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Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of European Statisticians

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Geneva, 19-21 June 2017
Item 10 of the provisional agenda
Selection of topics for seminars to take place during the 2018 plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians

List of possible topics for seminars to be held during the 2018 plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The Conference of European Statisticians traditionally includes two seminars. This note provides a list of possible topics for the seminars to be held in 2018. **Please indicate two topics that you would prefer for the seminars in 2018, and indicate whether your office is willing to be a seminar or session organizer or prepare a paper.**

You are also welcome to propose additional topics or elaborate further the description of the topics proposed in this note.

The list of seminars held during the last five years is provided in Annex I.

Based on the outcome of this consultation, the Bureau will make a proposal to the Conference for the 2018 seminar topics. The Conference will be invited to decide about the topics on 21 June 2017, under agenda item 10.

I. List of topics

II. Explanatory notes on the possible seminar topics

A. Challenges in environment statistics

1. Environment is a relatively new area of work for statistical systems that have been fine-tuned for measuring social and economic issues. It gains increasing attention through the emphasis on sustainable development. The question is how integrated environment is in statistical offices' work today, and how to get the best return on investment in environment statistics?

2. Environment statistics are one of the most challenging areas for statisticians: These statistics cover a wide range of information and are interdisciplinary. The statistics and their sources are typically dispersed across many different agencies, and numerous methods are applied in their compilation. It is challenging for statistical offices to coordinate the work on environment statistics, integrate the data, harmonize methods and even acquire the expertise to work with environmental data.

3. Regardless of these difficulties, environment statistics are gaining prominence. SDGs, the Paris Climate Convention and the 2030 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction call for better data looking towards statistical offices. The UN Statistical Commission has a few years ago adopted the Framework for Development of Environment Statistics (FDES) and the System of Environmental-economic Accounting (SEEA) which is a statistical standard. Implementation of SEEA is a challenge even for developed countries. Among the global list of SDG indicators, over 100 indicators relate to environment which is one of the areas where the development needs are the highest.

4. The seminar could focus on the following themes:

- Voicing users' needs and concerns, including those arising from SDGs, and discussing the response of statistical offices.
- Discussing lessons learned from integrating environment statistics into the national official statistical systems: What is the value added of bringing environment under the umbrella of official statistics?
- Sharing case studies and good practice examples from countries on the coordination of work in environment statistics among involved national agencies would be useful.
- Is there a role for the global system of official statistics, as a network of national statistical systems? How to address cross-boundary and global issues of environment in an effective way?

- Sharing latest advances in measuring emerging issues in environment statistics, such as biodiversity, ecosystems, links with spatial data, etc.

B. Can data save lives – official statistics for disaster risk reduction?

5. During the last few years, no region in the world has been immune to the effects of extreme events and disasters. People witnessed heat waves in India, disastrous droughts in Maldives and Africa, severe flooding in Southern France and unusually heavy rains in the Nordic countries. This is just the tip of the iceberg.

6. Disaster risk reduction relies on good information to "strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters" (under SDG 13). Reliable information on people, their housing and infrastructure in areas prone to disasters may help avoid damage and protect lives. Basic official statistics are needed to answer questions such as: How many people are at risk? How many impaired or elderly live in the region? What kind of houses people live in? Where are the closest distribution points for food, water and electricity?

7. The data to answer these questions, and more, are collected on a regular basis by statistical offices. But they have to be made available at the right time in the right format. The 2030 Sendai Framework for disaster risk reduction calls for reliable and real-time data and statistics. **A UNECE Task Force is currently defining the role of statistical offices in measuring disasters and extreme events. Their work would provide a good basis for discussing the way forward at a strategic level.**

8. The seminar could discuss the following issues:

- What should be the role of statistical offices in providing their data for disaster risk reduction and prevention of damage? Should we be more proactive and better prepared? What are the limitations of NSO involvement (e.g. data confidentiality)?
- What kind of collaboration is needed nationally and internationally to improve the availability of statistics for disaster risk reduction?
- What are the information needs for disaster risk reduction and humanitarian work dealing with disaster aftercare?
- Which existing good practices in using statistics for disaster risk reduction could serve as a starting point for developing the role of official statistics? Should we develop a "dashboard" or a "toolkit" with data needed quickly if a disaster strikes?

C. Challenges in measuring intergenerational relationships

9. Over the recent decades, the issues of intergenerational solidarity, justice, and relationships have moved to the focus of discussion among policymakers and academics. The 2012 Vienna Ministerial Declaration on Ageing identified intergenerational solidarity as one of the key policy challenges for UNECE countries. The main factors are population ageing and cuts in public spending and social welfare related to the recent economic crisis. These changes have led to the perception that some generations could have significant disadvantages over their life course compared to others. As an example, policy measures like exceptional early retirement plans may favour the generation that can benefit from such plans, but result in a financial burden that has to be paid by the previous or the following generations.

10. These issues are not straightforward to measure. The recent *UNECE Recommendations on ageing-related statistics* identify intergenerational solidarity and relationships as an area with large data gaps and insufficient conceptual understanding for developing comparable indicators that statistical systems could regularly produce.

