Summary of the GCC Regional Consultative Meeting on Population Estimates and Projections,

20-22 October 2019, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.

Background to the Meeting

1. Recognising the importance of consistent and reliable measures of the current and future size and composition of the population of GCC countries (UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar and Kuwait); GCC-Stat, relevant United Nations agencies and GCC member states organised a consultative meeting on Population Estimates and Projections from 20-22 October 2019 in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.

2. Population estimates are commonly understood to refer to monthly, quarterly or annual measures of the current or past population, based on current or recent conditions. Population projections are forecasts for what the population might be in the future, based on different scenarios.

3. The meeting aimed to improve understanding between representatives of GCC member states and regional and international agencies, of the statistical processes, assumptions and methodologies used in preparing population estimates and projections for GCC countries.

4. It brought together senior demographers from GCC countries, United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), United Nations Population Division (UNPD) and United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), and GCC- Stat. (Appendix 1 lists attendees). All actively participated in the meeting. All countries and agencies chaired discussions, presented current work and shared experiences.

Conceptual Frameworks and User Requirements

5. The frameworks used in the United Nations Demographic Yearbook System (DYB) – compiled by UNSD (https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/products/dyb/) and the United Nations World Population Prospects (WPP) prepared by UNPD (https://population.un.org/wpp/), provided the structure for the meeting. In particular, both use the standard Population Balancing Equation

$$E\ (P_t) = P_0 + (B\text{-}D) + M[I\text{-}E]$$

6. This means that the Estimate of the most recent Population (shown as P_t) is the sum of the previous Population (P_0) plus Births **(B)** minus Deaths **(D)** plus Migration **(M)**. Migration is calculated from the estimate of Immigrants **(I)** minus Emigrants **(E)**. This equation must always balance, as there is no other way for the population to change.

7. The DYB and the respective online dissemination tools are compiled annually from country data. The population base is either De Jure (Usual Residents) or De Facto, depending on what countries provide.

8. The WPP is produced every two years. It provides for all countries and regions, as well as at the global and regional levels, a consistent set of estimates and projections of population size and the three components of population change: fertility, mortality and net international migration. Key concepts and methods for the WPP include:
   a. De facto rather than de jure population measures
   b. Population balance (demographic accounting)
   c. Cohort component methods
   d. Use of 5 x 5 framework (Population Estimates and Demographic indicators are calculated for 5-year periods and for 5-year age groups)
   e. Estimates are calculated for the 1950-2020 period, vs. projections for the 2020 – 2100 period

f. Many sources of demographic estimates are available (see para 19 below), but additional estimation is often required:
   i. To fill-in gaps in data series (missing data) for most countries, where information is available for only some indicators or dates
   ii. To reconcile differences between data sources or estimation methods for a specific date and/or across sources over time
   iii. To ensure international comparability using similar methodologies and assumptions across countries and over time

9. It was noted that while GCC countries generally applied the relevant international concepts, there were two main differences:
   a. Usual Residents included ALL citizens irrespective of whether they were living in the country or not
   b. Common use of citizen/non-citizen concepts, which have different demographic drivers. Common definitions used in GCC countries are:
      i. Citizens are people with citizenship of the country
      ii. Non-citizens are people with citizenship of other countries (including other GCC citizens)

User Requirements

10. The meeting noted that population estimates and projections have always had a critical role in country development and planning in GCC states. There has also been a long tradition of producing international population estimates. (The demand for international data has its origins in the 1947 Population Commission). However, the meeting noted that new uses were emerging, including Sustainable Development Goal indicators and GCC policy requirements.

11. ESCWA has also agreed with members on a core set of population and social indicators to be provided annually. These cover themes such as Population, Health, Housing, Labour, Education, Poverty and Culture.

12. GCC-Stat is increasingly focusing on providing GCC level data aligned to the policy needs of GCC decision makers including the GCC Secretariat. GCC-Stat provides a range of population data, but only publishes GCC level data if there is data from all member countries.

13. Attendees noted that there are many challenges in measuring SDGs, especially multi-dimensional SDGs. It was recognised that international agencies that are SDG Data Custodians, have a key role in supporting countries in meeting these challenges.

