

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Third Meeting of the 2006/2007 Bureau
Geneva (Switzerland), 12-13 February 2007

REPORT OF THE 12-13 FEBRUARY 2007 BUREAU MEETING

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The third meeting of the 2006/2007 Bureau was held in Geneva on 12-13 February 2007. The following members of the Bureau attended: Katherine Wallman (Chairman), Eduardo Pereira Nunes, Heli Jeskanen-Sundström, Luigi Biggeri, Aija Zigure, Vladimir Sokolin, and Irena Krizman. The following permanent participants also attended: Pieter Everaers representing Hervé Carré, Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat); Ivan Fellegi, Chairman, Statistics Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); Enrico Giovannini (OECD); Mikhail Korolev, Commonwealth of Independent States Statistical Committee (CIS-STAT); Dennis Trewin representing Paul Cheung, United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD); and Heinrich Brünger (UNECE).

2. The following persons assisted members of the Bureau: Zelia Magalhaes Bianchini (Brazil), Bela Prigly (Canada), Andrey Kosarev of the Bureau of Economic Analysis (Russian Federation), Suzann Evinger of the Office of Management and Budget (United States), and Ann Nilsson (Eurostat). The following persons attended specific agenda items of the meeting at the invitation of Katherine Wallman: Jan Fischer of the Czech Statistical Office for item 5, Geert Bruinooge (Statistics Netherlands) for items 4b and 6, Paul Van den Bergh of the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) for item 1a, and Henri Laurencin (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)) for item 6. Lidia Bratanova of UNECE served as Secretary of the meeting.

3. The following staff of the UNECE Statistical Division also attended. Tiina Luige, Juraj Riecan, Carsten Hansen, Angela Me, and Petteri Baer.

II. IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF SELECTED STATISTICAL AREAS

4. The Bureau reviewed in-depth three statistical areas, namely the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) initiative, population statistics, and business statistics.

(a) SDMX initiative

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/2 and Add.1 (prepared by SDMX sponsors)

5. Mr. Paul Van den Bergh (BIS) introduced the topic. He emphasised that the collection and dissemination of data is a resource intensive activity for all international organizations. The value added of the SDMX initiative is in coordinating and harmonising these efforts. SDMX reduces duplication in data collection and dissemination, reduces reporting burden, improves timeliness and accuracy of statistics, and facilitates comparative analysis.

6. The importance of the January 2007 SDMX Conference in Washington was highlighted. About 200 experts representing 100 national statistical offices and international organizations attended the Conference. The SDMX Conference encouraged continued development, broad consultations, and organizing capacity building workshops. The SDMX sponsors plan to cooperate in capacity building with the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA), UN Statistical Commission (UNSC), and UNECE.

7. The following points were made in the discussion:

- the broad consultations with interested statistical agencies are a very positive development;
- there are huge amounts of data exchanged and these could not be converted to SDMX all at

