

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

First Meeting of the 2009/2010 Bureau
Washington, D.C. (United States), 15-16 October 2009

REPORT

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The first meeting of the 2009/2010 Bureau was held in Washington D.C. at the invitation of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank on 15-16 October 2009. The following members of the Bureau attended: Ms. H. Jeskanen-Sundström (Chairman); Mr. B. Pink; Mr. E. Pereira Nunes; Mr. M. Sheikh; Mr. G. O'Hanlon; Mr. O. Olsen; Ms. I. Krizman; and Mr. O. Osaulenko. The following permanent observers also attended: Mr. P. Schreyer (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)); Mr. P. Everaers (representing Mr. W. Radermacher, Eurostat); Mr. Y. Ivanov (representing Mr. M. Koroley, Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT)); Mr. S. Schweinfest (representing Mr. P. Cheung, United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)), Mr. A. Kitili (representing Ms. A. Bürgi-Schmelz, IMF), Mr. M. Belkindas (representing Ms. S. Badiée, World Bank); and Ms. L. Bratanova (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)). Ms. K. Wallman and Ms. S. Evinger (United States Office of Management and Budget) attended at the invitation of the Chairman. The following persons also attended: Ms. C. Dziobek (IMF) and Ms. P. Kelly (United States Bureau of Economic Analysis) for agenda item 2b; Ms. J. Madans and Ms. J. Weeks (United States National Center for Health Statistics) for agenda item 3f; Ms. V. Velkoff (United States Census Bureau) for agenda item 3h, and Mr. R. Heath (IMF) for agenda item 10c.

2. The following persons assisted members of the Bureau: Mr. L. Cortes Neto (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, Brazil); Mr. B. Prigly (Statistics Canada); Ms. I. Muzychenko (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine); and Ms. M. João Santos (Eurostat). Ms. T. Luige of UNECE served as Secretary of the meeting.

II. IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF SELECTED STATISTICAL AREAS

A. Statistical dissemination, communication and publications

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/2 (UNECE and the Steering Group on Statistical Dissemination and Communication), Add.1 (Slovenia)

3. 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 review also drew upon the results of consideration of this topic at the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) plenary session 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 Coordinating Committee of Statistical Activities (CCSA); CIS-STAT can provide some additional text based on experiences in the CIS 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) UNSD is organising a seminar on emerging trends in data communication and dissemination on 19 February 2010 (before the UN Statistical Commission session) and is conducting a number of workshops on this subject. Other international organizations are welcome to contribute to the workshops;

(r) Eurostat mentioned the project 'Statistics Explained' and requested to incorporate in the document information about it.

Conclusions

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

6. 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. Australia expressed interest in participating in this work. Eurostat would like to follow the issue but will not be able to play a very active role. This work should be linked to the related activities of the International Association of Official Statistics.

7. There is a need for international work on sharing good practices on pre-releases and embargoes, and on disseminating information on minority groups.

8. 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.

9. UNECE is willing to contribute to the UNSD work on conducting workshops on emerging trends in data communication and dissemination (including the seminar on 19 February 2010). Furthermore, the Steering Group on Statistical Dissemination and Communication can be contacted for identifying experts who could provide training on this topic.

B. Government finance, fiscal and public sector statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/3 (IMF), Add.1 (UNECE)

10. The Bureau discussed government finance, fiscal and public sector statistics based on a paper by IMF and an additional note by the UNECE.

11. The following points were made in discussion:

(a) The paper covers well the problems and challenges in this difficult and complex area;

(b) There was general support for more cooperation between international agencies working in this area and for bringing the data together in a virtual way; data exchange is quite well developed but can still be further improved;

(c) A network (a working group, committee, etc.) on this topic could be useful, similar to the IMF Balance of Payments Committee; some of the discussions could be hosted by the interagency group on finance statistics and by the Inter-secretariat Working Group on National Accounts (discussion on a number of issues is already planned, like public sector employment, treatment of emission permits and receipts, instruments in financial crisis, government debt);

(d) The Manual on government finance statistics (GFS) is planned to be updated following the adoption of the System of National Accounts (SNA) 2008; the first priority should be to include the minimum changes that are required to bring the Manual into line with 2008 SNA; the recommendations should be detailed enough to help countries with less developed statistical systems;

(e) The supplementary explanatory materials to the GFS 2001 manual are considered very useful; this practice should be expanded and continued; clarification of treatment of social benefits and pensions in the GFS and in comparison with SNA 2008 would be particularly useful;

(f) Some participants noted that it will not be easy to provide quarterly data on general government and it has to be considered whether the related benefits outweigh the costs; other participants considered quarterly data very relevant to provide a consistent monitoring of the situation;

(g) The recent crisis has emphasised the need for more information on public sector and its international comparability;

(h) It is difficult to obtain data at regional and municipal level; international cooperation in considering how to solve this problem would be welcome;

(i) The issues related to fiscal intervention outside the government sector may be handled over time using the current standards; a crisis is not the best time to establish new rules because of volatility in data;

(j) There is no need to reopen the discussion on public-private partnerships, these have been discussed leading up to SNA 2008;

(k) The countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) experience serious problems with GFS and with cooperation of different government agencies dealing with this topic; help from IMF in setting up GFS would be very much appreciated; CIS-STAT could host a meeting on this topic with representatives of financial ministries and national accountants of the CIS countries; IMF has some training materials that can be used for this purpose;

(l) Providing training and technical assistance on GFS to developing and transition countries would benefit from pooling resources at international level;

(m) The GFS yearbook should leave blank the tables where data are not available (e.g. the accrual tables) so as not to present a distorted picture of how many countries are following the standard.

