Data Integration Community of Practice: Evaluation

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Introduction

In 2018, the Committee on Statistics at its sixth Session supported a proposal by the Secretariat to form Communities of Practice to cover four integration dimensions – process, data, conceptual and disciplinary in support of Action Area C of the collective vision. It recommended taking a stepwise approach with the establishment of a Community of Practice on conceptual integration as a possible first step.[1] Later, the Bureau of the Committee on Statistics at its meeting on 11 December 2018, agreed data integration rather than conceptual integration should be considered as the immediate priority.

At its second meeting in July 2019, the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics, guided by the decision of the Committee on Statistics, discussed changing the modality of its working groups into Communities of Practice that: a) aim to facilitate sharing of knowledge and experience; b) strengthen coordination and follow-up mechanisms; c) provide cost-effective get-togethers by use of electronic forums; and d) facilitate South-South technical collaboration. The group also supported establishment of a pilot community of practice.

To support decisions made by the Committee on Statistics and the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics, the secretariat researched existing communities of practice, developed a design and implementation framework and established one pilot community of practice on data integration.

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[1] ESCAP. 2018. Committee on Statistics. Report of the Committee on Statistics on its sixth Session. https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/ESCAP_CST_2018_6_Report_of_the_Committee_on_Statistics_sixth_session.pdf

The Data Integration Community of Practice (DI-CoP) was launched as a pilot activity on 22 April 2020. The Terms of Reference, endorsed by the Bureau of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics on 15 May 2020, are provided at Annex 1.

Membership was voluntary and open to all Asia-Pacific countries. By early July, there were 119 community members; including representatives of agencies in National Statistical Systems, academic institutions, and international and regional organizations active in supporting statistical capacity building.

The objective of the DI-CoP was simple; to (a) provide a closed space for virtual collaboration, and a common location for sharing knowledge and experience; and (b) pilot online communities for the Asia-Pacific statistical community. As a newly formed group of experts, the community focused around the task of developing regional guidelines on data integration, based on those already developed for Europe through the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).[2]

The DI-CoP pilot involved testing the closed (i.e. login required) online platform created on Confluence, which included features for information sharing, managing a team calendar, asking questions and providing answers, and provided an editable version (wiki) of the draft regional guidelines. After an initial kick-off meeting on 23 April 2020, virtual meetings were held almost every week to further the work of the group by discussing the draft guidelines and examples of data integration shared by community members. Early July, the pilot Data Integration Community of Practice was evaluated in order to use the results to inform future decisions on applying such collaboration modalities as well as to improve the DI-CoP itself.

This evaluation was conducted by Jessica Gardner, the consultant supporting the DI-CoP pilot. It is based on information gathered from an online welcome survey (37 responses), an online evaluation survey (27 responses), eleven telephone interviews[3] and data from monitoring user activity throughout the pilot period.

This report provides an overview of the steps involved in piloting the DI-CoP, a summary of user activity between 22 April and 10 July 2020, evaluation findings and recommendations for the future of communities of practice in Asia and the Pacific. A report on the feedback and ratings gathered through the online evaluation survey is at Annex 2. Formal report of the secretariat on the establishment of Communities of Practice is submitted to the 7th session of the Committee on Statistics as an information paper[4].

Steps involved in piloting the Community of Practice

In December 2019, ESCAP engaged a consultant to work with them to pilot the Data Integration Community of Practice. As shown in Table 1, the pilot was first informed by analysis of existing approaches and a design and implementation framework that set out the purpose, likely challenges and suggested approach.

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[2] UNECE: Data integration. https://www.unece.org/stats/ces/in-depth-reviews/geospatial2.html
[3] Interviews were conducted with Aliimuamua Malaefono Taua and Leota Aliielua Salani (Samoa Bureau of Statistics), Shorena Tsiklauri (Georgia Statistics Office), Will Bell (Statistics New Zealand), Nilima Lal (Pacific Community), Jayachandran Vasudevan (UNICEF Asia and the Pacific), Jonathan Gessendorfer (UNSD), Petra Nahmias, Alick Nyasulu, Arman Bidarbakht Nia, and Afsaneh Yazdani (ESCAP Statistics Division). In two cases, connectivity did not work at the scheduled time and the feedback was provided by email (Will Bell and Aliimuamua Malaefono Taua).
[4] ESCAP/CST/2020/INF/2

Table 1: Steps involved in establishing and evaluating a pilot Data Integration Community of Practice

Task	Timeframe	Responsibility
1. **Analyse existing communities of practice and document lessons learned and recommendations**	December 2019 – January 2020	Jessica Gardner
2. **Prepare a Design and Implementation Framework for ESCAP Communities of Practice that provides the purpose, initial structure and recommended steps involved in piloting the DI-CoP**	March	Jessica Gardner
3. **Draft terms of reference for a Community of Practice to develop Asia-Pacific data integration guidelines**	March	Jessica Gardner and Afsaneh Yazdani
4. **Seek endorsement for the approach from the Bureau of the Committee on Statistics**	April and May	Gemma Van Halderen
5. **Identify and invite the Community of Practice core members (members of relevant regional steering groups and expert groups)**	Early April	Gemma Van Halderen and Afsaneh Yazdani
6. **Set up the Data Integration Community of Practice space, initial pages and create user accounts**	March-Early April	Jessica Gardner
7. **Email each member with their account asking them to log on and complete an initial survey**	Second half of April	Jessica Gardner
8. **Kick off meeting - Teleconference to welcome members and kick off the work**	23 April	Gemma Van Halderen

Task	Timeframe	Responsibility
9. Weekly meetings to progress the work	May-July	Afsaneh Yazdani and Alick Nyasulu (lead the meetings and coordinate the work) Panita Rattanakittiaporn (create user accounts and support the meetings) Jessica Gardner (create Confluence pages and monitor, document and evaluate the process, report to and participate in weekly meetings)
10. Email members with end line survey for the Community of Practice pilot	Early July	Jessica Gardner
11. In-depth interviews with stakeholders	Early July	Jessica Gardner
12. Draft evaluation report for the Committee on Statistics	July	Afsaneh Yazdani, Jessica Gardner, and Petra Nahmias
13. Draft evaluation report for the secretariat	Late July	Jessica Gardner and Afsaneh Yazdani

User activity during the pilot period

Confluence Platform

The DI-CoP Confluence Platform was set up with user accounts and ready for use from 22 April 2020. The site was structured around three types of activity:

1. **Contribute**: reviewing and contributing suggestions to draft the regional guidelines (12 wiki pages – one for each section of the guidelines);
2. **Share resources**: drag and drop/upload documents, presentations or adding links in the comments of the resources page; and
3. **Discuss (Q&A)**: a questions and answers feature with capacity to vote in best answers and earn points for contributing to any question or answer.

