

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

For decision

Meeting of the 2014/2015 Bureau  
Geneva, 21-22 October 2014

Item 7 of the Provisional  
Agenda

**EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF CES WORK**

**Prepared by the Secretariat**

*The paper describes the current procedures in place to evaluate the work under the CES, and includes a proposal on how to evaluate the impact of CES activities and the various outputs developed under the Conference. **The Bureau is invited to decide on future evaluations of the CES work. The Bureau is also invited to decide on discontinuing the formal Biennial Performance Reports.***

**I. BACKGROUND**

1. In January 2014, the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) reviewed and adopted the Biennial Performance Report 2012-2013<sup>1</sup>, prepared in the context of the United Nations (UN) Secretariat's biennial planning and reporting cycle.
2. The Bureau noted that the Biennial Performance Report is rather technical, not that useful for evaluating the CES work, and should be discontinued if possible. The Bureau asked the Secretariat to make a proposal on how to better evaluate the impact of CES activities.
3. In the meantime, UNECE revised its Evaluation Policy to focus the evaluations more on strategic issues and to increase their impartiality and utility. The revised Evaluation Policy<sup>2</sup> was approved by the UNECE Executive Secretary in April 2014, and subsequently by the Executive Committee (EXCOM).
4. This document describes the current UNECE evaluation policy following the UN rules (section II), and provides information on other means of following up on the impact of CES work, such as recommendations and guidelines developed under the Conference (section III).

<sup>1</sup> [www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/ece/ces/bur/2014/21-Biennial\\_Evaluation\\_Report\\_Statistics\\_2012-2013.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/ece/ces/bur/2014/21-Biennial_Evaluation_Report_Statistics_2012-2013.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [www.unece.org/unece-main/about-unece/evaluation-policy.html](http://www.unece.org/unece-main/about-unece/evaluation-policy.html)

## II. UNECE EVALUATION POLICY

5. This section provides a short overview of the revised UNECE evaluation policy and presents the proposal for the next evaluation of the statistics subprogramme.

### A. Types of evaluations

6. Evaluation is a mandatory part of the UN biennial planning and reporting cycle. UNECE is subject to the following types of evaluations:

- (a) External evaluations:
  - planned evaluations by UN oversight bodies;
  - ad-hoc evaluations of a broad thematic scope or strategic importance.
- (b) Internal evaluations:
  - self-evaluation of the regular programme of work;
  - evaluations of extrabudgetary projects at the end of the project.

7. **External evaluations** are managed and conducted by independent UN oversight bodies such as the UN Office for Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU). OIOS prepares a biennial report to the UN General Assembly on the status of evaluation in the UN secretariat.

8. **Internal evaluations** at subprogramme level are managed by the UNECE divisions. Until now, all UNECE divisions were obliged to prepare each biennium a Biennial Performance Report to assess *whether* results have been achieved. In addition, each subprogramme was requested to carry out an internal evaluation of a selected topic every biennium to explore *why* and *how* results were or were not achieved. The summaries of the self-evaluations undertaken by the Statistical Division are provided in the Annex.

9. All projects implemented from extrabudgetary sources are subject to a project evaluation, conducted by a consultant.

### B. Main changes introduced by the new UNECE Evaluation Policy

10. With the new UNECE evaluation policy, the Biennial Performance Report became voluntary. **The Bureau is invited to decide whether to discontinue the Biennial Performance Report**, as discussed in January 2014.

11. Furthermore, instead of covering all subprogrammes, UNECE will conduct **four internal evaluations per biennium**: three at the subprogramme level, and one at the UNECE level. As there are eight subprogrammes, not all programmes are evaluated every biennium. **Evaluations will be conducted by consultants** selected in a competitive process on the basis of their competence in evaluation.

12. The **themes of evaluations will be selected in consultation with Sectoral Committees**, such as the CES and its Bureau. The theme for the UNECE level evaluation will be consulted with EXCOM.

13. The **evaluation reports will be made publicly available** with management responses on the UNECE website.

### C. Proposed theme for the next evaluation of the statistics subprogramme

14. The next evaluation of the Statistics subprogramme is planned for the biennium **2016-17**. The secretariat proposes the following topic for the evaluation: **“Impact of CES work on measuring sustainable development”** to review the effectiveness and impact of the UNECE work on measuring sustainable development and related areas, such as environmental indicators, climate change related statistics, international development goals, etc. More detailed terms of reference for the evaluation will be prepared by end 2015. **The Bureau is invited to comment on and to approve the selection of this topic for the evaluation in 2016-17.** Following the approval by the Bureau, the proposed theme will be submitted for approval to EXCOM.