- once.. In order to show visible benefits, the SDMX should be first implemented for regular and frequent data exchanges (monthly, quarterly) and then gradually generalised;
- it is important to have a significant number of countries using SDMX;
 - the implementation of SDMX would be more effective if more statistical areas are covered. The situation is better in areas where standards exist, as is the case with most areas of economic statistics. In areas where there are no official standards, the SDMX domain specific guidelines could become de-facto standards. However, the development of standards in these other areas is not part of the SDMX process but should be addressed by the responsible agencies through their respective mechanisms;
 - MDG indicators provide an excellent opportunity for the SDMX implementation. UNSD could lead this process with assistance from other organizations to provide the needed technical expertise;
 - new data collection initiatives should be based on the SDMX standard from the beginning. An example cited in this respect was the UNSD data collection on trade in services where old techniques and formats are used. In such cases, countries should put pressure on international organizations to use the SDMX approach;
 - it was proposed to prepare country case studies focusing on national costs of the implementation of SDMX;
 - the SDMX implementation in the national statistical offices could provide an opportunity for improving the processes within national statistical systems. This also gives a better justification for the costs. For example, the Washington SDMX Conference in January 2007 showed that some developing countries are enthusiastic about introducing the SDMX, which could be used as an opportunity to improve their statistical systems;
 - the CIS Statistical Committee considered SDMX in the broader context of CIS activities towards implementation of the IMF standards where some of the CIS member countries already participate;
 - the benefits from the SDMX implementation would increase if the international organizations would agree on common reporting content in particular domains where data are collected regularly. This would offer an important incentive for countries, and may help in achieving significant savings in data exchange. The content should be based on statistical standards;
 - the importance of capacity building to help countries overcome the lack of technical knowledge was emphasised. Coordination among international organizations is needed in this respect. PARIS 21 has agreed to include SDMX capacity building within its work programme;
 - the SDMX sponsors should actively disseminate the SDMX related know-how. However, the best way to learn about SDMX is to do it.
8. The Bureau concluded that:
- the discussion helped to better understand how the SDMX content oriented guidelines will be developed with the involvement of the existing subject-matter groups;
 - the broad consultation with experts from all interested statistical offices is appreciated;
 - the Bureau expressed satisfaction with the process and how it is being managed;
 - the continuous involvement of NSOs at all relevant levels is important;
 - the organization of capacity building workshops and the use of existing groups and meetings to spread SDMX awareness is encouraged;
 - further developments of SDMX standards and tools are considered important, in particular the extension of the SDMX applications to other areas like social statistics,

demography, education, agriculture, etc..

(b) Population statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/3 (UNECE), Add.1 (UNSD) and Add.2 (Eurostat)

9. The Bureau reviewed the strategic issues in population statistics based on papers prepared by the UNECE, UNSD, and Eurostat. The discussion focused on producing accurate population benchmark figures (including the particular difficulty of measuring migration), the definition of total population, making demographic projections, and reconciling population data between censuses.

10. The Bureau emphasized that in many countries the most problematic issue in the production of annual population statistics is related to the measurement of migration. In this context, the following comments were also made:

- Canada is making an estimate of the number of people missed in the previous census by tracking down a sample of the previous census in the next census; a by-product of the exercise is the estimate of emigration. This could be recommended as a best practice;
- the production of standards for the exchange of data to support countries in their efforts to measure emigration is welcome. The CES Task Force on migration statistics plans to finalise soon the guidelines on how to measure emigrants using data on stocks and supplementary information on flows of immigrants collected in host countries;
- the specific difficulties in measuring illegal migrants were highlighted; a collection of good practices in estimating such population groups is planned as an output of the CES work on migration statistics;
- the forthcoming census round should be used to improve the data on migration, therefore UNECE should continue to consider the population census as a priority in its work.

11. Concerning population projections, it is important to have best practices documented to arrive at a more standardised approach. The following comments were also made:

- Canada would be ready to share experience in this area;
- statistical offices need to be independent in selecting the methods to calculate population projections; in several countries the best available scientific advice is used;
- standards in this area would not be productive since the methodology is based on the best available scenario, which is different across countries;
- Eurostat plans to produce population projections for the non-EU countries. UNECE will seek additional information from Eurostat on the coordination mechanisms existing between Eurostat and the UN Population Division which is in charge of the population projections at the UN level.

12. The Bureau discussed the discrepancies in population figures provided by national statistical offices and international organizations. Discrepancies also exist at the national level within the national accounts and demographic frameworks. It was emphasized that standards on the definition of total population should acknowledge different uses of population figures, and should be based on different concepts such as residency, use of services, and citizenship. It was recommended to have more case studies to see how the problem is handled in different countries.

13. Countries and international organizations have developed various good practices to produce intercensal population estimates and realign past estimates with new census data. The issuance of

international guidelines and/or good practices could represent a useful tool for many countries and ensure more standardized approaches in the future.

