

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

First meeting of the 2004/2005 Bureau
Washington, D.C., 18-19 October 2004

Item 2: ECE Statistical
Programme

DIRECTIONS FOR THE PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE NEXT BIENNIUM

Directions and priority areas for 2006-2007

UNECE Statistical Division¹

1. The main direction of work on statistics in the UNECE work programme for 2006-2007 is to coordinate international statistical work in the ECE region and to improve the quality of official statistics by developing and implementing statistical standards, strengthening the institutional frameworks of statistics and promoting the use of statistics as a tool for evidence based decision making.
2. The priority areas of work are:
 - promoting institutional frameworks and statistical policies that are in line with the UNECE Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, thus contributing to good governance;
 - improving national official statistics and their international comparability, and responding to emerging needs for international cooperation in developing standards covering Europe, North America and leading statistical agencies in other regions;
 - acting as the coordinator of the statistical activities of international organizations active in the region;
 - contributing to transparency in public debate and informed decision making through producing and making available essential macroeconomic, social and demographic statistics, e.g. the indicators related to the Millennium Development Goals.
3. The strategy for the implementation of the work programme involves the following:
 - i) Assessing existing institutional frameworks (statistical laws) and major practices in member countries and positively influencing eventual revisions, as well as developing good practices for implementing some of the principles. This can be achieved through technical cooperation activities such as bilateral advice to member countries at their request, and through multilateral workshops and seminars. Developing fundamental principles for international statistical organizations, promoting their implementation and adopting the principles for the statistical work in UNECE. The CES will discuss one foundational issue of official statistics every year in the presence of the highest representatives of national statistical systems of ECE member states and other members of the Conference.
 - ii) Continuing efforts to improve the comparability of official statistics, updating existing statistical standards and developing, when necessary, new standards. In most cases, such work is carried out as a joint activity with other international organizations to ensure synergy. Efforts will be also continued for statistical capacity building so that an increasing number of less advanced countries in the region are able to produce essential statistics such as indicators related to the goals contained in the Millennium Declaration, according to international standards. The UNECE will oversee, through the mechanisms established by the CES, that emerging needs of official statistics are addressed collectively by international organizations active in the region, whether the leading role is played by the UNECE, other international organizations, UNECE member countries or leading statistical agencies outside the region. The CES will address one emerging issue every year at its annual session.

¹ The present document was approved by the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians at its meeting on 18-19 October 2004, Washington, D.C.

iii) Continuing and strengthening its coordination role and support to the work of the CES and its Bureau. The CES, mainly through its Bureau, has established itself as the body where the statistical activities of all international organizations relevant for the region, such as Eurostat (the Statistical Office of European Communities), the OECD, IMF, UNSD, CIS etc., participating on a voluntary basis, are coordinated. UNECE will collect and disseminate regularly updated information on statistical activities of various international organizations active in statistics, in order to identify overlaps and gaps and search consensus on follow-up actions and recommendations to partner organizations.

iv) Producing and disseminating internationally comparable statistical information on the region aimed at more transparent public debate and decision-making process at national and international level. The UNECE will make all efforts to pool with other international organizations in collecting and sharing essential macro-economic, social and demographic statistics from national statistical offices. In deciding the best sources and methods for statistical data collection, the UNECE will take into account the coverage, reliability and timeliness of data as well as resource requirements and reporting burden on national statistical offices. The UNECE will make efforts in efficient use of modern technologies for collection, processing, warehousing and dissemination of data. Efforts will be made towards implementing data sharing models as requested by national statistical offices and the 2002 plenary session of the CES.

Activities to be continued, terminated or introduced.

4. The UNECE Statistical Division will regularly update its priorities to be able to continue its core services as well as to introduce work on new issues in official statistics. In this prioritisation, the availability of own resources and coverage of work by other statistical agencies is taken into account.

5. In order to keep outputs relevant to the needs of the intended beneficiaries, a certain part of the work programme is renewed every biennium. Active reorientation and consolidation of activities is going on in the 2004-2005 biennium. In 2004, all statistical activities were reviewed, about a quarter of them were substantially revised and a decision was taken to discontinue 7 activities. After such a comprehensive revision of the work programme in 2004-2005, it is expected that the reorientation of work during 2006-2007 will be on a somewhat smaller scale.

6. The strategy in revising the work programme focuses on strengthening the priority work areas. This is done by concentrating the resources on a smaller number of activities where substantial input can be made instead of spreading resources over a number of activities where the involvement can be only marginal. Therefore, the work programme is scrutinised every year to consider whether to continue activities that have minimal resource implications and where the UNECE Statistical Division does not make a substantive professional contribution. The resources freed up this way are used to strengthen priority activities that did not have adequate resources earlier or to take aboard new activities.

Streamlining of meetings, documents and publications.

Meetings

7. Streamlining of meetings is carried out with the help of the coordinating role of the CES and its Bureau. As a result of longstanding efforts on coordination, streamlining and preventing duplication, most UNECE expert meetings in statistics are jointly organized with other international organizations, both from within and from outside the UN system. Since 1997, there are no standing ECE working groups in statistics.

8. The majority of the activities of the UNECE Statistical Division are undertaken with the help of Teams of Specialists and are based on Terms of Reference approved by the CES Bureau. This mechanism ensures that the work targets the actual needs of member countries, leads to specific outputs and does not duplicate work carried out by other international organizations.

9. The policy of the UNECE Statistical Division is to coordinate activities with other international organizations so that the UNECE contributes a clear value added in areas where the relevant expertise is available. The review process by the Bureau ensures that this principle is adhered to and that meetings are not an end in themselves but part of an activity that leads to a clearly specified result.

10. The UNECE Statistical Division continues to look for ways to improve support to the work of the CES and its Bureau so that they can better fulfill their mandate of coordinating international statistical work in the UNECE area. The UNECE will continue to ensure that the CES plenary sessions remain relevant to the needs of the official statistics in the UNECE region.

Documentation

11. In order to reduce the workload with processing documentation, all meetings' documents are distributed electronically (made available on Internet). The dissemination of hard copies has been discontinued since 2001. In 2006-2007, the UNECE Statistical Division will continue to make use of new technological developments to improve the accessibility of documentation through electronic channels.

12. One of the main outputs of work - the Integrated Presentation (IP) of International Statistical Work Programmes - will continue to be maintained in a database format and made available on Internet (instead of distributing the approximately 250 pages document in a hard copy format). The UNECE Statistical Division will continue work on improving the search and updating facilities for the IP database and linking it better to the relevant documents of other international organizations.

Publications

13. The publications programme is revised every year to concentrate on publications where the UNECE Statistical Division can make a contribution in priority areas of work and to ensure that it meets the demands of official statistics. Emphasis is put on electronic dissemination: all publications will be available on Internet reducing to a minimum the number of required paper copies.

14. A regular publication on "Robotics" will be discontinued (as the involvement of the UNECE Statistical Division in this area is phased out). The statistical yearbook "Trends in Europe and North America" is being revised and will be issued in a new format (reducing its volume in a printed format and increasing the electronic dissemination through Internet and via a CD-ROM).

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