

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 53rd PLENARY SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS (Geneva, 13-15 June 2005)

- The Conference of European Statisticians held its fifty-third plenary session in Geneva. The Conference was attended by over 150 delegates representing 52 national delegations (of which 7 delegations from non-ECE member countries) and 18 international organizations, UN departments and specialised agencies.
- Ms. Brigita Schmögnerová, Executive Secretary of the UNECE, addressed the Conference. She referred to the new challenges for the UNECE and CES in the context of the EU enlargement and the review of the state of UNECE in the light of the new European institutional architecture. Ms. Schmögnerová drew attention to the activities of the UNECE to achieve internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration. She emphasised the role of official statistics, the importance of the quality of data on MDG indicators and that it will not be possible to measure the achievement of MDGs without statistical capacity building.
- The plenary session consisted of three parts: one session to deal with formal business and two seminar sessions, one on improved data reporting and the second one on sustainable development.
- The **seminar on improved data reporting** was organised by the United States. It considered the use of Internet and electronic data reporting (EDR) for data collection from households and businesses, cognitive and usability testing and marketing in support of Internet reporting, and reducing the respondent burden. Several statistical offices are shifting to EDR as a result of the national “e-government” initiatives and to meet the public expectations. Because of the considerable investment needed to develop, test and maintain the applications, EDR is not necessarily a method of achieving cost savings. However, the benefits of better data quality, reduced burden on respondents, improved timeliness and increased efficiency in data collection and processing are expected to outweigh the costs in the medium and long term. The challenges include the security and confidentiality of Internet data collection, partnerships with businesses and technology providers, communication with the public and better cost analysis of EDR. The Conference agreed that it would be useful to establish a working group to further explore the issues surrounding EDR.
- The **seminar on sustainable development** was organised by Statistics Sweden. The seminar looked at the role of national statistical offices (NSOs) in measuring the sustainable development, the frameworks and analytical tools that can be used, and the future needs and recommendations for this work. The discussion showed that NSOs are in a good position to be the key players in measuring sustainable development and that they should consider it as part of their core business. However, at present, there is great variety in the approaches used by countries reflecting their differing priorities in sustainable development and there is no common agreement on what exactly should be measured. The importance of a common and systematic approach was highlighted. The seminar called for more cooperation between NSOs in this area. The seminar served as a kick-off event for

future work towards developing common frameworks and statistics on sustainable development under the auspices of the CES. The Conference agreed that a group of countries would develop terms of reference for the work to be discussed by the CES Bureau at its future meeting.

- The Conference reviewed the progress with developing international **Guidelines on Confidentiality and Access to Microdata**. The Guidelines are planned to be finalised and endorsed by the Conference in 2006.
- The Conference adopted a revised **classification of transport statistics** on the goods being transported (TRANS/WP.6/2004/Rev.1).
- The Conference made an in-depth review of **migration statistics**. The significant remaining problems in migration statistics and the need to harmonise the terminology and definitions was emphasised. The challenge is to involve in the work in a coordinated way all agencies that are active in this area at national and international levels.
- The results of an experiment on **Measuring the Activities of Multinational Enterprises (MNE)** were presented. The project was carried out by Statistics Canada in cooperation with France, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom as a follow-up to the CES seminar on globalisation held in 2003. The results showed that data collected through the experiment differed from the data collected during measurement in regular statistical programmes of the NSOs. All participating countries found the exercise interesting and valuable, clarifying some of the problems related to data provision by MNEs.
- The Conference agreed to hold its 54th plenary session during the week of 12-16 June 2006 in Paris. The following topics were selected for the two seminar sessions:
 - a) Population Censuses
The Seminar should lead to the adoption of the CES recommendations on the 2010 round of population and housing censuses. The seminar will be organised by the CES Steering Group on Population and Housing Censuses.
 - b) Human resources and training (human resources development, organization of training in statistical offices, international training courses, e-learning).
The seminar will be organised by the Czech Republic.
- All documents for the 53rd Conference of European Statisticians are available on the ECE website at the following address: <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2005.06.ces.htm>
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