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**STATISTICAL COMMISSION and ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
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**COMMENTS ON THE PRE-PLenary VERSION OF THE
2003 INTEGRATED PRESENTATION
OF INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL WORK PROGRAMMES**

Note prepared by the ECE secretariat

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This note summarises the written comments received by the ECE Secretariat on the pre-plenary version of the “Integrated Presentation of International Statistical Work Programmes”, prepared for discussion at the June 2003 plenary version of the Conference of European Statisticians. It is prepared in support of the discussion under agenda item 3: “Integrated Presentation”.

Comments by the Czech Statistical Office:

2. Programme Element (PE) 3.14 - Business registers and economic records in support of economic statistics: In our view, a seminar on practical experience of establishing statistical units - enterprises, local units and kind of activity units - would be very helpful. It should be focused on an exchange of experience between EU member states and on problems the present EU candidates and other transition countries are facing.

Comments by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office:

3. Programme Activity (PA) 2: Technical infrastructure and other cross-cutting issues: Standardization is a very important strategy in information technology. This activity is a priority of the work to be undertaken in the next two years in International Statistical Work. The Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO) would like to participate in EUROSTAT working

groups to continue the standardization of XML for HCSO's electronic data collection and transmission of primary data.

4. PE 3.10 - Agriculture, forestry and fishery statistics: Activities of Eurostat (page 58) (ii) Income of the Agricultural Households Sector (IAHS) Statistics: The current handbook on IAHS statistics cannot be adapted to the circumstances in Hungary. The revision process of the handbook was halted in 2002. Hungary made a great effort to build up IAHS according to the unfinished revised version of the handbook. Eurostat should clarify the target methodology of the IAHS for the new Member States in order to avoid unnecessary effort.

5. PE 6.1 - Dissemination of data and coordination of international data collection: We welcome the initiative of international organizations to avoid inefficient duplication and to use jointly prepared questionnaires in international data collection. We would also appreciate an improvement in on-line data capture. One of the best practices is that of the ILO where, for the October Inquiry, they collect data on-line through the Internet. It would also be important if international organizations made the collected data available to national statistical institutes in printed or electronic form. For instance, we have access to the ILO and to the Eurostat databases, but OECD charges its data on-line.

Comments by the Australian Bureau of Statistics:

6. PE 1.1 - Promotion and coordination of multilateral statistical work: Should note UNSC's identification of the lack of coordination of WHO statistical activity with that of NSOs and other UN agencies. Caution against the extension of the integrated presentation to cover the activities of other regional commissions unless a very different approach is adopted - the detail involved can too easily reduce the focus on broad strategy.

7. Would have liked to see reference to development indicators produced by the UNSC Friends of the Chair in the UNSD work program, particularly given that the millennium indicators are identified as an important activity. Would have liked to have seen reference to the leadership role that UNSD intends to play in poverty statistics, given their involvement with the compendium of best practice.

8. PE 2.2 Statistical data collection and processing: Electronic data reporting (EDR) issues seem a little overdone in the light of the lower than expected take up rates for electronic communication in recent years in the B2G (e.g. recent falls in electronic lodgement of tax data by businesses), B2C (failed several years ago) and G2C fields (online dog registration not as popular as expected, irrelevance of information kiosks, slow progress with integrated portals, etc). It also seems to miss the point to some extent, since poor value propositions, usability and security/privacy have emerged as the main stumbling blocks to wider take up rates.

9. Would like to see more work addressing response rate, provider management and privacy issues. Most agencies are hurting on this front, yet the issues seem to be little discussed and solutions even less evident. For example, there is real potential for statistical fall-out from the worldwide backlash against relative lack of respect for privacy in B2C EDR.

10. Concepts of significance editing and significance intensive follow-up (IFU) are touched on but could be given more attention. Lots of agencies are interested in this area, but solutions tend to be highly customised to specific collections or systems; perhaps we could learn more from each other by stepping back a bit and looking for common patterns that should inform the approach that agencies (NSOs and supranationals) should take.