Conclusions

12. IMF will update the paper to reflect the comments from the discussion. The sections about the activities of the international organizations will be reviewed by the agencies concerned. Eurostat will provide specific remarks on the paper in writing.

13. The revised and updated paper will be presented to the CES plenary session in June 2010. The Conference will be informed about the outcome of the review.

C. Follow-up to in-depth review on housing statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/4 (UNECE)

14. The Bureau discussed possible future work in housing statistics following the in-depth review of housing statistics in February 2009, the consultation with countries in May 2009, and the discussion at the CES 2009 plenary session.

15. The following points were made in the discussion:

(a) The discussion about possible future work should focus on specific sub-topics from the broad area of housing statistics;

(b) Possible areas for future consideration are housing prices in the context of the International Comparison Programme, implications of housing prices on other economic areas in the light of the financial crisis, and mortgages in foreign currencies;

(c) The work of the European Union (EU) network dealing with housing statistics at ministerial level should be taken into account when planning any future work on housing statistics;

(d) With regard to undertaking any additional work on housing statistics, it would be better to wait until the population census has been carried out and the Eurostat manual on property prices has been developed.

Conclusion

16. There is no urgent need to establish a CES activity in housing statistics in addition to the activities already undertaken by other fora. Housing statistics will be kept on the list of follow-up items and the Bureau will come back to the topic in future.

D. Follow-up to in-depth review of agriculture statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/5 (Eurostat)

17. Following the in-depth review of agriculture statistics in October 2008 and the Bureau discussion in February 2009, the Bureau considered the terms of reference for a light Task Force on Agriculture Statistics prepared by Eurostat.

18. The following points were made in the discussion:

- (a) The work of the Task Force should provide a clear added value compared to the work of the Friends of the Chair of the UN Statistical Commission;
- (b) The discussion between Eurostat and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) about the work in agriculture statistics is still ongoing;
- (c) Ukraine supports setting up the Task Force and would like to participate in the work.

Conclusion

19. The Bureau postponed the decision on whether to set up the Task Force pending the outcome of the FAO-Eurostat discussion. If the Task Force is established, Ukraine will be included as a member.

E. Selection of topics and organization of in-depth reviews by the Bureau in 2010

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/6 (UNECE)

20. The Bureau discussed the organization of the next in-depth reviews, the statistical areas to be reviewed in 2010 and the Rapporteurs to prepare the background papers.

21. Furthermore, the Bureau considered the usefulness of discussing the in-depth review topics at the CES plenary session to obtain input to the Bureau discussion. It was noted that this depends on the type of topic and may not work so well with specific technical topics.

Conclusions

22. The Bureau selected the following topics and Rapporteurs for the next in-depth reviews:

- (a) The use of secondary and mixed sources for official statistics – to be reviewed at the June 2010 meeting of the Bureau; the paper will be prepared by UNECE (with inputs from Bureau members);
- (b) Time-use surveys (including the time-use related aspects of the political and community activities and volunteer work) – to be reviewed at the November 2010 meeting of the Bureau; the paper will be prepared by the United States or United Kingdom (to be confirmed);
- (c) Measuring the information society and statistics on science, technology and innovation – to be reviewed at the November 2010 meeting of the Bureau; the paper will be prepared by Australia.

23. The topics of time-use surveys and of measuring information society and statistics on science, technology and innovation will be discussed at the CES 2010 plenary session to obtain input to the Bureau discussion in November 2010 (deadline for the papers will be **15 March 2010**). The use of secondary and mixed sources for official statistics will be reviewed in-depth at the CES Bureau meeting on 11 June 2010 (deadline for the paper will be **10 May 2010**).

24. Other possible topics for the review that were mentioned but not selected were: access to microdata; information management; statistics on drivers for wellbeing; and metadata.

25. The Bureau will decide in future on a case-by-case basis which in-depth review topics should be considered at the CES plenary sessions prior to the review by the CES Bureau.

III. STIGLITZ COMMISSION AND GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT (GDP) AND BEYOND

Documentation: Report of the Stiglitz Commission. Executive Summary; GDP and beyond. Measuring progress in a changing world (Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament)

26. The Bureau discussed the main recommendations of the Stiglitz Report, the European Commission communication 'GDP and beyond', and their implications for official statistics.

