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Progress reports and work of the Conference of European Statisticians Teams of Specialists

Implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Statistical Programme: major achievements in June 2009 – June 2010 and plans for the rest of 2010

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The UNECE Statistical Division works according to an annual Statistical Programme that is approved by the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians and by the UNECE Executive Committee. The 2010 Statistical Programme is available at <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/ece/ces/bur/2009/mtg1/7.e.pdf>.

The present note provides an overview of the implementation of the Statistical Programme during the period from June 2009 to June 2010 and the main activities planned until the end of 2010.

The list of meetings and workshops held during June 2009 - June 2010 is provided in document ECE/CES/2010/5 Add.1 and the preliminary list of meetings planned to be held from June 2010 onwards is provided in document ECE/CES/2010/5 Add.2.

I. Coordination of international statistical work in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region

1. The **Conference of European Statisticians (CES)** and its secretariat, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Statistical Division, continue to play an important role in **coordinating the international statistical activities** in the region. The CES and its Bureau provide a forum for the Heads of national and international statistical agencies to address the most relevant issues of official statistics. The Conference also attracts membership from outside the UNECE region. Countries like Australia, Brazil, Chile, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea regularly participate in its activities. Participation of the major international organizations (Eurostat, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD), Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, etc.) helps to ensure that statistical work undertaken by these organizations in the UNECE region is coordinated and duplication is avoided.

2. The Conference meets every year in June at a **plenary session**. In addition to the formal segment, the plenary sessions include two one-day modules (previously called seminars) providing a forum for top-level management of statistical offices to explore the fundamental issues of statistical systems and leading-edge emerging topics.

3. In 2010, one of the modules will deal with the **impact of the global crises on statistical systems** (organized by IMF and OECD). This seminar will focus on the importance of a holistic view on official statistics in light of global crises and their evolution. The Conference will discuss the role of statistical information and its adequacy for alerting to possible crisis, the need to find the right tools to monitor developments, and how to use the lessons learned from the current financial crises for the longer term statistical development.

4. A second module will be devoted to the **role of a spatial dimension in official statistics** (organised by Eurostat and Mexico). The geographic reference is one of the basic uniting elements in statistics to which characteristics of persons, households and enterprises can be attributed. Such information permits analysis of the distribution and behavior of the economic, social and environmental phenomena with their relationships and interactions. The module will discuss how to deal with the demands and challenges associated with linking statistical data on a spatial basis and how to make the results of statistical spatial analysis more accessible to users.

5. The **Database of International Statistical Activities (DISA)** maintained by the UNECE secretariat provides information on the statistical work carried out by about 30 international organizations¹. The classification of statistical activities that was developed for DISA has been adopted for various other purposes. For example, it is used by the PARIS21 group for coordinating technical assistance², and the first three domains of this classification have been adopted as part of the Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX) Content-oriented Guidelines³.

¹ <http://unece.unog.ch/disa/>

² <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/acsub/2008docs-12th/SA-2008-19-Classification.pdf>

³ http://sdmx.org/?page_id=11

II. Collection, processing and dissemination of macro-economic, social and demographic statistics

6. The UNECE maintains a free **online statistical database** (www.unece.org/stats/data) available in English and Russian, covering the countries of the UNECE region. The database includes **macro-economic, social, demographic, forestry and transport** indicators. An important feature is that the data are provided with breakdown for men and women where possible, for example, new indicators on the gender pay gap have been added during 2010. Data downloads for the first four months of 2010 are over 25% higher than for the same period in 2009. A user survey in autumn 2009 gave positive feedback on data quality and accessibility. Updates being prepared for the second half of 2010 include the addition of data on progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, and a more user-friendly web interface.

III. Methodological work in various statistical areas

7. The Conference continued to be involved in work that leads to development of new statistical standards and guidelines in several areas of economic and social statistics.

8. Most expert meetings held in the various subject areas were organized as joint meetings with other international organizations, mainly with Eurostat, the OECD, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Bank, IMF and CIS-STAT.

