

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Second Meeting of the 2003/2004 Bureau
Geneva, Switzerland, 12-13 February 2004

REPORT OF THE 12-13 FEBRUARY 2004 BUREAU MEETING

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The second meeting of the 2003/2004 Bureau was held in Geneva on 12-13 February 2004. The following members of the Bureau attended: Katherine Wallman (Chair), Milva Ekonomi, Dennis Trewin, Luigi Biggeri, Andrey Kosarev (representing Vladimir Sokolin), Irena Krizman and Svante Öberg. The following permanent participants also attended: Michail Skaliotis (representing Michel Vanden Abeele), Enrico Giovannini, Mikhail Korolev, Robert Johnston (representing Willem de Vries) and Heinrich Brünger. The following persons attended at the invitation of the Bureau: Misha Belkindas of the World Bank, Ivan Fellegi and Béla Prigly of Statistics Canada, Heli Jeskanen-Sundström and Hilka Vihavainen of Statistics Finland, Robin Youll and Stephen Drew of the ONS (UK). The following persons assisted members of the Bureau: Eduardo Barredo of Eurostat, Lars Thygesen of OECD, Louis Kincannon and Dawn Haines of the US Census Bureau. Lidia Bratanova of UNECE served as Secretary of the meeting.

II. IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES 3 (ECONOMIC STATISTICS) AND POSSIBLY 5 (ENVIRONMENT STATISTICS) AND REVIEW OF THE DRAFT UPDATED VERSION OF THE INTEGRATED PRESENTATION

2. The Bureau reviewed in-depth programme activities 3 and 5 of the Integrated Presentation and the rapporteurs' reports that had been prepared by the designated rapporteurs. The Bureau also reviewed briefly the draft updated version of the Integrated Presentation of International Statistical Work Programmes.

a) Programme activity 3: Economic statistics

3. **PE 3.1, Implementation of the SNA:** the ongoing update of the 1993 SNA was discussed at some length. The deadline for the ISWGNA for finalising the update is 2007 and it should report to the Statistical Commission in 2008. In this context it was agreed that the attention of the Conference should be drawn to the financial and in kind contributions needed for the update (**action by ECE**). The World Bank stated it was establishing a Trust Fund for the purpose.

4. The Bureau discussed the way countries have to be involved in the process of updating the SNA and the role of the different working groups. The OECD and ECE agreed that they will use their groups on national accounts for that purpose. The ECE secretariat will consult non-OECD ECE countries, possibly using the Joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD meeting on National Accounts (**action by ECE**).

5. **PE 3.2, Money and banking, Government finance, and Balance of payments:** the Bureau agreed that a better, more expansive, description is required in paragraph 8 of the Rapporteurs' Report concerning Public sector accounting. The harmonization of public sector accounting with the

statistical guidelines (GFS Manual 2001 and SNA) is a very important issue from a policy perspective that should be brought to the attention of the Conference. The Bureau was informed that a Task Force consisting of the OECD, Eurostat, IMF and IFAC had been created to work on the convergence between the SNA and GFS, which will greatly contribute to the improvement of general government accounts.

6. **PE 3.9, Price statistics, including purchasing power parities:** the OECD noted that timeliness in reporting of PPPs for non-European countries is becoming an important issue. It was also noted that the global ICP round is not largely mentioned in the Rapporteur's report and it was suggested that there should be explicit reference made to it in an additional note to the CES in June 2004 (**action by ECE**). The Bureau agreed that a presentation on the state of the ICP at the CES is necessary.

7. The Bureau agreed that with reference to the 'Activities of ECE', the item International Comparisons of GDP: Ultimate output (p.56), the phrase "Coordinate comparisons in the ECE Region" should be changed to "Support comparisons in the ECE Region" as most of the ECE countries participate in the global 2004 round and they are already coordinated by other organizations (**action by ECE**). The Russian Federation expressed concern about the delay in publishing the 2000 ECP results. The publication was scheduled for last summer and the ECE secretariat was urged to publish the results as soon as possible since they are becoming out-of-date.