The platform also had a guide on 'How to use Confluence' customised for the DI-CoP members together with an instruction video, a space for meeting notes, recording and presentations, and a blog where news was posted about related events. A team calendar was on the home page and a polls feature was used for community members to vote (e.g. on whether the UNECE survey on national experiences with data integration should be repeated in the Asia-Pacific region). Polls were also used to encourage members to RSVP for the weekly meetings (33 people did so), to volunteer to work on the guidelines (12 people volunteered this way) or to give a presentation at the live meetings. Eighteen

people gave presentations although most were confirmed via email rather than through the form for volunteering on the Confluence space. Secretariat staff updated the list of presenters (Figure 1).

*Figure 1: List of presenters and topics for the regular live meetings*

Name	Topic of presentation	Preferred date
Ashutosh Ojha (Dr)	Comments on sections I-III	19 May
Gus Segura	Comments on the guidelines	19 May
Aliimuamua Malaefono Taua	Samoa experience	19 May
Sayed Mohammd Hosseini	Comments on section IV - Data Consideration	26 May
Bethany McKay	Brief Introduction to Stats NZ's Integrated Data Products	26 May
Ashkan Shabbak	Establishing Quality Framework in Statistical Center of Iran, Challenging with Register-based Statistics	2 June
Aycan ÖZEK	How We Integrate Data for Financial Accounts Statistics: Case of Central Bank of Turkey	2 June
Anna Lin	Introduction to Data Integration	9 June
Shorena Tsiklauri	Main sources and data Integration for demographic statistics in Georgia	9 June
Naira Mandalyan	Validation of Environmental Data	23 June
Joe McManamon	Assisting New Zealand's COVID-19 response with integrated data	30 June
Nurma Midayanti	Data Integration for Demographic Statistics: Experience from Indonesia	30 June
Aahlaad Musunuru	Mapping Land Cover Change 101: Land Accounting for Sustainable Development using Remote Sensing and GIS	7 July
Shiomi Yumi	Integrating geospatial and statistical information: from disaster risk reduction perspective	7 July
Nathaniel Matheson-Dunning	Use of administrative data in New Zealand's 2018 Census	14 July
Mohaddesseh Safakish	Record linkage experience and challenges at I.R. Iran population Register (NPD)	14 July
Giorgi Sanadze	Data sources for Agriculture and Environment Statistics in Georgia	21 July
Zahra Rezaei Ghahroodi	Machine Learning and Text Mining in Official Statistics	21 July

Figure 2: Screenshot of the home page of the DI-CoP Confluence site as at 13 July 2020
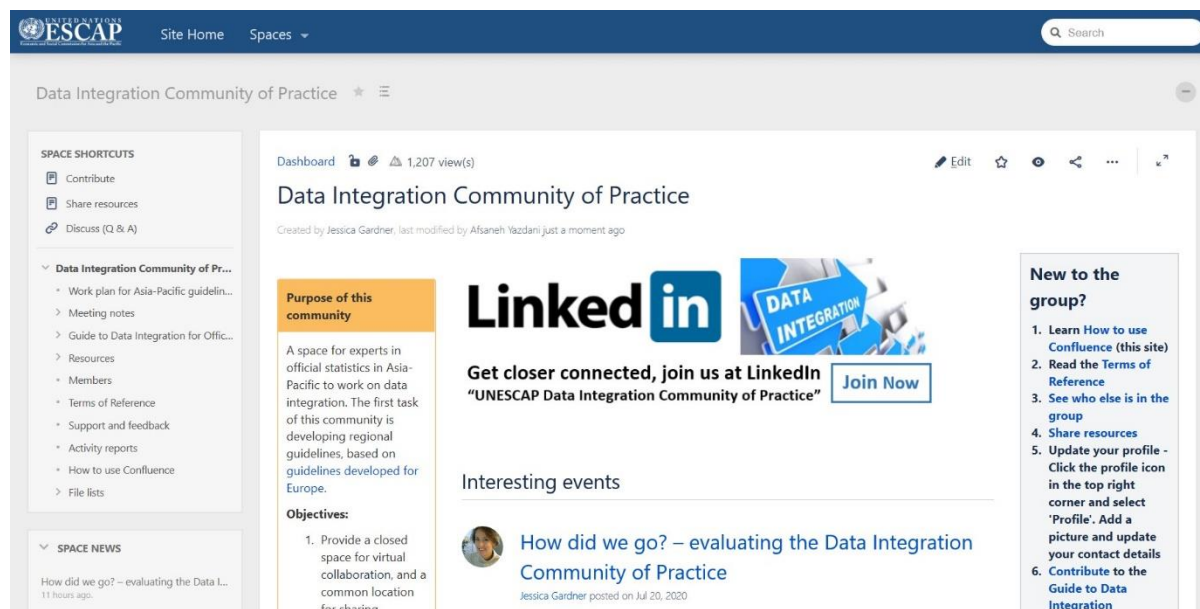
In the eleven weeks between 22 April and 7 July, the site was viewed almost 4,200 times (excluding site administrators); an average of 380 views each week. The blue line in Figure 3 below shows how views have fluctuated and how they are associated with the dates of the regular live meetings, with the yellow and green line representing number of editing and creating content, respectively.