9. In addition to providing substantive inputs to and secretariat support for these meetings, the role of the UNECE secretariat has been to allow for the non-European Union (EU) and non-OECD countries be associated with the development work of the partner organizations. Another role that the UNECE plays is to provide a bridge for the European-based specialized UN agencies (e.g. ILO, WHO) with the national statistical offices in the region.

10. The methodological work is undertaken with support, financial and mainly in-kind contributions, from the National Statistical Offices (NSOs) of the CES member countries as well as from major partner international organizations.

A. Economic statistics

11. The UNECE promotes the implementation of the global methodological standard for national accounting, the **System of National Accounts (SNA)** and contributes to the development of the implementation strategy for the 2008 SNA with an emphasis on the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) and some countries in South-East Europe (SEE). In this work UNECE is guided by the newly established Steering Group on National Accounts.

12. The biannual Expert Meeting on National Accounts that took place in April 2010 discussed issues related to the implementation of the 2008 SNA. A survey of the priorities and challenges in the implementation of the SNA in the EECCA and SEE countries was carried out by the UNECE. The results of the survey will be used as inputs for the development of an implementation strategy for the 2008 SNA in the region.

13. The UNECE is working jointly with Eurostat, OECD and IMF to prepare recommendations on how to deal with the distortions to statistics that are occurring as a result of **globalisation**. The WTO also actively participates in the work. The growing number of multinational companies and the advances in communication and transport that allow companies to operate across borders make it more difficult to measure economies

from a national viewpoint. A Group of Experts organised jointly with Eurostat and OECD is developing proposals on how to deal with these problems in statistics and improve the quality of national accounts. The outcome will be a publication entitled *Impact of Globalisation on National Accounts: Practical Guidance* to be presented to the CES plenary session in June 2011 for endorsement. The Group held its third meeting in April 2010 to discuss the remaining topics from the research agenda (labour mobility, second homes, e-commerce and the impact of the financial crisis) and to agree on a timetable for finalisation of the work. The publication would be revised to reflect the comments of the meeting and prepared for submission to the CES Bureau in December 2010.

14. In the area of **economic short-term statistics**, the UNECE in 2009 prepared a report on seasonal adjustment in the EECCA and SEE countries. The lack of seasonally adjusted short-term statistics seriously hampers assessment of the economic development and international comparisons in these countries. Based on the survey, a capacity building program in short-term economic statistics has been developed with financial support from the World Bank. The programme will include three regional workshops to take place in 2010/2011 on methodologies in short-term statistics, seasonal adjustment and compilation of price indices. Training materials, including practical guidelines in seasonal adjustment methods, will be prepared in English and Russian as part of the programme.

15. The UNECE aims to ensure that the EECCA and SEE countries implement statistical **business registers** – an indispensable tool for an efficient system of data collection from businesses. UNECE, in cooperation with Eurostat, organised in October 2009 a workshop on business registers for experts from these countries. Building on national experiences and expert recommendations, the workshop examined issues concerning legal framework for statistical business registers (BR), linking units of administrative sources with statistical BR, and incorporating enterprise groups into the statistical BR. The workshop preceded a two-day meeting of the Group of Experts on business registers that UNECE organises every two years in cooperation with Eurostat and OECD.

16. In the area of **price statistics**, UNECE has contributed substantially to the development of the *Practical Guide to Compiling Consumer Price Indices: A supplementary Handbook to the Consumer Price Index Manual*. The Handbook, published in October 2009 by the UNECE, focuses on practical implementation issues in Consumer Price Indices (CPI) compilation. It is targeted at developing countries and countries with economies in transition, but is also relevant for index compilers in general. UNECE also contributed with substantial input to the Export and Import Price Index Manual published by the IMF in December 2009. The UNECE provides the secretariat for and is chairing the Intersecretariat Working Group on Price Statistics (IWGPS), established by the UN Statistical Commission. The IWGPS provides guidance on price statistics in terms of manuals and handbooks and aims to coordinate international work on price statistics. An international expert meeting on consumer price indices was organized in May 2010 in cooperation with the ILO. The meeting discussed, among other issues, a new handbook on house price indices to be published in 2011.