14. It was noted that UNSD, ESCWA and GCC-Stat all require mid- year estimates (i.e. data for reference date of 1 July), to support the goal of comparable data. However, UNSD will publish official national population estimates for any other provided reference date.

15. It was also noted that there are multiple requirements placed on countries in the provision of population data. Country representatives urged the international and regional agencies to strengthen their cooperation, and to utilize modern technology, such as electronic databases for the receipt of data from member countries.
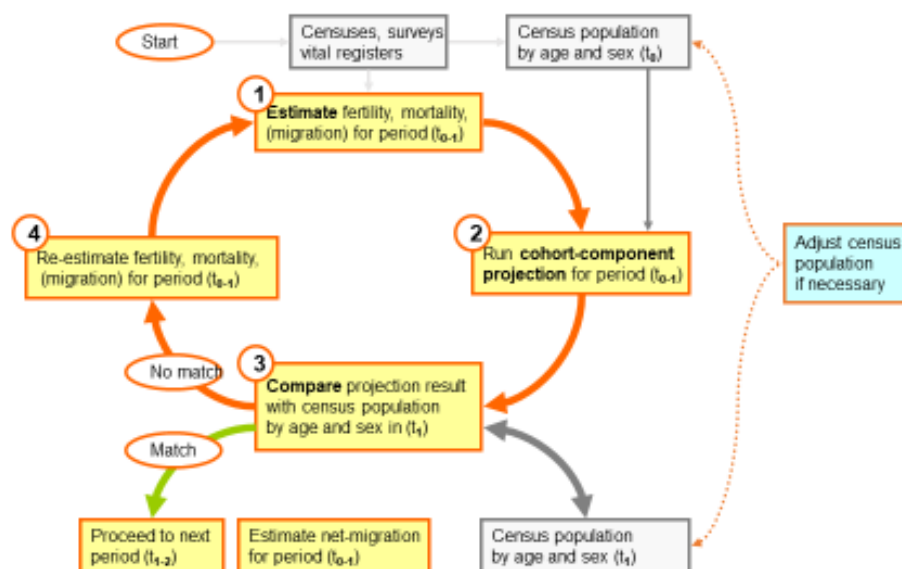
Population Estimates

16. The meeting noted the approaches used by international and regional agencies in the collection of data and the preparation of population estimates.

17. UNSD described how the outputs of the United Nations Demographic Yearbook System (DYB) – (https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/products/dyb/) are compiled from country data:
   a. During the first quarter of every year UNSD conducts a data collection by dispatching to NSO the DYB Population Estimates Questionnaire and the Population Estimates Metadata questionnaire; and

    b.   Annual Vital Statistics Questionnaire ; its first two worksheets request vital statistics metadata; and

    c.   Annual Questionnaire on International Travel and Migration Statistics

18. In all cases, National Statistical Offices are requested to provide the relevant data and associated metadata. Only country provided data is published. The templates of all the above questionnaires as well as of the DYB population and housing census questionnaires are available at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/products/dyb/#questionnaires.

19. UNPD explained that the Data Sources for the WPP include:
    a.   Official statistics reported to the UN DYB, including data from National statistical sources (tabulations and/or microdata) either taken as-is or adjusted after in-depth evaluation, such as:
        i.   1,690 censuses (236 since 2010) and post-enumerations surveys
        ii.   2,700 surveys (540 since 2010)
        iii.   vital registration systems from 163 countries or areas
        iv.   population registers and other administrative sources on international migration statistics
    b.   Refugee statistics from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees
    c.   Estimated time series of adult HIV prevalence and coverage of antiretroviral treatment sourced from UNAIDS
    d.   Estimated time series of infant and under-five mortality from the UN Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation
    e.   Estimates of international migration flows and stocks of foreign-born persons from the UN
    f.   Various other series of international estimates produced by international and regional organizations and academic research institutions.

20. These data sources are then used to determine the following population estimates for each of the 235 countries or areas:
    a.   Base population by sex and 5-year age groups in 1950
    b.   For 5-year periods from 1950-2020, time series of:
        i.   age-specific fertility rates for women aged 15-49 years by 5-year age groups
        ii.   sex ratio at birth (males/females)
        iii.   sex and age-specific mortality rates (life tables) for ages 0-1, 1-4, 5-9, 10-14, …., 90-95, 95-100, 100+
        iv.   net international migration by sex and 5-year age groups.

