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PROGRESS REPORTS

Implementation of the UNECE Statistical Programme in June 2006 – June 2007:
Major achievements and plans for the rest of 2007

Note by the secretariat

**I. COORDINATION OF INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL WORK IN THE UNECE
REGION (ACTIVITY 1: 1.1-1.5)**

1. Coordination of international statistical activities is the key element of the work of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES). The meetings of the CES, its Bureau and frequent working level contacts have made the coordination of work between Eurostat, OECD and UNECE a well-established regular practice. As a result of the long tradition of cooperation, the division of labour among international organizations active in statistics in the UNECE region is quite well defined and the CES provides the mechanisms to resolve problems on an ongoing basis.

2. The Conference meets every year in June at a plenary session that consists of three parts: one session devoted to formal business and two seminar sessions. One seminar explores the fundamental issues of statistical systems and the other one the leading-edge emerging topics. In June 2006, the CES considered the population and housing censuses at a seminar organised by the Steering Group on Population and Housing Censuses, and human resources development and training in statistical offices at a seminar organised by the Czech Republic. The CES recommendations for the “2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses” were adopted. The

Conference considered necessary to continue exchange of experience in the area of human resources and training. An Organising Committee has been set up to prepare a forum on this topic in 2008 (see also para 29).

3. The Conference also made an in-depth review of international statistical activities in the area of justice and crime statistics, and reviewed the coordination of international statistical work in the areas of health statistics, globalisation and quality frameworks. The “Guidelines and core principles of confidentiality and access to microdata” were adopted. The strategy for coordinating technical cooperation in the UNECE region was approved, with an agreed division of work between Eurostat, UNECE and CIS. The Conference also endorsed the procedure for adopting products and recommendations (such as standards, guidelines, manuals, etc.) by the Conference and its Bureau.

II. COLLECTION, PROCESSING AND DISSEMINATION OF MACROECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC STATISTICS (ACTIVITY 2: 2.1-2.6)

4. The UNECE Statistical Division collects data from the UNECE member countries, either directly from national producers or indirectly from other international organisations. These data are verified, analysed and adjusted where needed to ensure comparability between countries and across time. The data together with information on the sources and definitions are disseminated through the on-line database system. The main focus is on providing data about the CIS and the South-East European countries.

5. As a consequence of the UNECE Reform Work Plan, a number of economic data series were discontinued and it was decided to upload only a reduced number of selected economic time series to the public database. These series include national accounts aggregates and other key macroeconomic indicators. In 2006, several economic series were added to the public database (labour force, price indices and interest rates, industrial production and wages, external economic relations). A number of social and demographic series (Gender Statistics Database) were also made available in the course of 2006 while additional data and indicators will be included by the end of 2007. The public database is available in both English and Russian, and has seen a strong growth in demand from external users over the last year.

6. The external review of the UNECE public statistical databases was carried out. The assessment team strongly recommended that work on the economic and gender databases continue and suggested several improvements concerning database functionality, data and metadata quality. Some of these have already been implemented, whilst others are incorporated in the 2007-08 quality improvement programme.

III. METHODOLOGICAL WORK IN VARIOUS STATISTICAL AREAS (ACTIVITY 3: 3.1-3.22)

7. The methodological work towards new or revised statistical standards and guidelines continued. Most expert meetings held in the various subject areas were organized as joint meetings with other international organizations. In addition to providing substantive inputs to and secretarial support for these meetings, the role of the UNECE secretariat is to allow for the

non-EU and non-OECD countries of the UNECE region to be associated with the development work of the partner organizations. Another role that the UNECE plays is to provide a bridge for the European-based specialized UN agencies with the national statistical offices in the region.

8. The methodological work is undertaken with support, both financial and mainly in kind contributions, from the National Statistical Offices of the CES member countries as well as from major partner international organisations.