27. The Bureau did not take a collective official standpoint on the issue. Below is a summary of individual comments made in the discussion:

(a) The documents describe upcoming user requests and can therefore be expected to set the tone for the statistical work in the coming years;

(b) The positive outcome of the Stiglitz report is that it has given an increased visibility to statistics;

(c) The Report recognises the current statistical system as a good basis for further improvement and development, in some fields it makes a good assessment of the work that statisticians are currently doing and gives useful recommendations for further work;

(d) The Stiglitz Report is an important contribution to already ongoing discussions but not a working program for official statistics; it summarises well the issues that are being discussed by statisticians; the Report is not only directed at statistical offices but also beyond them;

(e) The statistical community should indicate in which areas mentioned by the Stiglitz Report data are already available and work is being undertaken; in some areas official statistics are going even further than what the recommendations prescribe;

(f) Statisticians have not always been able to communicate effectively the information that is available; there is a lot of potential to improve the communication with users and to make better use of the data that are already collected;

(g) Some of the recommendations can be implemented within official statistics, others are better suited for the research community;

(h) The high standards of quality of official statistics should be maintained; more research and development work is needed in several areas suggested by the Report; countries can do experimental work in these areas but the global statistical system has other priorities in areas where international standards exist;

(i) The work on economic and on social and environmental issues has to be balanced; until now there has been too much focus on economic indicators;

(j) Statisticians are sceptical of the recommendations to develop composite measures supplementing or replacing GDP; it is not possible to aggregate complexities of life into one simple measure;

(k) The countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia have a great concern with regard to Stiglitz Report and the fact that it can be interpreted as blaming statistics for the financial crises; an official position of the international statistical community would be helpful for these countries in confronting the criticism of country governments;

(l) The real test of the demand for statistics recommended in the Stiglitz Report will be if governments are ready to finance statistical offices' work in these areas, either by reallocating priorities in the statistical programmes or by providing additional financial resources; the resources are crucial to be able to do more in social or environment statistics; statisticians have a professional responsibility to remind policy makers that statistics is costly and it will not be possible to produce the additional data recommended by the Report with the available resources.

Conclusions

28. The discussion on how to address the issues raised in the Stiglitz Report and the EC communication 'GDP and beyond' will continue.

29. Several international organizations will address the report in the coming months. The UN Statistical Commission will organise a discussion on this topic in February 2010. OECD will discuss a roadmap at the 3rd World Forum on Measuring the progress of Societies (27-30 October, Busan, Korea). Eurostat is setting up a sponsorship group at Director General level to deal with the ability to respond to emerging issues, and is considering setting up a task force to look at the European Statistical System's response to the Stiglitz Report and 'GDP and beyond'.

IV. UNECE STATISTICAL PROGRAMME FOR 2010

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/7 (UNECE)

30. The UNECE Statistical Programme (SP) for 2010 was presented by the secretariat. Terms of reference (TOR) and progress reports of the various Steering Groups and Task Forces that are related to the activities were also reviewed under this agenda item.

31. The format of the SP has been streamlined to provide the basis for planning and accountability in view of the different lines of reporting within the UN: the CES and its Bureau, the UNECE Executive Committee (EXCOM), and the UN biennial programming and budgeting system.

Conclusion

32. The Bureau approved the UNECE Statistical Programme 2010, subject to the more

detailed comments on specific activities and the related decisions provided below.

A. National accounts

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/28 (UNECE)

33. The secretariat presented terms of reference for the creation of a Steering Group on National Accounts. The main aim of the Group will be to coordinate the CES activities towards the implementation of the 2008 System of National Accounts (SNA) in the UNECE region, focusing on the countries of East Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) and South-East Europe (SEE). The Group will also provide advice to the UNECE on developing the 2008 SNA implementation strategy and providing technical assistance to the EECCA countries.

34. The following points were made in the discussion:

(a) The Group should provide a link to non-EU, non-OECD countries and facilitate the coordination between the UNECE, EU and OECD concerning national accounts related work in the EECCA countries;

(b) The membership of the Group should reflect the needs of EECCA countries;

(c) CIS - STAT will appreciate recommendations from the Steering Group on establishing priorities in SNA 2008 implementation and is prepared to cooperate with the Steering Group and suggest its own view on this matter; at the same time, the EECCA countries still need to continue work to achieve full implementation of the SNA 93.

Conclusion

35. The Bureau approved the establishment of a Steering Group on National Accounts. The terms of reference should clarify the relation of the Group to the national accounts related work of Eurostat and OECD. Eurostat, OECD and CIS-STAT will participate in the SG. The revised terms of reference will be circulated to the Bureau.

B. Impact of globalisation on national accounts

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/8 (Group of Experts on the Impact of Globalisation on National Accounts)

36. The Group of Experts on the Impact of Globalisation on National Accounts provided a progress report. The Group asked for the extension of its mandate by one year aiming to present the final document *Impact of Globalisation on National Accounts: Practical Guidance* to the CES in June 2011.

37. The following points were made in the discussion:

(a) The work is aimed at giving practical guidance on how to deal with the impact of globalisation in selected areas; it is in accordance with the SNA 2008 recommendations and does not re-open or raise any new issues related to the SNA;

(b) The Group is developing operational guidelines for the treatment of goods for processing and merchanting related to the implementation of the SNA 2008;

(c) The case studies that are planned to be included in the practical guidance could be incorporated into the respective chapters to give them more visibility. The case studies should be identified as early as possible so as to meet the deadline for the final publication.

Conclusion

38. The Bureau agreed to extend the mandate of the Group of Experts on the Impact of Globalisation on National Accounts until June 2011.

C. Business statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/9 (Task Force on Business Statistics (chaired by Canada and Eurostat))

39. Following the CES seminar on business statistics held in June 2009, the Task Force on Business Statistics presented a proposal for further work. The Task Force proposed preparing papers to summarise best practices in the areas identified by the Conference. Four topics were identified, as follows: (1) efficient uses of administrative data, (2) the reduction of the perceived burden, (3) user demands for business microdata, and (4) user demands for new business statistics.