11. The seminar could discuss the following issues:

- What can be done in the framework of official statistics to overcome the challenges existing with the indicators proposed to measure intergenerational relationships?
- What data sources can be considered to produce data on intergenerational relationships and fill the gaps, with limited or no additional burden on NSOs?
- How can data on intergenerational relationships be disseminated in a way that they can be easily understood by the users, including policymakers?

D. Getting our message across: Strategic reflections on modernising communication with citizens

12. The seminar would cover how statistical organizations need to change their communication strategies to ensure that they connect effectively and efficiently with citizens. Effective communication is essential for maintaining the relevance of official statistics and maximizing our value to society. In the so-called "post-truth" era, authoritative facts, and the ways in which they are communicated, are becoming increasingly important.

13. At today’s times of social media, misinformation and misuse of statistics may appear in many ways and spread instantly, while having political implications. This is challenging statistical offices as prevention of misuse of statistics is one of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

14. National statistical authorities should remain the trusted source to whom to turn when questioning the factual basis of news relying on statistics. On the other hand, it is also important to address the question of how far can official statisticians ensure good communication while preserving impartiality.

15. The seminar could consist of two sessions. The first session could focus on the content of communication:

- What messages should we be communicating? To which extent commentary and "story-telling" should accompany the data in statistical releases?

- How to counter the increasing misuse and distortion of statistics and “fake news” based on statistics?
- How to combine different statistics to give a more coherent picture of a specific topic?

16. The second session could focus on communication channels:

- How should our messages reach citizens? How to reach new users (e.g. youth) and non-users of statistics?
- Should we develop strategic partnerships with the media and other information "re-sellers"?
- How to make effective and efficient use of new channels such as social media?

E. Breaking spatial barriers – from transboundary issues to neighbourhood statistics

17. The world is becoming more and more interconnected. It is no longer sufficient to only measure the economy, population and environment within the national borders since:

- Economic production crosses boundaries and the expansion of the Internet has made it easier to start a business. More often knowledge-driven goods and services are developed by international networks of experts.
- People are increasingly mobile and may have homes in many countries even at the same time. How to ensure their correct counting?
- To analyse, for instance, the availability of clean water or the impacts of extreme events users need small-area statistics from regions such as coastal zones, urban areas, islands, mountainous regions to the smallest villages and neighbourhoods etc.

18. Is there a way for official statisticians to adapt to the increasing need for data beyond traditional statistical regions? The data needs range from global statistics on transboundary issues to more detailed data at the local level. These issues will become even more topical with SDGs as most of them deal with the transboundary aspects of development, and several SDGs emphasize local communities.

19. The seminar could discuss:

- Are the national statistics we produce globally coherent? How to better address the challenges of measuring the cross-border phenomena?
- Is there a role for national statistical systems in dealing with global issues, such as climate change, air, ozone layer, water resources, etc.?
- Should we measure the cross-border impacts of migration, technology transfer, financial transfers, tourism, etc.?
- Which areas in social, economic or environment statistics are most affected by transboundary issues?
- What kind of mechanisms for international cooperation between statistical systems could help produce better data on issues, such as cross-border trade, mobility, etc.?

F. Measuring what matters – broadening official statistics

20. Recent years have witnessed growing interest in measuring areas that are new to official statistics, such as well-being, happiness, governance, institutions, etc. Official statistics are also broadening to other new areas that are difficult to measure, such as valuing the environment as an asset, measuring human and social capital, sustainability, inequality, risks and vulnerability. Furthermore, it is recommended that national statistical offices coordinate the provision of SDG indicators for a country but these include a number of non-statistical (qualitative) indicators.

21. All these developments raise a question of possibly having criteria helping to decide whether a new area should be taken on board by official statistics. The seminar could discuss the following issues:

- What are the emerging topics that society and politicians want to be informed about?
- What are the mechanisms to innovate concerning the areas covered by official statistics?
- Where are the limits for statistical offices? On the one hand, taking on new areas is necessary to remain relevant but on the other hand, official statistics can not cover all data that someone may need.

22. Broadening the scope of official statistics towards areas that have traditionally been considered outside the competence of statistical offices can be a risk. At the same time, if what matters is not measured, official statistics may become marginalized or even irrelevant. What is the way ahead for statistical offices?

Annex I
CES Seminars held during the last five years

2012 1. Implementing the fundamental principles of official statistics, including issues related to coordination of national statistical systems

2. Challenges for future population and housing censuses (based on lessons learned from the last round)

2013 1. Challenges in implementing the system of environmental-economic accounting (SEEA) and measuring sustainable development in follow up to Rio+ 20

2. Challenges in providing access to micro-data for research purposes

2014 1. What is the value of official statistics and how do we communicate that value?

2. Migration statistics

2015 1. Response by official statistics to the Sustainable Development Goals

2. Modernisation of statistical production and services and managing for efficiency

2016 1. Strategic partnerships

2. Geospatial information services based on official statistics

2017 1. Measuring poverty

2. The next generation of statisticians and data scientists