

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Approved

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Item 3(e) of the Provisional
Agenda

**FOLLOW-UP TO THE CES 2013 SEMINAR ON CHALLENGES IN
IMPLEMENTING SEEA AND MEASURING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Note by the secretariat

The note provides information on the progress in follow-up to the decisions of the CES 2013 plenary session and the CES Bureau on measuring sustainable development and implementing SEEA since October 2013. The Bureau discussed the proposed follow-up activities and decided on the next steps.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The CES Bureau discussed the follow-up to the CES 2013 seminar on challenges in measuring sustainable development and implementation of SEEA in October 2013. The Bureau asked the Secretariat to prepare, in consultation with selected countries, a more concrete proposal for further work on methodological issues on measuring sustainable development and on the implementation of SEEA in line with the suggestions in the document ECE/CES/BUR/2013/OCT/18, and to organise the pilot testing of the *CES recommendations on measuring sustainable development*.

2. Since October 2013, the secretariat submitted the CES Recommendations to print. The publication is expected to come out during February-March 2014. Its electronic version is available at: http://www.unece.org/publications/ces_sust_development.html. The publication is also being translated into Russian. The draft version of the translation is already available but the terminology in Russian needs to be checked.

3. The proposals for follow-up work are presented in the sections below according to three lines of action:

- a) Pilot testing of the indicators from the *CES recommendations on measuring sustainable development*;
- b) Further work on methodological issues related to measuring sustainable development; and
- c) Further work related to the implementation of SEEA.

II. PILOT TESTING OF THE CES RECOMMENDATIONS

4. One of the decisions to follow up on the *CES recommendations on measuring sustainable development* is to pilot test the indicator sets proposed in the Recommendations. Eight countries have volunteered to undertake the pilot testing: Australia, Italy, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Turkey and Ukraine.

5. The secretariat asked the above 8 countries how to approach the testing. Two approaches were identified, as well as work in a second stage:

(a) Use the indicators in the CES Recommendations as a starting point and map them against the national indicator sets. This approach was supported by Australia, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Russia and Turkey.

(b) Use the national indicators as a starting point and compare them to the CES Recommendations. This approach was supported by Italy and Slovenia, but also by Australia and Mexico.

(c) In the second stage, check the availability of data for the indicator sets, starting with the small set of indicators for international comparison. The countries are ready to construct a small pilot dataset of these indicators.

6. Italy, Mexico, Slovenia and Ukraine have already used the framework in building up or revising their national indicator sets. It will be useful to study and analyse the outcome and experiences of these countries, in view of refining the framework in line with the SDGs when these will be established.

7. OECD is planning to include in their work plan for 2015-16 the testing of the indicator set in OECD countries with the perspective of using them for monitoring and benchmarking the comparative performance of OECD countries. This work is planned to be pursued in close association with UNECE and the countries that will pilot test the indicators.

Proposal:

8. The pilot testing to be undertaken in the following way:

- Start with mapping the indicators in the CES Recommendations with the national indicators, following the preferred method in each of the eight piloting countries;
- After mapping, check data availability for the same group of countries;
- Compile case studies on the experiences of using the CES Recommendations in Italy, Mexico, Slovenia and Ukraine.

9. The secretariat will establish a timetable for the testing together with the eight participating countries.

III. FURTHER METHODOLOGICAL WORK ON MEASURING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

10. The Bureau discussed possible further methodological work on measuring sustainable development in October 2013. The Bureau asked the Secretariat to prepare, in consultation with selected countries, a more concrete proposal for further work on methodological issues in this area.

11. The secretariat consulted the proposals for further methodological work with a small informal Steering Group consisting of a few countries and organizations who participated actively in the UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Task Force on Measuring Sustainable Development (Australia, Canada, France, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Switzerland, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Eurostat and OECD).

12. The report from the CES 2013 plenary session presented a long list of subject areas where further methodological work on measuring sustainable development could be undertaken. However, as reported to the Bureau in October 2013, in several of these areas activities are already ongoing. When omitting from the list the areas that are being addressed, the four possible topics for further work are:

- (a) measuring transboundary impacts in the context of sustainable development;
- (b) linking subjective and objective indicators;
- (c) measuring sustainable development at different scales (regional level, urban/rural areas, company level, etc.);
- (d) measurement of risks.