17. The Task Force to update the Canberra Group Handbook on **household income statistics**, established by the CES Bureau, began its work in 2009. The purpose of the Task Force is to update the existing handbook from 2001 to reflect the developments in measurement of household income and to provide practical up-to-date guidance to statistical offices. The Task Force is led by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and includes experts from a number of countries and organisations. The handbook is expected to be finalised in 2011.

B. Social and demographic statistics

18. The UNECE plays a leading role (sometimes jointly with other organizations) in selected areas of social and demographic statistics, such as gender statistics, population and housing censuses, migration, and crime statistics. In **gender statistics**, the UNECE carries out methodological work as well as provides data on gender disparities in various fields. A *Manual on Gender Statistics* has been prepared and is submitted to the CES 2010 plenary session for adoption. Training tools on gender statistics, such as multimedia presentations and training modules, have been developed (in collaboration with the World Bank) and have been used in regional and national training events in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In April 2010, a work session on gender statistics discussed and shared good practices in many key areas, such as measuring the gender pay gap, population censuses as an information source for gender issues, new information needs on emerging patterns in gendered responses to the economic crisis and results from recent Time-Use Surveys. UNECE also offers a unique forum for statisticians, researchers, and policy makers to improve the measurement of **violence against women**, which has been a topic of a workshop in April 2010. Another workshop is planned in late 2010 as part of an interregional project. A survey questionnaire has been developed to serve as a standard in collecting data on this topic that is about to be tested in different countries of the world.

19. In the area of **population and housing censuses**, UNECE focused its work on supporting countries in the implementation of the *CES Recommendations for the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses*. In 2009, a meeting of census experts from all UNECE countries was organised, in cooperation with Eurostat, to facilitate the exchange of experience among countries and increase knowledge on various issues related to the 2010 round of population and housing censuses. A survey was carried out, in cooperation with UNDESA Statistics Division, to collect information on the current status of census activities and preparations in different countries. In April 2010, an expert group meeting on register-based censuses was organised in The Hague, in cooperation with Eurostat and Statistics Netherlands, to discuss various issues related to population and housing censuses conducted exclusively or partially using data from registers. Preparations have also started for a UNECE-Eurostat meeting and a training workshop on population and housing censuses planned in July 2010.

20. The UNECE secretariat is involved, together with Eurostat, Council of Europe, the UN Statistical Division and other international organizations, in the international monitoring of population and housing censuses in the UN Administered Region of Kosovo and in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In both cases, there are plans to take the census in 2011 to provide an accurate count of the population and a description of its socio-economic and demographic characteristics. This is much needed, considering that the latest censuses were taken there in 1991. For the census results to be widely accepted, it is of paramount importance that international standards are fully respected, including in particular the CES recommendations.

21. In the field of **demographic projections**, a joint UNECE-Eurostat work session was organised in Lisbon in April 2010. The meeting allowed projections' experts to exchange experiences and discuss methodological developments in this field.

22. The work on **migration statistics** continued to focus on the role of household sample surveys in collecting data on migration and on migrants. In collaboration with the UNDESA Population Division, Eurostat and several member states, a number of research projects are carried out in this area. The *Guidelines for Exchanging Data to Improve Emigration Statistics* that were endorsed by the Conference of European Statisticians in June 2009 have been disseminated through the UNECE website. A joint UNECE-Eurostat work session on migration statistics was organised in April 2010. The work session

allowed countries to exchange experiences on the methods and techniques used for the collection, processing and dissemination of data on international migration.

23. In the area of **crime statistics**, the *Manual on Victimization Surveys* prepared by UNECE and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) that was endorsed by the Conference of European Statisticians in June 2009 has been printed and disseminated. The Manual provides countries with a tool for developing national victimisation surveys under the framework of official statistics and following international methodological guidelines. New work has begun to develop principles for classifying crimes for statistical purposes, in cooperation with UNODC and Eurostat. A new task force is working on crime classification for statistical purposes at the international level.