8. The OECD suggested that the effect of the Euro on inflation rates is a very important issue and there is a need for an international initiative to highlight good practices and problems in measuring such effect. It therefore needs to be addressed by the Bureau and the Conference. The OECD offered to work with Eurostat in this area. Svante Oberg supported the idea of a study, in particular within the EU context, and suggested that changing attitudes of public confidence in official statistics should also be examined as well as effects on price levels, since this would be useful to potential members of the Eurozone. Although the Bureau supported the idea for a relevant study, it also noted that different studies and information, both from international organizations and within countries, are already available and that a collation of these sources might prove sufficient.

9. **PE 3.10, Agricultural, forestry and fishery statistics:** Slovenia pointed out that the issue of food safety will have increasing importance in the future and that it is cross-cutting in nature.

10. **PE 3.13, Science and technology statistics, including Information and Communication Technology:** the OECD recognized that the ICT Workshop was an important initiative but that more coordination is needed to avoid duplication of work and the confusing roles of different organizations. The ECE secretariat informed the Bureau that, when this issue was discussed last year, it was agreed that the Workshop was a one-time exercise for the ECE. The ECE does not have sufficient resources to continue the work in this area. The Workshop agreed that the best way to continue is through regional meetings which draw on the experience of OECD and Eurostat. UNCTAD assumed the responsibility for the coordination of those meetings. The ECE secretariat could contribute to back-to-back meetings with the OECD by bringing in non-OECD member countries.

11. The Bureau noted the ITU proposal for the development of statistics in this area but warned that a composite index is not compatible with official statistics.

b) Programme activity 5: Environment statistics

12. The Bureau discussed the Rapporteur reports on PE 5.1 “Sectoral concepts, definitions, classifications and environmental databases” and PE 5.2 “Environmental accounting”, and noted that the rapporteurs propose a better integration between environmental indicators and accounting, although this integration is sometimes difficult. The Bureau agreed that in future one rapporteur should review the two programme elements (**action by ECE**).

13. The problem of duplication in environmental data collection was also discussed. The Bureau recommended that the Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics recently established should probably address the issue of coordination, in order to reduce duplication as far as possible.

III. INTEGRATED PRESENTATION

a) Purpose of the IP

14. The ECE secretariat presented a note on the purpose of the IP (CES/BUR.2004/37) which outlined its origins, uses and common criticisms of the IP. The Bureau was asked to discuss the proposals for the IP's future development as recently agreed between the ECE, OECD and Eurostat and presented in attachment 1 to document CES/BUR.2004/37.

15. The Bureau agreed that the IP remains an important and powerful tool, despite the fact that some organizations may make less use of it than others. It was agreed that greater usage should be encouraged, through its active promotion, while at the same time it should be better adapted to user needs.

16. Statistics Canada suggested that an electronic discussion of pertinent issues amongst CES members should be promoted, with a focus on those issues highlighted in the 'Attention of the Conference is drawn to' section of the IP. Firstly, however, this section should be streamlined to cover only crucial issues before its circulation for discussion (**action by ECE**).

17. The Bureau discussed the process of designating Rapporteurs and the desired structure of their reports. It was agreed that the usefulness of the IP could be enhanced through improvements to the Rapporteurs' reporting regime. It was felt important to involve NSOs in the reporting regime as this would provide a more objective/independent assessment of the work of international organizations and the progress in international cooperation. Svante Öberg, however, pointed out the possible danger of the NSO view being too narrow and resulting in inconsistencies.

18. The Bureau agreed that the role of NSOs should not be determined in a dogmatic fashion but rather that their role should be enhanced through the greater use of Steering Groups as Rapporteurs, in which NSOs are already well-represented. Louis Kincannon, of the US Bureau of the Census, suggested that the determining factor in deciding the identity of the Rapporteur should be the degree of knowledge (including the regularity of contact with those involved in the work) of the would-be Rapporteur in the activity to be reported on.