40. The following points were made in the discussion:

(a) Establishing the right balance between timeliness and the other quality dimensions, the limited resources and the response burden is a continuous challenge; users' tolerance towards revisions is an additional aspect that should be taken into account;

(b) It is important to make policy makers understand the trade-offs between the available resources and the relevance, timeliness and quality of statistics.

Conclusion:

41. Topic 1. 'Efficient uses of administrative data' will be covered by an in-depth review, therefore no paper will be prepared on that topic as a follow-up to the CES seminar.

42. The following countries/organizations will take the lead in preparing the papers on the remaining topics: Topic 2. 'The reduction of the perceived burden' - Eurostat; Topic 3. 'User demands for business microdata' - Canada; and Topic 4. 'User demands for new business statistics' - U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. Australia would like to contribute to the work on user demands on business microdata (topic 3). Other Bureau members can contribute and send their input to the countries/agencies leading the work under the respective topics.

43. The papers will be prepared for the November 2010 meeting of the Bureau with a view of being presented to the CES plenary session in June 2011.

D. Short-term statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/7 Add.1 (UNECE)

44. The Bureau considered the work proposed by the secretariat in the area of short-term economic statistics (STS). The work will focus on providing technical assistance in seasonal adjustment to the EECCA countries, organizing workshops and preparing methodological guidelines. The project is funded by the World Bank.

45. It was noted that UNECE should take into account the work of the European Central Bank on seasonal adjustment in order to follow the most advanced developments in this area.

Conclusion

46. The Bureau approved the proposal for future work on Activity 5.5 Short-term economic statistics in the SP 2010. The Bureau thanked the World Bank for financing the project.

E. Social statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/10 (UNECE) and Add.1 (Task Force on Families and Households), ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/14 (UNECE) and Add.1 (Canada), and ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/29 (UNECE)

47. The report of the **Task Force on families and households** was sent to the Bureau, labelled 'for information' by mistake. This document includes recommendations on how to define and measure new forms of families and households. Therefore, it should be consulted with the Bureau and, if the Bureau considers appropriate, be submitted to the CES plenary session for approval.

48. As the Bureau members were not asked to comment and there was not sufficient time to review the document, it should be sent for further consultation electronically.

49. The final report of the work of the **Task Force on volunteer work** was presented to the Bureau for information. The Task Force has concluded its work and will cease to exist.

50. The draft terms of reference for a **Steering Group on emerging issues in social statistics** were presented to the Bureau.

51. The following points were made in the discussion:

(a) The Steering Group does not have a specific agenda, deadline and concrete issues to deal with; the Bureau should refrain from establishing groups with open ended invitation to find something to work on;

(b) There is a need for strategic thinking in social statistics as a whole;

(c) It would be useful to take stock of what is available on measuring wellbeing and discuss country experiences in this area;

(d) The session related to social and household statistics during the CES 2010 seminar on impact of crises on statistical systems could help to identify specific areas from social statistics for further work;

(e) The members of the group can continue networking and developing a more concrete proposal for future work.

Conclusion

52. The secretariat will send the report on **measuring new forms of families and households** to the Bureau members for electronic consultation. Depending on the outcome of the consultation, the Bureau will decide in February 2010 whether the report can be circulated to all CES members for comments and submitted to the CES 2010 plenary session for endorsement.

53. The work of the **Task Force on measuring volunteer work** has been completed. The Bureau thanked the Task Force members for the work done.

54. With regard to the creation of a **Steering Group on emerging issues in social statistics**, the UNECE was asked to communicate the comments by the Bureau to the proposed members of the group. The Bureau encouraged the secretariat and the interested countries/organizations to continue to maintain an informal network. The Bureau could review again a mandate for a Steering Group on emerging issues in social statistics following the CES 2010 seminar, provided that a more concrete proposal emerges.

F. Health statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/11 (UNECE)

55. The Chair of the Task Force on measuring health status (the so-called Budapest Initiative (BI)) presented a progress report of its work. Furthermore, the revised TOR for the Steering Group and Task Force on measuring health status were submitted to the Bureau for approval.

56. The Budapest Initiative, working in collaboration with the Washington Group on disability statistics (WG) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), has made considerable progress in developing and testing standard questions on health state. Cognitive testing of the question set was carried out in nine countries in 2009, with field testing being conducted in five countries. Further testing is planned in 2010. This work is expected to result in the establishment and approval of BI-Mark2 (BI-M2) in 2010/2011.

57. It was proposed that the Steering Group be mandated until 2013 to provide a focal point to countries for sharing experiences on measuring health status and disseminating the results of the work of the BI. The Task Force will work until the end of 2010 when the question set is planned to be finalised.

58. The following points were raised in the discussion:

(a) It is important to formulate the questions on health status in such a way as to avoid the bias due to different social security systems in the countries;

(b) The new set of questions will have to link to the work of the EU countries on household interview questions, and to the EU regulations in this area; there is also a link to the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions in relation to measuring mental inability.

Conclusion

59. The Bureau expressed support for the work of the Budapest Initiative and approved the TOR for the Steering Group and Task Force on measuring health status.