24. In the area of **health statistics**, the CES Task Force on Measuring Health Status (the so-called Budapest Initiative) continued to work on developing a questionnaire to be used by countries to measure health status. A meeting was organised in January 2010 to discuss a revised version of the questionnaire (so-called Budapest Initiative Mark 2 question set). At the meeting, a broad agreement was reached on the questions to be adopted or revised based on the results of cognitive and field tests conducted in a number of countries. This work is conducted in close coordination with the Washington Group on Disability Statistics and other initiatives carried out in this field by Eurostat and the World Health Organization (WHO).

25. UNECE has been providing statistical support to the countries in the region in **monitoring the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**. In 2009, UNECE started preparatory work, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNSD and the UN Regional Commissions, to create a new Regional Millennium Development Goals (MDG) database. The database will provide a dissemination platform for MDG-relevant data on countries of Eastern and South-eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. It is expected to be launched in 2010. Furthermore, the UNECE is developing a network of national MDG focal points in statistical offices with the goal to identify capacity building needs and to develop strategies to address them.

26. Progress has been made in developing a framework for measuring the **quality of employment**. Experts from national statistical offices, in collaboration with UNECE, International Labour Office (ILO), the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Eurostat, and Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), have developed and tested the proposed dimensions and indicators. An indicator validation study and nine country profiles based on the proposed framework were prepared in 2009 (funded in part by the European Commission). These documents formed the basis for the meeting of the Group of Experts on measurement of the quality of employment, organized by UNECE in cooperation with ILO and Eurostat in October 2009. The experts agreed on the overall structure of the framework and made suggestions to improve specific indicators and metadata. In May 2010 UNECE published country pilot reports in a collective volume "Measuring quality of employment: country pilot reports". The Report on Potential Indicators for Measurement of Quality of Employment will be submitted to the Conference in June 2010 for endorsement.

C. Environment and sustainable development statistics

27. In 2009, the Report on **measuring sustainable development** was issued as a result of the work of the Joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Working Group. The Report made a breakthrough to reach a common understanding of the principles of measuring sustainability within the capital approach framework. This approach is based on four types of capital: economic, natural, human and social capital. A new Task Force was set up in

2009 to further identify capital indicators to present the long-term dimension of sustainable development. In addition, under each capital indicator, the Task Force reviews indicators to present the distributional aspects of sustainable development. The work focuses on those indicators where further research is most likely to result in improved statistical concepts or methods, for example in the area of human and social capital. The work of the Task Force is strongly linked to the work undertaken by other institutions, such as the most recent recommendations in the Report issued by the Stiglitz Commission, the European Commission's initiative *GDP and beyond*, and the OECD project on *Measuring the Progress of Societies*.

28. Recent developments in the environment (e.g. climate change) and the intensified debate on the subject have put the environment high on the political agenda and increased the demand for high quality statistics in this field. A Joint Intersectoral UNECE Task Force on **Environmental Indicators** began its work in 2009 to improve environmental data production and promote comparability of environmental statistics in EECCA and SEE countries. It is a joint undertaking by two UNECE Sectoral Committees - the Committee on Environmental Policy and the Conference of European Statisticians. The UN Statistics Division in New York and the European Environment Agency are actively contributing to the work of the Task Force. The Task Force is reviewing selected indicators presented in the *Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia*, endorsed by the "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference in 2007. More importantly, this work is bringing together environmental experts and statisticians, a cooperation that has proved successful and already led to concrete outcomes in improved methodologies and better time series data. During the first meeting (autumn 2009), the Task Force reviewed 5 indicators from the *Guidelines*, namely: emissions of pollutants into the atmospheric air, greenhouse gas emissions, household water use per capita, land uptake and waste reuse and recycling. At the second meeting (May 2010) the Task Force reviewed 6 more indicators in key areas, such as clean air, energy, drinking water, waste, transport demand, land uptake, freshwater resources and protected areas. The work will continue in 2010 to review additional indicators from the *Guidelines* and to discuss professionalism, independence and confidentiality in producing environmental indicators, reporting to the international community, financing the indicator production, and training experiences and needs.