21. In preparing the estimates in the WPP, UNPD takes an iterative approach, ensuring that the different sources reconcile. For example, it is critical to ensure that the differences between any two census estimates can be explained by Fertility, Mortality and Migration during the same period. The iterative approach used by UNPD is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Iterative Estimation Process for population estimates

GCC Country Population Estimates

22. Representatives of GCC countries presented on current practices. Common themes included:
    a. Nearly all countries calculated and produced the following Population Estimates
        i. Population by Sex
        ii. Population by Nationality
        iii. Population by Age (Five year age-groups, Single Age)
        iv. Sub-National (e.g. Emirate, Governate)
    b. **Demographic Indicators** (e.g. Sex Ratio, Dependency Ratios, Fertility and Mortality Rates) **are not always produced** with Population Estimates
    c. Countries generally use international definitions in the preparation of estimates, **including the 6-month usual residence** rule; but all GCC countries **include citizens living outside the countries** as part of their usual resident population.
    d. Population is generally based on citizens and non-citizens registered in Population Register. However, some countries apply additional criteria to ensure full coverage of citizens (e.g. Oman includes citizens who have ID cards that expired in the last 10 years).
    e. Population Registers, Population Census and Immigration records (e.g. Bahrain) are common sources
    f. Countries use a range of quality processes and checks, including
        i. Electronic linking of databases (Oman, Bahrain)
        ii. Data quality checks such as reviewing counts of babies with Births, comparing time series, cohort analysis and review of age-sex structure

23. Common quality issues, especially in relation to data sources included
    a. Under-reporting of deaths among older females in rural areas
    b. Errors in age reporting
    c. Treatment of GCC citizens, who can enter other GCC countries without a visa
    d. Need to consider impact of naturalized citizens

24. Participants also acknowledged that the iterative approach used by UNPD in preparing estimates for the WPP (described in para 20 and Figure 1) provides a coherent approach for reconciling the different sources within countries.

25. As most countries use or plan to use administrative registers, it was also recognised that it is important to separate the administrative purposes from the statistical purposes of data in the administrative registers. This may mean for example that the statistical population counts will differ from the administrative counts.

Availability of GCC country data to International and Regional Agencies

26. The meeting reviewed the availability of GCC country Population and Vitals data provided to UNSD, ESCWA and GCC-Stat. Table 1 below shows information about the most recent data provided by GCC countries, including availability.

Table 1. Latest GCC country data provided to UNSD, ESCWA and GCC-Stat

A. Population Estimates - Total Population

		UAE	Bahrain	Saudi Arabia	Oman	Qatar	Kuwait
UNSD – Mid-Year Estimates	Available[1]	Not Available	2017	2017	2017	2017	2017
	Population Base		De Jure	De Facto	De Facto – Registered Population	De Facto	De Facto
	Reference Period		Mid year	Mid year	Mid year	Mid year	1 Jan
ESCWA							
GCC-Stat	Available	2017	2018	2018	2018	2018	2018
	Reference Period	31 Dec	Mid year	Mid year	Mid year	Mid year	1 Jan[2] e.g. (1/1/2019) refer to 2018

1.   2017 Reporting Year
2.   Estimates dated 1 January refer to the previous year. Eg estimates for 1 January 2019 refer to 2018

B. Population Estimates - Population by Nationality

	UAE	Bahrain	Saudi Arabia	Oman	Qatar	Kuwait
UNSD	Not applicable					
ESCWA	2010	2018[3]	2017	2017	…	2018[3,4]
GCC-Stat	2010	2018	2018	2018	…	2018 [4]

3.   Sourced from GCC-Stat
4.   Reference Period is 1 January

C. Births and Deaths

	UAE	Bahrain	Saudi Arabia	Oman	Qatar	Kuwait
Births						
UNSD[5]	2015	2016	2017	2017	2017	2016
ESCWA	2017	2017	2015	2017	2017	2016
GCC-Stat	2017	2017	2017	2017	2017	2017
Deaths						
UNSD5	2015	2016	2017	2017	2017	2016