14. Several Bureau members expressed concern about the discontinuation of the Council of Europe's publication *Recent Demographic Developments in Europe*. Eurostat reported that in an agreement with the Council of Europe, it will collect and disseminate the demographic data that were previously the responsibility of the Council of Europe, and therefore will also cover non-EU countries. UNECE will seek additional information from Eurostat on the format of the data dissemination and on the process that Eurostat will use to ensure the agreement of non-EU countries to report their data to Eurostat.

15. Since the paper did not indicate priorities within population statistics, the following possible priorities were suggested: (i) improving population estimates and projections, and sharing knowledge on best practices in these areas; (ii) defining the terms population, immigration, and emigration; and (iii) making a review of the standards in population statistics.

16. In conclusion, the Bureau agreed that:

- it is important to develop and document best practices in cases where methods cannot be standardised because of different situations in countries;
- there is an active work programme under the CES umbrella in this area; the work on migration and censuses should continue as planned;
- UNECE will inform the CES group working on population projections on the need to produce documented best practices;
- UNECE will assess if there are available resources in 2008 to initiate work on documented best practices in producing annual population statistics;
- Eurostat will inform the Bureau about the details of taking over the publication *Recent Demographic Developments in Europe*.

(Action: UNECE, Eurostat)

(c) Business statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/4 (IMF), Add.1 (Finland), Add.2/Rev.1 (UNSD), Add.3 (UNECE), Add.4 (Eurostat), Add.5 (Canada)

17. The strategic issues in business statistics were considered based on written contributions from IMF, Statistics Finland, UNSD, UNECE, Eurostat and Statistics Canada.

18. The following comments were made in the discussion:

- the question of coherence of business statistics is one of the most important issues to be dealt with for NSOs. For example, Statistics Finland is currently working on a strategy for an "integrated approach" to business statistics, including also the national accounts;
- another challenge would be to include aspects of environment, energy, and research and development in business statistics;
- EU has launched the programme for Modernisation of European Enterprise and Trade Statistics (MEETS) to further harmonize and streamline business and trade statistics over the next four to five years. The programme is a response to the pressure from the European Parliament to reduce the reporting burden on enterprises;

- there are a number of EU regulations governing the work on business statistics in EU member countries. However, there is a lack of guidelines on data collection strategies for complying with those regulations, and on good practices for non-EU and non-OECD countries. A particularly important issue would be the use of business registers and/or economic censuses for business statistics, and issues related to the use of different data sources. The UNECE would like to contribute to such work;
- it is important to share knowledge of good practices in business statistics; UNSD has done a lot of work in this area which should be better publicised;
- several groups dealing with business statistics exist at present: the Friends of the Chair group on the integrated approach to economic statistics, Roundtable on Business Survey Frames, and the group on multinational enterprises. It is too early to take major decisions for work in the area or form new groups before the work of the Friends of the Chair group has provided some outcome. Thus, any larger initiatives, including establishing a possible steering group, should not be dealt with before 2008;
- meanwhile, a small task force could be set up for the exchange of national experiences in the field of business statistics (e.g., to deal with mixed mode data collection, business surveys, addressing declining response rates, etc.). Overlap should be avoided with the Task Force on Electronic Data Reporting that is concerned with technical issues.

19. In conclusion, the Bureau decided to include the issue of business statistics on the agenda of the CES plenary session in 2008. Meanwhile, a small task force should be formed to address pending issues in the field of business statistics. Ivan Fellegi and Pieter Everaers volunteered to draft a proposal for the terms of reference. The group may invite more members, including from outside the UNECE region. (**Action: Canada, Eurostat**).

III. MEETING WITH MR. GARONNA, DEPUTY EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

20. The CES Bureau met with Mr. Paolo Garonna, Deputy Executive Secretary of the UNECE. Mr. Garonna informed the Bureau about the results of the implementation of the UNECE Reform and the change in the UNECE governance structure. Some of the responsibilities of the Sectoral Committees have been delegated to the Executive Committee to ensure that the sectoral work forms a part of a common program. Mr. Garonna stressed the relevance of the reform for the CES work in the context of the pan-European integration. Statistics is a genuinely cross-sectoral activity and an area where the international cooperation in the UNECE region could be taken as an example for the other sectoral committees. He thanked the CES and its Bureau for the excellent work in this respect.

