



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

CES/2004/WP.6
9 June 2004

ENGLISH ONLY

STATISTICAL COMMISSION and ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Fifty-second plenary session
(Paris, 8-10 June 2004)

**NOTE ON THE SELECTION OF POSSIBLE TOPICS
FOR DISCUSSION AT THE CONFERENCE IN 2005**

Note by the ECE secretariat

BACKGROUND

1. In mid-April, the ECE secretariat conducted electronically a survey to consult with the member countries of the Conference and international organizations on the possible topics for discussion at the 2005 CES plenary session. In 2002, the 50th Conference decided that two seminar sessions be organised at the annual plenary sessions - one to deal with foundational issues of the statistical systems and the second one to deal with new emerging issues. The Conference also adopted a list of possible topics to be discussed at future plenary sessions, which is reproduced below.
2. Member countries and the international organizations were invited to select a topic to be discussed as a “foundational issue” and another one to be discussed as a “new emerging issue”. They were also asked to recommend new topics and, most importantly, to indicate whether their office would be willing to be a session organiser for a specific topic if selected for discussion in 2005.

3. The list which was circulated included the following topics:
 - a) Measurement of sustainable development: what is the role of official statistics, what are the analytical tools that are needed to measure it and what kind of information needs to be collected?
 - b) Issues related to the statistical environment: (i) public trust in statistics, protecting the privacy of respondents while respecting the right for information – principles of good practice; (ii) supporting analysis and research by providing access to anonymous microdata, changes in institutional framework, etc.
 - c) Privacy issues: (i) how to keep legitimate concerns about privacy from preventing progress on building longitudinal files – what are the prerequisites of evidence-based social policy decisions; (ii) how to maintain a productive relationship with Privacy Commissioners.
 - d) Improved data reporting: (i) electronic reporting; (ii) decreasing burden on respondents; (iii) coordinating requests by international organisations.
 - e) The role of statistical offices in the development of e-government.
 - f) Social statistics: (i) linking outcomes to the determinants of those outcomes; (ii) reviving the system of social and demographic statistics;
 - g) Environmental statistics: issues in implementing the new handbook of Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting.
 - h) The relationship between statisticians and policy makers.
 - i) How to encourage increased statistical numeracy of children in the education system (i.e. a better understanding and knowledge of statistics).
 - j) Performance measures: political and statistical issues in their selection and publication.
 - k) Official and non -official statistics.
 - l) Implementation of Fundamental Principles in Europe.
 - m) The revision of the SNA.
 - n) Population and Housing Censuses in the future - traditional method, based on registers, mixed - traditional with using of registers or other - or what?
 - o) Issues in the place of performance measures in official statistics, and the implications for statistical practice in their expansion.
 - p) Current thinking about measures of population and components of change, including the measurement of migration, identifying ethnic and other communities, and the future form and place of population censuses.
 - q) Strengthening ties between NSOs and academic institutions.

4. Member countries and international organisations were informed that the CES Bureau in February 2004 considered the possibility that topic a) (Measurement of sustainable development...) be selected for seminar discussion by the Conference in 2005, and that Statistics Sweden volunteered to be the organizer of the seminar in the event that this topic would be actually selected.

II. RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

5. The following thirty countries and six organisations replied to the survey: Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Republic of Korea, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, CIS-Stat, European Central Bank, ILO, IMF, OECD, World Bank.

6. In several replies a distinction was made between favourite topics and other topics to be considered as possible alternatives. In other cases, the proposed topics were ranked (first choice, second choice, etc.). For simplicity, these distinctions are not taken into account in the present note. Therefore, the number of preferences for each topic presented in the note should be considered as an indicator of the general interest in that topic, and not as an exact number of members of the Conference that expressed their interest in it.

7. The topics that received most preferences are presented in the next paragraphs, by decreasing number of preferences.

Topic a) Measurement of sustainable development: what is the role of official statistics, what are the analytical tools that are needed to measure it and what kind of information needs to be collected?

8. This topic received most preferences: 15 votes. As the Bureau underlined in February 2004, the objective of the seminar on this topics would not be to define sustainable development but rather to discuss what is the role of official statistics, what are the analytical tools that are needed to measure it and what kind of information needs to be collected. Statistics Sweden volunteered to be the organizer of the seminar, if this topic will be selected.

Topic d) Improved data reporting: (i) electronic reporting; (ii) decreasing burden on respondents; (iii) coordinating requests by international organisations.

9. This topic received 11 preferences. Sweden, in particular, proposed to restrict the seminar to sub-topics (i) electronic reporting and (ii) decreasing burden on respondents only (that is, to cut sub-topic (iii) coordinating requests by international organizations). Poland proposed to add a new sub-topic: (iv) electronic dissemination of official data by OECD and Eurostat. Access to data bases.

Topic b) Issues related to the statistical environment: (i) public trust in statistics, protecting the privacy of respondents while respecting the right for information – principles of good practice; (ii) supporting analysis and research by providing access to anonymous microdata, changes in institutional framework, etc.

10. This topic received 10 preferences.

Topic n) Population and Housing Censuses in the future - traditional method, based on registers, mixed - traditional with using of registers or other - or what?