ESCWA	2017	2017	2015[6]	2017	2017	2016
GCC-Stat	2017	2017	2017	2017	2017	2017

5. 2017 Reporting year
6. Sourced from GCC-Stat

D. Migration Flows

	UAE	Bahrain	Saudi Arabia	Oman	Qatar	Kuwait
UNSD[7]			2016[8] –			
ESCWA						
GCC-Stat	Not currently collected					

7. 2017 Reporting year
8. Sourced from household surveys

Differences between the WPP and country estimates

27. The meeting reviewed some of the reasons why the estimates produced by countries differed to those produced in the WPP. Among the reasons, outlined by UNPD were:
    a. Estimates for the most recent years (e.g. the 2018-2020 estimates in the 2019 WPP) **are not yet available from countries** and so UNPD uses short-term projection methods to estimate the data.
    b. The WPP estimates and projections **are for the de facto population**, while many countries produce usual residence (de jure) estimates
    c. The WPP methodology **reconciles data across sources and across time**, while countries often release the most recent data.
    d. UNPD does not have access to some of the data needed to understand certain specific local country situations. For example, the official estimates of population, births and deaths reported to the DYB typically are not disaggregated in a way that enables understanding the impact of the different demographic drivers for citizen and non-citizen populations in GCC countries
    e. Countries may not always update their data or metadata in the UN DYB – a core source for the WPP.

28. It was agreed that while the estimates published in the WPP are based on a common methodology that enable the provision of a wide range of internationally consistent indicators, these estimates should not replace country estimates (and projections) that reflect country specific situations.

29. It was also noted that other countries have differences between the official population statistics and those released by international organisations. Some countries take active steps to explain the differences to users. An example is Singapore, where Statistics Singapore produced a media release when the WPP was released explaining the differences between the WPP and Singapore statistics (https://www.gov.sg/factually/content/why-are-sporean-pop-stats-different-from-those-released-by-intl-orgs). Participants agreed that this type of release might be useful for GCC countries and international and regional agencies.

Population Projections

30. UNPD outlined some standard considerations for population projections. It was noted that there are a number of different uses for population projections; including planning, establishing population policies and modelling the long-term implications of population for sustainability (e.g. land use, agriculture, food production, energy use, climate change). Projections can be produced for different levels of geography (local, national, regional and global), and for different time periods (short, medium and long term). Population projections can also provide different demographic characteristics (e.g. Total population, population by age and sex, as well as different socio-economic characteristics).

31. The choice of a projection method should be guided by:

- Length of time horizon – e.g. short, medium, long term
- Detail required – e.g. total population, age groups, population subgroups
- Availability and quality of input data, as well as options for treatment of missing data
- Projection tools (including software)

32. Common projection methods include
   a. Trend extrapolation methods (mathematical models which are fitted to historical data and then used to project population values)
   b. Cohort-component methods – based on the demographic change components of fertility, migration and international migration. These can be
      i. Deterministic, scenario based or
      ii. Probabilistic – using statistical models