### III. EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF CES WORK

#### A. Evaluations are built into the work of the CES and its Bureau

15. Continuous evaluation of the UNECE statistical work is built into the working processes of the Conference and its Bureau. The Bureau meets twice a year to **review the plans and progress** of the statistical activities which ensures that the work is flexible and reflects member countries' priorities. The outcomes of the Bureau meetings, including the work programme for the next year and the report on implementation of the work programme of the previous year are reported to the CES plenary session.

16. Involving key partners in the Bureau ensures that **the UNECE statistical activities are subject to key stakeholders' evaluation** and are focused on issues not addressed elsewhere. During the UNECE review, the EU delegation noted this as a model to be used across UNECE as a “guarantee of non-duplication of work with other organizations”.

17. The **in-depth reviews**, conducted by the Bureau, **provide an evaluation** on the need to launch new statistical work or to improve coordination of international work.

18. The Conference and the Bureau may establish task forces to address specific issues with concrete terms of reference, defined membership, specific output, time frame (2-3 years) and a sun-set clause. This ensures flexibility and ability to address current priorities. **The outcomes of all task forces are evaluated** by the Bureau.

19. The **outputs of CES task forces are subject to electronic consultation** with all CES members before they are finalized. This 1) raises awareness of CES recommendations among members, 2) helps to ensure relevance and usefulness of the outputs, and 3) **provides feedback on CES members' intention to use these outputs**, for example, to implement the new recommendations. The outcomes of the electronic consultation are presented to the Conference.

20. To ensure relevance, the topics of seminars of the annual CES plenary session are selected based on voting among all CES members. Similarly, the outcomes of in-depth reviews are **exposed to wide evaluation by consulting them with all CES members.**

## B. Examples of good practices in assessing the impact of CES work

21. The Secretariat has a number of mechanisms to follow up on the use of CES outputs. These include (1) undertaking surveys on the implementation of CES recommendations and guidelines; (2) analysing country case studies and pilot testing of CES recommendations; (3) global assessments of national statistical systems and gathering feedback from capacity building workshops; (4) using webpage downloads, Google Analytics and monitoring citations of CES products; and (5) web user surveys. Finally, discussions with individual countries and organisations are also used to assess impact, though only in a qualitative way. Examples of using different tools to evaluate the impact of CES work are given below.

### *Surveys and reviews of the implementation of recommendations prepared under CES*

22. UNECE carried out an online survey in 2013 to collect **information on whether and how countries implemented the CES Recommendations for the 2010 Censuses of Population and Housing**. The survey provided detailed information on countries' census practices in terms of concepts, definitions and classifications covering practically all topics included in the *CES Recommendations*. Information was also collected on any deviations from the *CES Recommendations* and reasons for such deviations. Out of 50 countries 47 (94%) reported having referred to the *CES Recommendations* (or to the EU census legislation that in turn refers to the *CES Recommendations*) while planning their census. The UNECE Steering Group and the nine Task Forces on censuses discussed the survey results at an expert meeting in October 2013. The material also provided basis for the publication *Measuring Population and Housing - Practices of UNECE countries in the 2010 round of censuses*.

23. Following up on the global strategy for **2008 SNA implementation**, UNECE conducted surveys in East European, Caucasus and Central Asian (EECCA) and South East European (SEE) countries on their plans and challenges, and developed *a template for 2008 SNA implementation plans*. Countries' first implementation plans were discussed at a special session in 2012. This provided input for *a set of UNECE regional recommendations* that takes into account countries' conditions while ensuring coherence with the global strategy. Thereafter, countries have updated their implementation plans in 2014, and plan to do so every second year. Based on the information, UNECE has developed capacity building workshops that address countries' needs. **The 2008 SNA implementation plans also provide feedback on the impact of the UNECE regional recommendations**. For instance, the UNECE recommendations led to the creation of interagency working groups in countries involving the main government agencies, i.e. national statistical offices, central banks and ministries of finance. According to countries' feedback, these groups have notably improved national coordination of work in 2008 SNA implementation.

