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STATISTICAL COMMISSION

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Fifty-seventh plenary session
Geneva, 8-10 June 2009
Item 2 of the provisional agenda

MEETINGS OF THE PARENT BODIES OF THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN
STATISTICIANS

**MATTERS ARISING FROM THE APRIL 2009 SESSION OF THE ECONOMIC
COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The sixty-third session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe was held in Geneva from 30 March to 1 April 2009. The session was attended by representatives of 50 countries, European Community, Holy See, international organizations and non-governmental organizations.

This note provides an overview of the main outcomes of the session, highlighting the implications that are relevant to the Conference of European Statisticians and its programme of work. The following were the main substantive agenda items: (a) economic development in the region of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe; (b) climate change mitigation and adaptation – the work of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe: translating global objectives and commitments into regional results; (c) review of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe reform; reform of the “Environment for Europe” process; and other issues calling for action by the Commission.

I. BACKGROUND

1. The session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) defines the overall direction of work of the UNECE. It addresses the issues that are relevant for the region in promoting pan-European economic integration through international cooperation. The decisions of the Commission are implemented by the UNECE secretariat and the Sectoral Committees of the UNECE, of which the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) is one.
2. Any possible follow-up to the matters arising from the March-April 2009 session of the Economic Commission for Europe will be reflected in operational terms with the UNECE Statistical Programmes for the rest of 2009 and 2010.
3. The following main substantive agenda items were discussed:
 - (a) Economic development in the UNECE region;
 - (b) Climate change mitigation and adaptation – the work of UNECE: translating global objectives and commitments into regional results;
 - (c) Review of the UNECE reform; reform of the “Environment for Europe” process; and other issues calling for action by the Commission.

II. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE REGION OF THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

A. Discussion at the session

4. The discussion of this agenda item was organized around an opening session on the general economic situation in Europe, followed by three panel sessions on (i) economic integration in the wider Europe, (ii) promoting competitive knowledge-based innovative economies, and (iii) enhancing economic cohesion.
5. The keynote speakers, moderators and panelists all acknowledged the difficult economic situation facing not only the wider European region but the global economy. The fact that the situation was likely to deteriorate further was also widely recognized. Some expressed the view that the crisis would have significant effects on long-term trends such as globalization as well as on the design and operation of international or regional institutions. There was some agreement that any solution to the current crisis was dependent on increased cooperation, and therefore, UNECE’s historic role in promoting intergovernmental cooperation was emphasized.
6. Countries were encouraged to use the “opportunity” provided by the crisis to design their fiscal expansions to further develop renewable energies and other green technologies, and improve productivity-increasing infrastructure. Furthermore, it was argued that the environmental sustainability and macroeconomic objectives need to be addressed coherently instead of as separate issues.

B. Issues discussed during the panel sessions relevant to the work of the Conference of European Statisticians

7. The ability of Governments and the private sector to assess economic and social developments within a country and compare them to others is dependent on having high quality and internationally comparative statistics. It was stated that the importance of **human capital** as a source of growth would increase after this crisis because international flows of physical capital would become less important. The work being undertaken by the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) to measure sustainable development, which also includes a segment on measuring human capital, was considered to be of increased relevance.

8. Speakers stressed that despite the current financial crisis, which was likely to reduce progress in achieving the **Millennium Development Goals** (MDGs), efforts towards achieving these targets in the UNECE region should be maintained. It was considered more important than ever to know where the bottlenecks are so that policy initiatives could be focused in these areas. Therefore, the statistical capacity of countries to produce MDG indicators should be strengthened to provide more timely, comprehensive and accurate data.

9. In addition, the crisis had highlighted the need for and importance of having good quality **migration data**. The work undertaken by the UNECE in improving the production and comparability of migration statistics was noted.

10. The importance of more disaggregated **gender statistics** was also emphasized as a prerequisite for allowing a better assessment of the systematic differences between the situation of women and men within the region. It was stressed that UNECE normative work should reflect the gender perspective and that UNECE should further develop its gender database and continue to provide technical assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and South-East European countries for producing disaggregated gender statistics. Similarly, the importance of age-related statistics and indicators was highlighted.

C. Follow-up actions:

(a) Further pursue the work on measuring sustainable development and human capital as a part of it;

(b) Strengthen the statistical capacity of concerned countries in the UNECE region to produce indicators for monitoring progress towards achieving the MDGs; establish a new regional database on MDG indicators to include region specific indicators and to further disaggregate the existing indicators;

(c) Promote activities aimed at improving the production and comparability of migration statistics using different data sources, including household surveys, administrative data, population censuses, etc.;

(d) Continue to develop the gender database and to assist the CIS and South-East European countries in producing gender disaggregated statistics.

III. CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION AND ADAPTATION – THE WORK OF THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE: TRANSLATING GLOBAL OBJECTIVES AND COMMITMENTS INTO REGIONAL RESULTS

A. Discussion at the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe session

11. Discussions under this agenda item comprised an opening session on climate change in the UNECE region, followed by panel sessions on UNECE activities on climate change, covering (i) energy efficiency, air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, (ii) water, forestry and timber: natural systems must adapt, but can contribute to mitigation, and (iii) societal change to address climate change.

12. Climate change was perceived as one of humanity's most pressing challenges. It was stressed that there was a need to support the financing and planning of climate change measures by a regional political dimension, such as creating a political forum for climate change dialogue. The need for adequate funding resources and delivery mechanisms to implement the necessary measures in the region was highlighted.

13. Speakers appreciated UNECE's work related to climate change, emphasizing that it benefited from an adequate structure for mainstreaming climate change issues into sectoral planning.

14. The Commission recommended that UNECE develop its role as a lead agency for the integration of climate change considerations into development planning in the region.

15. The work of UNECE was considered to be necessary to support implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and to play an important role in regional cooperation and putting in place strategies for combating climate change.

B. Issues discussed during the panel sessions relevant to the work of the Conference of European Statisticians

16. Ms. Heli Jeskanen-Sundstrom, Chair of the CES, made a presentation on "Climate Change and Official Statistics" during the panel session on societal change to address climate change. She stressed the role of statistics in providing a basis for decision-making and action. Official statisticians have a key role in contributing to the production and dissemination of relevant climate change statistics; however, consistent and comparable annual statistics are not yet available for a sufficient number of countries. The urgent need for **authoritative, robust, timely and comparable climate change statistics** was strongly emphasized.

17. The important role that the national statistical offices in the UNECE region have in providing statistical information for monitoring and analysis of climate change was also pointed out. They should aim at both making better use of **existing statistics** and identifying **data gaps** and the ways to fill them.

18. In particular, it was stressed that obtaining a comprehensive picture of **global greenhouse gas** (GHG) emissions and emission trends is a challenging task. Lack of relevant statistical data

for input into GHG emissions inventories had been identified as one of the most significant barriers for the development of the quality of GHG inventories in the developing countries.

19. The improvement of climate change data to inform policymakers requires a **joint effort by environmental agencies and statistical institutes** as well the research community at national, European and global levels.

C. Follow-up actions:

(a) Following a CES Bureau decision, the UNECE secretariat plans to survey the extent to which the CES members are involved in climate change related work and in compiling the GHG inventories;

(b) Envisage work to explore the possibilities to contribute to the UNECE climate change activities in areas like transport, energy, forestry and housing, jointly with other UNECE Sectoral Committees.

20. Any future CES work in this area will take into account the activities of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), UNFCCC, and other institutions dealing with related data (e.g. Århus convention), and fully respect the framework of official statistics as enshrined in the UNECE Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

IV. REVIEW OF THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE REFORM; REFORM OF THE “ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE” PROCESS; AND OTHER ISSUES CALLING FOR ACTION BY THE COMMISSION

21. The Commission expressed its satisfaction with the implementation of the **UNECE reform**. The role of UNECE as a unique, pan-European platform for all countries to discuss, on an equal footing, issues of importance, such as economic integration, regional cooperation and best practices, was emphasized. Member States noted the pragmatic results of UNECE’s work that have an impact not only in the UNECE region but also in other parts of the world.

22. The Sixth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” (Belgrade, 10–12 October 2007) recognized the important value of the “Environment for Europe” (EfE) process as a unique pan-European forum for tackling environmental challenges and promoting broad environmental cooperation, and as a pillar of sustainable development in the UNECE region. Also in Belgrade, the ministers agreed to undertake a **reform of the EfE process** in order to ensure that the process remains relevant and valuable, and to strengthen its effectiveness as a mechanism for improving environmental quality and the lives of people across the region. The Commission endorsed the EfE reform plan.

23. The Commission approved the holding of ECE’s fourth **Regional Implementation Meeting for Sustainable Development**. The meeting will take place on 1-2 December 2009 in Geneva.

V. FUTURE STEPS

24. During its meeting on the 4 May 2009, the UNECE Executive Committee (EXCOM) agreed to invite the Sectoral Committees to consider the outcome of the Commission session, with a view to seeing how the ideas and suggestions on the economic development in the UNECE region and on climate change mitigation and adaptation could be taken on board. **The outcome of the discussions of the Sectoral Committees should then be submitted by the Chairpersons of the Sectoral Committees at their respective meetings with EXCOM later in 2009. The EXCOM will decide on further actions to be taken.**

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