Figure 3 – Number of page views
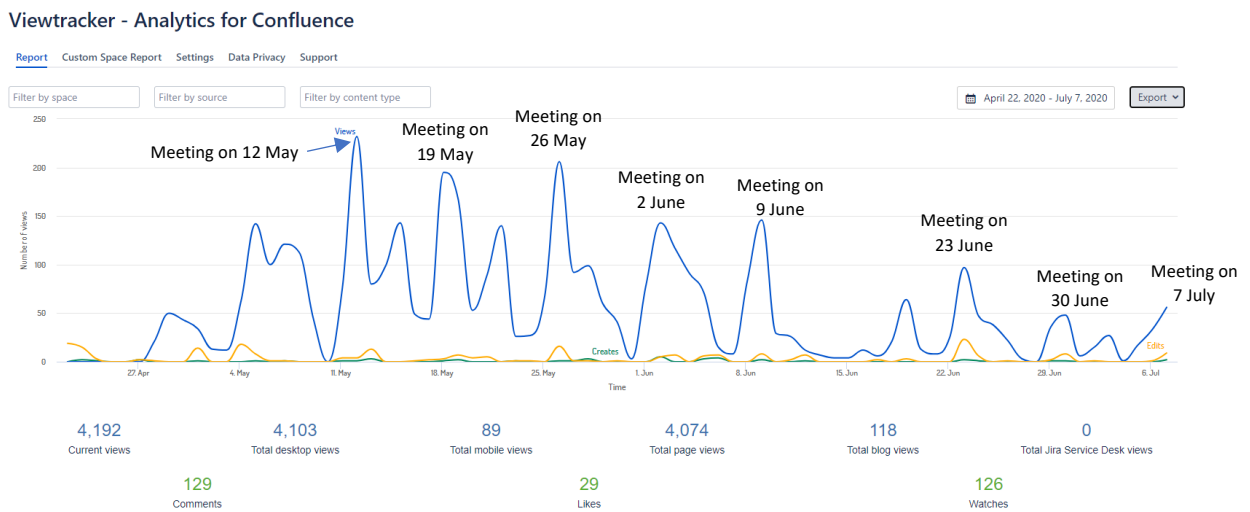
Number of active users

At the end of the evaluation period (7 July) there were 119 registered members of the community, representing 19 member states and associate members, and 10 regional and international bodies. Based on the evaluation survey results, for most (67%) the DI-CoP was their first experience using an online community of practice. By the end of the evaluation period, more than three quarters (78%) had successfully logged in to the Confluence platform and the remaining 22% had never attempted to login.

User engagement with the online community is measured through the different activities they could do. Almost one third (35 members; 29%) updated their user profile by adding a photo and/or updating their contact details. One in five (20%) community members (24 in total) left a comment on one or more of the pages in the site. Eleven members (9%) edited one or more of the pages directly and 10 members (8%) have asked and/or answered a question. Six community members added files to the Resources section. Overall, 48 of the community members (40%) have done one or more of the activities beyond simply logging in.

Figure 4: Number of the DI-CoP members by activity type, 7 July 2020
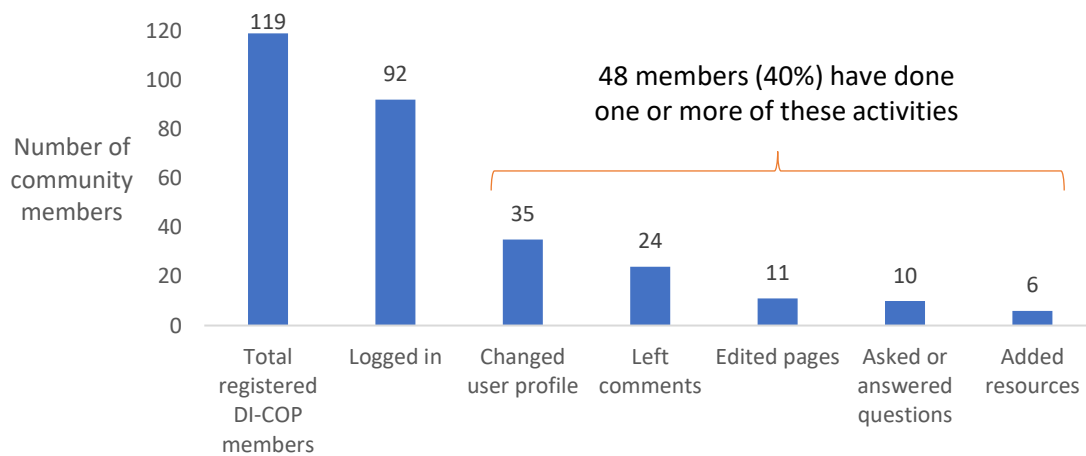
Inputs to the draft regional guidelines

The initial focus of the DI-CoP has been to review guidelines on data integration developed through UNECE and adapt them for the Asia-Pacific region. There has been a good amount of inputs gathered through the Confluence platform with a total of 116 comments added by 21 different community members. The comments have mainly been suggestions about how the guidelines might be expanded, where regional examples are needed, sections to be added or moved, as well as questions and suggestions where clarifications are needed. The table below provides a summary of the number of comments by section.

Table 2: Number of comments and commenters for each section of the draft guidelines

Guidelines section	Number of comments received	Number of community members who commented
Preface	1	1
Introduction	9	5
What is data integration?	26	7
Planning for data integration	10	3
Data considerations	25	8
Quality	0	0
Methods and tools	6	4
Annexes		
A. Integrating survey and administrative sources	12	4
B. Integrating new data sources (such as big data) and traditional sources	5	3
C. Integrating geospatial and statistical information	5	2
D. Validating official statistics	10	3

Note: some comments on Annexes B and C were made in the period 8-10 July but are included in this report to reflect the totality of inputs on the guidelines as at 13 July 2020.

Weekly Meetings

The DI-CoP was launched with a virtual 'kick-off' meeting held on 23 April 2020 and chaired by Gemma Van Halderen (Director, ESCAP Statistics Division). This attracted the most attendees of all the virtual meetings with 59 members participating.

In the weeks following, eight one-hour 'weekly' team meetings were held between 12 May and 7 July. The meetings were organized and chaired by the ESCAP secretariat and held virtually using Microsoft Teams. Each meeting featured a short update on the DI-CoP user activity, an overview of the section of the guidelines under review that week, and one or two presentations from community members on national and international experiences with data integration.[5] There was strong participation in these meetings with an average of 34 people joining each week. Overall, 78 (66%) of the 119 members attended at least one of these meetings (excluding the kick-off meetings) and an average of 3.5 meetings each member. The number of participants in each meeting and feature presentations given are summarised in Table 3 below.

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[5] Notes of the proceedings as well as a recording and copy of the presentation slides were published in the DI-CoP Confluence space (see Meeting notes).

