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**COORDINATION OF INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL WORK IN THE REGION OF  
THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE:  
BUSINESS STATISTICS**

IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF BUSINESS STATISTICS

Note by the secretariat

*Summary*

The paper provides information on the outcome of the in-depth review of business statistics carried out by the CES Bureau in February 2007. The paper presents the main points from the Bureau discussion and conclusions and follow-up to the review. Information on international activities in business statistics in 2008 extracted from the Database of International Statistical Activities is provided in document ECE/CES/2008/5/Add.1.

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians reviews each year 4-5 statistical areas in depth. The purpose of the reviews is to improve coordination of statistical activities in the region of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), identify gaps or duplication of work, and address emerging issues. The review focuses on strategic issues and highlights concerns of statistical offices of both conceptual and coordinating nature. The criteria for selecting a topic for a review are that (1) there are significant developments in that area, (2) there are significant coordination issues, or (3) there is a lack of activities at international level. The Bureau has decided to inform the Conference on the outcome of the in-depth reviews.

2. The Bureau discussed business statistics in February 2007 based on written contributions by the following Bureau members: Canada, Finland, Eurostat, IMF, UNECE and UNSD. The readers are encouraged to consult the documents on Internet at:

<http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2007.02.bureau.htm> (paper no. 4 and Addenda).

Furthermore, information on international activities in business statistics in 2008 is provided in document ECE/CES/2008/10/Add.1: Excerpt of the UNECE Database on International Statistical Activities.

## II. THE BUREAU DISCUSSION ON STRATEGIC ISSUES IN BUSINESS STATISTICS IN 2007

3. The CES Bureau reviewed business statistics (excluding macroeconomic statistics) in depth in February 2007. The following points were made in the discussion:

- (a) the question of coherence of business statistics is one of the most important issues to be dealt with for NSOs. For example, Statistics Finland is currently working on a strategy for an “integrated approach” to business statistics, including also the national accounts;
- (b) another challenge would be to include aspects of environment, energy, and research and development in business statistics;
- (c) EU has launched the programme for Modernisation of European Enterprise and Trade Statistics (MEETS) to further harmonize and streamline business and trade statistics over the next four to five years. The programme is a response to the pressure from the European Parliament to reduce the reporting burden on enterprises;
- (d) there are a number of EU regulations governing the work on business statistics in EU member countries. However, there is a lack of guidelines on data collection strategies for complying with those regulations, and on good practices for non-EU and non-OECD countries. A particularly important issue would be the use of business registers and/or economic censuses for business statistics, and issues related to the use of different data sources. The UNECE would like to contribute to such work;
- (e) it is important to share knowledge of good practices in business statistics; UNSD has done a lot of work in this area which should be better publicised;
- (f) several groups dealing with business statistics exist at present: the Friends of the Chair group on the integrated approach to economic statistics, Roundtable on Business Survey Frames, and the group on multinational enterprises. It is too early to take major decisions for work in the area or form new groups before the work of the Friends of the Chair group has provided some outcome. Thus, any larger initiatives,

including establishing a possible steering group, should not be dealt with before 2008;

- (g) meanwhile, a small task force could be set up for the exchange of national experiences in the field of business statistics (e.g., to deal with mixed mode data collection, business surveys, addressing declining response rates, etc.). Overlap should be avoided with the Task Force on Electronic Data Reporting that is concerned with technical issues.

### **III. CONCLUSIONS FROM THE BUREAU DISCUSSION IN FEBRUARY 2007**

4. In conclusion, the Bureau decided to form a small task force to address pending issues in the field of business statistics. Canada and Eurostat volunteered to draft a proposal for the terms of reference of the task force.

5. Furthermore, the Bureau decided to include the issue of business statistics on the agenda of the CES plenary session in 2008 (instead of 2007) in order to take into account the outcomes of the work of the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) Friends of the Chair Group.

### **IV. FOLLOW-UP TO THE IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF BUSINESS STATISTICS**

8. At its 12-13 February 2008 meeting, the Bureau discussed the terms of reference for a Task Force to address pending issues in the field of business statistics, prepared by Eurostat and Canada (see <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/ece/ces/bur/2008/13.e.pdf>). The Bureau approved the terms of reference.

9. The terms of reference includes a proposal for the organisation of a one-day CES seminar on business statistics in June 2009. The Bureau asked the co-chairs of the Task Force, Canada and Eurostat, to prepare a detailed agenda for a possible seminar.

10. At its 2008 plenary session, the Conference will select the topics for seminars in 2009. A proposal for a seminar on business statistics will be presented under agenda item 9.

11. Furthermore, any follow-up work on business statistics under the auspices of the Conference should take into account the outcome of the work of the Friends of the Chair of the UNSC. Therefore, the conclusions of the UNSC session on 26-29 February 2008 concerning business statistics are presented in Annex for information.

**ANNEX**

**OUTCOME OF THE WORK OF THE UNITED NATIONS STATISTICAL  
COMMISSION FRIENDS OF THE CHAIR GROUP**

1. The UNSC Friends of the Chair presented a note on integrated economic statistics to the United Nations Statistical Commission session on 26-29 February 2008 (see <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/sc2008.htm>, document E/CN.3/2008/6).
2. As a conclusion to the discussion on integrated economic statistics, the Commission:
  - (a) Welcomed with appreciation the high quality and comprehensiveness of the report and congratulated the moderator and members of the Friends of the Chair group for producing this original and excellent report ;
  - (b) Agreed with the findings and the recommendations of the Friends of the Chair as presented in the report;
  - (c) Affirmed the role of the System of National Accounts as the integrating framework in economic statistics and recognized the importance of increasing the coherence of basic economic statistics for enhancing the quality and analytical value of both basic economic statistics and macroeconomic statistics;
  - (d) Agreed with the need to collect and disseminate case studies and develop other practical knowledge material to share experience and guide countries in the process of implementing an integrated approach in their national statistical systems and that there might be a need to develop a framework for establishing such guidelines;
  - (e) Recommended that guidance on practical aspects of integration should focus, in
  - (f) particular, on the need for cooperation with users and data suppliers; development of central business registers and use of administrative data; conceptual harmonization of data content across surveys, strong and centralized coordination of survey operations within the national statistical institution; the need to have within a national statistical institution an entity that is specialized in preparing administrative data to be matched to survey data; a sampling strategy that takes into account the burden of the reporting entities;
  - (g) Underscored that such guidelines should be tied to economic theory and highlight the differences between a centralized and decentralized statistical system;
  - (h) Took note of the difficulties faced by developing countries in collecting basic economic statistics, the cost of setting up and maintaining a central business register, building an administrative infrastructure of data collection, maintaining databases, obtaining data from respondents not captured in business surveys, and suggested that such issues be given due consideration in providing guidance with a view to furthering the integration of economic statistics;
  - (i) Acknowledged that the merits of developing an integrated system of statistics deserve consideration beyond economic statistics;
  - (j) Suggested that the follow-up should be led by a new Friends of the Chair group and requested interested countries to join in the collaborative effort as well as express interest for undertaking the role of the moderator of the group.

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