A. Economic statistics

9. The UNECE secretariat has been involved in the process of the current update of the 1993 System of **National Accounts** (SNA93) at a global level through its participation in the work of the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts (ISWGNA) and the Advisory Expert Group on the SNA update, and through contributing to the consultation with the countries in the UNECE region. Special attention is paid to ensure that the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) and of South-East European (SEE) are well informed of the process and their opinion on the revision issues is taken into account. Among the projects to be completed in 2007 are the survey on employment data and measures of productivity in the CIS and Western Balkan countries.

10. The survey on National Practices in Measuring the **Non-Observed Economy** was carried out in 2005/06. The UNECE secretariat is currently finalising the publication based on the survey results from over 40 countries (to be issued in 2007). Within the framework of the UN Development Account Project, a Workshop on Measuring Non-Observed Economy for SPECA countries took place in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (25-27 April 2007) (see also para 37). The meeting included a discussion on issues related to the implementation of the update of the SNA 93 in the SPECA countries.

11. The Statistical Division is actively involved in developing methodology on emerging issues that are of interest to both developed and transition economies, such as measurement of the impact of **globalisation** on national accounts and related statistics. The CES has created an Expert Group in cooperation with OECD, Eurostat, IMF and UNCTAD to explore how statistical offices can cope more effectively with the distortions to statistics that are occurring as a result of the globalisation phenomenon. Within the technical assistance framework, the UNECE is organizing in 2007 a workshop on globalization and its effect on national accounts in Ukraine.

12. The UNECE aims to ensure that EECCA and SEE countries are able to catch up in the implementation of **business registers** – an indispensable tool for an efficient system of data collection from businesses. The UNECE Survey on business registers in the non-EU member countries in the UNECE region was carried out. This survey complements the corresponding Eurostat survey in the EU countries. The results were presented at the joint UNSD/CISSTAT seminar on use of administrative data sources in Moscow in October 2006, Eurostat Working Group on business registers in November 2006 and will also be presented at the joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Meeting on Business Registers on 18-19 June 2007.

13. The UNECE took over the chair and the secretariat of the Intersecretariat Working Group

of **Price Statistics** (IWGPS) in March 2007 and is involved in the revision of the existing manuals on CPIs and PPIs and in the work on the new Export and Import Price Index (XMPI) Manual, edited by the IMF.

14. In the field of **economic short-term statistics**, there is a serious lack of international comparability for the EECCA and SEE countries for key indicators, such as industrial production and price indices. Therefore, a pilot project to analyse the possibilities of calculating seasonally adjusted short-term statistics will continue through 2007, and methodological work on the compilation of coherent data series will be undertaken.

15. As an intersectoral activity, the Inland Transport Committee (ITC) and the CES plan to carry out jointly a review of ECE data work in **transport statistics** by external experts during 2007 and 2008. The aim is to assess the present situation and to propose recommendations to improve the work in the area of transport statistics.

16. The work on the international Handbook on Rural Households, Livelihood and Well-being: Statistics on Rural Development and Agriculture Household Income was completed. The Handbook is now available from the UNECE website and will be published in 2007. Following its publication, the UNECE will discontinue its involvement in this area.

B. Social and demographic statistics

17. UNECE provides support for the production of comparable social and demographic data particularly in the areas of population and housing censuses (in cooperation with Eurostat), migration statistics, and measurement of health status (in cooperation with Eurostat and WHO), including technical assistance to EECCA and SEE countries on the implementation of standards in these areas.

18. The CES Recommendations for the 2010 round of **Population and Housing Censuses** were adopted by the CES plenary session in June 2006. Two related publications, on countries' practices at the 2000 Census round and on countries' experiences of register-based censuses will be issued during 2007. A webpage including census forms and documentation is already available in the UNECE website. A feasibility study of a census module to measure emigration was carried out to compare data, definitions and organizational frameworks of selected countries that included questions on emigration in the 2000 Census Round. The report of the results, including indications on good practices, will be issued by mid-2007.