11. PE 2.4 Dissemination and interchange of statistical information: Some of the broad issues that could usefully be included in the work-program are:

- Sharing of infrastructure. In order to keep up (or in some UN / EU cases – a need to catch up), there is a need to share applications / infrastructure. There is a need for applications and infrastructure to be developed in a way that makes their exchange simple. Developments in specific products make sharing difficult.
- Marketing on the web - while there is mention of undertaking marketing, there do not seem to be 'good practice guidelines' developed to assist statistical agencies to better market their content online. Examples might include the use of search engines and the appropriate key words.
- Web services. No doubt many of the developments will use web services, but there are many unresolved issues like data security that need addressing. This may be covered in the work of EuroStat Telematic networks ESS – perhaps this needs to be made explicit.
- Co-ordination of standards. There seems to be too many standards being developed for data dissemination (e.g. GESMES, CLASET, SDMX, etc.) and these need to be coordinated - is this the role of UN/ECE?
- GIS. There is a growing need for users to access statistical data on a geographic basis and expect GIS type functionality (past that of map interfaces). GIS work does not appear on the work program.
- Educational Services. I'm not sure if the affiliated agencies see part of their role as educating users (incl. school children) on how to use their statistics correctly to make 'informed decisions', but if this is a role then perhaps there is a need for some focus on educational resources.

12. PE 2.5 - Statistical Research and Development: Areas that ABS has a particular interest in, and which are not included in the work-program, are:

- Generalised estimation methods that are both economical to apply across a wide range of statistical subject matter and make best use of auxiliary information;
- Ways of using by-product data (both administrative by-products and business by-products) to augment or replace directly-collected data;
- Methods for linking and merging multiple datasets to augment their value for policy and research;
- Methods for generating estimates for smaller domains --smaller geographic areas, sub-populations, sub-industries and finer time periods-- than sample surveys will support;
- Methods for making richer microdata available to researchers, without compromising providers' confidentiality.

13. The strongest strategic focus of the CES paper is on work that will systematise and standardise statistical methods, and that will promulgate common standards throughout Europe. There is comparatively little discussion of research into discovering better methods per se that will address emerging statistical problems.

14. PE 5.1 - Sectoral concepts, definitions, classifications and environmental databases: There seems to be too much emphasis in the work programs on environmental protection expenditure without any real attempt to quantify the benefits/outcomes of this expenditure.

15. There is a need to integrate these data with air quality and water quality data (for example) where indicator information often exists. This will need to be done on a regional scale to understand the linkages. This highlights the need for statistical agencies/offices to spend time interpreting data - a role often missing and without which the collection of statistics and compilation of indicators is of little benefit.

16. PE 5.2 - Environmental accounting: The role of the London Group is as yet poorly defined. Maybe it should be overtaken by some of the other working parties, etc. which have been set up. Again EPE seems to be given too high a priority, and data integration and analysis should be seen as an essential component of the statistical work.

17. PE 6.1 - Dissemination of data and coordination of international data collection: ABS is particularly keen to see that this data is captured electronically to improve the efficiency of the process. In general, problems of duplication between questionnaires of different agencies that have existed in the past appear to have been largely overcome.

Comments by the World Health Organisation:

18. The activities of WHO/HQ are summarised well. Several of the tasks referred to have already been completed as part of WHO's multi-country survey study. We note that the attention of the CES has been drawn to the need for improved co-ordination between the WHS and the health surveys carried out by national and regional organizations. We wish to reiterate our intention to work with UNECE and the CES along with the ministries of health in improving collaboration on future rounds of the WHS. As mentioned in CES/2003/3/Add.4 under PE 4.9, WHO will work closely with UNECE and CES to organize a meeting in January 2004 to discuss the issues related to measurement of health and risk factors and the harmonization of national, regional and international efforts related to gathering health and health-related data with the World Health Survey.

Other comments:

19. Statistics Canada submitted several briefing notes with specific comments on various programme elements of the Integrated Presentation, rapporteur's reports and reports of recent ECE meetings. The information contained in these documents will be used by the ECE Secretariat in the preparation of the post-plenary session version of the Integrated Presentation.

20. The European Central Bank proposed some changes to its contribution to the "Integrated Presentation Programme", which will be included in the post-plenary version of the document. The ECB has also indicated that it intends to provide more extensive information on its activities for the next version of the Integrated Presentation. For instance, the division of labour between Eurostat and the ECB in the field of statistics will be clarified.

21. The World Bank submitted a revised version of its contribution to the "Integrated Presentation Programme", which will be included in the post-plenary version of the document.