19. Eurostat underlined the need for reducing substantially the number of Programme Elements (PEs) for in-depth review. The choice should be driven by priority setting. In this way, both assessment of international coordination and progress towards meeting the recommendations that were addressed to international organizations (as a result of the in-depth reviews) can be monitored in a more efficient way. Regarding the number of PEs to be reviewed annually, Eurostat and OECD suggested a range between five and ten.

20. The OECD proposed that Rapporteurs' reports, by international organizations or Steering Groups, should be sent to an individual country for analysis and comments between May and October

of any particular year. Recommendations for actions on the basis of this analysis could then be reported to the October Bureau meeting for discussion and approval or amendment. The October Bureau meeting could then choose the next group of PEs to be reviewed by Rapporteurs for the following February meeting. The ECE secretariat agreed to investigate the feasibility of this proposal and how the system could be more effective in general, inviting comments from ECE countries, and to report back to the October Bureau (**action by ECE**).

21. The Bureau agreed that the Programme Elements (PEs) chosen for in-depth review should be selected from among those that seem the most topical. However, the Bureau agreed that it is important to ensure that there is a maximum time period in which all activities are reviewed. The ECE secretariat agreed to recommend to the October 2004 Bureau Meeting the next set of PEs to be reviewed at the February meeting in 2005 (**action by ECE**).

b) Statistical activities of the United States and Canada reflected in the IP

22. The Bureau expressed some support for the proposal to include the statistical activities of the USA and Canada in IP. There was some concern, however, that the inclusion of the activities of individual countries in the IP could be open-ended, adding to its complexity when its key purpose is to help coordinate the statistical work that international organizations are undertaking.

c) Rationale for revision of the classification of statistical activities in the IP

23. The ECE presented a paper (CES/BUR.2004/39) which argued that, from the point of view of user needs and facilitating the IP update, the classification of statistical activities in the IP should be reviewed.

24. Louis Kincannon warned that attempting to change classifications could be a difficult and dangerous task. The Bureau agreed, however, that the classification should be revised through the creation of a Task Force, which would recommend amendments to the classification to the October Bureau meeting. Statistics Canada accepted the invitation to join this Task Force which would also include the secretariats of ECE, Eurostat and OECD. The OECD suggested the Task Force should take into consideration the needs of SDMX and submit its findings to the CCSA meeting for approval (**action by ECE**).

d) Feedback on the use of the Integrated Presentation database

25. The ECE presented a note on the feedback received from various categories of internal and external users, and on subsequent changes made in response to this feedback to the design of the IP on the web. A major improvement should be implemented to allow for remote updating by the contributing international organizations. The ECE secretariat informed the Bureau about its plans to implement remote updating in 2004 (**action by ECE**).

26. The Bureau considered that the IP is a good tool, and suggested the launch of an awareness campaign, which would involve the distribution of an electronic bulletin explaining the nature, structure and benefits of the IP and how to access it (**action by ECE**). This could be accompanied by the distribution of printed leaflets to delegates at the CES meetings. It was also suggested that the information on meetings organized by various international organizations (topics, dates and venues) be kept up-to-date since it is of interest of staff in NSOs, and could increase the use of the IP (**action by the ECE secretariat in cooperation with other international organizations**).

IV. FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION ON THE ECE ANNUAL STATISTICAL PROGRAMME

a) Handbook of Official Statistics: procedure for its updating

27. The ECE secretariat presented a note on developing the ECE Handbook of Official Statistics (CES/BUR.2004/27). The note included a review of the information available for updating the Handbook and a proposed new structure. It was also proposed that in future the Handbook be produced in an electronic form only.

