

**Economic and Social Council**Distr.: General
30 March 2010

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of European Statisticians

Fifty-eighth plenary session

Paris, 8-10 June 2010

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

Coordination of international statistical work in the UNECE region**Outcome of the in-depth review of statistical dissemination,
communication and publications****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

The present document provides information on the outcome of the in-depth review of statistical dissemination, communication and publications carried out by the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians in October 2009. The Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians reviews each year selected statistical areas in depth, with the aim to improve coordination of statistical activities in the region of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. The review focuses on strategic issues and highlights concerns of statistical offices of both a conceptual and a coordinating nature. The review of statistical dissemination, communication and publications benefited from the discussion of this topic at the plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians in June 2009.

I. Introduction

1. The Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) reviews each year selected 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.

2. In October 2008, the Bureau decided that it would be useful to discuss selected in-depth review topics at the CES plenary session to obtain input from all CES members. Following the Bureau decision, the topic of statistical dissemination, communication and publications was considered at the CES 2009 plenary session.

II. Summary of the Bureau discussion

3. The Bureau discussed statistical dissemination, communication and publications in October 2009. The discussion was based on a paper by the UNECE secretariat and the Steering Group on statistical dissemination and communication, and an additional note by Slovenia. The paper benefited greatly from the input by the CES members in June 2009.

4. The following points were made in the discussion:

(a) The paper gives a rich overview of the problems and issues in this area;

(b) Statistical dissemination and communication complement each other, professionalising communication should not lead to oversimplification and should not compete with the dissemination of statistical information in all its complexity;

(c) Improving statistical literacy is a special challenge in this area; collecting and disseminating good practices of improving statistical literacy would be useful;

(d) The dissemination and communication should focus on regular users rather than targeting the hard-to-reach groups;

(e) International licensing frameworks (such as Creative Commons) should be tested before they can be recommended to be used for official statistics at international level;

(f) There are different practices in countries in disseminating data on minority groups (e.g. ethnic or religious minorities), in some countries it is considered acceptable (and even desirable) to produce statistics on minority groups to improve their economic and living conditions; in other countries the data are not collected because of their sensitivity;

(g) When collecting data about minorities, it is important to inform the respondents about the use of the data and allow them not to answer any questions they consider too sensitive;

(h) The paper should include more explanation about the benefits and risks related to disseminating data on minority groups (e.g. meeting a policy demand, protecting confidentiality, avoiding possible stigmatising of the groups, etc.), exchanging experience and collecting practices of different countries would be useful;

(i) The practices in countries concerning pre-release access are different ranging from a total ban to supporting controlled pre-release as a specific communication tool;

(j) If pre-releases are used, it is important to have a transparent mechanism for informing the public about the rules and procedures (who can get access, why, how early in advance, etc.);

(k) It is not easy to ensure that the ministries or other agencies producing official statistics follow the Fundamental Principles and strict pre-release policies;

(l) The Fundamental Principles prescribe that official statistics should be made available on an impartial basis, this general rule leaves room for different country practices; providing pre-release access to certain media may result in more attention to statistics from these media in the short-term, however, in the long run it may be more useful to focus on improving communication and providing a clear message simultaneously to all users;

(m) Exchange of experiences and collecting good practices in pre-release of data would be very useful, including on how to ensure that good practices are followed across the whole statistical system;

(n) The paper raises important questions related to data dissemination by international organizations, the paper should be updated to include the latest developments in this area following the meeting of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA); the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States can provide some additional text based on experiences in their region;

(o) It can be recommended that statistical offices review their communication strategies in the light of the financial crisis and the fact that on some occasions statistics were partially blamed for the crisis;

(p) The questions of pricing and free-of-charge access should be developed in the paper, this is a very topical issue for the statistical offices;

(q) Eurostat mentioned the project 'Statistics Explained' and requested that information about this is included in the paper.

III. Conclusions of the in-depth review

5. The Bureau identified the following main conclusions from the discussion:

(a) Communicating with hard-to-reach groups is not the first priority, statistical offices should rather focus on improving dissemination and communication to regular user groups;

(b) Work should be undertaken regarding how to improve statistical literacy (possibly by a small group). The Steering Group should develop a related proposal and submit it to the Bureau. This work should be linked to the related activities of the International Association of Official Statistics;

(c) There is a need for international work on sharing good practices on pre-release and embargoes, and on disseminating information on minority groups;

(d) The paper should be updated to reflect the discussion that took place in CCSA on data dissemination by international organizations, and to develop the text on dissemination of data on minorities, on pre-release access and on the issue of pricing.

IV. Follow-up action

6. The in-depth review paper has been updated to reflect the comments and conclusions of the Bureau. It will be available as document ECE/CES/2010/1/Add.1.

7. The UNECE secretariat and the CES Steering Group on Statistical Dissemination and Communication intend to propose to the forthcoming Work Session on the Communication of Statistics (Paris, 30 June-2 July) to set up an informal group to draft guidelines on improving statistical literacy as part of the “Making Data Meaningful” series of publications. The UNECE secretariat is also developing an on-line library of statistical training materials¹, using a wiki approach. Initial discussions have taken place between the UNECE secretariat and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia on possible joint actions to enhance statistical literacy.

8. Practices on pre-release and embargoes will be discussed during the forthcoming Work Session on Communication of Statistics.

¹ <http://www1.unece.org/stat/platform/display/TRAINSTATS>