19. **Gender** statistics continued to be one of the areas of major involvement of UNECE. In addition to the maintenance of the gender statistics website and database, training tools (such as multimedia presentations and activities for national trainings) on making National Statistical Systems more gender sensitive were developed in collaboration with the World Bank and other International Organizations such as UNFPA; FAO and UNDP. These tools and events are developed to improve the availability and quality of gender statistics, particularly in the EECCA and SEE countries. The initial contributions to the "*Training Manual on Engendering National Statistical Systems*" were prepared and discussed by the UNECE Task Force and a plan for the finalization of the manual was developed.

20. UNECE is also offering a unique forum for statisticians, researchers, and policy makers to improve the measurement of **violence against women** (VAW). UNECE coordinated the work of the task force which reviewed methods used in national surveys to measure VAW. The report was finalized in September 2006, presenting the outcome of the analyses and recommendations for developing standard methods to measure VAW. Substantial contributions were presented at relevant events in the region (e.g. presentation on measuring violence against women at a meeting organised by the Committee on Official Statistics of the UK Royal Statistical Society; a paper on Gender Minority presented at the ECE Work Session on Gender Statistics and a paper on Challenges for Gender Statistics in Europe presented at a meeting organised by the NSO of Portugal). The Task Force on promoting time-use surveys completed its work.

21. The Task Force on **migration** statistics analysed the feasibility of using receiving countries data to estimate emigration in sending countries and prepared draft recommendations. The UNECE developed, in collaboration with the Task Force, the framework for the data exchange and coordinated inputs from the participating countries. The Task Force is now working on the following areas:

- Building a crosswalk of various definitions for immigrant stocks such as “foreign born” and “foreign background”, illustrated by data availability;
- Preparing a compilation of current/emerging practices used in NSOs to measure groups that are difficult to count, such as illegal, temporary and “circulatory” migrants;
- Developing definitions and classifications to standardize survey tools to collect data on remittances.

22. The UNECE/UNODC Task Force on **Victim Surveys** is expected to present the first inputs of the manual on victimization surveys by the end of June 2007.

23. UNECE continued to coordinate and contribute to the Steering Group and Task Force on the measurement of **health status** (the so-called Budapest Initiative). A set of survey questions was finalized in early 2007 by the Task Force on health status and approved by the CES Bureau (BI Mark 1).

24. UNECE works to provide statistical support **in monitoring achievement of the Millennium Development Goals** and improving the use of statistics for policy making and monitoring in the SEE and CIS countries. UNECE continued the partnership with the regional offices of UNICEF and UNDP, leading the joint Task Force on MDG statistics. The Task Force finalized and launched the Regional MDG Info. The Task Force also carried out an assessment of countries’ capacity to produce and disseminate MDG relevant statistics, which is expected to be published by mid-2007. The request of the UNECE Reform Work Plan to set up a regularly updated MDG database is still pending, because of the unresolved issue of providing the necessary extra-budgetary resources.

C. Cross-cutting issues in statistics

25. The UNECE secretariat provides a unique forum where informatics managers from national and international statistical offices can share experience with other countries. It also plays an important role in the standardisation of statistical **metadata**. The Common Metadata Framework, maintained online by UNECE, provides statisticians with a single gateway to multiple information sources on metadata related standards. The first version of the framework was released on Internet in 2006. A workshop will be held in Vienna 4-6 July 2007 at the invitation of Statistics Austria to further advance the content of the framework, notably the part dealing with the role of metadata in statistical cycle.

26. In June 2006, the meeting on **management of statistical information systems** launched an initiative for a consortium on open source statistical software led by the Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom. The 2007 Meeting confirmed the interest in issues of governance (including outsourcing and service partnerships), architecture and user interaction (interfaces, accessibility, usability). The good practices in these three areas and successful/unsuccessful experiences will be posted on the UNECE website. To encourage sharing of software and modules among offices, a toolbox will be also created and made available on Internet to facilitate sharing of statistical IT tools.

27. Future challenges in the management of **statistical information systems** relate to the reconciliation of sometimes contradictory goals, such as: making data providers increasingly responsible for the quality of data while decreasing response burden; increasing the level of detail and availability of data in online databases, while improving the protection of confidentiality; linking various data sources and combining statistical surveys with administrative registers; promoting the understanding of the importance of statistical metadata as a key to statistics. The work on **dissemination** provides a forum for statistical organizations to discuss issues related to media and public relations activities.

