CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

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RAPPORTEUR REPORTS FOR PROGRAMME ELEMENTS IN PROGRAMME ACTIVITY 2, TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND OTHER CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

PE 2.1: MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE

Rapporteur: ECE

I.   Important issues that should be brought to the attention of the Bureau and/or the Conference

1.   The global character of emerging information and communication technologies calls for a broad cooperation in this area rather then being limited within a particular region. Wide cooperation and exchange of experience with statistical agencies in developed countries in other regions is to be encouraged.

2.   Another aspect to be taken into account is the statistical focus of this Programme Element rather than the ICT in general. While the statistical agencies follow the emerging technologies, methods and techniques, their primary concern remains how these techniques could be applied to collection, processing, storing and dissemination of statistical information.

3.   The Conference has reviewed in-depth Programme Element 2.2 at its 2002 plenary session. The discussions and findings were much broader. They proved the relationship and close links between various programme elements in Programme Activity 2, and also Programme Elements 1.1 "Promotion and coordination of multilateral statistical work", 1.2 "Management and policy issues of concern to presidents of NSOs" and 6.1 "Dissemination of data and coordination of international data collection". The decision of the CES calls for the following:

- To investigate the possibility of developing a common system (portal) for monitoring data collection activities by International Organisations;

- To ensure the development of data sharing models;

- To give both NSOs and other data providers easy access to statistics available at the international organisations in a form allowing comparisons and usage in national dissemination programmes;

- To put in place secure and operational methods and tools for the transmission of sensitive information. The experiences from the STADIUM/STATEL solution supporting GESMES CB should be considered in this context;

- To investigate the possibility of defining a standard codification scheme for economic time-series (for national accounts and balance of payments) with an initial focus on short-term indicators;

- To work with national statistical offices to facilitate the reuse of their standard products.

4.   The Programme Element 2.1 should play a central role in the follow-up to the decisions of the Conference. The work is underway jointly by ECE, OECD, Eurostat and Statistics Norway. The Steering Group described in the following paragraph can assume a coordinating role.

5.   A Steering Group on Management of Statistical Information Systems (MSIS) was created in 2002 involving ECE, Eurostat and OECD along with some national statistical offices. The first task was to draft the terms of reference for the series of meetings in this area. The main points can be summarised as follows: (i) the keyword is "statistical information systems", which aims at covering the whole range of issues related to handling of statistical information using the ICT means; (ii) the agreed focus in on the managerial issues, while detailed issues like statistical metadata, statistical data editing, geography, etc. are expected to be dealt with under other programme elements. However, the Steering Group plans to review in-depth periodically these particular fields and make recommendations to the Bureau in this respect. A framework for such reviews will be considered at the February 2003 meeting on MSIS. Finally, the Steering Group recommended not to limit the geographical scope of the MSIS, but to encourage all statistical offices to participate.

6.   A particular topic considered under this programme element are the methods and techniques for the protection of statistical data confidentiality. These are technically oriented issues, which concern some mathematical methods, software, Internet security and other technical tools. While the Conference reports its activities on data confidentiality under Programme Element 2.1, some organisations report related activities under Programme Element 2.2 "Statistical data collection and processing". The rational for this is that confidentiality is the main concern of data providers.

7.   The information and communication technology infrastructure can play a new role in the international statistical cooperation. While there is a call for more and broader cooperation, at the same time, the funds for travel and international meetings are limited. The e-mail exchange, web-boards (electronic discussion groups) and telephone conferences may replace, to certain extent, the personal meetings, but the contact between experts is quite important. For example, very few electronic discussion groups achieve their goals, because they require a big effort in moderating and stimulating the discussion. On the other hand, video and Internet conferences may provide sufficient visual and vocal contact to substitute for personal meetings. The main reason for their little use is the price of equipment and communication costs, but these are favourably changing. Eurostat has started experimenting with video and Internet conferences.

II.   Progress being made collectively by organizations towards Member States' Objectives and Outputs

8.   A website was established as a joint undertaking involving national statistical offices and international organisations (OECD, Eurostat, ECE) on IT practices in national statistical offices. The website's initial structure will be reviewed after analysis of the first year's experience. The role of

national focal points and the editorial board responsible for the contents have to be specified. The common pages of the website is hosted by the OECD.