28. The Bureau agreed that the Handbook was still a useful tool for transition economies in preparing statistical legislation and for other countries making changes. Its current content, however, was deemed to be both out-of-date and an inaccurate portrayal of reality in the countries it describes. Its usefulness to many organizations could therefore be increased if its content was broadened to include firmly established practices, both formal and informal, rather than simply describing statistical laws. The Bureau suggested, therefore, that the Handbook should include details on comparative laws, written policies and unwritten practices.

29. The Bureau discussed the mechanism to be adopted in updating the Handbook. It was agreed that the aim should be to make sure the Handbook is as up-to-date as possible but with a minimum burden to countries, so annual lengthy questionnaires to countries should not be considered. The Bureau agreed to establish a Task Force to consider the future content of the Handbook and how it might be updated effectively (**action by ECE**).

b) Crime statistics: terms of reference

30. The ECE secretariat presented a note (CES/BUR.2004/28) on the work that ECE, in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), intends to implement in the region. The note included the proposal to organize a meeting on Crime Statistics in late 2004 jointly with UNODC and UNICRI, with the purpose of identifying priorities in crime statistics and to put together an agenda for future work. A Steering Group composed of international organizations, including the UNODC and UNICRI, and two or three country representatives, would develop specific terms of reference for the meeting (**action by ECE**).

31. The United States and Canada offered to participate in the Steering Group, and it was proposed to contact Italy, considering the experience of the country in this area. Eurostat informed that the European Union would be interested in this activity (to be confirmed by Eurostat). Robert Johnston of UNSD suggested looking at areas such as violence towards women, human trafficking, and smuggling. Dennis Trewin noted that international comparability in the area of crime statistics is very difficult, due to different concepts of crimes in different countries and cultures.

V. MEETING WITH AMBASSADOR KULL (ESTONIA), CHAIRMAN OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

32. At the invitation of the Bureau, Ambassador Kull, Chairman of the Economic Commission for Europe, participated in the Bureau meeting. Ambassador Kull presented the plans for the forthcoming session of the ECE. The Spring seminar will focus on "Competitiveness and Economic Growth in the UNECE Region". Following the Seminar, the formal session of the ECE will be devoted to a discussion of the policy implications of the Spring Seminar, the impact of the EU enlargement and the cooperation between ECE and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

33. With regard to the impact of the EU enlargement on the ECE and the PSBs, Ambassador Kull noted that in most areas the EU and the ECE are complementary, and therefore there is a limited risk of duplicating activities.

34. Members of the Bureau reminded Mr. Kull of the central role that the Conference of European Statisticians has played in bringing together the heads of NSOs to discuss issues of common interest.

Louis Kincannon noted the role of the Conference for bringing together the EU and the transition countries. Ivan Fellegi stressed that the CES is a unique forum where the people responsible for formulating statistical policies can meet and discuss statistical issues often before the European Union has developed a common position. Furthermore, the Conference has attracted countries beyond the ECE region such as Australia, Japan, Korea and Mexico.

35. The international statistical cooperation in the Balkans and in Central Asia was also discussed. Eurostat is very active in the Balkans and statistics is probably the area where international cooperation in the Balkans gives the best results.

36. The representative of the World Bank noted that his organization is now less active in statistical cooperation in the region than in the past. However, there are still two important programmes with the Russian Federation and Ukraine. The important work carried out by the ECE Regional Adviser on Statistics was also mentioned.

VI. PREPARATIONS FOR THE 2004 PLENARY SESSION AND THE TWO SEMINARS

a) Preparation of the formal session on the first day: selection of the topic for in-depth discussion based on the Rapporteurs' reports

37. The ECE secretariat informed the Bureau that less and less time was being spent on the review of the Integrated Presentation at the annual sessions of the CES. The Bureau suggested that electronic discussion on the Integrated Presentation (that is, via e-mail) could take place in future in consideration of the very limited time available at the annual sessions (**action by ECE**).

