



## **Videoconference: "Measures taken by National Statistical Offices to address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic"**

March 26, 2020, via Webex

### Minutes – Summary of the meeting

The Statistics Division of ECLAC convened the National Statistics Offices (NSOs) from Caribbean to a videoconference to jointly assess the effects that the COVID-19 pandemic is having on the statistical operations of the countries. The following is a summary of the session.

#### **1. Presentation of STATCAN: Results of the questionnaire "COVID-19 and its impact on statistical operations in the region"<sup>1</sup>**

Susie Fortier disclosed the results of a questionnaire previously sent by the Statistics Division of ECLAC to the NSOs of the region (both Latin America and the Caribbean), through which it sought to know the effects it was generating the health emergency in the operation of statistical institutions.

The response was obtained from 20 countries, where all of them declared that they were in some type of health emergency due to COVID-19. As for the statistical operations most affected by the situation, the surveys ranked first, followed by records and censuses.

Regarding the household surveys, in most cases it was stated that the gathering of information would be postponed, with a foreseen reschedule during the current year in most of the processes. Among the main difficulties in collecting information are mobility restrictions and the closure of establishments.

In terms of collecting prices, most of the countries indicated having undertaken operations in March 2020, where a large part reached between 50% and 70% of the collection in the first half of the month. However, the majority estimates that for the second half of March the corresponding rise will be less than 50%.

Among the main difficulties that countries have experienced in collecting prices are mobility restrictions, followed by insufficient human resources and the closure of establishments.

#### **2. CARICOM**

Philomen Harrison briefly informed about the situation that the Caribbean countries are experiencing. She noted that they are working from their homes, since quarantines were decreed. In

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<sup>1</sup>See presentation in:

[https://rtc-cea.cepal.org/sites/default/files/rtc\\_connected/files/COVID\\_Debriefing\\_english2%20CEPAL.pdf](https://rtc-cea.cepal.org/sites/default/files/rtc_connected/files/COVID_Debriefing_english2%20CEPAL.pdf)



this situation, they are evaluating alternatives to carry out the information gathering, where one of the options is to apply online or telephone surveys.

### **3. Statistics Division of ECLAC: Economic statistics**

Federico Dorin summarized the meeting held on Wednesday, March 25, in relation to economic statistics. He briefly referred to the situation of the National Statistical Offices and the contingency plans that they are implementing to carry out their information surveys. He specified that there was a suspension of field work, carrying out the teleworking modality. Faced with this situation, online and telephone surveys are being carried out. Also, it is trying to maintain communication with users through web pages and social networks. On the other hand, in some cases the imputation of missing prices is being adopted to calculate the CPI for March.

He added that an ILO document was received regarding the calculation of the CPI in the context of COVID-19, which will be shared with the countries.

### **4. Statistics Division of ECLAC: Social statistics**

Xavier Mancero summarized the meeting held on Tuesday, March 24. He noted that they had a presentation from ILO, Chile and the Dominican Republic, regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on labor force surveys.

He specified that countries have changed the way of collecting information, trying to implement telephone surveys. This situation, however, has been challenging since this has not been a common modality for conducting surveys and telephone contact details are not always available. In this regard, he highlighted that some countries are making use of administrative records and censuses to obtain the missing information. Along with that, countries are considering a reduction in the number of questions on the questionnaires.

Other strategy is resuming the fieldwork after this special period is over, but visiting the missing sample from previous weeks or months.

### **5. World Bank**

William Vigil Oliver referred to the International Comparison Program (ICP) 2020. He noted that they are working with all ICP offices around the world to assess the situation of price collection, in terms of its feasibility and continuity. In this regard, he added that it can vary greatly depending on the region, where there will surely be more variation in Asia than in Africa.

They are comparing the information collected, and hope to send the information as soon as possible regarding how to proceed in this situation.

## 6. ILO

Kieran Walsh referred to a study carried out by the ILO last week, in which information was collected from 100 countries, in relation to labor force statistics.

He noted that the impacts and responses to the crisis vary by country, depending on the systems they have, the capacity and infrastructure, but all countries are facing great challenges, regardless of the level of capacity.

There are difficulties in maintaining the continuity and quality of the data, and trying to respond to the demands. Some patterns are observed, where the main problem for most is data collection and how to maintain field work. Those countries that were conducting face-to-face surveys have had to suspend or modify their operations, implementing online and telephone surveys. The challenges depend on the infrastructure of each country and the availability of contact details, but these details are not always available.

He noted that there are countries where the impact has been less; especially more developed countries or that are already using online and telephone surveys. In these cases, they have contact information. Regarding teleworking, he indicated that this modality has an impact in all stages of the statistical process.

Unemployment data will vary greatly in the context of the crisis, where it will be necessary to supplement some indicators with other elements. He stressed that they are working on the elaboration of a guide to solve these problems, and deliver it to the countries. In this sense, training for interviewers will also be necessary.

Along with that, he added that some countries are reducing the number of questions in their questionnaires, while others have chosen to increase the number of questions to analyze in depth the effects of COVID-19.

## 7. Participant interventions

In the comment space, reference was made to the concerns and difficulties that statistical offices have faced. Doubts were raised regarding how to proceed with the labor force survey in the event of not being able to produce the information. For its part, CARICOM stated that they are evaluating the possibility of suspending the labor force survey due to the great variation that will occur in the industry. For other countries, meanwhile, the current crisis is compounded by the constant lack of funds.

On the other hand, the opportunity that this crisis represents to obtain positive experiences, and to rethink legislation and the importance of entities and data, was also highlighted. STATCAN pointed out that they are evaluating their role as data producers, to move towards a more open entity. They are considering aspects that they have never done. They are exploring the use of web scraping and non-probability dashboards with volunteers. They have also added specific questions about the relationship between employment and unemployment.



## 8. Actions to take

The Statistics Division of ECLAC will create a group of experts to try to answer the questions. It will ask Canada for support.

The links of the meeting will be sent, along with the materials, through the Knowledge Transfer Network site (<https://rtc-cea.cepal.org/en/conectados-rtc/videoconference-measures-taken-national-statistical-offices-address-effects-covid-19>).