9.   The international organisations (Eurostat, OECD, World Bank, IMF, CIS-STAT) progressed their work on improved Internet-based data collection and dissemination. More work still remains to be accomplished. The ECE has launched internal projects in this respect recently.

III.   Outputs for the programme element

(i) Standards and norms of official statistics: methodologies; classifications, recommendations and guidelines, best practices, manuals;
   ♦ Website on IT practices in national statistical offices was created and the first years trial will be completed soon. The coordination has to be formalised, structure reconsidered and the publicity issue is to be addressed as well.

(ii) Surveys and inventories of countries' practices and data availability;
   ♦ The Bureau asked at its October 2002 meeting that the MSIS Steering Group undertake a survey on IT practices in NSOs and report back to the Bureau. This will be taken up at the 17-19 February meeting on MSIS.

(iii) Data dissemination: statistical databases, publications and websites;
   ♦ The recommendations developed under this programme element have impact on harmonisation of concepts for statistical databases and dissemination methods through various kinds of electronic publications and mainly websites.

(v) Technical assistance
   ♦ ECE, together with UNSD, are presently discussing possible cooperation on providing technical assistance to the CIS countries. A topic under consideration is the management of technological infrastructure for 2010 round of population and housing censuses.

IV.   Suggestions and recommendations to the Bureau and/or the Conference related to I and II above

10.   The Bureau and the Conference may consider requesting the international organisations to report on the follow-up process to the in-depth review at a future plenary session (see I above). In particular, measures should be taken (setting benchmarks, requesting periodic progress reports, etc.) in order to ensure the continuity and progress of the follow up activities. The Bureau may also wish to consider the recommendations coming out of the reviews undertaken by the MSIS Steering Group and MSIS meetings.

11.   The Bureau and the Conference may wish to unify the way in which the statistical data confidentiality is considered under Programme Activity 2. Its inclusion under Programme Element 2.2 looks logical, because PE 2.1 covers mostly general and managerial issues of statistical data processing. Particular topics of technical nature are dealt with under other programme elements.

V.   Suggestions for amendments to the text in the IP

12.   We recommend to extend the objectives of this Programme Element to reflect the follow-up to the six priority areas set by the Conference at the 2002 plenary session (see I. above), with a cross-reference made to other relevant programme elements.

PE 2.2: STATISTICAL DATA COLLECTION AND PROCESSING

Rapporteur: ECE

I.   Important issues that should be brought to the attention of the Bureau and/or the Conference

13.   The main concern of the national statistical offices in the field of data collection is the response burden put on them by the various international organisations. From this perspective the Conference undertook an in-depth review of this Programme Element at its 2002 plenary session. The Conference outlined how statistical information systems may assist in better coordination, data sharing, bringing benefits back to data providers and mainly in decreasing the response burden. The discussion also showed the relativity of the term "data collection", because what is collection for one party is dissemination for the other.

14.   The data collection is fast moving towards electronic means. This, together with the existence of global networks, may open possibilities for integration of respondents and data collectors so that data disseminated by national statistical offices become data collected by the international organisations. This issue, identified within the above-mentioned review, should become one of the priorities for this Programme Element.

15.   Data security is one of the major concerns for data providers at all levels. It is recommended to unify the presentation of activities related to data security, disclosure limitations and other confidentiality issues under this programme element.

16.   As data quality is of major importance to any data collector, the Conference traditionally undertakes discussions related to data quality under this programme element. In particular, experts in statistical data editing regularly meet for exchange of experience. For several years they dealt with the quality indicators and evaluation methods for statistical data editing.

II.   Progress being made collectively by organizations towards Member States' Objectives and Outputs

17.   The international organisations work towards the objectives and outputs specified in the Integrated Presentation. However, a common work programme is to be developed by the various organisations towards decreasing response burden and better sharing of data, as requested by the Conference at its 2002 plenary session. As the goals are quite ambitious, the development of this work programme should involve not only international secretariats but also the national statistical offices.

18.   The ECE is supporting the preparation of a methodological material on statistical data editing, as requested by the Bureau a couple of years ago.

III. Outputs for the programme element

(i) Standards and norms of official statistics: methodologies; classifications, recommendations and guidelines, best practices, manuals;
- Methodological material/guide on quality indicators and evaluation methods for statistical data editing.
- Proposals for IT security standards for the European Statistical System.

(ii) Surveys and inventories of countries' practices and data availability;
- World Bank's project on reorganisation of statistical data collection and processing in the Russian Federation.