38. The ECE secretariat recommended that the two main topics for discussion based on the Rapporteurs' reports should be Programme Element (PE) 3.9 Price Statistics (based on Statistics Canada's report), with specific reference to the new CPI Manual, and PE 5.1 Environmental Statistics: Sectoral concepts, definitions, classifications and environmental databases (based on Statistics Norway's report), with additional discussions specifically devoted to the MNE and confidentiality projects.

39. The Bureau agreed that, in order to streamline proceedings, delegates should be invited to comment on the IP via e-mail before the meeting and the ECE should prepare a room document for the meeting, which collates these comments (**action by ECE**).

40. The Bureau agreed that the CES should not 'endorse' the CPI or PPI Manuals, as this should be done by the Statistical Commission.

41. The Bureau agreed the draft agenda for the forthcoming CES should include one-hour discussion of PEs 5: Environmental statistics. An additional time should also be included to discuss the progress of the projects on Confidentiality and Microdata and MNE, with less time being devoted to the latter as there would be little to report at that stage (**action by ECE**). The Bureau asked the ECE secretariat to invite Statistics Norway to prepare a more in-depth and structured paper on which to base the discussion on PE 5.1 (**action by ECE**).

b) Organization of the first seminar session dealing with foundational issues of statistical systems – National Statistical Systems

42. Heli Jeskanen-Sundstrom of Statistics Finland introduced the proposed format of the session (doc. CES/BUR.2004/31). The role of the discussant was emphasised, as was the need to focus the seminar on issues rather than details. It was suggested that the seminar should concentrate on issues affecting NSSs rather than international bodies. International coordination was seen as important but,

in this case, international organizations are only expected to give comments rather than be given an explicit slot in the seminar to express their views.

43. The Bureau agreed that it would be useful to invite Statistics New Zealand to contribute a paper to the seminar as they had worked a lot recently on defining 'national statistics' and developing legal frameworks.

44. Robert Johnston informed the Bureau that Willem De Vries would be willing to participate in the seminar on national statistical systems, possibly by way of an oral report on the results of the Global Review. Statistics Finland welcomed any additional supporting papers. The ECE indicated that the deadline for their submission would be mid-May.

c) Organization of the second seminar session dealing with emerging new issues – Measuring prices and volume of the service sector

45. Robin Youll of the UK Office for National Statistics introduced to the Bureau the proposed format of the seminar (CES/BUR.2004/31). The seminar would be split into three main sessions focusing on non-market, market and user issues respectively. Strategic issues and summary conclusions would be emphasised in preference to technicalities.

46. The Bureau recommended that an overview paper be prepared after the seminar to guide Heads of NSOs towards good practices they could follow or at least investigate. Heinrich Brünger requested that more specific guidance be given to transition economies on how to make the first steps. The ONS agreed, as part of the follow-up activity to the seminar, to lead on the development of a synthesis of best practices, with transition economies specifically in mind.

47. The Bureau also recommended that more background documents be made available to ensure that Heads of NSOs had a full picture of all the relevant issues in this area, in particular concerning progress of work in the Voorburg Group. The ONS representative noted that the relevance of the Voorburg Group would emerge from already planned documents.

48. The United States expressed specific support for the seminar: both the BLS and the BEA were very positive about the seminar, especially in light of the series of workshops which had taken place on this topic at the Brookings Institute recently.

49. Dennis Trewin agreed to provide an additional invited paper to the 1st session concerning ongoing innovations in this area at the ABS. The Bureau agreed that a designated 'Rapporteur' be used for summarizing the conclusions of this seminar and others as well. Statistics Sweden agreed to provide an invited paper mapping European experiences of Service Price Indices.

d) Draft agenda and timetable for the 2004 plenary session

50. The ECE secretariat presented the draft agenda and timetable for the 2004 plenary session (CES/BUR.2004/33), which will have to be modified to take into account the decisions taken by the Bureau under items a), b) and c) above.

