PROPOSAL: A HYBRID APPROACH TO THE USE OF POPULATION DATA FOR EDUCATION INDICATORS

Background

Estimates of the total population are required to compute a large range of indicators disseminated by UIS, particularly those derived from national administrative data and school census. The United Nations Population Division (UNPD) is the source for the large majority of this data. The rationale for using UNPD population data includes

- o Availability of an estimated data series that is regularly updated and running from 1950 with projections till 2100
- o High country coverage with data available for 235 countries and territories
- o Widely employed by other UN agencies and research bodies
- o Lack of quality population projection data that is reliable and consistent over time at national level

However, a number of countries have objected to the use of UNPD population data rather than national population data, particularly for indicators of participation rates in schooling. The objection is due to UNPD data is not as sensitive to the needs for single-year age estimates that education needs for accuracy.

For a number of cases recorded, this objection is expressed when national population figures from their national sources are in favor of progress over years in a number of education indicators. But, even at the national level where administrative data in education is collected by the ministries in charge for education, tensions exist between the figures of enrolment related indicators generated through households based surveys by the National statistical office. A given country may then face three figures (UN/UIS, NSO, MoE) on the same indicator, therefore adding confusion to education stakeholders.

In response to country requests, and after comparative analysis of national and UNPD sources, the UIS currently accepts national population estimates for a limited number of countries. These are detailed in table 1, alongside the source from which national population estimates are obtained.

Table 1: Countries for which UIS uses national population estimates due to inconsistencies with UNPD estimates based on country's request

Countries	Source of national population data	N
France; Ireland; Latvia; Liechtenstein; Lithuania and Serbia	Eurostat population database	6
Brazil; USA	National collected through UOE data collection	2
Dominican Republic; Moldova; San Marino; Singapore	National statistical offices submitting directly data to the UIS	4

Note: The list excludes Azerbaijan and Cyprus, for which national data are used since UNPD includes the population in disputed territories not under government control.

In addition to the fourteen countries in table 1, several countries have requested the UIS to use national population estimates in the last years. Nearly, all European countries prefer that the UIS uses national population data published by Eurostat rather than UNPD's, as made clear in recent OECD meetings. Population issues has been discussed in TCG7 and summarized in a presentation by OECD. Additionally, a comparative analysis between UNPD population estimates and national source vis-à-vis enrolment data was undertaken to see the accuracy of UNPD estimates by ESM (UIS). The analysis provides no clear-cut evidence regarding the accuracy of either of data sources.

From the analysis and the discussion with countries the UIS concludes that the use of national population estimates could give countries more confidence in the indicators produced by UIS and would be more consistent with national indicators values. However, availability of data by single age and age group face technical issues which can be sorted out with developing appropriate methodologies and techniques that are not always available to all countries.

Based on this context and the recurrent discussions and the fact that some countries are not vetting the publication of the education population-based indicators, the UIS is proposing the TCG8 a hybrid approach for the use of population data for the report of the indicators that attempts to balance quality considerations with country's ownership.

Decision points for TCG8

1. Change in the collection of population data
The proposal is to introduce the possibility for all countries to report population data. This could be done by adding a dedicated module (such as DEM in the case of OECD) where countries could report their national population estimates and/or expanding some of the UIS tools for data collection.
The adjustment in the data collection would ask countries to report population data required by the UIS to calculate the relevant indicators as well as the source of this data; in cases of non-response, the UNPD data would be used.

Advantages: increases government ownership over statistics; addresses a frequent grievance raised by countries during dialogue with UIS and values of indicators produced are more consistent with national indicator values.

Disadvantages: demands the recalculation of all the series according to the sources proposed and agreed with the country. The country should make a choice applicable for a long period (10 years as for the population census?). Alternatives based on needs (specific indicators are of specific interest of the national authorities) would need special rules and protocols.

Two additional decisions that could help to ensure transparency around the source of population data.

2. Require national population statistics to be sourced from national or, if the country wishes, regional publicly available data
Advantages: using publicly available sources would increase transparency because the projection methodology and data would be known and its credibility potentially would be subject to review by national or international experts.

Disadvantages: UNPD data would be used in cases where countries have national data sources but are not publicly available/not reliable due to absence of population census for long time (more than 15 years).

3. Prioritize Population estimates from NSO or the Bureau of Population Census in case there are multiple sources of population data in the country
Advantages: ensures that population data being reported has official endorsement to boost credibility.

Disadvantages: a potential issue could be the consistency with other SDG indicators if country continues using UNPD data for these other indicators. Regional and global averages will continue being calculated using UNPD data.