Table 3: Overview of the content and attendance at the virtual DI-CoP meetings

Meeting date	Main presentations	Number of participants
12 May	- Afsaneh Yazdani (ESCAP) – Review objectives of the DI-CoP - Alick Nyasulu (ESCAP) – Work arrangements	38
19 May	- Afsaneh Yazdani (ESCAP) – Introduction to sections I, II and III of the guidelines - Insights from discussants: Gus Segura (New Zealand), and Ashutosh Ojha (India) - Aliimuamua Malaefono Taua (Samoa), Samoa's experience regarding data integration for migration statistics	30
26 May	- Afsaneh Yazdani (ESCAP) – Overview of section IV (Data Considerations) - Insights from discussants (continued from 19 May due to connection difficulties) – Sayed Mohammd Hosseini (Iran) - Bethany McKay (New Zealand) – Stats NZ Integrated data: An introduction to Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI) and Longitudinal Business Database (LBD)	31
2 June	- Alick Nyasulu (ESCAP) – Overview of section V (Quality) - Ashkan Shabbak (Iran) – Establishing Quality Framework in Statistical Centre of Iran, Challenging with Register-based Statistics - Aycan Ozek (Turkey) – How We Integrate Data for Financial Accounts Statistics: Case of Central Bank of Turkey	34
9 June	- Afsaneh Yazdani (ESCAP) – Overview of section VI (Methods and Tools) - Anna Lin (New Zealand) – Introduction to Data Integration, experience from Stats NZ - Shorena Tsiklauri – Main sources and data integration for demographic statistics in Georgia	43
23 June	- Afsaneh Yazdani (ESCAP) – Overview of Annex A and D (Integrating survey and administrative sources and validating official statistics) - Naira Mandalyan (Armenia) – Validation of Environmental Data at ArmStat	34
30 June	- Alick Nyasulu (ESCAP) – Overview of Annex B (Integrating new data sources and traditional sources) - Nurma Midayanti (Indonesia) – Data Integration for Demographic Statistics: Experience from Indonesia - Joe McManamon (New Zealand) - Assisting New Zealand's COVID-19 response with integrated data	37
7 July	- Afsaneh Yazdani (ESCAP) – Overview of Annex C (Integrating geospatial and statistical information) - Shiomi Yumi (Asia Disaster Reduction Center) – Integrating geospatial and statistical information from disaster risk reduction perspective - Aahlaad Musunuru (ESCAP) – Mapping Land Cover Change: Land accounting for sustainable development	25

Evaluation findings

"This is a very good community and a very good start. I don't think the interest in this group is going to go away."

The feedback gathered during the evaluation was extremely positive. Most respondents see the DI-CoP as a good model for regional collaboration and information sharing. Many would like more people to join the group, and commented how they enjoy the cooperation, the sharing of information and practices, and the overall learning aspect. For almost all respondents to the evaluation, the DI-CoP has exceeded their expectations.

Many see the informality of the group interactions as a positive, and an encourager to participation. The cost-effective nature of the platform/group was noted by many (no travel required to participate), as is the fact the online nature of the platform has worked well during the COVID-19 pandemic. The evaluation was appreciated as a good time to take the pulse of the community and think about how it could best evolve in future.

"Very good initiative to have this community, especially during this COVID-19 time when we can't travel. Useful modality for those areas where we need to make progress, like data integration. It is also good to have a discussion like this (evaluation) before we move forward too far in the project so we can lift it to another level."

The DI-CoP is generally seen as a complement to existing modalities more than a replacement. It is considered a good method to work together in between face-to-face meetings and to progress things faster. Several respondents commented on the approach being an effective way to engage more of the right people working on the issues at national level, whereas attendance at face to face meetings is limited and attendance influenced by other factors.

"Solid mandates and a clear purpose help drive people to work on things. It doesn't replace other modalities but can help continue the work when not meeting."

"We're now reaching a lot more of the right people and they really want and need the support. They're very interested in learning from other countries and share experiences."

It was noted that the ESCAP secretariat has been working hard to encourage participation and manage the group. Respondents involved in this discussed the considerable efforts it took to get members engaged, and to conduct presentations, etc. Some observed that work involved in managing online communities could be transferred from the time usually spent in other forms of project management and coordination, such as face-to-face meetings and workshops.

"It has been challenging to bring people into the community and encourage members to be involved."

Confluence Platform

Several respondents expressed a lack of enthusiasm for the Confluence platform, and difficulties in the navigation of the platform were discussed, suggesting it be made easier and more intuitive. Some respondents clearly had difficulties in finding their way to what parts of the site they wanted to access. Some were confused about if they can and should edit the pages directly or what they were meant to do.

"We use Microsoft Teams at Stats NZ, so the Confluence platform is another tool that we have to actively remember to go to, rather than being an integrated part of our systems. That's okay, it does just mean that the DI-CoP is "extra" rather than feeling like a core part of our work."

"If people want to have the discussion, they have to find how to get to the page but it should be the first thing that people see so they realise that this space is more for discussion."

Suggestions to improve the site included highlighting trending topics so the platform can better act as a knowledge base, with easy access for users to find/participate in topics that interest them. Transposing online discussions for access post-meeting to create an archive of discussions/topics was suggested, and then creating links to topics to limit time-wastage of users looking for certain information. It was suggested that automated emails to participants regarding important additions to the site would draw them back regularly, increasing the familiarity. Although one respondent commented that the frequency of current email notifications had been off putting.

Weekly Meetings

"Loved the recordings of the weekly meetings. They were really helpful. Really liked the format of the meetings. Nice way to engage with people. Meetings were a continuous reminder of the existence of the community and platform."

Respondents were positive about the weekly meetings, but many suggested the frequency needed to be pushed out to fortnightly, or even every three to four weeks. If less frequent, the meetings could be slightly longer. It was noted by one respondent that if the meetings were to be kept only one hour in length, presentations should be limited to one, to allow more time for discussion. Another suggestion was the rotation of the chair/hosting of the meetings by country and/or dividing into sub-groups based on different topics.

"Frequency is too much. We are not getting enough time to reflect on this too regularly."

Further to this, one respondent suggested *"to be sustainable, we need some part of the regular meeting to be assigned to discussing the decision points. In the future it may be more of a project management meeting than sharing information."*

Given the difference in time zones across the members' respective locations, the actual time of day of the regular meetings proved a challenge for some respondents.

"I haven't looked at all the different time zones covered by the DI-CoP countries, but most meetings tend to happen after hours in the evening NZ time. I don't know if there's scope to move these times around a bit from time to time."

"Major challenge is the time difference."

Other ideas for improvement and evolving the DI-CoP in the future

"Have to capitalise on the momentum created – people will drop it if things become business as usual."

Several respondents discussed the gathering of areas/topics of interest across the group members (by suggestions, voting etc.) to then using the popular topics as the focus of meetings. One suggested that the group of members is large, and it may be better to have small thematic groups coming together on topics. Another suggested to keep extending to different topics to continue to evolve and encourage others to join and use the platform.