VII. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE MNE PROJECT

51. Ivan Fellegi, of Statistics Canada, presented the progress report on the MNE project to the Bureau. The countries that had so far volunteered to participate were reported to be working well together. The project is in a first exploratory stage though, with no fixed timetable as of yet, and it is thus difficult to see at this stage how it will develop. Data collection will not have taken place in time for the June meeting of the Conference but it will be possible to inform the meetings of the International Roundtable on Business Survey Frames of the content of the survey, support given to the

project by national banks and general discussions, etc. Substantive reporting to the Conference is, however, anticipated for its session in 2005.

52. The Bureau congratulated Statistics Canada on its work on the project. The Bureau agreed to discuss at its October meeting the details of the contents of a report on the project to be presented to the 2005 Conference (**action by ECE**).

53. Louis Kincannon expressed concern that the survey work for the project would significantly increase respondent load and impact negatively upon ongoing primary survey work. Reporting burden remains a significant issue to enterprises and therefore he expressed some reservations about the United States participation in the survey.

54. The Bureau agreed that it would be very important for the Project Team to maintain informal contacts with accountants. It was seen as necessary to encourage the harmonisation of accounting concepts and statistical concepts. Not only should accounting bodies be approached but also IT companies so as to encourage the development of their accounting packages.

55. Irena Krizman of the Statistical Office of Slovenia suggested that non-confidential information on the project's website be opened up to non-members of the Bureau if possible (**action by Statistics Canada**).

VIII. PROGRESS REPORT BY THE TASK FORCE ON CONFIDENTIALITY AND MICRODATA

56. Dennis Trewin presented the report of the Task Force to the Bureau. It was stressed that, although cultural and legal differences would always exist between countries, there is a need to agree on a set of common principles and to provide examples of good practices consistent with these principles. This would then give guidance to countries, but the extent to which the principles are adopted could be expected to vary from country to country.

57. The Bureau expressed strong support for the Task Force's work and stressed its importance for both building strong statistical systems and allowing for well-informed and relevant socio-economic research. The Bureau praised both the work so far achieved and Dennis Trewin's leadership of that work.

58. The Bureau discussed the impact of cultural differences between countries. Some countries may be too small to exclude the risk of identification of individual business from confidentialised data; in other countries, levels of suspicion of government may vary, ways of dealing with data may also vary and so on. It was therefore agreed that the body of the Task Force's report should concentrate on principles rather than details, to allow countries flexibility in their approaches.

59. The Bureau agreed that dealing with business data presented a particularly challenging issue that should be addressed specifically in the Task Force's report. Combining personal/household data with business data can produce important results for researchers but presents a greater danger of the identification of individual businesses or persons.

60. The Bureau discussed the problems created by the varying use of terminology. The term 'anonymised' data was generally preferred to the term 'confidentialised', but it was recognised that its usage varied substantially from country to country. It was therefore agreed that terminology should be better defined, and in a way that would not alarm any particular constituencies. Eurostat informed the Bureau that it is working on producing a glossary of terms concerning confidentiality and it was agreed that this could provide a useful input to the Task Force's work.

61. The Bureau discussed the importance of communicating clearly to the public the principles and statements issued concerning confidentiality. This should involve producing transparent and understandable statements, consulting with privacy bodies, and creating a firm understanding between statistical bodies of the meaning of any universal statements.

62. Eurostat urged the Task Force to give some emphasis to issues concerning the exchange of data between countries. The ECE raised the issue of whether or not international organizations should be considered a legitimate user group.

63. The Bureau agreed that the Task Force's end product should be a report with chapters detailing principles of confidentiality and possible ways of implementing them. This text should include a glossary of terms.

