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# Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on COVID-19 Mortality Assessment

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# TAG - Composition

- TAG shall have up to 40 members, who shall serve in their personal capacities to represent the broad range of disciplines relevant to the measurement of excess mortality.
- In the selection of the TAG members, consideration shall be given to attaining an adequate distribution of technical expertise, geographical representation and gender balance.
- Members of the TAG, including the Chairperson(s), were selected jointly by WHO and UN DESA, and appointed by WHO under the WHO Regulations for Study and Scientific Groups, Collaborating Institutions and Other Mechanisms of Collaboration, in consultation and coordination with UN DESA, following an open call for experts.
- <https://www.who.int/data/technical-advisory-group/covid-19--mortality-assessment/membership>

# Terms of Reference - TAG

- To critically appraise current approaches to measuring excess mortality attributable to COVID-19 defined as deaths directly attributable to COVID-19 as well as those due to the indirect impacts of the pandemic on mortality from other causes of death
- Develop a comprehensive, pragmatic and policy relevant set of measurement methods to track excess deaths due to COVID-19 in countries, including the certification of COVID-19 deaths, all in the context of the implementation of the UN Legal Identity Agenda, a holistic approach to civil registration, vital statistics and identity management.
- Review and offer guidance on methods for estimating the global death toll from COVID-19.

# TAG supports and advises on

- Best practices for reviewing, assessing and harmonizing data sources . WHO will make all COVID data publicly available.
- Globally standardized methods and statistical models for estimating COVID deaths and associated excess deaths.
- Establish analytical framework for underlying factors for COVID mortality.
- Strengthen country capacities to generate reliable, timely and complete data that can be used to estimate COVID deaths and associated excess deaths.

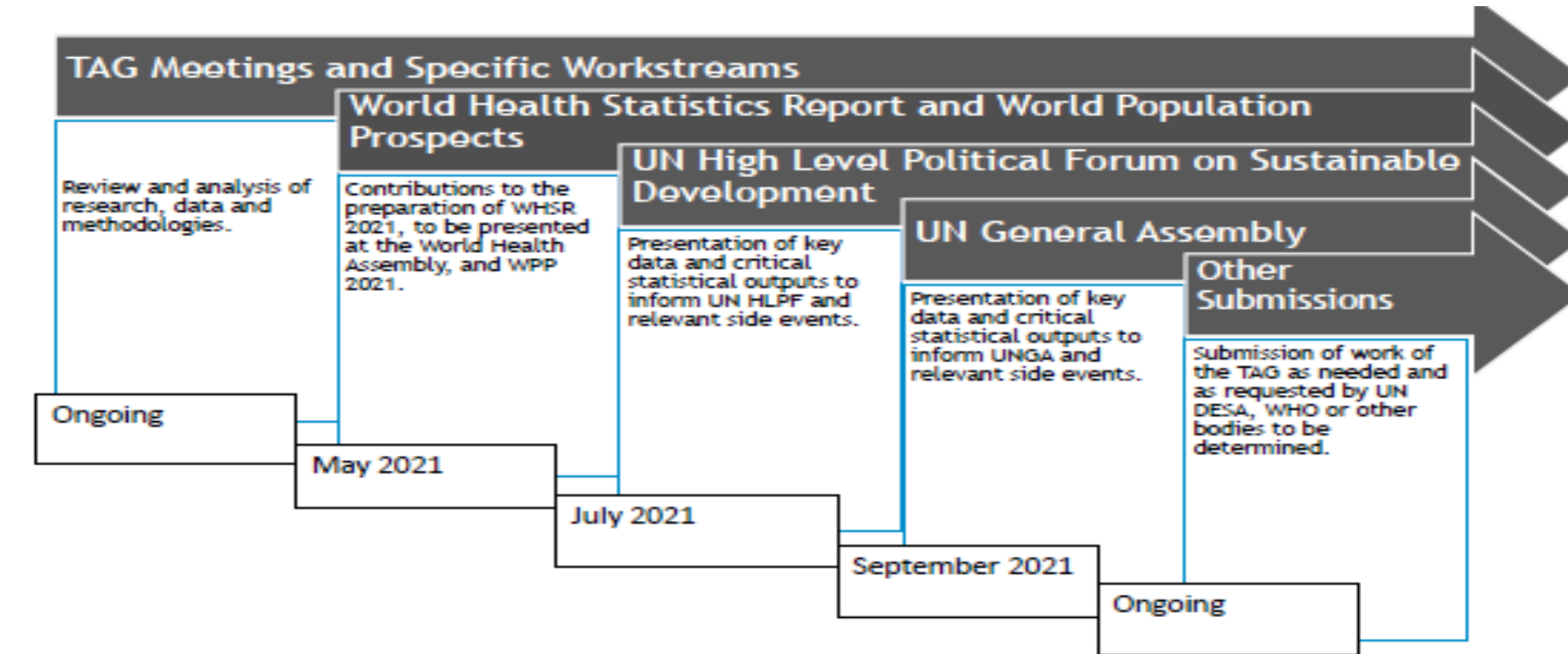
All work of the TAG will go through country consultation processes prior to publication and estimates will be made publicly available