21. Bureau members made the following points in the discussion that followed:
- the work procedures of the CES and its Bureau have been consistent with the changes in priorities of the UNECE reform. The Teams of Specialists have specific work programmes, objectives, products, and sunset clauses;
 - it becomes increasingly important to relate the work of the Conference to the political level; joint activities with other organizations, such as working with the European Commission within the European Neighborhood Policy and launching work on MDGs together with UNICEF, are important to keep the UNECE relevant;
 - the UNECE region includes major global players, and therefore it is necessary to cooperate with countries from other regions. The UNECE statistical work has implications for other

regions; standards developed under the CES umbrella are often a first step towards developing global standards.

- raising the political profile and prominence of statistics is essential also for maintaining the necessary resource base for statistical work;

IV. FOLLOW-UP TO THE SEMINAR ON HUMAN RESOURCES AND TRAINING

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/9 (Czech Republic and Canada)

22. The Bureau discussed the follow-up to the seminar on human resources and training on the basis of a note prepared by Jan Fischer (Czech Republic) and Ivan Fellegi (Canada).

23. An Organising Committee (OC) will prepare a forum to exchange views and know-how on human resources management to take place in 2008. The Human Resources directors from statistical offices should be included in the target audience of the forum. The Czech Republic and Canada will co-chair the Organising Committee and steer the preparatory work. IMF, CIS, and Finland expressed willingness to be members of the OC. The IMF can represent the international organizations in the OC, given that they are already coordinating the work of the international organizations in this area in the CCSA. OECD and Eurostat supported the initiative.

24. The proposal for the forum to also address the human resource issues in the South East European (SEE) countries was welcomed. A member from this region should be included in the OC.

25. The OC will draft the agenda and set up a timetable for the preparation of the forum.
(Action: Czech Republic and Canada)

V. PREPARATIONS FOR THE 2006 PLENARY SESSION AND THE TWO SEMINARS

(a) Organization of the first seminar session – increasing the efficiency and productivity of statistical offices

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/6 (Latvia)

26. The Bureau discussed the draft outline for the Seminar. As there are only two sessions, three invited papers are planned for each. The Discussants for both sessions have been identified. The Bureau stressed the need to give guidance to the authors of invited papers on what should be the focus of their papers. It is also important to have forward-looking papers that challenge the thinking of how to do things differently in the future and to take advantage of the technological developments.

27. OECD offered a supporting paper about a survey carried out in 29 countries on the general public's knowledge about official statistics (e.g., whether people know what is the official figure for GDP, inflation, unemployment rate, current deficit, etc.). The results may not yet be available at the time of the plenary session but a paper on the survey methodology can be prepared. The Bureau considered the paper to be of interest as there is no long tradition of such surveys of public knowledge in statistical offices. The Bureau discussed whether a short presentation of the survey should be made during the seminar. However, it was decided not to have a presentation during the session to comply with the policy that individual papers are not presented during the seminars. A possible presentation could be given during the lunch break.

28. The Organising Committee agreed to meet in New York in conjunction with the UN Statistical Commission meeting to talk further about preparations for the seminar. (**Action: Latvia**)

(b) Organization of the second seminar – measuring capital

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/7 (Netherlands) and Add.1 (IMF)

29. The Bureau discussed the draft outline for the Seminar. The Bureau stressed that the keynote speech should focus on state-of-the-art methods of measuring capital.