G. Crime statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/12 (UNECE)

60. Draft terms of reference for a Task Force on classifying crimes were presented to the Bureau for comments and approval. The work will be carried out jointly with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

61. The following points were made in the discussion:

(a) Crime statistics is a very important field often neglected in official statistics in countries; work in this area is welcome;

(b) The perception of insecurity is growing among the population and there is no good statistical assessment of the situation;

(c) Point 3b on page 2 of the paper should be corrected to make it clear that it refers to the undertaking of a case study of defining and classifying selected offences.

Conclusion

62. The Bureau approved the TOR subject to the correction above. Australia, Brazil, Canada and Eurostat would like to join the Task Force. Finland will check whether they could participate in the work.

63. The secretariat should clarify which countries and organizations will be members of the Task Force.

H. Migration statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/13 (UNECE)

64. Draft terms of reference of a Task Force on improving migration and migrant data using household surveys and other sources (the so-called Suitland Working Group) were presented to the Bureau for comments and approval.

Conclusion

65. The Bureau approved the terms of reference for a Task Force on improving migration and migrant data using household surveys and other sources. The Bureau noted that the terms of

reference for this group are a good example of TOR to be followed, including concrete tasks and outputs.

I. Climate change

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/7 Add.2 (UNECE)

66. The Bureau discussed the proposed CES work on climate change in view of the outcomes of the 63rd UNECE session in February 2009 and the meeting of the UN Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting in June 2009. Following a Bureau decision, the UNECE plans to carry out a survey to find out to what extent the national statistical offices are involved in work related to climate change statistics. This survey should be conducted in consultation with Eurostat and the UN Statistical Division. The secretariat will also explore possibilities to cooperate with other UNECE divisions on climate change related work.

67. The following points were raised in the discussion:

(a) Official statistics should be involved in climate change related work, however, it is difficult to identify the role of statisticians among the many agencies active in this area working with different aspects of the problem; at present, only a few statistical offices are dealing with emission inventories (e.g. Finland, Norway, Israel);

(b) Official statisticians should be involved in defining standards for climate change statistics, especially when these are directly related to existing statistical standards (e.g. ISIC); the UN Statistical Commission should be the coordinator for developing any standards related to this area at international level;

(c) It is not clear whether the proposed survey of statistical offices will give good results because most of the work linked to climate change statistics is done outside statistical agencies;

(d) The aim of the survey will be to obtain a general picture of how national statistical offices (NSOs) are involved in climate change related work (focusing on emission inventories and on drivers for climate change); the survey would permit the assessment of whether this is an issue to the statistical offices that should be dealt with at international level;

(e) It should be made clear in the survey what kind of climate change related work is covered and where lies the borderline between climate change and broader environment statistics;

(f) The CES should establish contacts at relevant levels but not put too many resources into this area.

Conclusion

68. The Bureau approved the proposal for future work on Activity 7.3 Statistics related to climate change in the SP 2010. The work of the CES in this area will be discussed again at the November 2010 meeting of the Bureau.

J. Management of Statistical Information Systems

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/15 (UNECE)

69. When the Bureau reviewed the challenges and priorities of the Steering Group on Management of Statistical Information Systems (MSIS) in February 2009, the Bureau asked that Group to develop terms of reference for the creation of the Sharing Advisory Board (SAB). Draft TOR for the Sharing Advisory Board were presented to the Bureau for comments and approval.

70. The following points were raised in the discussion:

(a) Creating a framework and encouraging more offices to get involved in sharing statistical software is very welcome; the proposal for practical work in this area is important; if the group succeeds in this difficult endeavour, the outcome will be useful for everyone;

(b) To be successful, the group will need strategic thinking and a commitment from people at management level;

(c) The terms of reference deal with legal and strategic issues, therefore the work should be overseen by heads of statistical organizations. The group should report directly to the Bureau on an annual basis;

(d) The governance structure should also preserve a link to the MSIS Steering Group, which is working on a more strategic level; the Bureau discussed challenges for the MSIS in February 2009 and agreed with the general direction of the work;

(e) The work on metadata and on sharing software should be strongly linked to use opportunities to make the statistical processes more efficient;

(f) The mission statement in the document requires clarification: is it dealing with business or information architectures?

Conclusion

71. The Bureau welcomed the proposal for work on facilitating sharing of statistical software. However, the Bureau did not approve the terms of reference for the creation of the SAB in their current form and requested changes to the governance structure. The secretariat, together with Mr. P. Everaers (Eurostat) and Mr. B. Pink (Australian Bureau of Statistics), will formulate a proposal for revising the terms of reference of the SAB. The revised TOR will be circulated for electronic discussion and approval by the Bureau.

K. Coordination of technical cooperation in Central Asia

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/7 Add.3 (UNECE)

72. At the request of the Bureau, the secretariat has carried out two surveys of technical cooperation activities in Central Asia. Recently, the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21) has set up a Partner Reporting System on Statistical Development (PRESS), to which the secretariat is contributing. In view of this, the UNECE

will no longer carry out the survey of technical cooperation activities in Central Asian countries.

73. The UNECE will continue to produce annual reports on the statistical technical cooperation activities in the countries of the UN Special Programme for Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) using the results from the PRESS and the UNECE network in these countries.