13. The secretariat asked the small group of countries which of these areas would be a priority. Two topics came on top of the list:

- (a) measuring transboundary impacts: Australia, France, the Netherlands and Switzerland consider work in this area as a priority.

14. The Netherlands has done an overview of footprint indicators used by statistical offices. Switzerland established concepts for the measurement of transboundary impacts in 2008 and has been regularly updating a set of indicators about this topic. France and OECD have also done some work on footprint indicators. Switzerland notes that this topic strongly needs further development. Several countries emphasise that the measurement of transboundary impacts should go beyond the environmental aspects to consider other aspects, such as the brain drain/gain, knowledge transfers, international flows, etc.

- (c) measuring sustainable development at different scales: Australia, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Switzerland consider this a priority.

15. The Netherlands is planning to undertake a project to compare the framework from the CES Recommendations with the framework used at company level (the Global Reporting Initiative), possibly including also the product level (done by the Sustainability Consortium). Switzerland informed that the Swiss indicator system MONET is being used by a Swiss canton. Switzerland is also managing and developing two SDI-Systems for the cantons and the cities of Switzerland. OECD has been recently working on a project (“How’s Life in Your Region?”) aimed at developing sub-national metrics for the ‘here and now’ dimension of the CES Recommendations. Outcomes of this work could possibly feed into work to develop sub-national measures for the ‘later’ and ‘elsewhere’ dimensions.

16. Point (b) linking subjective and objective indicators was considered as a priority by Australia and Slovenia. France noted that they have done some work but considers this area of a lower priority.

17. Point (d) measuring risks was not considered a priority. OECD is planning to undertake some work on ‘economic insecurity’.

18. OECD suggested that follow-up work by UNECE in any of the four methodological areas should take the form of stocktaking. OECD stands ready to provide references to relevant reports that could inform the stock-taking exercise. France also suggests that the work should begin by stocktaking of the existing activities.

19. Eurostat strongly supports adjusting the indicators from the CES Recommendations to the SDGs, once these are set up. Eurostat is ready to contribute to the small informal Steering Group of a few countries and organizations discussing how to take the work forward.

Proposal by the secretariat:

20. The secretariat with the assistance of a small group of countries (could be the same countries who were consulted) to prepare stocktaking reports on the topics (a), (b) and (c) with the following priority:

- (a) measuring transboundary impacts in the context of sustainable development;
- (c) measuring sustainable development at different scales; and
- (b) linking subjective and objective indicators.

IV. WORK RELATED TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SEEA

21. In June 2013, the Conference asked for strengthening the governance of and support to the SEEA implementation in collaboration with UNSD; and for developing mechanisms to share good practices and exchange experience in SEEA implementation. In October 2013, the secretariat proposed to organise a one-off event on SEEA implementation, possibly in collaboration with Eurostat, OECD and UNSD.

22. The secretariat consulted the proposal with the same small informal Steering Group as mentioned in Section III (Australia, Canada, France, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Switzerland, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Eurostat and OECD).

23. The responding countries and organizations considered it useful to have a meeting to exchange experience in implementation of SEEA, in coordination with other fora where the related issues are discussed.

24. Australia pointed out that coordination should be improved across existing meetings and initiatives, such as the London city group on Environmental Accounting, the Oslo city Group on energy statistics, a UN Task Force on the Implementation of the SEEA Central Framework; and the World Bank's Wealth Accounting and valuation of Ecosystem Services (WAVES) initiative.

25. OECD has recently established an Expert Group on the implementation of SEEA, that brings together national accountants and environment experts to guide the work on compiling a set of core tables in this field. The main priorities of the group are related to air emissions and the measurement of stocks of natural resources. OECD is ready to cooperate with UNECE in organising a seminar to share experiences in the SEEA implementation open to all UNECE countries.

Proposal by the secretariat:

26. Organize a joint UNECE/OECD seminar on implementation of SEEA.