(iii) Data dissemination: statistical databases, publications and websites;
- Creation of a secure environment where researchers can access EU's microdata for scientific purposes (Safe Centre).

(iv) Statistical support for policy analyses work (data collection and processing);
- Production of documentation (by Euorstat) on EDI projects for decision makers, key partnersin data collection, key technological players such as software houses, EDI providers and standardisation bodies with aim to incorporate outcomes of these projects in data collection and processing.
- Windows version of IDEO/CN8 (Eurostat)

(v) Technical assistance
- Cross reference: the technical assistance activities to be discussed by UNSD and ECE under PE 2.1 may have relationship to this Programme Element as well.

IV. Suggestions and recommendations to the Bureau and/or the Conference related to I and II above

19.   On the occasion of the review of the structure of the Integrated Presentation that will be carried out in October 2003, the Bureau may wish to unify the presentation related to statistical data confidentiality (disclosure limitation, data security, etc.) under this Programme Element. The Bureau may also wish to consider the recommendation spelled out above that the central responsibility for the follow up to the 2002 in-depth review of PE 2.2 be with PE 2.1.

V. Suggestions for amendments to the text in the IP

20.   We recommend to include "the reuse of NSOs' standard electronic data products by the international organisations when it is cost effective and feasible" in the priorities of this Programme Element – as a follow up to the 2002 review by the Conference. If the Bureau agrees, the presentation of statistical data confidentiality, security, disclosure limitation and related issues will be unified under this programme element, the objectives are to be reviewed in order to reflect the change.

PE 2.3: DISSEMINATION AND INTERCHANGE OF STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Rapporteur: ECE

I.   Important issues that should be brought to the attention of the Bureau and/or the Conference

21.   The vast majority of the data dissemination and interchange is expected to be undertaken using the Internet technologies. The Internet community seems to handle successfully the issues related to the standardisation, speed, languages, security, which are common to the Internet. Therefore, statisticians may focus on issues specific to the dissemination and exchange of statistical information – the main specific issue being the statistical metadata. In identifying the best practices and developing standards a due attention should be paid to re-usability of existing data and metadata models. Therefore, standards and recommendations related to this programme elements should be general ones dealing with statistical functionalities rather than particular technological details.

22.   Statisticians may have their particular interest in the XML technology, which, unlike its predecessor HTML, allows them to use logical rather than physical structure of multidimensional statistical arrays and time series, and thus to implement the agreed data and metadata models in a natural way. While informaticians still discuss applicability of XML with respect to various versions of Internet browsers, statisticians may already think about the applicability of XML to their database applications using tailor-made software modules or possibly also existing parsers (software able to process XML).

23.   The Conference, at its 2002 plenary session, asked the international organisations to put in place secure and operational methods and tools for the transmission of sensitive information. The experiences from the STADIUM/STATEL solution supporting the Generic Statistical Message (GESMES)/CB should be considered in this context. Another issue to be taken up by the international organisations, under this programme element, is the request to give both NSOs and other data providers easy access to statistics available at the international organizations in a form allowing comparisons and usage in national dissemination programmes.

24.   In considering the scope of this Programme Element, its relationship to PE 6.1 "Dissemination of data and coordination of international data collection" is also to be kept in mind. While the PE 6.1 contains all types of statistical publications (printed, electronic, websites, etc.), PE 2.3 is focused on methods and techniques for dissemination and exchange of statistical information.

II.   Progress being made collectively by organizations towards Member States' Objectives and Outputs

25.   Various projects and initiatives are underway. Eurostat is traditionally active in the field of telematic networks and statistical EDI, and assumed worldwide leadership in development of standards, in cooperation with other international organisations and also industrial consortia. The Generic Statistical Message (GESMES) became, thanks to its GESMES/CB version a success story, mainly thanks to the involvement of the Bank for International Settlements, European Central Bank, national banks of their respective member countries and support provided by the OECD and IMF. The data model, which primarily aimed at exchange of aggregated multidimensional economic time series, may be reused practically for all kinds of aggregated data, and in many cases also for microdata. While the original

GESMES is a recognised and maintained standard within the EDI standardisation machinery, the involved national and international statistical agencies created a GESMES/CB Maintenance Group (GMWG) mandated to maintain the GESMES/CB subset as an international standard. GMWG is presently incorporated as one of the projects included in the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange initiative.