Conclusion

74. The Bureau agreed with the proposal for future work on Activity 1.4 Coordination of technical cooperation in Central Asia in the SP 2010.

L. Sustainable development

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/7 Add.4 (UNECE)

75. The secretariat presented a progress report of the new Task Force on measuring sustainable development.

76. The following points were raised in the discussion:

(a) The group should reach an outcome that is a step further from a purely academic exercise and can be used in practice;

(b) It is important to involve statistical offices in the discussions on capital approach from a theoretical viewpoint. However, it is not clear to what extent this approach can be used to produce official statistics;

(c) The Budapest Initiative could contribute to the work in relation to measuring human capital. United States will check this possibility with the Chairperson of the BI;

(d) Statistics on sustainable development can serve as a stimulus to try to estimate a larger part of total wealth.

Conclusion

77. The Bureau welcomed the progress report and supported further work of the group.

V. REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2009 UNECE STATISTICAL PROGRAMME

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/16 (UNECE)

78. The secretariat presented a short report on the work accomplished by the UNECE Statistical Division in 2009 for comments and approval by the Bureau. The document provides a preliminary status as part of the work still needs to be undertaken by the end of the year. The final report on the implementation of the programme will be submitted for approval in February 2010. The Bureau was informed that the reports on the implementation of the SP in 2008 and 2009 form the basis for the assessment of work accomplished at the end of the 2008-2009 biennium and for preparing the UN Programme Performance Report.

Conclusion

79. The Bureau approved the preliminary report on the implementation of the 2009 UNECE Statistical Programme.

VI. PLANNING FOR UNECE BIENNIAL EVALUATIONS IN 2010-2011; DRAFT STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2012-2013

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/17 (UNECE)

80. The Bureau discussed the planning for the UNECE biennial evaluations in 2010-2011 and the draft strategic framework for 2012-2013. The UNECE Statistical Programmes are harmonised with the UN biennial planning. The clusters of activities in the SP are directly linked to the expected accomplishments and indicators of achievement in the UN biennial budgeting and planning system.

Conclusion

81. The Bureau agreed with the proposed revision of the targets for selected indicators of achievement for the 2010-2011 biennium as follows: the indicator of achievement b(ii) 'Increased percentage of users who express, through user survey, satisfaction with the quality, coverage and timelines of data contained in the UNECE database' was set at 80 per cent; the indicator of achievement c(ii) 'The number of statistical areas (according to the DISA classification) in which the UNECE undertakes substantive methodological work' was set at 27 areas.

82. The Bureau approved the draft strategic framework for the 2012-2013 biennium.

VII. MANUAL ON GENDER STATISTICS

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/18 (Task Force on Gender Statistics Training for Statisticians) and Add.1 (UNECE)

83. The Manual entitled *Developing gender statistics: a practical tool* prepared by the Task Force on Gender Statistics Training for Statisticians was presented to the Bureau for comments and approval.

84. The Manual was considered very useful and is already being used in some countries.

85. Different opinions were expressed on whether to make the Manual available in its draft form on Internet. Some Bureau members were concerned that releasing the draft may create confusion between different versions of the Manual in case there will be amendments to the text. Others found that the Manual could be released with a note that it is subject to approval, so that countries can start benefiting from this useful material in practice. The Bureau requested to see first how the comments are taken into account before the Manual is made available on Internet.

Conclusion

86. The secretariat will update the Manual to incorporate the comments. Following the regular procedure, the Manual will be circulated for electronic comments to all CES members.

If the comments are positive and do not indicate a need for substantive changes to the text, the Manual will be made available on Internet with a note "Subject to approval by the CES". The Manual will be submitted to the CES 2010 plenary session for approval.

VIII. CLASSIFICATION OF STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/19 (UNECE)

87. The Classification of International Statistical Activities was developed under the auspices of the Bureau in 2005 and implemented by the UNECE secretariat in the Database of International Statistical Activities (DISA). Since then, the classification has also been adopted as part of the SDMX (Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange) Content-oriented Guidelines. As the classification is becoming more widely used, there is a need to establish a procedure and responsibilities for its future development and maintenance.

88. The secretariat proposed that the Conference of European Statisticians, through its Bureau, will become the owner of the classification and will be responsible for authorising revisions in future. It was also suggested to change the name of the classification into "Classification of Statistical Activities" (CSA), and to include two minor changes in the classification.

89. The Bureau discussed the proposed procedure. The following points were raised in the discussion:

(a) The classification is good for the practical purposes of international organizations. However, it may be useful to consider the national perspective and consult with the member countries;

(b) As part of SDMX, the list of statistical areas will be used by countries globally, therefore it may require adoption at the UNSC level;

(c) It will be useful to test the classification in practice and see whether it is being picked up at the national level;

(d) It is not strictly speaking a classification but rather a framework; the use of the term classification can be misleading;

(e) The name can not be changed because it is embedded in software;

(f) The final valid version of the document should be made available on Internet, accessible to everyone and, in case of change, the date when the new version becomes effective should be indicated.

Conclusion

90. The Bureau approved the procedure for the maintenance of the list of statistical areas used in DISA and the proposed changes in the list. The Bureau decided not to change the name because it is embedded in software.