Members want to see the community to continue to be clear on its purpose and specific tasks. As the guidelines are near to being finalised the next steps need to be confirmed. The community should continue to evolve and go into deeper discussion of some issues. It was suggested that the community look at ways to gather views, analyse and encourage more discussion.

> *"We are not spending enough time to go through and discuss the issues."*

It is clear that the respondents see plenty of potential for the DI-CoP, but that the group will need to keep up regular mutually beneficial interactions for the group to continue in the future. Many commented on the benefits of cooperation and information exchange, and the learning this can bring. This being especially true for some of the countries that are not as developed in data integration as others.

> *"The online platform is important to share information and all contribute. Different countries have different levels of development."*

> *"New Zealand is quite advanced in our data integration practices, so we seem to have more of an information sharing role, which I think is working well. We're not actually involved in any similar, international groups, but we do often get requests for information on our IDI and LBD from overseas. This group could serve as a more direct and possibly informal channel for some of these queries to be addressed."*

Some suggested the importance of working together on real-life ongoing data integration activities and discussing case studies involving successful adoptions of data integration.

> *"One way to keep it alive is to associate it with an activity we are doing regarding data integration."*

> *"The community should discuss how data integration initiatives achieve savings– haven't seen this kind of analysis – UNICEF, ESCAP and other partners could support work on this."*

> *"Anything related to regional work on data integration should be implemented through this community."*

> *"There are some relevant projects the Statistics Division are working on - big data, admin data, statistical business registers. One or more of these projects can be implemented through the Di-CoP and members can be pilot countries. New projects – develop a plan and ask for countries to work on it collectively."*

Several respondents discussed their interest in individuals/countries that are experts in data integration to take leadership in meetings about topics related to their expertise. In addition, one respondent suggested they would like more discussions on the technical aspects of data integration.

> *"Nice to get country representatives to lead the discussion on some issues. Important in the beginning to create a culture of people actually discussing things. The likelihood of continuing*

things without the same amount of effort would be higher. Getting to that culture of active participation, it could be sustainable."

"Looks like we are missing discussion on the technological aspects of data integration – more about the theories, how easy, how difficult, how are technology advancements and artificial intelligence going to help us in the future. Suggest bringing in experts working on the technology side."

Respondents stressed the need to give greater control to members, to empower them as part of the group for the ongoing success of the project. Encouraging more participants, more countries to become engaged in the DI-CoP was also raised. Trying different methods to reach those who are likely to benefit from participation but may not have been made aware of the DI-CoP.

"Have another try to get more people engaged. Email the NSOs, not the members of the regional groups."

One respondent suggested a guide to 'meeting etiquette' be sent to participants so they know to mute microphones and turn off cameras. Also keep emails to a minimum and remind people not to generically 'reply to all' reducing emails going out to participants that may not need to see them.

The following comments were made by other respondents as suggestions of overall improvements that could be made:

"This is not just a forum but a platform for implementation. Change our mindset about what a community of practice is. At a management level it should be a platform for implementation not a forum for discussion."

"We should stress the informality of the community. A meeting of friends and colleagues. You can share your thoughts and ask whatever question you have. We can use this to create a collegial environment that will help have even more effective face to face meetings and workshops."

Recommendations

The feedback from community members has been overwhelmingly positive. Many see the community as a convenient and innovative complement to expert groups. Some highlighted that it has been vital for collaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many reflected that the community has been a useful way to come together and share ideas and provides an active and effective learning environment. All stakeholders interviewed emphasised that they want to see the community continue in the future and that it provides a cost-saving and environmentally friendly alternative to physical meetings. The evaluation found that the Community of Practice:

a) can be applied as a modality of collaboration to support task groups holding purpose, mandates and/or high enthusiasm which ensures satisfactory engagement of members
b) should have a clear purpose aligned to a particular project or output rather than solely a platform for the exchange of information
c) can provide cost-effective get-togethers and strengthen connections among national, regional and international experts in a specific area
d) provides a cost-effective opportunity to share knowledge and experience and learn from each other at the regional level

e) does not fully replace but complements conventional ways of communication and collaboration, such as emails and face to face meetings

f) shifts secretariat staff time allocated to administrative activities related to face-to-face meetings to activities related to reaching out to members and keeping them involved.

g) focusing on a specific area of expertise, as the pilot Data Integration Community of Practice, is likely to attract technical staff and fewer in high-level management positions.

Members want to see the momentum generated and lessons learned to date used to make improvements and support the sustainability of the community. The feedback suggests the next priorities should be to:

1. Identify a clear task(s) for the community to work on beyond the regional guidelines
2. Invite more participation in the community through networks in national statistical offices/systems, academia, and partner organizations.
3. Review the suggested topics and areas of interest that surfaced during this evaluation and ask community members to vote to establish clear priorities for information sharing.
4. Reconsider the use of Confluence as the most effective online platform and determine if there are any other feasible and cost-effective alternatives (Microsoft Teams, etc.).
5. Review the design of the Confluence platform to make topics the most prominent feature of the site and that all content (meeting notes, etc) can be catalogued by topic.
6. Reduce the frequency of regular meetings to every two or three weeks and consider lengthening the duration to 1.5 hours.
7. Consider shifting the time of meetings to be more suited to colleagues in the Pacific region or at least alternating the start time to sometimes be earlier so their involvement does not always need to be after office hours.
8. Invite countries and/or partner organizations to host some of the meetings and contribute the feature presentation(s).
9. Invite guest presenters from outside the community to speak on relevant initiatives in data integration.

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Annex 1: Terms of Reference
Asia and the Pacific Data Integration Community of Practice

Terms of Reference
Endorsed by the Bureau of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics on 15 May 2020

Background

1.   ESCAP provides the Asia-Pacific statistical community with opportunities to meet and exchange ideas, and to develop standards and good practices across all fields of official statistics. In 2016, the ESCAP Committee on Statistics endorsed a collective vision and framework for action by the Asia-Pacific statistical community[6] that "*… by 2030, national statistical systems are enabled and empowered to lead development of and to deliver innovative, trusted and timely products and services for urgently needed and evolving statistical requirements of Agenda 2030.*" The five agreed action areas are Action A: Engaging users and investing in statistics; Action B: Assuring quality and instilling trust in statistics; Action C: Integrated statistics for integrated analysis; Action D: Modernizing statistical business processes; and Action E: Having requisite skills set.