33. Trend methods may be useful for short term projections of the total population. Cohort-component methods are preferred for longer-term projections and for those disaggregated by age and sex, as in the WPP. In addition to the base population requirements (similar to those for estimates set out in para 19), projections of Life Table survival ratios, Vitals (especially births) and net international migration are needed to produce cohort-component population projections.
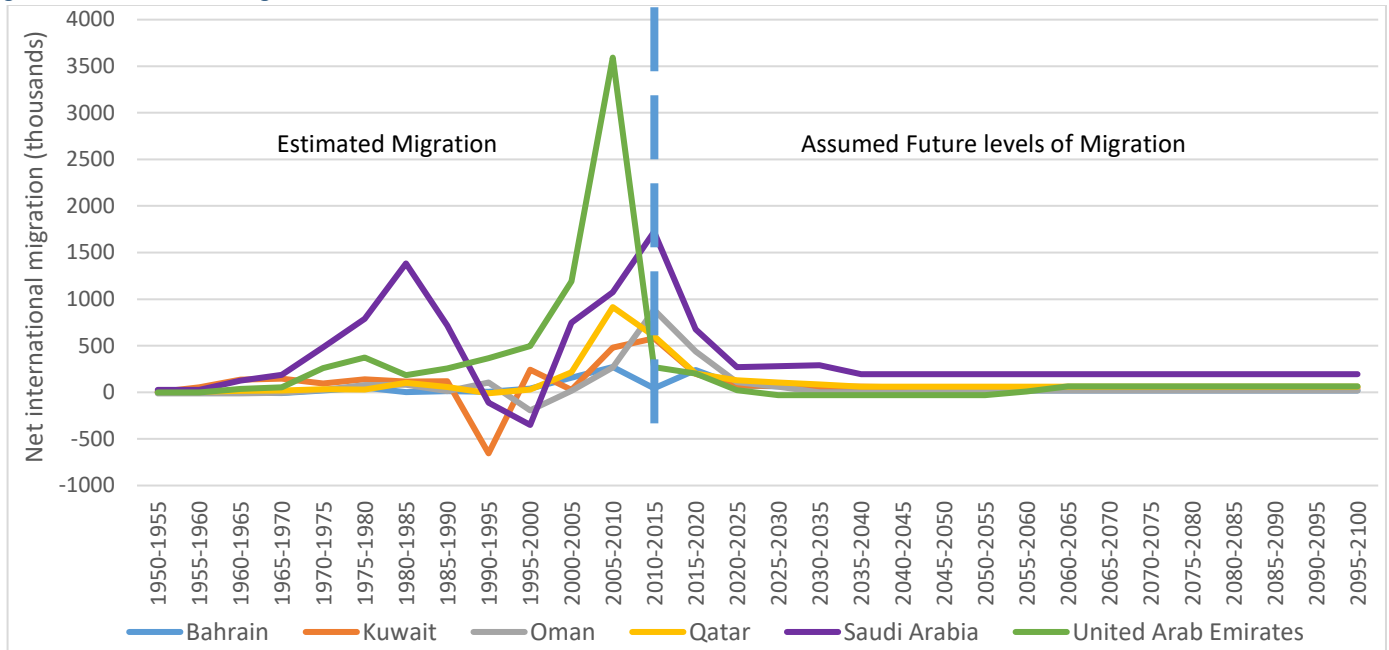
34. UNPD outlined how projections are prepared for the WPP, including the use of historical data based models of demographic transition, and probabilistic modelling. Preparing the WPP requires reconciling data between countries and across time, as the WPP covers the period 1950 to 2100. UNPD projection models of total fertility and the life expectancy at birth are informed primarily by the historical trajectories of those variables for each country, but are additionally informed by the past experience of other countries as they experienced demographic transition.

35. UNPD also noted that both data driven probabilistic projections and assumption-based scenarios are used in producing the WPP.

36. It was noted that the WPP takes a deterministic (scenario based) approach to projections of net international migration. UNPD confirmed that there is major uncertainty surrounding future levels of net international migration, which is not currently reflected in the WPP projections.

37. Figure 2 shows both the estimated levels of migration used in the WPP since 1950 and the future levels assumed for the WPP projections for each of the GCC member states. As the figure shows, there has been considerable volatility in international migration up until the current period (shown by the blue line). However, the WPP projections assume relatively constant net international migration in the future. UNPD explained that this approach is used, as future international migration lacks a theoretical basis comparable to the demographic transition theory that underlies the projections of fertility and life expectancy.

Figure 2 –International Migration in the WPP for GCC countries

38. UNPD also explained that the WPP calculates projections for nine different scenarios based on different demographic assumptions in relation to Fertility, Mortality and Migration:
    a. Low fertility
    b. Medium fertility
    c. High fertility
    d. Constant fertility,
    e. Instant replacement fertility,
    f. Momentum (assuming Instant replacement Fertility, Constant Mortality, and Zero International Migration – as of 2020-2025),
    g. Constant Mortality,
    h. No Change (Constant Fertility, Constant Mortality and constant International Migration)
    i. Zero Migration.

