

**STATISTICAL COMMISSION and  
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

**STATISTICAL OFFICE OF THE  
EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES  
(EUROSTAT)**

**CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN  
STATISTICIANS**

**ORGANIZATION FOR ECONOMIC  
COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT  
(OECD)**

**Joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Meeting  
of Directors of Social Statistics  
(Luxembourg, 29-30 September 2005)**

**Session 3- Invited paper**

**NOTE ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A CES FORUM ON SOCIAL STATISTICS**

Paper prepared by the Organizing Committee

**I BACKGROUND**

1. As follow-up to a discussion held during the meeting of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians in October 2004, the Bureau decided, at its meeting in February 2005, to organize the first ECE-Eurostat-OECD meeting on social statistics back-to-back with the September 2005 meeting of Eurostat directors of social statistics. An Organizing Committee was created with the participation of Australia, Italy, United States, Eurostat, OECD and ECE. The objective of the Group was to develop a concrete agenda for the meeting and identify possible outcomes. The United States was elected as the chair of the Organizing Committee.

2. In June 2005 the Bureau, confirmed “the decision to have the first meeting of UNECE directors of social statistics back-to-back with the Eurostat meeting of directors of social statistics on 29-30 September 2005. The Bureau stressed the need to focus the work on the development of common survey questions/modules and recognized the forum as an opportunity to address issues related to definitions and measurement (for example, non-response bias, cognition) of emerging social issues. The target audience of the forum should be the directors of social statistics in NSOs and the meeting should produce concrete outcomes. The Bureau asked the Organizing Committee to consider possibilities to prolong the future meetings of the directors of social statistics (at least two days).”

## II. GENERAL MATTERS

3. The development of an ECE/Eurostat/OECD forum on social statistics responds to two different needs expressed by countries and international organizations:
- to provide an opportunity for those who are actively engaged in the collection and production of official statistics, i.e. those on the front lines of official data collection, to establish a forum to examine specific problems and determine if there are solutions that go beyond single countries,
  - to develop common (survey) modules in the sphere of social statistics as well as to define a number of key statistics based on these modules that are both relevant from the national point of view and internationally comparable.
4. The primary membership is proposed to be the Heads of Social Statistics of countries in the extended ECE Region, including Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Mexico, Korea and Mongolia. In addition, representatives from Eurostat and the international agencies will be members of the forum. All parties seem to agree that the forum will continue to exist only if concrete outputs are produced.

## III. OBJECTIVES

5. The main objective of this ECE/Eurostat/OECD initiative is to provide a forum where directors of social statistics can:
- ◆ identify emerging issues in societies that affect the content and methods of data collection
  - ◆ discuss strategies used in different countries to address the emerging issues
  - ◆ discuss methodological issues related to the measurement of emerging issues
  - ◆ developing common data collection methodology (survey modules) to collect data on the emerging issues (the term “survey module” is to be understood in such a way that non-survey sources are included if they can provide comparable results)
  - ◆ developing guidelines/best practices to help countries to address the emerging issues
  - ◆ organize the testing of draft survey modules
  - ◆ developing a set of key statistics based on the above data collection methodology that provide users with internationally comparable results
6. For the above items, the forum may:
- discuss the on-going work in existing specialised groups with similar geographical coverage; and
  - set up appropriate new structures in the framework of the forum, define their mandates and overview the progress made

#### IV. ORGANIZATION

7. Focus: The focus will be on surveys rather than on registers or censuses. Two general areas will be covered by the Group. The first general area should be concerned with methodological problems. The other area is improved international comparability through core questions and/or references.

##### Annual Meetings

8. The forum is structured through annual meetings scheduled at the same time as some other function such as the Eurostat meeting of directors of social statistics. This will give a chance to put placeholders in calendars. The meetings will be no longer than two days. Once this forum is firmly established, the meetings are structured as follows:

9. The first part is in a form of seminar, where one emerging issue is discussed with the view of exchanging concerns, practices, challenges, solutions, open questions. At the previous meeting the forum will have decided on a theme (e.g. sexual orientation, alcoholism, extreme poverty) and within that theme a particular problem that presents itself. This may be response rate, respondent bias, imputation methods, etc. The forum will determine if there is sufficient agreement to develop a best practices paper and make assignments to produce that paper or to bring it to the attention of the CES (organizing one of the CES seminars for example).

10. The second part focuses on practical aspects of the collection of data and will be dedicated to the development of common survey modules. Once more a theme – such as crime statistics – will have to be decided in advance. It is likely that subgroups will be necessary to work on these topics between meetings and bring their work back to the forum. These subgroups will be responsible to produce draft methodology and make suggestions for testing such methodology.

11. Meetings will not be held unless sufficient work has been done ahead of time to justify the cost of the meeting. The focus will be on discussion and resolution of problems. To that end there will be a minimum of presentations. At each meeting, a member will be invited to prepare a paper on a topic in one of two areas. Two or three countries will be invited to prepare papers on possible ways to ameliorate the conditions described in the first paper. The papers will have to be distributed sufficiently far in advance to allow for digestion by the members. Any of the members of the forum may submit background papers for information. Depending on the selected topic, the work of existing task forces/groups will be reviewed if relevant.

12. The final part of the meeting will also dedicate time to the reporting of existing task forces and on the discussion of proposals made by the Organizing Committee on the new topics to be covered the following year.

## V. GOVERNANCE

13. The current organizing committee established to organize the first meeting of directors of social statistics could be converted into a permanent Steering Committee. Australia, Italy, the United States, Eurostat, UNECE and OECD are the initial members but other countries can join. The role of the Steering Committee would be to coordinate the work of the forum on social statistics to make sure that the objectives and the mode of operandi described above are met. The Committee could make proposal for the issues to be discussed at the annual meetings, decides on the speakers and finalizes the agenda. It would also oversees task forces created to develop common modules or create new task forces in area where there is the commitment of Eurostat and other countries to implement common methodology.

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