the statistical and geospatial communities. The need for accessible and usable geospatially enabled statistical data has been well articulated by the 2030 Agenda and the 2020 round of population censuses. Moreover, the prevalence of the COVID-19 pandemic has further stressed the crucial role of data to inform data-driven decision-making.

20. While the GSGF was adopted by the Committee of Experts at its ninth session in 2019, and subsequently endorsed by the Statistical Commission at its fifty-first session in 2020, its vibrant development and broad consultation has led to its implementation in various levels by Member States, including Australia, Canada, Egypt, France, Mexico, New Zealand, Sweden and within the regions, in advance of its adoption.

21. The Expert Group aims to collate and share such national and regional case studies and good practices to further provide guidance for Member States in the operationalization and implementation of the GSGF. Member States are urged to participate and contribute their experiences, regardless of their membership status, to the Expert Group.

22. Notwithstanding the current global challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, some Member States are proceeding with their national population censuses as planned. In many cases, this is leveraging the transformational opportunity provided by digital technologies. However, noting that the overarching principle of the 2030 Agenda is to leave no-one behind and to endeavour to reach those furthest behind first, the Expert Group is cognizant of the need to bridge the data gaps caused by countries unable to initiate or continue their census activities.

23. Accordingly, the Expert Group urges Member States to implement the GSGF, irrespective of their current working modalities, in progression of their census or level of capacity. The Expert Group stresses that the implementation of the GSGF has demonstrably enabled countries, through the application of its five principles and supporting key elements, to produce harmonised, standardised and integrated, geospatially enabled statistical data to facilitate data-driven decision-making, in-turn supporting all stages of the census, from its preparation through to the dissemination of its outputs.

VI. Other meetings of the Expert Group

24. In addition to the physical meeting of the Expert Group in Manchester, United Kingdom, the Expert Group has been conducting quarterly (approximately) virtual meetings. Alongside these regular virtual meetings, ad-hoc meetings have been convened to support the work of the Expert Group, including meetings between the co-Chairs and the Secretariat, with its task teams and work streams convening virtual meetings as appropriate.

VII. Conclusion and the way forward

25. In making decision 9/106, the Committee of Experts adopted the GSGF, a decision that was subsequently endorsed by the Statistical Commission in its decision 51/123. These key decisions bring to a close a significant body of work; the beginnings of which lie at the very core of the foundation of the Expert Group.

26. In revising its terms of reference, developing its work plan for 2020 – 2022, and the formation of its task teams, the Expert Group is continuing its work to ensure the applicability, development and distribution of guidance and good practices to enable the implementation of the GSGF at the national and regional level. Furthermore, the Expert Group extends its appreciation to Australia and Mexico, especially considering the milestones and work achieved under their leadership.

27. Through the efforts of the Expert Group, the Committee of Experts is continuing to work with the Statistical Commission and help strengthen the interlinkages between the two professional communities. To further accelerate and leverage any available capacity and resources, the Expert Group invites the participation of more Member States in its ongoing and upcoming work. Through supporting the implementation of the GSGF at the national and regional levels, a globally consistent mechanism for enabling the integration of statistical and geospatial information can support national development priorities and regional and global initiatives, strengthening the attainment of the 2020 round of population censuses and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

VIII. Recommended for noting by the Committee of Experts

28. The Committee of Experts is invited to take note of the report of the Expert Group, including its revised terms of reference and work plan for 2020 – 2022. The Committee is also invited to urge Member States to adopt and implement the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework and contribute further to the work of the Expert Group.