Data sources for calculating the scale of assessments

Note prepared by the Statistics Division, DESA, United Nations, June 2023

I.   Introduction

1.   The Statistics Division collects data on national accounts statistics, external debt, population and exchange rates, which are required in order to calculate the scale of assessments for the contributions of Member States to the regular budget of the United Nations. The present note provides an overview of the sources of the data and related information that are used for calculating the scale of assessments according to the methodology applied for the 2022–2024 scale.

II.   National accounts data

2.   The estimates of annual national accounts data are obtained primarily from United Nations national accounts questionnaires submitted by individual countries to the Statistics Division. The questionnaire is sent annually to the national statistical offices and/or institutions responsible for the dissemination of national accounts statistics. For Member States that do not reply or that reply only partially to the questionnaire, estimates are prepared by the Division to fill data gaps in order to complete the data set for each of the years required for the calculation of the relevant scale of assessments. Those estimates are based on information available from other official sources, notably the publications of Member States, regional commissions, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. In some cases, it is also necessary to include estimates prepared by the Division.

3.   The Statistics Division disseminates the national accounts data in two separate databases. The official data submitted by Member States in their national currencies are disseminated in the National Accounts Statistics: Main Aggregates and Detailed Tables database.[1] The data updated to the most recent year, including the estimated values, in national currencies and United States dollars, are disseminated in the National Accounts Main Aggregates database.[2] The data in national currencies from that database are used in the scale calculations.

III.   Population estimates

4.   Midyear estimates of total population are obtained from the World Population Prospects publications prepared by the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat. The estimates are based on the most recent data available from such sources as censuses, demographic surveys, and vital and population registers. With each new round of data collection, the time series of fertility, mortality and migration and population trends by age and sex are extended and, if necessary, corrected retrospectively. For countries for which the demographic data are deficient or in which a census or demographic survey has not been conducted in many years, the availability of new data can often lead to a reassessment of historical demographic trends. Further details on the methodology can be found in the publication World Population Prospects, 2022 Revision: Methodology of the United Nations Population Estimates and Projections.[3]

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[1] Available from https://unstats.un.org/unsd/nationalaccount/madt.asp.
[2] Available from https://unstats.un.org/unsd/snaama/Introduction.asp.
[3] Available from https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2022_Methodology.pdf.

IV. Exchange rates

5.   National accounts aggregates reported by Member States in national currencies are converted to United States dollars. As a general rule, the exchange rates used for the conversion of national currencies to United States dollars are annual averages of exchange rates communicated as "market exchange rates" to IMF by the monetary authority of each Member State. The rates are published in the IMF publication International Financial Statistics.[4]

6.   As used by IMF, the term "market exchange rate" could refer to one of the following three types of annual average rates that are used in foreign exchange market transactions:

>   (a)   Market rates, determined largely by market forces;

>   (b)   Official rates determined by government authorities;

>   (c)   Principal rates, for countries maintaining multiple exchange rate regimes.

7.   For non-members of IMF, since their exchange rates are not published in International Financial Statistics, average annual United Nations operational rates of exchange are used.[5] Those rates are established primarily for accounting purposes and are applied to all official transactions of the United Nations with respect to those currencies. The rates may take the form of official, commercial or tourist rates of exchange.

V. External debt data

8.   Data on external debt stocks and principal payments of debt are obtained from the World Bank International Debt Statistics database.[6]

9.   The principal sources are reports submitted to the World Bank through its Debtor Reporting System by low- and middle-income countries among its members that have received either International Bank for Reconstruction and Development loans or International Development Association credits. Total external debt stocks include public and publicly guaranteed long-term debt, private non-guaranteed long-term debt (country-reported and estimated by the World Bank), IMF credit and estimated public and private short-term debt. Principal payments of debt are part of the total external debt flows (which also include disbursements, net flows and transfers on debt and interest payments) and consist of the payments in foreign currency. Interest payments/receipts on debt are already included as part of primary income, a component added to gross domestic product (GDP) to obtain gross national income (GNI).

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[4] Available from https://data.imf.org
[5] Available from https://treasury.un.org/operationalrates
[6] Available from http://datatopics.worldbank.org/debt/