39. In reviewing the experiences of preparing population projections in GCC countries, the meeting noted a number of common themes, including:
    a. Most GCC countries produce Population projections, although some are not currently published. The UAE advised that they plan to produce projections by 2023
    b. Some countries update their demographic indicators as part of publishing projections (e.g. Saudi Arabia)
    c. GCC countries produce short/medium term projections (e.g. Saudi Arabia for 10 years, Oman until 2040, Qatar for the 2017-2042 period, Bahrain for 2019-2032 and Kuwait 2017-2030)
    d. Cohort-component methods are commonly used , with ratio and mathematical models also reported
    e. A wide range of data sources are used, including population registers, census data, demographic indictors and migration (especially for non-citizens)
    f. Different assumptions are used for citizen and non-citizen populations. Assumptions for citizens are only demographic, assuming that migration for citizens is zero. Assumptions for non-citizens are primarily economic.
    g. UN sources and reference manuals are used by GCC countries, including use of the WPP as a quality check

40. Among the specific examples highlighted by countries, were:
    a. Oman presented the different scenarios - three fertility scenarios (High, Medium and Low) for citizens and two scenarios regarding the composition of non-citizens in the population (Same as in 2017 – i.e. 44.5%, and Lower percentage (33%).
    b. Qatar outlined some of the detailed ways in which economic information was used in preparing both the projections for the labour force, and the non-citizen populations.
    c. Bahrain and Qatar explained how the country visions were important for preparing future scenarios, especially in the demand for international migration
    d. Saudi Arabia explained how a Mortality Statistics Committee (involving GaStat, Ministry of Health, hospitals) was working to improve the quality of Mortality data
    e. ESCWA explained that it had prepared projections for Kuwait. These had included different fertility assumptions for the citizen and non-citizen population

41. Participants agreed on the importance of having a range of measures of fertility and mortality. Countries were encouraged to collect alternative measures through surveys such as MICS, Demographic and Health Survey (DHS).

42. In reviewing differences between the WPP projections and those that were produced by member countries, it was noted that:
    a. GCC Countries have specific assumptions for migration, based in many cases on country development plans. However, as noted in para 36, there are major uncertainties around the Migration component in the WPP, due to lack of consistent international models on migration and limited migration data, including assumptions.
    b. Reflecting their population composition, GCC countries have specific fertility assumptions for the citizen and non-citizen populations. In following the standard international approach, UNPD usually only considers the total population.
    c. The WPP produces projections for the de facto population, while GCC countries produce projections for the usual resident population.

43. The meeting agreed that in order to help UNPD refine assumptions used in the WPP projections, it was useful for countries to share information, especially in relation to the treatment of Citizens and Non-citizens and economic models and frameworks for migration and labour force projections.

Going Forward

44. Recognising that the quality of data sources is a key factor in preparing population estimates and projections, the meeting noted a number of initiatives that are being implemented in the GCC, including:
    a. The Harmonised GCC 2020 Census
    b. GCC-Stat initiatives in working with member countries to improve Population sources
    c. Implementation of the outcomes of the Workshop on Principles and Recommendations for Vital Statistics System, Revision 3 for Arab speaking countries held in 2016

45. All countries recognised the importance of using data from multiple sources in preparation of both estimates and projections. Many countries reported on plans for using surveys in the validation of population estimates from the 2020 Census. Countries also emphasized the need to improve the range of country level metadata that is published.

46. Countries also reported on specific initiatives and planned improvements to enhance sources and methodologies, including:
    a. UAE plans to assess the data quality of deaths, focus more on migration statistics, continue work on census, but also build estimation system

b. Bahrain noted that the move of responsibility for Births and Deaths registration to the Information and EGovernment Authority (IGA) should help in improving estimates

c. Saudi Arabia will produce updated estimates after the 2020 Census

d. Oman will update projections following the 2020 Census

e. Qatar reported on work to improve vital statistics, including working with Ministry of Health to improve Mortality data

47. International and Regional agencies also reported on initiatives to improve methodologies and sources:

a. ESCWA reported on their involvement in a joint UN project, which will improve CRVS data, and also reported on work to improve refugee statistics across the ESCWA region.