2.   In 2018, the Committee on Statistics at its sixth Session supported a proposal by the secretariat to form Communities of Practice to cover the four integration dimensions (including process, data, conceptual and disciplinary integration) under Action Area C. It recommended taking a stepwise approach with the establishment of a Community of Practice on conceptual integration as a possible first step.[7] Later, the Bureau of the Committee on Statistics in its meeting on 11 December 2018, agreed data integration rather than conceptual integration should be considered as the immediate priority.

3.   In the meantime, the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics, which was established in 2017 to oversee the implementation of the Regional Strategy to Improve Population and Social Statistics in Asia and the Pacific,[8] at its second meeting in 2019, guided by the decision of the Committee on Statistics, discussed changing the modality of its working groups into Communities of Practice.[9]

4.   Research was conducted in late 2019 and early 2020 on existing Communities of Practice to inform development of a design and implementation framework for an initial Community of Practice in Asia-Pacific on data integration.

5.   The following terms of reference have been developed to guide establishment and piloting of the data integration Community of Practice during March – June 2020. Drafting data integration guidelines is the priority activity identified for the Community with the piloting of a suitable online environment a by-product.

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[6] See E/ESCAP/CST(5)/1/REV.1
[7] See ESCAP/CST/2018/6
[8] See E/ESCAP/CST(5)/3
[9] See ESCAP/CST/2020/INF/5

Purpose

6.   Generically, Communities of Practice are established as an online space for sharing of knowledge and experience, technical collaboration and learning. It is not a forum for decision making and/or financial collaboration. Communities of Practice:

   a) aim to facilitate sharing of knowledge and experience;
   b) strengthen coordination and follow-up mechanisms;
   c) provide cost-effective get-togethers by use of electronic forums;
   d) facilitate South-South technical collaboration.

7.   The Data Integration Community of Practice will be used to further work in Asia-Pacific on data integration. It will be the platform to bring experts in the statistical community to develop generic guidelines on data integration relevant to the Asia-Pacific region, building on existing guidelines developed for Europe through the Conference of European Statisticians (of which many Asia-Pacific countries are also a member).

8.   Once the Asia-Pacific guidelines are developed, they will provide the basis for developing a training course on data integration, which can be a second product of the Community of Practice should it prove successful. The future establishment of other Communities of Practice will be informed by the lessons learned from this pilot exercise.

Objectives

9.   Objectives of the Data Integration Community of Practice includes:

   a. provide a closed space for virtual meetings and collaboration between members of a Data Integration Community of Practice and a common location for sharing information and documenting the work of the group; and

   b. piloting and evaluating the approach of online Communities of Practice and their effectiveness for the Asia-Pacific statistical community.

Task and timelines

10.   The Data Integration Community of Practice is tasked with drafting generic guidelines on data integration for submission to relevant regional mechanisms, including the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics, Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, and Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific and eventual publication as a product to be endorsed by the ESCAP Committee on Statistics.

11.   The Data Integration Community of Practice will exist for the duration of 2020 with critical review points in August 2020 following evaluation of the initial pilot and at the end of the 2020 calendar year.

Roles and responsibilities

12.   Members will be representatives of National Statistical Offices and lead

agencies in the National Statistical System, international and regional organizations active in supporting statistical capacity building and relevant NGOs. Membership should be voluntary and open to all Asia-Pacific countries. There is also a possibility for members to nominate other individuals with relevant expertise.

13. Roles will be allocated to the Data Integration Community of Practice members and ESCAP Statistics Division staff as the secretariat to encourage meaningful participation and ensure it has the best chance of success.

Role	Responsibilities
Leaders	High-level decision makers and influencers in the Asia-Pacific statistical community who can show active support to the Community of Practice which may include:
	a) championing the Community of Practice among Asia-Pacific countries and development partners, who will in turn encourage, recognise and support their staff to participate and contribute to the Community
	b) providing strategic direction and identifying opportunities for the Community of Practice
	c) advocating for the Community of Practice model as a valuable mode of communication and collaboration
	d) providing suggestions and advice to enhance Communities of Practice and increase their effectiveness.
Facilitators	Individuals tasked with facilitating work via the Community of Practice. Their responsibilities include:
	a) initiating meetings and communication between Community of Practice members.
	b) developing and adding content to the online space.
	c) encouraging communication and collaboration within the Community of Practice.

Role	Responsibilities
Moderators	There will be one or more moderator who should be a member of relevant regional mechanisms and to the extent possible, a country not a development partner. Their responsibilities include: a) support members to promote the Community of Practice to other interested parties through electronic communication channels. b) participate in the Community of Practice activities, as appropriate. c) providing suggestions and advice to the ESCAP Statistics Division as the secretariat to enhance Communities of Practice and increase their effectiveness.
Members	Practitioners from the Asia-Pacific statistical community who have expertise in the areas being discussed and will actively contribute to the purpose and objectives of the Community. An account will be set up by the ESCAP Statistics Division as the secretariat to give access to the Community of Practice and members will need to log in to interact in the online space.

Code of Conduct

14. Communication and work through the online Community of Practice must adhere to the following rules:

a) All communication will be respectful and that under no circumstances will personal or professional attacks be tolerated.

b) Privacy and confidentiality to be maintained within the Community to encourage free and open discussion.

c) Members are responsible for ensuring that the information they share or discuss is accurate, and not confidential.

d) Views expressed are to be respected as those of individual members and not to be attributed to the group as a whole until the work reaches a point ready for review and publication and members endorse the collective contributions as representing the product of the group.

e) All members should be encouraged to contribute, and an environment should be maintained that supports contributions from all participants.

f) The default operating language of the Community is English. This is not

the mother tongue of many members and a respectful environment that allows these members to contribute fully should be maintained.

g) Using the Community of Practice for unsolicited or unauthorized advertising, promotional materials, "junk mail," "spam," "chain letters," "pyramid schemes," or any other form of solicitation is prohibited.

h) Members must not solicit anyone to buy or sell products.

i) No donations of any kind.

j) If a Member is found to be in breach of the Code of Conduct, they will be warned and/or removed from the Community of Practice.