26.   Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) initiative represents an important step in the coordination of the standardisation activities. Four projects are currently undertaken by the SDMX, which involved initially IMF, OECD, Eurostat, BIS, ECB and UNSD. These projects are: (i) practical case study on emerging e-standards, (ii) Batch time series data exchange (this includes GMWG); (iii) A metadata common vocabulary; and (iv) Metadata repositories.

27.   Progress was made in the OECD's National Accouts World Wide Exchange (NAWWE) project. One of the achievements is the codification scheme for National Accounts data. The Conference asked, at the 2002 plenary session, to develop a codification scheme for economic time series. The achievement from the NAWWE project and experience gained by OECD are a good starting point.

III.   Outputs for the programme element

(i) Standards and norms of official statistics: methodologies; classifications, recommendations and guidelines, best practices, manuals
- ♦ Methodological materials and website on dissemination of statistical output to information media and dissemination of statistical commentary.
- ♦ Website providing reference materials, guides and best practices in statistical electronic data interchange (www.gesmes.org).

(ii) Surveys and inventories of countries' practices and data availability
- ♦ Collection of the best practices in the field of dissemination and interchange of statistical information among the members of the Conference.
- ♦ Publishing of the best practices through a common website established by OECD. Eurostat and ECE.

(iii) Data dissemination: statistical databases, publications and websites
- ♦ The recommendations developed under this programme element have impact on harmonisation of concepts for statistical databases and dissemination methods and techniques including classical and electronic publications.
- ♦ The ECE's priority is to put in place tools for improved dissemination of statistical data to all kinds of data users via the website.

(v) Technical assistance
- ♦ Transfer of know-how, with particular attention to the countries which are not in access to the European Union.

IV.   Suggestions and recommendations to the Bureau and/or the Conference related to I and II above

28.   The Bureau and the Conference may wish to review at regular intervals the follow-up by the international organisations with respect to giving access to NSOs and other users to their statistical data allowing for international comparisons and with respect to putting in place secure and operational methods and tools for the transmission of sensitive information.

V.   Suggestions for amendments to the text in the IP

29.   The expected outcomes include the improved web-based dissemination of statistical information by the ECE; output delivery in four SDMX priority areas; methodological material for NSOs on how to deal with output to information media (ECE); and implementation of the Data Shop and Data Shop relays action plan by the EU.

30.   With respect to the follow up to the 2002 discussions of the Conference, we recommend to include the following priorities for this programme element: (i) dissemination by international organisations of statistical data, and (ii) standards for electronic data interchange. With respect to data dissemination a cross-reference should be included to Programme Element 6.1

PE 2.4:   STATISTICAL CLASSIFICATIONS

Rapporteur: Eurostat

I.   Important issues that should be brought to the attention of the Bureau and/or the Conference

Convergence between ISIC/NACE and NAICS

31.   With the ever-growing acceptance of ISIC, the fact that North America and Japan are outside the system is growing in importance. Therefore, a project has been launched to be carried out under the administrative arrangements among the United States Office of Management and Budget, Statistics Canada and Eurostat.

32.   The purpose of this project is to bring out greater convergence between NAICS (the North American Industrial Classification System) and NACE (Nomenclature Statistique des Activités Economiques dans la Communauté Européenne). The project will address questions of feasibility, consider implications of carrying out the work, and develop specific proposals for changes to foster convergence.

33.   In the conduct of this work, an important consideration will be to make the results available to UNSD as a major input to the planned revision of ISIC that is to be undertaken by UNSD by 2007.

Classifications for trade in goods statistics

34.   While HS 2002 has just entered into force as from 1.1.2002, work is still in progress for the next revision (1.1.2007).

Classifications for social statistics

35.   No new work in this area has been carried out in this period.

II.   Progress made collectively by organisations towards the stated Objectives and Expected Outputs:

a) Activity and product classifications

36.   Eurostat, UN and other classification owners have arrived at agreement on a common time-schedule for revisions for the near future of ISIC/NACE, NAICS and CPC/CPA etc. and all projects are progressing on time.

b) ISCO and ESEC

37.   ILO has only limited resources to support national adaptations to the ISCO-88. A possible revision of the ISCO-88 is hampered by limited resources available at ILO and Eurostat and would only be feasible as a long-term project.

38.   Progress is being made on creating a European Socio-Economic Classification. This work is funded and supported by Eurostat and also involves active participation of ILO.