b. UNSD noted that the Demographic Yearbook system has the capability to provide data received from countries once the validation is completed. Using this system, other organizations can easily access the data available in the UN Demographic Yearbook system without any additional effort and extra burden on countries. Data are available in record format as well as in tabular format. Data are available in record format at the UN Data Portal (http://data.un.org/Explorer.aspx) under the 'Demographic Statistics Database'; In addition to the dataset mentioned above, data on economic characteristics, household and housing characteristics from the population censuses questionnaires (as described in para 18) are available. All data can be downloaded using this platform. For example, population by age and sex are accessible at http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=POP&f=tableCode%3a22

c. UNSD aims to strengthen support for countries in collection, analysis and quality assessment.

d. UNSD will also seek to strengthen mechanisms for input from GCC countries into Population source data.

e. UNPD plans to prioritise and improve metadata published in the WPP and to develop visualizations that relate the WPP estimates of demographic indicators to empirical data sources, including the country data reported to the DYB. UNPD also plans to move from the current 5X5 framework (see para 19) to a 1X1 framework – i.e. producing single year age group data for single years.

f. UNPD is also developing a set of tools for demographic estimation using R. Projection tools in R, including bayesPop, bayesTFR and bayesLife, are already in the public domain.

48. In terms of enhancing cooperation between international and regional agencies, countries proposed GCC-Stat to provide data for GCC countries to UNSD and ESCWA. Proposed actions from international and regional agencies to enhance cooperation included:

a. ESCWA plans to use GCC-Stat data for GCC countries

b. UNSD will continue to strengthen cooperation with ESCWA and GCC-Stat

49. Concerning training, it was noted that some training on Estimates and Projections is available through AITRS. ESCWA is also willing to host workshops on Projections (when?).

50. GCC countries requested GCC-Stat to investigate specific regional training on R software, and separate training in R based Projection tools.

51. The attendees agreed that the meeting had provided a valuable opportunity to share and understand the assumptions and methodologies necessary to provide coherent and reliable population estimates and projections for GCC countries.

52. Attendees expressed their appreciation to GCC-Stat for organizing this type of technical meeting, and to the Sultanate of Oman as the country hosting the event.

Recommendations

53. The meeting agreed on a series of recommendations, which were submitted to the GCC Social and Population Statistics Standing Committee for consideration.

54. The following recommended actions for member states were made:
    a. Countries to continue to expand the range of published population statistics and demographic indicators, along with relevant metadata, in order to improve the range of population statistics about the GCC.
    b. Countries to provide the full range of population data and metadata, necessary for both UNSD and UNPD, through the UN Demographic Yearbook System
    c. Until the new GCC electronic system for the provision of statistical data (MARSA) is completed, countries to notify GCC-Stat when websites and/or portals have been updated with population statistics.
    d. In order to improve the quality of population estimates, countries to identify options for the collection of alternative measures of Fertility and Mortality, eg via DHS, MICS.
    e. Countries to share population projection methodologies with UNPD, especially in relation to the treatment of Citizens and Non-citizens for consideration in the future development of the WPP.
    f. Countries who have prepared labour force and migration projections based on economic models and frameworks to share the methodologies and analysis with UNPD

55. The following recommended actions for GCC-Stat were made:
    a. Establish a GCC Technical Working Group on Population Estimates and Projections, with the aim of improving the range and quality of population statistics in the GCC.
    b. GCC-Stat to work with UNSD and ECSCWA to identify how the current GCC-Stat databases and the electronic transmission system (MARSA) can be adapted to meet international and regional requirements for population data and metadata, and so reduce reporting load on countries.
    c. Provide standard guidelines to GCC countries on how to explain to users the differences between country and international population measures.
    d. In coordination with regional and international organizations, hold regional workshops on population projections and a regional workshop on the use of the R program in official statistics.

56. The following recommendations for ESCWA were made:
    a. ESCWA to institute mechanisms with UNSD and GCC-Stat, with regard to demographic data collection, in order to reduce reporting burden on countries.
    b. In the meantime, ESCWA to adopt electronic databases for receipt of data from member countries.

57. The following recommendations for UN Statistics Division were made:
    a. UNSD to institute mechanisms with ESCWA and GCC-Stat, with regard to demographic data collection, in order to reduce reporting burden on countries.

58. The following recommendation for UN Population Division was made:
    a. UNPD to investigate options to deal with specific country situations for estimates and projections.

GCC-Stat,

10 December 2019

Appendix 1 –Consultative Meeting Attendees

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