# TAG – Targeted Outcomes

Inform the estimation of total mortality for 2020 and 2021 in future editions of World Population Prospects and World Health Statistics, through:

- Reliable and policy relevant estimates of excess deaths at the national, regional and global levels
- Better understanding of the direct and indirect impacts of COVID-19 on total mortality, including effects on the cause of death structure in populations and the implications for public health policymaking of the interaction of COVID-19 infection with major causes of morbidity and mortality.
- Improved coordination in the production of mortality and cause of death statistics within and across national and international statistical systems, consistent with the increased emphasis on strengthening civil registration and vital statistics systems promoted by WHO, UN DESA and partners

# Original Workflow and Timeline



# TAG – Working Groups

The Technical Advisory Group established five Working Groups (WG) to ensure that it took a comprehensive and multidimensional approach to delivering on its responsibilities.

- **Working group 1** - global mortality estimates.
- **Working group 2** - the use of household surveys and population censuses to fill data gaps.
- **Working group 3** - death registration and reporting systems: lessons learned from the pandemic.
- **Working group 4** - summary metrics of the toll in lives lost.
- **Working group 5** - inequality in COVID-19 mortality between and within countries

# TAG – Working Group 1

Working group 1, on global mortality estimates, including COVID-19, followed a two-track approach, focusing from the beginning on both tracks:

- (a) short-term guidance and assistance in the production of mortality estimates by age and sex for all countries and areas for the year 2020, using all information available by June 2021 to identify the excess mortality attributable to COVID-19; and
- (b) strategy for generating authoritative, transparent and well-documented estimates of global mortality for each year beginning in 2019, using all information available on deaths from COVID-19 and other causes to quantify the excess mortality directly or indirectly attributable to the pandemic.

A more complete elaboration of the results of working group 1 was presented to the Statistical Commission at its fifty-third session in the report entitled “Report of the World Health Organization on health statistics: strengthening statistical systems to track the health-related Sustainable Development Goals.”  
<https://undocs.org/en/E/CN.3/2022/13>



# TAG – Working Group 2

Working Group 2, on the use of household surveys and population censuses to fill data gaps, was established to provide advice and recommendations to WHO, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and national statistical offices on using censuses and surveys for time-sensitive and reliable information on COVID-19 mortality at the country level.

The Inter-secretariat Working Group on Household Surveys, established by the Statistical Commission at its forty-sixth session, in 2015, contributed, in collaboration with the Statistics Division and the Population Division, to a stocktaking exercise on countries' use of censuses and surveys for adult mortality data.

The report is available as a background document. A set of recommendations on how to better collect adult mortality data through censuses and surveys in the context of COVID-19 will be prepared for submission to the Commission at its fifty-fourth session.