Classifications for trade in goods statistics

39.   Proposals to amend the HS are examined with DG TAXUD in the WCO framework, with a view to better reflect statistical requirements that will be integrated in EU Combined Nomenclature (CN).

Classifications for social statistics

40.   Due to a shortage of resources, no progress has been made in this area.

III.   Outputs for the programme element

Classifications for trade in goods statistics

41.   Update of HS with a view to modernise this classification according to new needs for information. Subsequent adaptation of Combined Nomenclature to reach more consistency in statistical data for trade of goods.

IV.   Suggestions and recommendations to the Bureau and/or the Conference related to I and II above

Classifications NACE, CPA & c.

42.   That the project to bring about convergence be fully supported.

Classifications for social statistics

43.   In view of the lack of resources for this activity, it should be considered whether it should continue to be included in the report.

V.   Suggestions for amendments to the text in the IP

44.   None

PE 2.5 STATISTICAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Rapporteur: Eurostat

I. Important issues that should be brought to the attention of the Bureau and/or the Conference

45.   Major developments have taken place in this domain over the last years. Eurostat has launched EPROS (European Plan for Research in Official Statistics), and has inserted it into the E.U. 5th R&D Framework Programme (1998-2002). In the period, close to 40 (36) research projects in statistics have been launched, with the majority being related to official statistics.

46.   In the methodological field, Eurostat has promoted activities in seasonal adjustment, measurement of data quality, data collection, statistical disclosure control, estimation, editing and imputation.

II. Progress being made collectively by organisations towards the stated Objectives and Expected Outputs:

47.   Research teams from the E.U. Member States, the accession countries and the other associated countries have been involved in the implementation of R&D actions in the 5th EU research framework programme. Most of the NSIs of the Member States are participating. Participation from the accession countries and the other associated states has been especially encouraged.

48.   Research in statistics has also been covered in the 6th EU research framework programme, although no budget line is designated specifically for research in official statistics.

49.   Within the research projects launched within the research programmes, synergies are reached through accompanying measures, networking and clustering projects. In particular transfer and exchange of knowledge, best practices and technologies is addressed in traditional areas such as statistical disclosure control, quality, business registers, automated data collection and time series analysis. In particular, possible synergies are addressed in the field of statistical indicators for the New Economy and in the field of metadata.

50.   Progress have in particular been made in the following fields:

* Classification & automated classification
* Ex-post survey harmonisation (ECHP)
* Meta-data model & harmonisation, Meta-data for data warehouses
* Access to new data sources for statistics, such as satellite data
* Automated data collection & integration
* Integration of public data sources
* Data quality in complex surveys
* Distributed data validation
* Editing & imputation, Small area estimation, Flash estimates of GDP
* Analysis of symbolic data, Object-oriented approach to official statistics
* Business cycle analysis
* Visual & spatial data mining, Interactive statistical atlas

- Disclosure control - microdata & table
- E-learning for statistics
- Statistical indicators for the New Economy (SINE); E-work in the labour force survey, Innovation evaluation through patents, Indicators for the knowledge based economy
- Development of quality data framework (IMF and Eurostat)

51.   In the context of seasonal adjustment, the main activities have concerned the development, dissemination, and implementation of tools to apply best practices for seasonal adjustment in the ESS. In order to discuss and promote seasonal adjustment methods and tools (Demetra), Eurostat has organised meetings with participants - mainly from the European NSIs, Central Banks, and the USA. The fifth such meeting was held in Luxembourg on April 2001 with around 75 participants. In the same time, a more efficient organisation scheme for the co-ordination of seasonal adjustment activities has been proposed and is going to be set up. An internet-based interest group on seasonal adjustment methods with more than 100 registered users, hosting the help desk for seasonal adjustment, is organised.

52.   In the context of disclosure control, CIF 2.0 software has been developed. It acts as an user friendly interface for the German GHQUAR system for cell suppression in tables. This interface is currently used in production in Eurostat.

53.   Reviews of methods and best practice have been undertaken. Results have been / will be presented at meetings and conferences listed below.

54.   An important Statistical Disclosure Control project (Computational Aspect of Statistical Confidentiality) has been funded under the 5th Framework Programme. The on going work aims at providing a software solution (tau/mu ARGUS) for both micro and tabular data integrating the state of art and the research results undertaken by the consortium bringing together 14 bodies including NSI's and academia.