IX. PROGRESS REPORTS ON THE ECE STEERING GROUPS

a) Information on the UNECE Steering Groups

64. The ECE secretariat presented a note (CES/BUR.2004/22) on the ECE guidelines for the establishment of teams of specialists and on the functions of Steering Groups, Task Forces and Organising Committees. An annex to the note (CES/BUR.2004/22/Add.1) provided updated information on the activities of the various groups. It was agreed that, on the basis of the definitions proposed in document CES/BUR.2004/22, the “category” of the various groups (that is, Steering Groups, Task Forces or Organising Committees) would be reviewed and, if necessary, modified. The Bureau agreed that a note on the guidelines be presented to the Conference in June 2004 (**action by ECE**).

65. The representative of the United States reminded the ECE secretariat that the appointment of US delegates in the various groups should always be done through the Office of Management and Budget.

b) Joint ECE/Eurostat programme on 2010 population and housing censuses

66. The ECE secretariat presented the report of the first meeting of the Steering Group on Population and Housing Censuses which took place on 19-20 January 2004 (CES/BUR.2004/23). The report included the proposals of the Steering Group on: the structure of the new recommendations, the areas selected for in-depth review of the recommendations, and the structure of the questionnaire to be sent to countries to obtain information on the extent to which they complied with the 2000 recommendations.

67. The Bureau approved the proposals contained in the note, but asked the ECE secretariat to better define the terms “evaluation” (para.7) and “institutional households” (para.8) (**action by ECE**).

68. The Bureau stressed that when countries offer to participate in Steering Groups or similar groups, it should be clear that they commit to participate in the activities of the groups, including possible meetings. With regard to the composition of the Steering Group on Population and Housing Censuses, it was agreed to invite France (which is developing a very innovative approach to the census) and a Nordic country (to cover the case of register-based censuses) to join the group (**action by ECE**).

c) Joint ECE/Eurostat project on families and households

69. The ECE secretariat presented the report of the Task Force on Families and Households, which met on 20-21 January 2004 (CES/BUR.2004/24). The report included a proposal on the enlargement of the Task Force and a work plan for the future activities of the group. The Bureau approved the proposals contained in the note.

d) Coordination of international housing statistics

70. The ECE secretariat presented a note on Coordination of International Housing Statistics including the draft Terms of Reference of the Steering Group to be set up in this area (CES/BUR.2004/25). The Bureau welcomed the paper and acknowledged the fact that there is a number of international organisations (both intergovernmental and non-governmental) dealing with housing statistics and that better coordination and dissemination of international housing statistics is needed. Moreover, despite the large quantity of data being collected, some areas of major importance in the area of housing are currently not covered that are crucial for policy makers. There is also a major overlap in the compilation processes of the data which is a burden to the NSOs. Accessibility of data was also seen as a constraint.

71. The Bureau agreed to set up a Steering Group to work towards the objectives as stated in the ToR. However, the Bureau recommended that the concept of "housing statistics" should not be used in a broader sense but rather cover the areas currently presented in the ECE Bulletin of Housing Statistics as part of official statistics. The Bureau requested the Steering group to prepare, at its first meeting, a programme of work and related timetable and report them to the Bureaux of the CES and the Committee on Human Settlements. It also requested the Steering Group to present progress reports to both Bureaux.

e) Steering Group on Sustainable Development

72. The ECE secretariat presented a note that summarized some of the current challenges in the measurement of sustainable development and highlighted some questions related to the role of official statistics in this field. The note proposed the creation of a Steering Group to prepare a seminar in 2005 for Heads of NSOs to discuss the role of official statistics in the measurement of sustainable development.