IX. COMMON METADATA FRAMEWORK

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/20 and Add.1-3 (UNECE)

91. The Steering Group on Statistical Metadata is developing a Common Metadata Framework (CMF). Part A of the framework, *Statistical Metadata in a Corporate Context* was presented to the Bureau for comments. The Bureau was also invited to comment on progress on the other parts of the framework, and particularly the recently developed *Generic Statistical Business Process Model*.

92. The following points were made in the discussion:

Part A. *Statistical Metadata in a Corporate Context*

(a) The main aim of Part A is to convince top and middle managers of the strategic value of metadata and their crucial importance for the management of the statistical organizations;

(b) Part A would benefit from a review by a professional editor to make the language more approachable to people who are not metadata specialists;

(c) It would be useful to add an executive summary to the document;

Part C. *Generic Statistical Business Process Model*

(d) A business process model can not be efficiently implemented without good metadata management;

(e) The model can also be used in the context of harmonizing statistical computing infrastructures and facilitating the sharing of software components; therefore the link between the work on the business process model and on sharing of software, tools and solutions, should be maintained and developed;

(f) The Generic Statistical Business Process Model is already used by many countries as a basis for adapting their own models.

Conclusion

93. The Bureau considered the Common Metadata Framework very useful and supported the continuation of this work. The text of Part A should be edited to make it more approachable to non-specialists. The Bureau encouraged countries to contribute case studies to the CMF.

X. EVALUATION OF AND FOLLOW-UP TO THE CES SEMINARS AND THE 57TH CES PLENARY SESSION

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/21 (UNECE)

94. The summary of the evaluation questionnaires of the 2008 CES plenary session was presented for information. The comments have been taken into account in the proposals for the draft agenda of the CES 2010 plenary session.

XI. PREPARATIONS FOR THE CES 2010 PLENARY SESSION

A. Organization of the CES seminars

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/22 (Canada)

95. The Bureau discussed how to further improve the organization of the CES seminars based on a paper by Canada. The paper proposed several ideas on how to maximise the usefulness of the seminars. These include focusing on a selected number of sub-topics/issues instead of broadly covering the whole topic, replacing the current format with a panel discussion, and establishing a Rapporteur to report at the next CES plenary session on how countries have implemented the best practices identified at the seminar.

96. The following points were made in the discussion:

(a) There is room for improvement of the seminars, and the paper makes good recommendations;

(b) The idea to select certain issues in a broad topic was generally supported, the Bureau should give directions regarding the issues on which to focus early in the preparation process;

(c) The seminar format was changed not so long ago; the seminar organisers have considerable freedom in how to structure the seminar within the available time limits, therefore it was suggested to consider implementing the proposals after 2010;

(d) The importance of allowing enough time for discussion is emphasised every year but there are still problems with ensuring that the recommendations are followed in practice;

(e) The number of papers/speakers per session should be limited strictly to 2-3 papers (maximum); organisers need to have a clear understanding of the available time;

(f) For countries it is important to have visibility at the seminars; countries expect to be given the floor when they have prepared an invited paper;

(g) With the panel discussion it is essential that the number of panel members is limited, consisting of not more than 3 persons;

(h) Not all topics are suited to identifying best practices that could be implemented as a follow-up to the seminar.

Conclusion

97. The Bureau welcomed the good ideas on how to improve the CES seminars proposed by Canada. However, the Bureau decided not to change the general rules for organising the seminars for the time being. The proposals will be communicated to the organisers of the 2010 seminars and, if they so wish, they can try out the proposed ideas and see how well they work. The Bureau will come back to the discussion on how to improve the CES seminars at a future meeting.

B. Preparation of the formal session, draft agenda and timetable for the 2010 plenary session

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/23 (UNECE)

98. The Bureau discussed the organization and provisional agenda for the CES plenary session in 2010.

99. The secretariat drew the attention of the Bureau to the fact that the word 'seminar' in UN terminology denotes a specific kind of meeting that can not be part of a plenary session of a UN subsidiary body. Therefore, a different term will be used for this part of the meeting (e.g. module).

Conclusion

100. The CES plenary session in 2010 will take place with the following timing:

(a) The plenary session will start on Tuesday, 8 June at 14:30 and finish on Thursday, 10 June at 17:30;

(b) The module on spatial statistics will take place on Wednesday, 9 June (10:50 – 12:30 and 14:30 – 17:30);

(c) The module on impact of crises on statistical systems will take place on Thursday, 10 June (9:30 – 12:30 and 14:30 – 16:45).

101. The in-depth review topics on time-use, and science, technology and innovation will be discussed during the June 2010 plenary session to obtain input to the review by the CES Bureau in November 2010. The first version of the in-depth review papers on these topics should therefore be prepared by 15 March 2010.

102. The Bureau agreed with the proposed draft provisional agenda. The final agenda will be approved at the February 2010 meeting of the Bureau.

C. Outline for the seminar on impact of crises on official statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/24 (IMF and OECD)

103. An outline of the seminar was presented to the Bureau for comments and recommendations. The seminar will be organised by IMF and OECD.