24. UNECE conducted a comprehensive review of **gender statistics** in national statistical systems in the region in 2012, as part of the global review of gender statistics. The surveys included 30 questions related to institutional arrangements, data collection, user needs and mainstreaming of gender in the national statistical system. Similar surveys were conducted in 2004 and 2008 to provide input to the manual *Developing gender statistics: a practical tool* which contains guidance for developing gender statistics. The 2012 review **enabled analysing whether the countries' gender statistics are compiled according to the UNECE manual**. The results were discussed at UNECE Work Sessions on Gender Statistics.

### *Collecting case studies and piloting outputs*

25. Case studies are an important tool for promoting implementation of various CES recommendations. They also help to identify possible issues and gaps. For example, the ***Guide to Measuring Global Production will include about 20 country case studies*** as a result of a wide electronic consultation among CES members in early 2014. These case studies indicate that many countries started using the guidance as soon as it became available and wish to share their practical experience in implementing the recommendations.

26. For technical standards such as the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) **implementing organisations are requested to provide case studies** detailing their experiences. These are primarily intended as a resource to help other organisations in the implementation, but also provide useful information about impact.

27. In some cases, the Secretariat invites countries to pilot new CES outputs. For example, **eight countries carried out pilot testing of the CES Recommendations for Measuring Sustainable Development** and the related indicator sets. The results will provide information on the feasibility of the recommendations, and will feed into the work on Sustainable Development Goals.

### *Global assessments of national statistical systems*

28. UNECE carries out Global Assessments of national statistical systems with Eurostat and EFTA in EECCA and SEE countries. The purpose is to evaluate the capacity to produce official statistics and to provide concrete recommendations for improvement. Moreover, **Global Assessments are a thorough evaluation of how countries implement CES recommendations**. The findings are also used to plan UNECE capacity building activities to address countries' priorities and evaluate the progress. UNECE, its partners and the countries plan to launch so called regular **"rotating schemes" of assessments** to provide a mechanism to follow up on the progress in implementing the recommendations of Global Assessments.

### *Monitoring access to the outputs, citations in papers and presentations and web surveys*

29. The impact of UNECE outputs in the area of statistical modernisation is evaluated in various ways. The volume and geographical distribution of **access to the outputs relating to modernisation is monitored using Google Analytics**, assuming that there is a degree of correlation between levels of access and usefulness. Whilst this gives an indicator of the take-up of outputs, it does not, however, fully measure their impact. Current approaches to measuring impact include **monitoring citations in papers and presentations**. Internet searches on the title of the output are also used to evaluate the impact.

30. The Statistical Division conducts an **annual user survey to evaluate the usefulness of the UNECE Statistical Database** and **monitors data downloads** monthly to adjust the provision of data according to users' priorities. Furthermore, the UNECE Statistical **Database provides information on countries' progress in developing and improving their statistics** according to CES and other recommendations.

## V. PROPOSAL FOR THE BUREAU

31. In addition to the practices described above, some other means could be used to evaluate the impact of the CES work.

32. Recently, national statistical offices have brought up the **need to establish systematic mechanisms to follow up on the implementation of international guidelines and recommendations**. For example, (1) in April 2014, the Conference noted that there is a need to develop follow-up mechanisms to evaluate the progress made in implementing the methodological guidelines on migration statistics; (2) the Conference also noted that countries will need support in implementing the CES recommendations, e.g., the *Recommendations on climate change-related statistics*.

33. The Secretariat proposes to **assign to Steering Groups the responsibility to follow up** on the implementation of CES recommendations. The Steering Groups should develop the most appropriate mechanisms for following up on the implementation, and report to the Bureau and Conference on the outcome. The terms of reference for two new Steering Groups presented to the Bureau in October 2014 include this task, namely on migration and climate change. It could be included in other terms of references when they are updated.

34. As the Secretariat systematically collects feedback from the experts participating in meetings, it would be possible to include **a question in evaluation questionnaires on the implementation** of the CES recommendations or other outputs relevant for the domain of a particular meeting.

35. Even though CES recommendations and other outputs are usually widely known in the statistical community, it might be useful **to increase their visibility** more generally. This is true for all outcomes of the statistical communities, both national and international. During the UNECE review, the Chairman of EXCOM felt that “the very good achievements of the Statistics subprogramme and the CES were not sufficiently communicated to policy makers”. Press releases could be used more noting that promoting statistical outputs to the wider public requires using plain language and new ways of communication.