30. The OECD paper on social capital and the Italian paper on human capital were confirmed.

31. Other comments made in the discussion:

- there may be a potential overlap with the discussions in the Joint UNECE/OECD/Eurostat Working Group on Statistics for Sustainable Development. However, the Group is not yet ready to report at this seminar and is looking to the seminar as a potential input to its work;
- the seminar should take into account the work of the experts in the SNA93 review;
- OECD offered a discussant (Paul Schreyer) who is currently working on the revision of the OECD Handbook on Capital Stock Measurement;
- the discussion on human capital should not go too much into the theory but stay on a more practical level;
- the papers should be tailored to the heads of the statistical offices, not to technical experts;
- as the seminar is quite overcharged, it is important to make the statements of Discussants and invited paper authors short and to leave time for discussion;
- a review of the timetable was suggested.

32. The Bureau members emphasised the need for more focus in the discussions. It would be useful if the papers summarise not only the national experience but also the different views on capital measurement. The Bureau suggested dividing the keynote speakers: one for the overall discussion in the beginning and one for the first session after the lunch break. (**Action: Netherlands**)

(c) Preparation of the formal session on the first day: selection of the topic for in-depth discussion; election of the CES Bureau; draft agenda and timetable for the 2007 plenary session.

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/8 (UNECE)

33. The Bureau decided to postpone the in-depth review of business statistics and the report of the Task Force on Electronic Data Reporting to the June 2008 plenary session.

34. The Bureau also decided not to have an in-depth review of a topic at the 2007 June plenary session. Instead, the following topics will be on the agenda of the plenary session either for discussion or as progress reports for information:

For discussion:

- Population;
- Health;

- Plans for the implementation of the updated System of National Accounts (SNA93 update).

For information:

- Human resources management;
- Confidentiality of integrated datasets;
- Statistics for sustainable development;
- Globalisation;
- SDMX.

35. It was pointed out that the SDMX topic is also on the agenda of the OECD Statistics Committee meeting immediately after the CES plenary session. However, some Bureau members considered it important to include the SDMX as an information item because of the considerable interest expressed previously and the fact that some countries will not participate in the OECD Statistics Committee.

36. The Bureau agreed in principle with the proposed timetable.

VI. COORDINATION OF WORK ON GLOBALISATION STATISTICS

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/10 (UNECE in cooperation with Canada and ONS, UK)

37. The Bureau had its first discussion about the work on globalisation statistics at its October 2006 meeting. Following the Bureau's recommendations, a revised proposal was prepared by the UNECE secretariat in cooperation with Robin Lynch (ONS, UK) and Philip Smith (Statistics Canada). The secretariat consulted the proposal with OECD, IMF, Eurostat, UNCTAD, and Statistics Netherlands. Varying views about the focus of the work of a possible expert group were expressed during the consultation and therefore the Bureau was asked to advise on further steps.

38. The following points were made during the discussion:

- Eurostat proposed to take a step-by-step approach in the work and agreed on the initial focus of the group, e.g. national accounts;
- it would be difficult for an expert group to cover all statistical areas affected by globalization. Therefore, it is suggested to approach the issue from a national accounts perspective using the SNA as an integrating framework. The proposed expert group should deal with the main distortions caused by globalization and propose approaches (surveys, additional data sources) to help repair the accounts. National accountants may decide to consult other experts if needed;
- globalization is important for the developing countries as well. Therefore, it would be interesting to address the issue also from the perspective of developing countries. UNECE should involve South-East European countries in the work of the proposed expert group;
- UNSD and UNCTAD pointed out that developing countries need help in measuring the impact of globalization on the economies and advice on what benefits they can expect from the globalization process. Until now, mainly the financial impact has been addressed. Any attempt to measure the overall economic impact of globalization is very welcome. UNCTAD supports the proposal to base globalization on the national accounts structure;
- OECD has a Working Group on measurement of the impact of globalization. In addition, an internal task force has been created in OECD to discuss how the work on globalization could be carried forward among the different Directorates involved. The first proposal will