A concept note for the working group is available at [https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesa\\_pd\\_2021\\_tag\\_wg\\_2\\_concept\\_note.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesa_pd_2021_tag_wg_2_concept_note.pdf).

# TAG – Working Group 2 moving towards recommendations) - 1

Building a set recommendations for censuses and surveys to improve the collection of adult mortality data in terms of:

- Availability
- Scope
- Quality/accuracy
- Timeliness
- Relevance to assessment of excess mortality

# TAG – Working Group 2 moving towards recommendations) - 2

- Monthly webinars on innovative approaches/lessons learnt: high-frequency survey; sampling and statistical power for mortality surveys; causes of deaths data collection.
- UN Expert Group Meeting:
  - 23-26 August 2022, Abu Dhabi
  - Hybrid
  - NSOs, Academia, regional and international organisations

# TAG – Working Group 3

Working group 3, on death registration and reporting systems: lessons learned from the pandemic, focuses on the registration of deaths during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Specifically, in several countries and areas, the pandemic has had an adverse impact on the functioning of the civil registration system, with respect to the registration of deaths and issuance of death certificates, owing possibly to pre-existing deficiencies in registration systems or to the breakdown of such systems during the pandemic.
- Those deficiencies have resulted in data gaps that constrain the timely and reliable assessment of the number of deaths and the level and patterns of mortality.
- Simultaneously, national health systems, facing a once-in-a-century pandemic and stretched to their limits, have had difficulties in maintaining regular functions, such as the reporting of deaths and causes of death to the civil registration system, which ultimately resulted in discrepancies among sources concerning the number of deaths caused by COVID-19.

# TAG – Working Group 3 - Considerations

In discussing the relevant national experiences, the working group highlighted several points that should be taken into consideration by national authorities:

- i. Maintain timeliness. The more time that elapses between the occurrence of vital events, especially unregistered deaths, the more difficult it becomes to fill the gaps and rectify the non-registration;
- ii. Introduce interim solutions. Several experiences involving the collection and compilation of data directly from cemeteries and funeral homes during the pandemic yielded valuable information;
- iii. Reiterate the need to fully implement the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda as the fully developed model of interoperability of various components;
- iv. Define a minimum standard in times of pandemic and simplify the registration procedures;
- v. Learn from national experiences. Countries adapted to the circumstances, and the practices used provided valuable documentation that should be followed up and synthesized;
- vi. Digitize the civil registration system. Enabling online registration of vital events proved to be effective in a time of pandemic.

# TAG – Working Group 4

- Working group 4, on summary metrics of the toll in lives lost, aims to summarise the impact of COVID-19 on mortality through metrics such as:
  - death counts,
  - years of life lost or the decrease in life expectancy at birth.
- The working group will provide advice and recommendations on appropriate interpretations and possible applications of different summary metrics to assess the death toll from COVID-19.
- The metrics will be illustrated and compared using real-world data from the current and historical pandemics, such as the pandemic of 1918–1919.

# TAG – Working Group 5

Working group 5, on inequality in COVID-19 mortality between and within countries, will lay the groundwork for a comprehensive global study to document and analyse the differences in levels of mortality attributable to COVID-19 between and within countries.

- To that end, the working group will undertake an assessment, with illustrative examples, of the potential for the use of existing operational frameworks, in particular the WHO approach based on the social determinants of health, to assess inequalities at the local, national and global levels.
- The working group will consider the utility of assessing inequality by focusing on (conditional) risks of progression through various stages of the disease, from the risk of becoming infected to the risks of developing mild or severe disease or disability and the risk of succumbing to the disease.
- Priority will be given to analytical approaches or frameworks that can be used to identify possible windows for intervention, so that policymakers, civil society, programme administrators and others can use the recommended framework(s) to drive policy formulation and programme implementation.

# Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on COVID-19 Mortality Assessment

This presentation gives an insight into the work of the WHO/UN DESA Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on COVID-19 Mortality Assessment.

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