55.   The implementation of the Regulation 831/2002 on access to confidential data for scientific purposes (entered into force in June 2002) has started under the supervision on the Confidentiality Committee (December 2002 meeting). It includes the setting up of safe center for access to confidential data, anonymisation of targeted micro data sets and the practical organisation arrangements.

56.   The definition of user needs and best practices has been the focus of the workshop on Statistical Disclosure Control (Eurostat) in December 2001 and the CEIES seminar on Confidentiality (Lisbon) in September 2002 Training courses has been organised for statisticians from EU Member States and countries of central and eastern Europe.

57.   In the context of data quality, the Working Group on the Assessment of Quality in Statistics co-ordinates the methodological work on the quality of statistical products. Its fifth meeting was organised by Eurostat in May 2002. Dedicated task forces on Variance Estimation and Quality Indicators has been set up. Several reference documents on Quality were issued or updated. The interest group "Quality in Statistics" has now around 250 members from all over the world, and around 200 documents on quality. The LEG on Quality Implementation Group is using this forum as well

58.   The activities related to sampling design, data collection, editing and imputation, and estimation concern evaluation of methods and tools for improved production of statistics in Eurostat and the

Member States. A dedicated task force has been set up to provide guidelines for designing surveys for the production of timely European indicators.

Conferences organised or co-organised:

- NTTS '01 ETK '01 June 2001, Crete
- Eurostat/UN-ECE Joint work session on statistical data confidentiality, UN/ECE work session on Statistical Confidentiality, 27-28 May 2002, Helsinki.
- The International Conference on Quality in Official Statistics, May 2001, Stockholm, Sweden.
- The Workshop on Statistical Disclosure Control, December 2001, Eurostat, Luxembourg
- The CEIES seminar on Confidentiality, September 2002, Lisbon

Conferences planned:

- Eurostat/UN-ECE Joint work session on statistical data confidentiality, Luxembourg, April 2003

III.   Outputs for the programme element

59.   -   Domain specific quality reports
        -   Revised version of the standard document on quality reporting
        -   A handbook on "How To Make A Quality Report"
        -   Methodological documents on how to assess quality (accuracy, geographical comparability, flash-estimates, administrative data)
        -   Guideline for "Variance Estimation Methods in the EU"
        -   Methodological seminars (model based small area estimation techniques, variance estimation methods, the Demetra software)
        -   Statistical tools/ software (POULPE, SALOMON, DEMETRA 2.0 Service Pack 1. CIF v2.0)
        -   Finalisation of Regulation 831/2002 on access to confidential data for scientific purposes (approved May 2002)
        -   Organisation of TES courses (seasonal adjustment, confidentiality)

IV.   Suggestions and recommendations to the Bureau and/or the Conference related to I and II above

60.   The ongoing importance of co-operative methodological and research work with member states and other organisations needs to be stressed, in relation to the harmonisation requirements of the new policies (monetary union, information society…), globalisation and the need to reach a critical mass.

61.   As more tools and know-how become available, a stronger importance for technology transfer has been put. A project has started in 2001 that aims at reinforcing the dissemination, valorisation and transfer of the research outcomes. A large number of suppliers and users from NSIs is expected to participate

V.   Suggestions for amendments to the text in the IP

62.   None.

PE 2.6 GEOGRAPHICAL AND REGIONAL DATA

Rapporteur: Eurostat

I.   Important issues that should be brought to the attention of the Bureau and/or the Conference

63.   The second Urban Audit exercise was launched in co-operation with the Regional Policy DG of the Commission. The initial results from this will be available in July 2003 and finalised during first quarter 2004.

64.   The data from the candidate countries is now included in the dissemination products of the unit within a process of continuous quality improvement during the run-up to accession.

65.   The Commission has initiated a major new initiative for GIS data infrastructure across the EU and candidate countries (called "INSPIRE"). Primarily concerned are the services responsible for Environment, Joint Research Centre and Eurostat.

II.   Progress being made collectively by organisations towards the stated Objectives and Expected Outputs

66.   The Council Regulation concerning the NUTS classification is completing the final stages of the legislative process. The NUTS breakdown for the Candidate Countries is finalised prior to the formal commencement of the accession process.

67.   The inter-departmental group on geographical information within the Commission (COGI) continues to assure the need for a strategic approach and for a better co-ordination and visibility of Commission actions related to GI (Geographic Information) and GIS (Geographic information systems). The "INSPIRE" initiative (q.v.) is providing a wider context for the standards for GI data discussed within this group.