11. This topic received 9 preferences including Switzerland, which proposed the topic for a seminar in 2006.

Topic h) The relationship between statisticians and policy makers

12. This topic received 8 preferences including Ireland, which proposed to consider this topic jointly with topic j) Performance measures: political and statistical issues in their selection and publication.

13. Other topics that were supported include:

- **f) Social statistics: (i) linking outcomes to the determinants of those outcomes; (ii) reviving the system of social and demographic statistics** (5 preferences, two of which restricted to sub-topic (i)) NOTE: Some respondents noted that this topic perhaps should not be discussed at this stage, since UNSD is currently setting up an expert group as a result of the last meeting of the Statistical Commission
- **k) Official and non -official statistics** (4 preferences including OECD, which proposed to devote a “slot” to the experience of International Organisations)
- **e) The role of statistical offices in the development of e-government** (3 preferences)
- **i) How to encourage increased statistical numeracy of children in the education system (i.e. a better understanding and knowledge of statistics)** (3 preferences, and the suggestion to extend the topic to children and students in general)
- **j) Performance measures: political and statistical issues in their selection and publication** (3 preferences including Ireland, which proposed to consider this topic jointly with topic h) The relationship between statisticians and policy makers)
- **p) Current thinking about measures of population and components of change, including the measurement of migration, identifying ethnic and other communities, and the future form and place of population censuses** (3 preferences)
- **m) The revision of the SNA** (3 preferences)
- **o) Issues in the place of performance measures in official statistics, and the implications for statistical practice in their expansion** (2 preferences)
- **q) Strengthening ties between NSOs and academic institutions** (2 preferences)
- **l) Implementation of Fundamental Principles in Europe** (1 preference)
- **g) Environmental statistics: issues in implementing the new handbook of Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting** (2 preferences)

14. The only country which has offered to organise a seminar is Sweden in relation with topic a) “Measurement of sustainable development...”. The Netherlands, Spain and the United States informed that they might consider the possibility of organising a seminar depending on the topics that will actually be selected.

III. NEW TOPICS

15. In addition to the topics included in the list, members of the Conference were invited to propose new topics. The new topics proposed are presented in this section.

New topic proposed by Australia:

- Techniques for improving the accuracy of population estimates, especially for small areas

New topics proposed by Canada:

- Analysis of confidential business microdata (foundational issue)
The approaches statistical agencies now take to facilitate the use of household microdata in socio-economic research are inappropriate when it comes to business microdata. There are difficulties associated with (i) skewed firm size distributions making it impossible to mask business identities, (ii) the adverse consequences that can result if a few large, critical businesses lose confidence and stop responding to business surveys, (iii) the sensitivity of tax authorities vis-à-vis security and confidentiality of corporate tax data and (iv) potential current or future conflicts of interest for researchers. How can statistical agencies most effectively facilitate useful research with business microdata given these constraints?
- Measurement of local government sector “infrastructure” capital (new emerging issue)
There are growing concerns in some countries that the stock of this type of capital (local roads, bridges, sewers, water treatment facilities, and the like) is deteriorating as the responsible governments have lacked funds to maintain and improve this capital over the past two decades or so. There is a need for more detailed statistics on stocks, flows and associated depreciation of local government infrastructure capital.
- The measurement of public sector output (including that of hospitals, schools and public administration) (new emerging issue)
The measurement of public sector output should be considered in a broad framework -- where the output of hospitals is health improvement, and that of schools is learning gain.
- International comparability of self-report status in household surveys of health and disability (new emerging issue)
There is work underway in WHO, the Washington City Group on Disability, the Joint Canada-US Health Survey, several EU projects, among others. It would be helpful to have some consensus on (a) just how much international comparability should be sought in different statistical domains (obvious for SNA, pop counts and mortality rates; generally accepted for educational attainment / years of schooling; but not so clear re health status – at least among OECD countries; (b) what are the main conceptual challenges to achieving needed comparability; (c) what are the most promising strands of work currently underway; and (d) what actions / priorities should the CES endorse or commit to.

New topic proposed by Armenia:

- How to encourage administrative bodies to create and maintain administrative registers

New topic proposed by the United States:

- The impact of the EU enlargement on the statistical work of the ECE

New topic proposed by ILO:

- Social statistics and globalization: the role of NSOs

New topic proposed by CIS-Stat:

- Statistics of consumer prices: issues of practical implementation of a new international manual on consumer price index calculation (first results and problems)

IV. CONCLUSIONS

16. The 50th Conference delegated to the Bureau of the Conference the implementation of the new structure of organising the seminar sessions, including the selection of topics. Based on the survey results, it is proposed that the following topics be considered by the Conference for discussion in 2005:

- **For the session on new emerging issues:**

Topic a) Measurement of sustainable development: what is the role of official statistics, what are the analytical tools that are needed to measure it and what kind of information needs to be collected? (15 preferences)

Proposed session organiser: Statistics Sweden.

- **For the session on foundational issues of statistical systems:**

The following four topics could be considered:

Topic d) Improved data reporting: (i) electronic reporting; (ii) decreasing burden on respondents (11 preferences)

Session organiser: to be decided.