73. The Bureau approved the creation of the Steering Group and decided to devote one of the 2005 CES seminars to the measurement of sustainable development. It was agreed that the objective of the meeting will 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. The importance of presenting case studies where official statistics were used to measure sustainable development was stressed. Australia offered to provide one of the case studies and Canada expressed their availability to contribute. Sweden volunteered to be the organizer of the seminar.

f) Statistical Metadata (METIS)

74. The Bureau was informed of the outcome of the Joint ECE-Eurostat-OECD Work Session on Statistical Metadata (METIS) held in Geneva on 9-11 February 2004. The session concluded that various models, definitions and concepts of statistical metadata were used in different concepts and that national statistical offices were missing a common framework which might help them to build their metadata systems. Furthermore, the widespread collection, sharing and dissemination of statistics over the Internet calls for accelerated efforts to develop such a common framework. Following the meeting, the ECE secretariat prepared a note for the Bureau proposing the creation of a Task Force.

75. The Bureau asked the ECE secretariat to prepare, in cooperation with experts from national statistical offices, Eurostat and OECD, a more detailed proposal defining the objectives of the Task Force and circulate it by e-mail to the Bureau members, so that it can be discussed at its June 2004 meeting (**action by ECE**).

76. The Bureau recalled that the CES traditionally organizes METIS work sessions to continue the work launched within the ECE/UNDP Statistical Computing Project. The Bureau stressed that the utility of such recurrent activities needs to be reviewed. Some of the Bureau members supported the idea that the new initiative may streamline METIS activities and focus them on a useful and well-specified output.

X. FOLLOW-UP TO DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE BUREAU

77. The ECE secretariat reminded the Bureau that a note on follow-up to decisions taken by the Bureau was prepared for information (CES/BUR.2004/41). The Bureau noted that the document was submitted only a few days before the Bureau meeting, and asked the ECE secretariat to try in future to submit all documents at least two weeks in advance of the meeting, if possible (**action by ECE**).

XI. ALLOCATION OF THE ECE STATISTICAL DIVISION RESOURCES

78. The ECE secretariat informed the Bureau that the forthcoming session of the Economic Commission for Europe (24-26 February 2004) might decide to ask the Principal Subsidiary Bodies (including the CES) to review and endorse the allocation of the respective ECE staff resources for the biennium 2004/2005 and 2005/2006. This would mean that the CES Bureau should agree on a note outlining the directions and priority areas in the work of the Conference, and the allocation of the staff resources of the Statistical Division for the various statistical activities. If this were to be the case, it was proposed that the prioritisation be made according to the four main categories of the Annual Statistical Programme.

79. Some members of the Bureau noted that, in this exercise, the priorities of the ECE should be taken into account. It was also suggested that, in order to carry out the prioritization, a matrix could be produced with the four functional categories in which the statistical activities are classified in the ECE Statistical Programme and the various subject matter areas.

80. The Bureau agreed that Irena Krizman would represent the CES at the meeting of the Chairs of the PSBs that would be organized within the framework of the forthcoming session of the Economic Commission for Europe. The Bureau thanked Irena Krizman for accepting to represent the CES at this important meeting.

XII. DATES AND VENUE OF THE NEXT BUREAU MEETING

81. The Bureau agreed on the following tentative dates for the next Bureau meetings: 18-19 October 2004 (in Washington) and 10-11 February 2005 (in Geneva). It was also agreed that the 2005 CES plenary session should take place in Geneva on 14-16 June 2005.

XIII. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

82. Statistics Canada informed the Bureau of the plans for a workshop on international technical cooperation in statistics that would be organised in co-operation with the OECD and PARIS 21 and put together donors, recipients, and official statisticians (CES/BUR.2004/42). The Bureau welcomed the proposal while expressing some doubts that much would be accomplished if the focus would be only on financing, and noted that it would be important to involve in this initiative representatives from both the most and the least developed countries. Moreover, this workshop could be used to raise the issue of international statistical cooperation at political level.

83. The representative of the World Bank informed the Bureau of the recent international roundtable on Managing for Development Results, organized in Marrakech on 4-5 February 2004 by the World Bank jointly with various regional Development Banks and the OECD Development Assistance Committee. The roundtable addressed various issues such as measuring and reporting on

progress, obtaining better statistics for decision-making, improving the business environment, and strengthening countries' capacity to manage for results.