III.   Outputs for the programme element

68.   - Publication of statistical yearbook "REGIONS": mid 2003.
          - Production of the initial results of the Urban Audit II exercise: July 2003
          - Draft legislative proposal for the "INSPIRE" programme: December 2003.

IV.   Suggestions and recommendations to the Bureau and/or the Conference related to I and II above

69.   None

V.   Suggestions for amendments to the text in the IP

70.   None

PE 2.7.   HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Rapporteur: Eurostat

I.   Important issues that should be brought to the attention of the Bureau and/or the Conference

71.   In order to support the development of the European Statistical System by the means of training, Eurostat has awarded a framework contract for training services for three years 2001-2003. This contract has successfully been implemented for two years and the third has started.

72.   Faced with a situation that the institutional set-up of tendering and contracting is not really sustainable, large efforts have been undertaken by Member States of the EU to create a long term solution. A public foundation is being created, with participation of as many as possible Member States, which should resume at least parts of the implementation of the training programme. This foundation now legally exists.

73.   Eurostat continues to adapt the course programmes to needs and wishes and takes into account brand-new parts of the statistical acquis communautaire.

II.   Progress being made collectively by organisations towards the stated Objectives and Expected Outputs

74.   During the last years, the training programme "Training for European Statisticians" showed a steady participation with around 30 courses delivered per year with an average participation of 20 persons. The size of the programme still seems to be appropriate. The annual programmes were announced widely via a small brochure (3500 copies). A certain increase has been noted through the interest of candidate countries and those countries of the Mediterranean region.

75.   Courses were delivered tailor-made for certain countries and inside the countries, thus promoting European standards in a variety of regions from NIS to Western Balkan, with a focus on candidates.

III.   Outputs for the programme element

76.   The course delivered on international and national level create a high number of trained and aware people as concerns European statistical standards.

IV.   Suggestions and recommendations to the Bureau and/or the Conference related to I and II above

77.   It is recommended to increase the co-ordination in the field of statistical training. As training on an international level shall fill gaps within national training schemes and gain synergies, the exchange of information is an important and basic issue.

V.   Suggestions for amendments to the text in the IP

78.   No suggestion made.

PE 2.8:   SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Rapporteur: OECD

I.   Important issues that should be brought to the attention of the Bureau and/or the Conference

Key new issues

79.   The area of sustainable development is one where there is substantial experimental and preliminary work going forward in a number of national and international institutions. The latter have tried to identify a single set of indicators, but the conclusion was that this is not a feasible and/or useful target. In fact, user needs are different in various contexts and there is no scope to try to force them to adopt a single set of indicators. Therefore, notwithstanding the continuous dialogue between national and international organisation, the focus has been put in the implementation of concrete plans to produce good quality statistics, to be subsequently used for calculating indicators.

80.   On the other hand, more attention is now paid to the development of accounting frameworks for measuring sustainable development, able to take into account the economic, social and environmental dimensions.

Gaps

81.   There is still a dichotomy between the design of indicators for sustainable development made by international organisations and the availability of good statistics at national level. In addition, there is an issue in terms of comparability between indicators used for evaluating the situation of developing and developed countries. International organisations should continue to push ahead this agenda, both at political and technical levels.

82.   In the area of accounting frameworks for sustainable development, projects undertaken in some countries are interesting, but is too early to identify common trends and best practices. In addition, these experiences are normally addressing two dimensions out of three. Therefore, a comparison of such experiences is a first step to evaluate how the research in this field could evolve in future. The publications of the SEEA and the results of the LEG on Social Accounting Matrixes, chaired by the Dutch statistical office, are important opportunities for promoting more attention to this approach.

Problems

83.   More co-ordination is needed between national agencies in charge of sustainable development and national statistical offices, at least in some countries. On the other hand, a better co-ordination is necessary between the UN Commission on sustainable development and international organisations active in this field. The creation of a UN Intersecretariat Working Group on statistics for sustainable development could improve such co-ordination.

IV.   Suggestions and recommendations to the Bureau and/or the Conference

84.   Most institutions have commitments to produce reports in the near future. Clearly this is an area which needs to be kept under review to discern any emerging consensus or, on the other hand, widely divergent approaches. This topic could be a good candidate for the seminar session of the CES in 2004.

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