

# SUMMARY OF PARIS21 WEBINAR “ADDRESSING COVID-19: HOW ARE NATIONAL STATISTICAL OFFICES DOING?”

08 APRIL 2020

Moderator: Salma DAHIR (PARIS21)

Responding to the COVID-19 crisis requires strong NSOs and capacity development in this direction. In a [policy brief](#) published on 8 April, PARIS21 notes two effects derived from this crisis. One on data supply, where NSOs are struggling to maintain data collection as planned because operational processes are being postponed or placed on hold. On the other hand, the demand for data is on the rise as policymakers and data users are demanding more and more granular data relevant for responding to the crisis. The COVID-19 crisis has brought data to the centre of attention and it is pressing to accelerate innovation, think differently and foster peer-learning.

## 1. How has COVID-19 affected statistical activities and how are NSOs responding to it?

Main areas of NSOs' work that are affected by the COVID-19 crisis:

- **Operational area:** Countries face challenges collecting basic information using traditional face-to-face surveys and maintaining old calendars of publications. NSOs are exploring the use of telephone and online surveys, administrative data and data gathered using new techniques such as web scraping, in order to reduce face-to-face work. Moreover, NSO staff are working from home and for many institutions, this represents a huge challenge to cope with the pace of work and IT requirements. A remote working environment also implies working while undertaking other care responsibilities. There is a need for policies on teleworking and relevant guidelines.
- **Conceptual area:** Conceptual frameworks have to be adapted to address challenges related to new data collection methods, which might involve the use of new technologies, but also new data needs.
- **Responding to an increased data demand for highly disaggregated data:** NSOs are faced with growing demand for data to inform emergency responses to COVID-19, including to answer questions such as: how to support the government response (e.g. cash transfer system in Colombia) to protect the large informal workforce, which is on the front-line of COVID-19 impact? Whom to help first? What are the basic needs of families and their dwellings to fight with the pandemic?

Responses of NSOs – Examples:

- **National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) Colombia** (Mr. Juan Daniel Oviedo, DG) – crossing data from administrative records of the health sector and population data from census to show where the population is most in need and at a higher risk of the effects of the COVID-19 crisis. With this information, DANE has developed granular maps for authorities to show the level of risk of contagion for households in different areas (picture).

## What can the NSO leverage in times of crisis to still be responsive and relevant?

### DANE as Colombia's Data Steward

#### Street block level COVID-19 risk assessment map

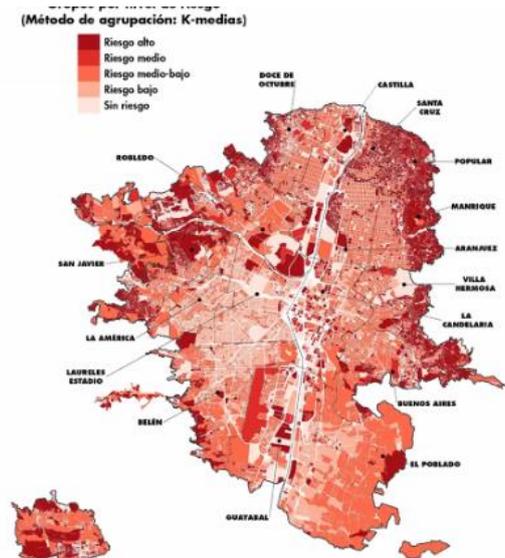
Assembling together information from:

##### Housing and Population Census (2018)

- Population aged 65 years or over
- Multigenerational households
- Housing overcrowding status

##### National Health System records:

- Population with pre-existing chronic pathologies



NSOs need to find new ways for collecting information differently and need to improve their strategic communication framework to inform citizens of the potential impacts of these changes in the quality of the data.