### 36. The Bureau is invited to:

- (a) **Decide on discontinuation of the Biennial Performance Report** since it became voluntary with the introduction of the new UNECE Evaluation Policy;
- (b) **Approve selection of the theme “Impact of CES work on measuring sustainable development”** for the next internal evaluation of the UNECE statistics subprogramme in 2016-17;
- (c) **Provide advice on how to promote the results of CES work** among CES members and other audiences;
- (d) **Provide advice on how to enhance evaluation of the impact of CES outputs.**

## ANNEX. PREVIOUS INTERNAL EVALUATIONS IN STATISTICS

37. The Statistical Division has carried out the following self-evaluations during the previous biennia:

### A. 2008-2009: Use of the UNECE Statistical Database

38. The review of use of the UNECE Statistical Database was based on a user survey. In 2009, over 84% of respondents rated the quality of data as good or excellent. In total, 95 % of respondents found the data highly or partly relevant. On average 77% (63% in 2008) of respondents were satisfied with timeliness, and 91% (88%) with metadata. The evaluation report gave recommendations and led to actions as follows:

- *Improve user-friendliness of the database interface* – this has been improved with highly interactive maps, charts and indicative country rankings;
- *Repeat the user survey annually* – the survey is done annually including monitoring of data downloads every month with various independent tools showing steady growth in the use. Some data series have been dropped as a result of this monitoring, and some have been added, such as globalisation indicators, migration clearing house and indicators on Millennium Development Goals;
- *Improve timeliness and metadata* – user satisfaction has slightly increased with regard to timeliness and metadata, but at the same time users' expectations have also grown. Efficiency of data updates and timeliness of data has considerably improved through automated data extraction from source databases. UNECE collects data directly from countries only in case the data are not available elsewhere. A glossary of terms has been added to further improve metadata.

### B. 2010-2011: Outreach to international statistical organizations and UN agencies

39. The review on the UNECE outreach to other international organizations in statistics took stock of joint activities, projects, statistical standards and guidelines produced by UNECE in collaboration with other IOs and UN agencies. The evaluation collected evidence from project reports, electronic consultations among CES members, UNECE staff interviews, meeting participants and reports etc. It concluded that many work procedures lead to good coordination, flexibility and cost-efficiency allowing the subprogramme to take on new work on board to remain relevant. The report cited IOs' comments given during electronic consultation of CES recommendations. These comments confirmed the wide use of CES outputs by IOs. The evaluation report gave recommendations for further improvement of outreach and led to actions as follows:

- *Focus in-depth reviews on emerging, strategic issues instead of reviewing all statistical domains in turn* – the review topics are now selected from both topical subject matter issues and managerial issues;
- *Design a communication strategy for statistics* – since then UNECE designed and approved a communication strategy at the UNECE level. The Statistical Division uses the templates developed in this context for communication. The Division has improved communication to EXCOM – the reports emphasise why the UNECE statistical work matters;
- *Improve visibility of UNECE statistical work* – for instance, all currently active CES Task Forces with their terms of references and the outcomes of recent in-depth reviews have been made available on the UNECE website.

### **C. 2012-2013: The relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of organising international meetings**

40. The way of organising international meetings was reviewed as meetings are an essential tool for achieving the objective of UNECE statistical work. The evaluation analysed meeting reports, participants' feedback and staff interviews. It concluded that the high attendance (at countries' own cost) to UNECE meetings in statistics is an indication of relevance, as also highlighted by participants' feedback. The meetings provide an effective tool for producing tangible outputs, such as discussing draft guidelines. Meetings organisation is quite efficient as the staff use many standard processes while preparing meetings. The evaluation report gave recommendations and led to actions as follows:

- *Ensure relevance*: consult countries when selecting the topic of meetings and guide those preparing presentations to ensure focus on the essential – this practice has been discussed at a Division meeting and is continued;
- *Pay attention to effectiveness*: find ways to support participation of countries with less developed statistical systems both by financing travel to meetings and interpretation – a new UN Development Account project for 2014-2018 provides some funding to support countries' participation in line with their national priorities;
- *Improve efficiency further*: prepare an internal wiki with instructions and common tools for meeting organisation – a wiki tool is now operational and is being completed with existing and new guidelines. Various other new working methods are used to make the work more efficient and reduce the need for face-to-face meetings.

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