D. Cross-cutting issues

29. The UNECE secretariat provides unique forums for **information systems managers, methodologists and communication experts** from national and international statistical organizations to share experiences. Task forces and working groups are currently preparing a number of outputs including a framework for the joint development and sharing of statistical IT tools, and a guide to metadata standards. Cooperation with other statistical organizations has intensified, particularly in the field of statistical data and metadata exchange (SDMX), and data dissemination systems.

30. The **dissemination and communication of statistics** remains an area of active involvement for the UNECE. Annual meetings are held to share experiences and promote good practices in communicating with the media, managing customer relationships and outreach, gathering and analysing feedback, improving statistical literacy and managing the dissemination and communication within a statistical organization. A new guide to presenting statistics was published in the *Making Data Meaningful* series, and a task force is currently updating a *Guide to communicating with the media*, for publication in 2010.

31. As a follow-up to the first-ever forum on **human resources management and training** in statistical offices in September 2008 in Skopje, a workshop on human resources

management and training in 2010 is being prepared. The workshop is organized in cooperation with national statistical offices from a number of countries, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), Eurostat and IMF. The workshop will focus on training in statistics and how to attract and retain staff in statistical offices.

E. Technical assistance

32. An important part of the work is to assist countries of Eastern and South-eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia in **building and improving their statistical capacity** by organising seminars and workshops, providing advisory services, promoting the implementation of international standards and recommendations, and transmitting best practices. UNECE also helps countries to implement the **UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics**, a standard that was adopted by the Economic Commission for Europe in 1992, by giving advice on statistical legislation, institutional frameworks, and on ensuring the independence and impartiality of official statistics.

33. At the request of a number of countries, **training workshops and advisory services** were provided to Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, Russian Federation, Serbia, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and the UN Administered Region in Kosovo on various topics, such as the organization of national statistical systems, statistical legislation, preparation for the 2010 round of population and housing censuses, migration statistics, gender statistics, violence against women, national accounts, price statistics, measuring sustainable development, MDGs, statistical quality, statistical literacy, and dissemination and marketing of statistical information.

34. UNECE provided advice on **price statistics** at the meeting organised by the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States in November 2009. A training workshop on **short-term economic statistics** is planned to take place in autumn 2010.

35. A meeting “Better Evidence for Better Development Results” was organised jointly with UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA and OECD for countries with economies in transition to discuss the use and future development of the MDG indicators. Two meetings for the EECCA countries related to MDGs took place in Astana, Kazakhstan: an expert group meeting on producing and disaggregating MDG indicators in October 2009, and a training workshop on dissemination of **MDG indicators** in November 2009. A workshop on indicators of the MDGs of child mortality and maternal health is planned to take place in autumn 2010.

36. Several training activities have been organized in the field of **gender statistics** in 2009-2010 (jointly with the World Bank Institute, UNDP, UNFPA and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)). A sub-regional workshop on gender statistics was held in Skopje, in February 2010, and a national workshop took place in Serbia, in May 2010. UNECE is participating in a global Development Account project on developing tools to measure **violence against women**. UNECE has been contributing to a UN Development Account project on migration statistics to improve the production and comparability of **migration** data in Central Asian countries, and promoting the use of these statistics for planning and monitoring of migration policies in that region. A regional Workshop on Migration Statistics took place in Bishkek, in February 2010.

37. The UNECE, together with the main partners Eurostat and EFTA, has been involved in conducting **global assessments of the national statistical systems** of countries with economies in transition. In 2009, such a global assessment was carried out in Armenia.

Preparations have started for global assessments of the statistical systems of Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan in 2010.

38. Documents and presentations from all meetings, seminars and training workshops organized by the UNECE can be found on the UNECE Statistical Division's web site at: <http://www.unece.org/stats/archive/docs.date.e.htm>