- be ready in May. The possible recommendations of the task force will be the revision of the Handbook on Globalization Statistics and the creation of a Working Group on Globalization Statistics under the auspices of the OECD Committee on Statistics;
- all countries, developed and developing, should be invited to contribute to the activity;
 - the Expert Meeting on Globalisation could take place back-to-back with the Joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD meeting on national accounts;
 - technical cooperation activities should be kept outside of the scope of the expert group. Technical assistance is considered very important but it could be addressed only after some recommendations are developed on how the statistical systems can better cope with the globalization phenomenon;
 - Statistics Netherlands is facing many problems linked to the activities of multinationals and is looking at the distortions caused by globalization on their system of economic accounts;
 - Statistics Finland is very interested in the work on globalization as they are facing similar problems.
39. The following conclusions were drawn from the discussion:
- the expert group will approach the issue of globalisation using the national accounts framework and will look at how statistical offices can cope more effectively with the distortions to the traditional statistical measures that are occurring as a result of globalisation (including those outside national accounts);
 - Statistics Netherlands accepted to act as the chair of the expert group and will prepare a revised, more specific proposal on future work on globalization statistics, taking into account the recommendations made by the Bureau;
 - Finland, Canada, and the IMF are willing to participate in the group;
 - Statistics Netherlands will consult the revised paper with all interested parties and will provide it for electronic consultation with the Bureau members before the plenary session in June 2007;
 - the forthcoming Conference in June 2007 will be informed about the creation of the expert group and its terms of reference.

(Action: Statistics Netherlands, UNECE)

VII. REVIEW OF ISSUES AND PROBLEMS IN INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL WORK IN THE UNECE REGION

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/5 (UNECE)

40. In the past, in addition to the in-depth review of selected statistical areas at its February meetings, the Bureau also made a general review of the international statistical work undertaken in other areas based on the Integrated Presentation of International Statistical Work. In 2005, it was decided that the review will be based on a paper to cover all statistical areas prepared by the UNECE secretariat with the help of other international organizations. The first version of the paper was presented at the February 2006 Bureau meeting and updated for the October 2006 meeting. However, the discussion on whether the UNECE should compile a paper on issues and problems was postponed to the February 2007 meeting.

41. The Bureau reviewed the original aim of the discussion on issues and problems and looked for a more efficient way to achieve the same goal. The paper on Issues and Problems, prepared by the UNECE, was meant to be a tool to help the Bureau as an executive body of the Conference to carry out its mandate, that is: to promote the coordination of the statistical activities in the region,

avoid duplication, and address emerging issues. The paper reviews the entire range of statistical programmes in order to highlight concerns of statistical offices, of both conceptual and coordinating nature.

42. The following points were made in the discussion:

- a review of the full range of statistical activities is too overwhelming and consumes a lot of resources; it does not serve a purpose as the Bureau discusses only a fraction of the topics;
- it is necessary to take stock of the achievements, provide an overview of the situation, and reflect when problems are being addressed;
- to preserve the institutional memory, it would be useful to list the international Working Groups;
- better information is needed on the currently valid international manuals and guidelines (excluding the EU Regulations), particularly in the areas that are not yet covered. However, the document on issues and problems should not become an inventory of all manuals and recommendations duplicating the list of the UN manuals to be maintained by UNSD;
- the Bureau may need to reconsider how recommendations are made: a lot of groups have been created to address the pending issues; sometimes a better approach could be to push the involved international organizations to deal with the issues;
- CIS Statistics Committee and Russia proposed using a questionnaire to ask the members of the Conference about the topics that are problematic for them, and to establish priorities; these can be different for different countries;
- several Bureau members were sceptical about the usefulness of a questionnaire to consult the whole Conference to identify the areas with major problems. The work programs of international organizations should already reflect the problems identified by countries;
- UNECE is already surveying the CES members on the topics for the CES seminars and on the topics for the in-depth Bureau discussion, an additional questionnaire might be confusing;
- the problems identified in the in-depth review papers could be matched with the information in DISA to find out whether some of the problems are already being addressed;
- the Secretariat could submit the segments of DISA related to the topics identified for the in-depth discussion as a regular document to the Conference;
- the review of the issues and problems in the various statistical areas by the Bureau and the Conference is extremely useful; however, the CES and the Bureau should focus on coordination of work and initiate some joint development work by international organizations in areas that are not covered;
- in the future the Bureau should identify the topics to be reviewed, either groups of statistical areas (like business statistics) or individual topics; the Bureau should identify the issues within the selected topics. DISA can be used to highlight overlaps, duplication, and gaps in the work.