28. Following the recommendations of the 2005 CES Seminar on Measurement of **Sustainable Development**, the Joint UNECE/OECD/Eurostat Working Group on Statistics for Sustainable Development (WGSSD) and its Steering Group have worked intensely to develop a framework for statistics on sustainable development. The work aims to reach a common understanding of the "object" of sustainability and to establish core principles of the measurement of sustainability. Three meetings of the Working Group have been held and the first outline of the report has been prepared. The report aims to describe a conceptually sound and statistically based approach to the measurement of sustainable development and to reconcile the two main approaches used so far by different countries and organizations, based either on the concept of capital, or sets of indicators linked to sustainable development policies. The Joint Working Group is planning to finalise the report in December 2007.

29. As a follow-up to the CES seminar on **human resources and training** in 2006, the Proceedings of the seminar have been prepared in CD-ROM format in cooperation with the Czech Statistical Office. An Organising Committee has also been set up by the CES Bureau to prepare a forum to discuss the related issues in 2008.

30. The four final issues of the quarterly Statistical Journal were prepared during 2006,

including a special issue on economic statistics. With finalising the 2006 volume, the Journal is discontinued, as decided by the CES Bureau in 2005.

IV. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO UNECE MEMBER COUNTRIES (ACTIVITY 4: 4.1-4.4)

31. An important part of the work is to assist countries in **building and improving their statistical capacity** by organising seminars and workshops, providing advisory services, promoting the implementation of international standards and recommendations, transmitting best practices, and promoting exchange of experience. UNECE also helps these countries to implement the **UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics** by giving advice on statistical legislation and institutional frameworks, and how to ensure the independence and impartiality of official statistics, especially to countries with economies in transition.

32. The Statistical Division provided technical cooperation in various statistical areas to the SEE and CIS countries. The activities were concentrated on assisting economies in transition in the implementation of international statistical standards and statistical capacity building. In particular, **advisory services** to statistical capacity building were provided to:

- Serbia and The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on National Accounts and related areas,
- The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on the revision of the law on official statistics and on monitoring the achievement of Millennium Development Goals;
- Georgia on the revision of the law on official statistics and on population statistics;
- Romania on the revision of the legal framework for official statistics;
- Russian Federation on international migration statistics.

33. No Global Assessments of National Statistical systems were carried out in 2006.

34. The joint work with The World Bank Institute, UNDP, UNFPA, USAID and the US Census Bureau to provide technical assistance in the field of **gender statistics** continued through training workshops and development of training material. A new project for activities in 2006-2008 was developed jointly by all concerned agencies and the World Bank agreed to support it. In the framework of this project, a Workshop “Training of Trainers” was organized in April 2007 in Almaty (Kazakhstan), where an innovative training module was presented and discussed.

35. The UNECE has continued the implementation of the UNDP-funded project on MDG **Statistical Literacy**. Two training workshops were organised in Georgia and The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in 2006. A third training workshop will take place in June 2007 in Kazakhstan.

36. UNECE continued its participation in **monitoring the population and housing census** in the UN Administered Region of Kosovo. UNECE has also contributed to some activities in the field of population and housing census and migration statistics outside the UNECE region.

37. The Development Account Project for statistical capacity building in Central Asia as part of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) was started. The project focuses on 3 areas: **population and housing censuses**, measurement of the **health status** of the population and defining and measuring **non-observed economy**. Five workshops have taken place: three workshops on population and housing censuses (in Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan), one on disability statistics (December 2006, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan) and one on measuring the non-observed economy (April 2007, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan).

38. A continuous challenge for the Statistical Division is the deficit of financial resources for providing the highly required assistance for statistical capacity building in the SEE and CIS countries. Part of the financial shortcomings are solved through increasing cooperation with other international organizations. The Statistical Division is exploring the possibility of establishing a Trust Fund for the support of statistical capacity building in the UNECE region.

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