104. The following points were made in the discussion:

(a) The draft outline is a good basis for the seminar; it will look at how statistics have reacted to the crisis and what lessons can be learned from the crisis;

(b) It would be interesting to consider the institutional responses to the global crises: whether the available statistical infrastructure permits rapid action and how it can be used in creative ways to address the crisis;

- (c) The seminar should be more future oriented and look at how to respond to future crises;
- (d) The reason for considering social statistics in the seminar is that the system of social statistics is not geared to monitor quick changes that may happen during crises, this calls for new solutions to collect data quickly, e.g. by including questions related to crisis in ongoing social surveys; this aspect should be brought out more clearly in the seminar;
- (e) Vulnerability, savings, remittances and the deprivation issues are related to the impact of crisis on social statistics; Eurostat is working on a paper on lessons derived from the crisis in this context;
- (f) A possible issue to discuss is how to make a difference between the structural changes happening in their normal course and those caused by crisis;
- (g) The global alert system planned to be set up by the UN could be covered as one specific reaction to the crisis;
- (h) This seminar could try a panel approach, e.g. in session 3, to discuss the emerging issues.

Conclusion

105. The Bureau supported the plans for the seminar subject to the comments above. The organisers will prepare a more elaborate outline, including titles and authors of invited papers, and send it to the Bureau members for electronic consultation **by 15 December**. An updated version of the outline, taking into account the results of the electronic discussion, will then be prepared by the beginning of February 2010.

D. Outline for the seminar on spatial statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/25 (Mexico, Eurostat)

106. An outline of the seminar was presented to the Bureau for comments and recommendations. The seminar will be organised by Mexico and Eurostat.

107. The following comments were made in the discussion:

- (a) The Bureau acknowledged the enthusiastic work of the team preparing the seminar and the many contributions offered by countries;
- (b) The seminar has to be shortened and the number of invited papers reduced considerably to fit into the available time limits, there should not be more than two-three presentations per session;
- (c) Session 1 describing country practices should be shortened, confidentiality issues should be covered as this is very relevant to everyday work in this area, another possibility would be to deal with confidentiality topic in session 4;

(d) It was considered whether sessions 2 and 3 could be merged. Some participants suggested that they are related to the same topic and could therefore be combined: how useful is spatial analysis and what can be done with this information. Other participants considered that a merged session would be too broad; session 2 can focus on opportunities and potential to produce new statistics, session 3 on improving dissemination;

(e) Members suggested that the issue of confidentiality for small countries or small areas within larger countries for spatial statistics could be a topic of the last session (session 4) which could take the shape of a round table;

(f) The seminar should look into standardisation of geographical information, there is currently no international body at global level to share experience and to harmonise the needs for geographical information;

(g) Slovenia has good experience in spatial statistics and would like to submit a paper to the seminar, this can be a supporting paper.

Conclusion

108. The seminar organisers will prepare an updated outline, including titles and authors of invited papers, **by 15 December** and send it to all Bureau members for electronic consultation. The revised version, taking into account the results of the electronic discussion, will then be prepared for the February 2010 meeting of the Bureau.

XII. DATES AND ORGANIZATION OF THE NEXT CES BUREAU MEETINGS

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/27 (UNECE)

Conclusion

109. The Bureau confirmed the dates and venue of its next meetings as follows:

(a) 24 February 2010, 8:00 – 10:00 in New York (back-to-back with the UN Statistical Commission);

(b) 11 June 2010, 9:00 – about 15:00 in Paris (back-to-back with the CES plenary session);

(c) 3-4 November 2010 in Geneva.

110. It was proposed that the meeting of the management board of the International Comparison Programme take place in Geneva on 5 November, back-to-back with the CES Bureau meeting.

111. The agenda of the 2010 February meeting of the Bureau will include the preparation for the CES 2010 seminars and any other urgent issues.

112. The agenda of the 11 June 2010 meeting will include the first discussion on CES 2011 seminars, in-depth review of 'The use of secondary and mixed sources for official statistics', and work of Teams of Specialists.

XIII. INFORMATION ITEMS

A. UNData

Documentation: presentation on UNData (UNSD)

113. The UN Statistical Division informed the Bureau about the progress of work with UNData. UNData is a modern continuation of UNSD's mandate and work on the UN statistical yearbook in a user-friendly web-database format. It can be searched using a Google-like tool to find the necessary data. UNData is updated continuously with new information provided by the various partners. On average, each UN agency transmits new data once/twice a year as soon as it releases them to the public domain. An achievement of the system is that it has created pressure to harmonise data within the UN system. There are future plans to also include original country databases.

B. Agenda for the Statistical Commission Session in February 2010

Documentation: E/CN.3/2010/1 (UNSD)

114. The draft provisional agenda of the United Nations Statistical Commission session on 23-26 February 2010 was presented for information.

C. Follow-up to decisions

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2009/OCT/26 (UNECE)

115. A note on follow-up to the decisions taken by the Bureau and the Conference was presented by the secretariat.

Conclusion

116. The Bureau decided to keep culture statistics on the list of follow-up topics.

117. The decision on whether and which international organization will report next to the Bureau will be taken at a future meeting.

118. The secretariat will contact the organisers of the CES 2009 seminar on balancing professional autonomy to consult on whether the proceedings of the seminar should be published.

XIV. OTHER BUSINESS

119. The new organisational chart of the UNECE Statistical Division was presented to the Bureau for information.

120. The Bureau decided which papers from the Bureau meeting will be made available on Internet.

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