- **Maldives National Bureau of Statistics** (Ms. Shahuda Aishath, Chief Statistician) – despite the closing of all government agencies, the NBS is trying to pursue its current operations (CPI and quarterly NA) and include new data collection to address the COVID-19 impact on the country. The NBS is operating with limited IT resources (not all staff equipped with laptops, no cloud for exchanging data).
- **Lesotho Bureau of Statistics** (Ms. Malehloa Celina Molato, Director General) – all regular surveys have been affected and are currently on hold. New arrangements to collect data are being planned but implementation is challenging, as no updated database with contact-details (e.g. telephone numbers and emails) of informative units are available.
- **Office for National Statistics of the UK** (Emily Poskett, Head of International Development) – consolidated a task force on operations to adapt the ICT infrastructure to enable ONS staff working from home. The ONS is working on reshaping data collections by conducting telephone-based surveys online and it is conducting a new survey to obtain information on the response of citizens and business to COVID-19. Moreover, the analytical work is continuing. ONS launched a new webpage dedicated to the latest analysis of the impact of COVID-19 and it has a new publication with COVID-19 experimental indicators on the economy and society. For example, it is using shipping data to have a rapid measure on the impact of the crisis on international trade. The ONS has also set up a Data Science Campus team to scale up data collection and analysis on COVID-19 impact. Finally, the ONS has also invested in partnerships to implement peer learning (UNECA and three countries from Africa). The use of non-conventional data sources can help to cover the lack of information now, but traditional sources will be necessary for the future to inform potential biases.

## 2. What are the mid and long-term problems/effects?

- **Trust in data** – as highlighted by DANE, citizens are more aware of the need for quality data and demand data that reflect their reality. NSOs cannot work in isolation if they want to maintain the public's trust in their data. Building trust requires NSOs to establish new partnerships and transform their role into data stewards. One of the most important challenges now and after COVID-19 is that people need information that can be trusted and is relatable, so NSOs need to develop accountability and effectiveness to gain people's trust.

- **Coordination and new partnerships** – COVID-19 has enabled collaboration and coordination between the NSO and other government agencies. DANE stated that NSOs are able to access to data produced by other government entities which were not available before. Likewise, in Lesotho, responding to the COVID-19 crisis has enabled collaboration with line ministries and other relevant agencies to see if their data can complement survey data to minimize data collection in the field. The NSO has been working with the agencies to support them on how to collect, store and process data and metadata. They started with selected ministries but intend to scale up and cover all ministries that have relevant data.

Similarly, the NBS of Maldives is working closely with other government entities as well as UN agencies and other partners to conduct a rapid assessment of livelihoods. The intention is to address the impact of COVID-19 on tourism (largest industry), job security and foreign workers. The World Bank and UN Women are also collaborating with the NBS on rapid surveys addressing vulnerable populations. The access and use of administrative data has been key in this process, since the preparation of the main survey on labour (HIES) has been interrupted, the NBS is attempting to implement phone surveys (which implies reducing the size of previous surveys) and utilise geospatial data.

#### Q&A

- Colombia DANE – From the methodological perspective, using new methods (e.g. telephone surveys) implies biases. DANE is working with other agencies on how to correct for this in the future after COVID-19 while it helps to evaluate how fast the agency can innovate its data collection processes.
- Lesotho BS – Having telephone and email contact with all the units from where data is collected would have facilitated the data collection process. Namibia NSO participating in the webinar was eager to exchange on how Lesotho’s adjustments could be implemented in Namibia.
- Maldives NBS – COVID-19 might impact prioritisation of development areas related to the SDGs in the country, for example education and labour areas are being reprioritised now.
- Colombia DANE - Methodological changes play a crucial role in trust and NSOs have to be open and explain to their citizens and data users why changes were done and how.
- UK ONS – integration of administrative data and big data into official statistics might create potential disruptions. Communication of this and the potential implications is crucial for NSOs. UK is using different tools, such as webinars and articles, to explain how changes were applied. Transparency and communication are crucial to such efforts.

#### Final remarks

Johannes Jütting - Executive Head of PARIS21 - closed the webinar by underscoring that the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the importance of data and science for decision-making. The pandemic is accelerating existing trends on digitalization and new partnerships. However, different countries respond differently to new challenges based on their capacities. For some, it is harder to accelerate the innovation process (digital divide) and PARIS21 will continue its support to those countries and explore new ways to advance in this process together. In this context, South-South collaboration is very important.

Responding to NSOs’ priorities and needs derived from the COVID-19 crisis, PARIS21 has established a Rapid Action Task Force, which partners are invited to join, and has prepared a Policy Brief and a framework of the COVID-19 impact on NSOs. Furthermore, PARIS21 is working with OECD Digital Workspace, UNSD and WB to explore other innovative solutions for partner countries.