Anticipated benefits of the Community of Practice

15. The Data Integration Community of Practice will:

a) provide a basis for building a knowledge management system for official statistics in Asia and the Pacific,

b) shift working group communication from email – where information is only available to the sender and recipient of the email – to a common space that provides a record of interaction and a place where every group member can contribute,

c) improve the functionality of working groups, enhancing coordination, streamlining information sharing, and making their work more efficient,

d) increase the transparency and cohesiveness of work done by the Asia-Pacific statistical community and its shared vision and work methods,

e) provide a private space for sharing and working together that is appropriate for early discussions and product development, which, being closed, will be easier for the ESCAP Statistics Division as the secretariat to manage,

f) allow publication ready content to be moved across to the public domain when appropriate at the click of a button, allowing a combination of closed and open webpages,

g) allow participants see the shared history of group work making it easier to welcome new members and manage turnover in expert working groups.

Evaluation

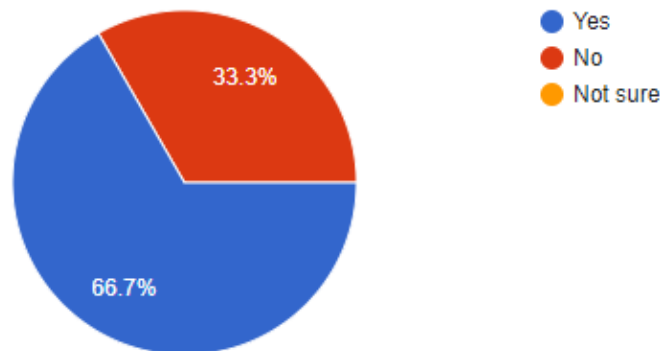16. The pilot exercise will be evaluated based on information gathered throughout the process:

a) Participants in the Data Integration Community of Practice will be asked to complete a short survey on their experience and expectations at the beginning and again at the end of the pilot exercise. This will provide baseline and endpoint data to assess their perceptions of the success of the exercise.

b) The process, lessons learned, and recommendations will be documented by the lead consultant throughout the pilot exercise.

c) In-depth interviews with key stakeholders and members of the Data Integration Community of Practice to evaluate the challenges and benefits of the modality and develop recommendations for the future.

_____

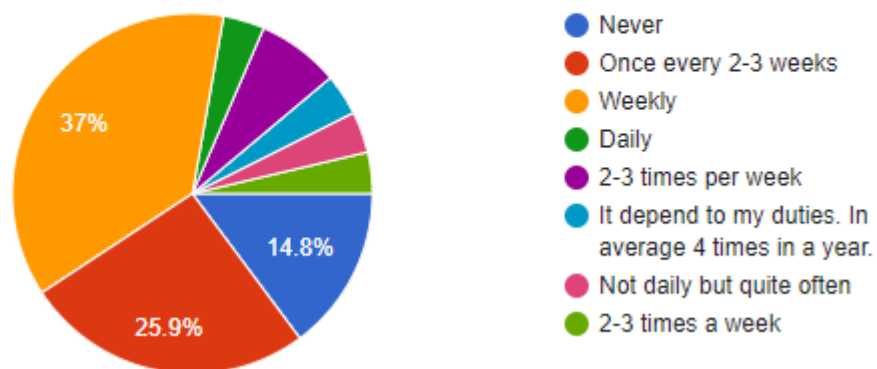# Annex 2: Results on the online evaluation survey for the DI-CoP

1. Was this your first experience using an online community of practice?

27 responses

- ● Yes
- ● No
- ● Not sure

33.3%

66.7%

2. How often did you use the Data Integration Community of Practice?

27 responses

- ● Never
- ● Once every 2-3 weeks
- ● Weekly
- ● Daily
- ● 2-3 times per week
- ● It depend to my duties. In average 4 times in a year.
- ● Not daily but quite often
- ● 2-3 times a week

37%

14.8%

25.9%

3. What are your views on using an online Community of Practice as a method for collaboration, either to replace or complement expert groups?
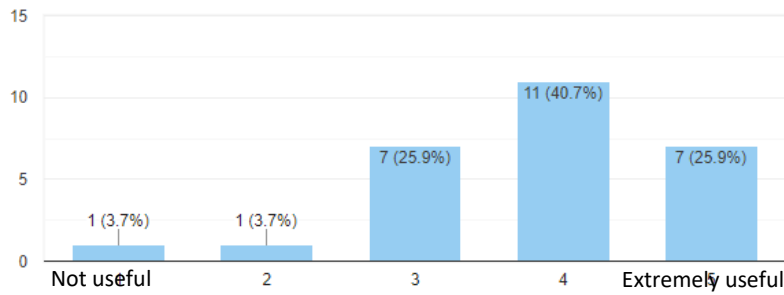**20 responses**

(note: this question seemed difficult to answer, many did not actually answer the question per se, more so give their feedback on the online platform/system)

Summation: many see this as a good/convenient/innovative complement to expert groups, a small number suggesting it is necessary option for collaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic. In an online sense, one participant noted the challenges in differing levels of ICT infrastructure, internet reliability, and capacity across the group. Many discussed it being a useful way of collaborating and sharing ideas, and it being a highly social learning environment. Some discussed participants be categorised into small groups according to their specific experience. One respondent replied with a one-word answer: negative (they were the only respondent with a completely negative response).

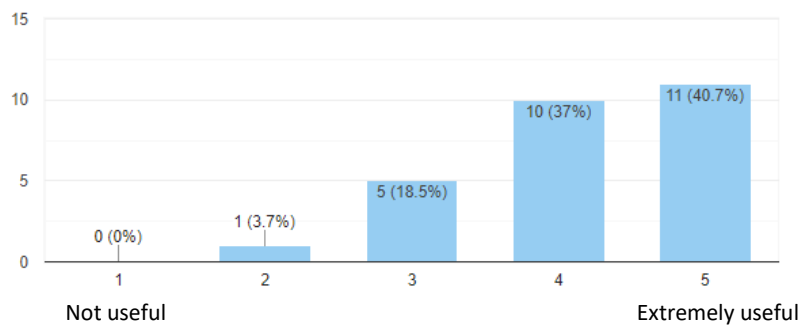# 4. Please rate each component of the Data Integration Community of Practice

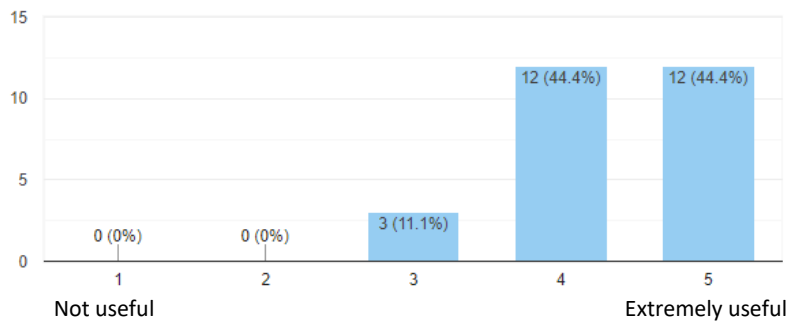## 4.(a) As a tool to develop regional guidelines on data integration

27 responses

Bar chart showing:
- Not useful (1): 1 (3.7%)
- 2: 1 (3.7%)
- 3: 7 (25.9%)
- 4: 11 (40.7%)
- Extremely useful (5): 7 (25.9%)

4.(b) As a tool for asking questions and discussing issues

27 responses

Bar chart showing:
- 1 (Not useful): 0 (0%)
- 2: 1 (3.7%)
- 3: 5 (18.5%)
- 4: 10 (37%)
- 5 (Extremely useful): 11 (40.7%)

4.(c) As a tool for sharing resources

27 responses

Bar chart showing:
- 1 (Not useful): 0 (0%)
- 2: 0 (0%)
- 3: 3 (11.1%)
- 4: 12 (44.4%)
- 5 (Extremely useful): 12 (44.4%)

4.(d) Weekly meetings to showcase and discuss examples of data integration

27 responses

Bar chart showing:
- 1 (Not useful): 1 (3.7%)
- 2: 1 (3.7%)
- 3: 4 (14.8%)
- 4: 12 (44.4%)
- 5 (Extremely useful): 9 (33.3%)
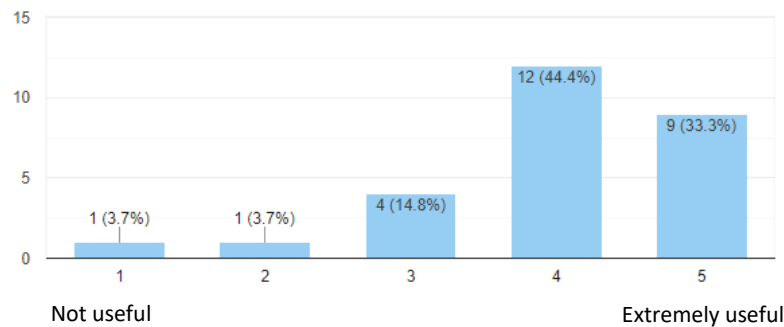
5. What have you liked about the Data Integration Community of Practice?
23 responses

Interesting presentations, interesting discussions, the frequent exchange of views on a weekly basis, being able to meet more often, the collaboration/sharing of information/resources across countries, the ability to participate, the increased frequency of communications amongst international peers, being an easy way to ask questions with quick and reliable responses, that the weekly meetings helped keep participants engaged, that the platform was easily accessed from anywhere anytime, the learning from peers, loved listening to people sharing lessons and experiences from doing this integration work so we can improve our own similar work, and that it is a better/more cost-saving alternative to physical meetings and the fact that more people can participate.

6. How could the Data Integration Community of Practice be improved?
20 responses

It was noted by several respondents that the levels of familiarity with the subject are diverse. Encouraging members to share their views and feedback more, even subtle examples of data integration and smaller concerns/ideas, encouraging greater 'casual' conversations. One responded that 'bi-weekly call can improve efficiency' another suggested 'weekly meetings are too much'. Discussing more country-specific and practical case studies/experiences. Three respondents gave negative feedback regarding the lack of flow and intuitiveness of the Confluence platform. More than one respondent discussed the time needed to participate in was too much for their own busy work schedules, one mentioned the time differences meant they needed to work far longer days in order to participate.

> *"I didn't find the platform very intuitive to use. I also think there was too much expectation for us to put in large amounts of time into this. Unfortunately (especially due to COVID) this was a really busy time for our team, so I didn't have much time to log in and engage with the community very often."*

One also suggested the following:

> *"I think that it would have useful for people to have been told upfront what volunteering for a section of the guidelines would involve. There could have also been an option to volunteer for different levels of cooperation (i.e. presenting on a section, involved in discussion group or just able to provide comments and feedback etc). I think more people would have volunteered if this was the case."*

7. What could have made you get more involved?
18 responses

Several respondents suggested the time pressures of their work being a barrier to greater involvement, one suggested the Q/A section is practically reserved for too general and major questions, and that 'minor subjects would have made it more interesting', some may have enjoyed greater involvement with topics aligned more to their specific roles/responsibilities, and the 'opportunity to join a discussion group with all people that made comments and others interested in each section would have been good.'

> *"The weekly meetings could have also been a chance to have proper discussions about each section - people could have been asked prior to the meeting to have a look at Section X and come along with their comments/questions to discuss so that everyone who attends is better prepared."*

> *"Form groups of less than five people with one task and common expertise and interest to work together. Facebook style crowding may not be the best way forward to develop useful outputs."*

8. Did the Data Integration Community of Practice meet your expectations?

27 responses

Below my expectations — Exceeded my expectations
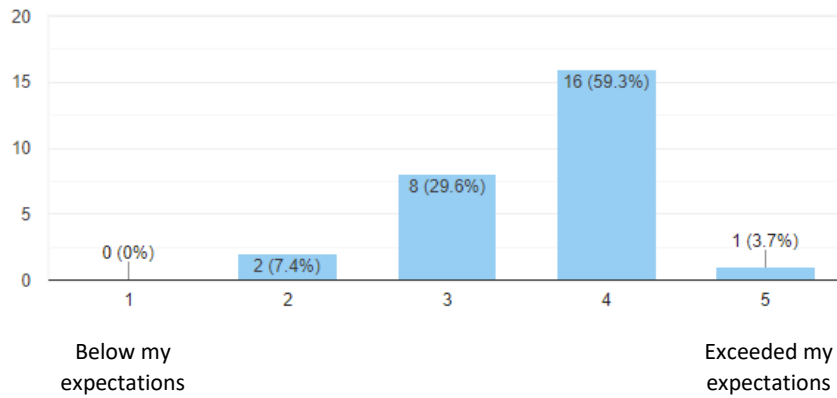
9. Any additional comments or questions?
16 responses

More experiences (examples?) from developed countries and international agencies, a general appreciation from more than one respondent being involved and the opportunities/cooperation it has presented, one suggested not many people provided feedback and that they are unsure how to improve that, one hopes the experiences in this community results in similar communities of practice for other aspects of CRVSID, and another believes the time differences between countries is an obstacle to join the community in the future.