43. As a conclusion, the Bureau decided that:

- no additional surveys will be carried out;
- the issues and problems document covers too many topics to be useful, it should focus only on areas (groups of topics or individual topics) that will be reviewed;
- the paper will be discussed by the Bureau and the Conference;
- the section on recent achievements is useful and should become more visible.

44. In order to move forward and organize the in-depth discussions at the next Bureau meetings:

- the UNECE will ask Bureau members to suggest for in-depth review either single topics or ad hoc groupings from among the 55 areas of the classification of international statistical activities. The criterion for selecting a topic, or a group of topics, could be that there are significant developments in that area (e.g. business statistics), there are significant coordination issues (e.g. health statistics) or there is a lack of activities at international level;
- the Bureau would then ask either a Bureau member, the UNECE, an international organization, or a NSO to do a short review paper (similar to the IMF paper on business statistics, ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/4). The paper will be circulated ahead of time and Bureau members can contribute additional papers on the topic.
- the UNECE will circulate to the Conference the appropriate excerpts from the Database of International Statistical Activities (DISA) together with a statement of why the particular topic(s) was chosen for in-depth review and the Bureau decisions. Incidentally, one of the decisions could be that the topic (or group of topics) would be a good candidate for one of the forthcoming CES seminars;
- this approach can be experimented with for the next 2-3 meetings of the Bureau to see how effectively it serves its purpose and to decide how to proceed in future.

(Action: CES Bureau, UNECE)

VIII. PROGRESS REPORTS ON THE CES TEAMS OF SPECIALISTS

(a) Confidentiality aspects of statistical data integration

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/11 (Brian Pink)

45. The Bureau appreciated the proposal prepared by Brian Pink. The following comments were made in the discussion:
- the planned timetable is too tight;
 - the task force should broaden its scope to include privacy aspects; privacy is at risk of being compromised every time when individual records are linked; it was proposed to call the group Task Force on Confidentiality and Privacy Aspects of Data Integration;
 - synergies between the existing *Guidelines on Managing Statistical Confidentiality and Microdata Access* and the outcome of this task force should be clarified; the task force is expected to build on the Guidelines;
 - opinions differed as to whether the two sets of guidelines should be integrated into one document or kept separately, the new document could be an Add.1 to the existing *Guidelines*.
 - the confidentiality issues related to giving access for researchers to microdata from linked files should be stated explicitly.
46. In conclusion, the Bureau:
- approved the proposed terms of reference of the task force, subject to the comments above;
 - agreed on the following composition of the task force: Canada, Finland, Netherlands (to be confirmed), Poland (to be confirmed), Slovenia, United States, UNECE, and Eurostat.

(Action: Brian Pink)

(b) Business registers

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/12 (UNECE)

47. The Bureau reviewed the updated terms of reference of the Steering Group on Business Registers. The following comments and recommendations were made:

- the recommendations of the Bureau at its previous meeting were not properly reflected in the revised terms of reference, which was found to be still too vague;
- it is still not clear what is the difference in practice between the steering group and the work of the Roundtable on Business Survey Frames; no work plan and no concrete outputs are planned for the steering group;
- the steering group should focus more on methodological work and produce some concrete deliverables, e.g., a handbook, manual or collection of best practices for establishing and maintaining statistical business registers. It was also noted that UNSD has plans to develop a manual on business registers;
- the steering group should put more emphasis in its work on how to improve the quality and international comparability of business registers, to reduce the gap between advanced and less advanced countries in this area, and how to develop and maintain the business registers so as to facilitate the compilation of business demography statistics;
- the Roundtable is discussing the advanced issues and is therefore not an appropriate forum for the countries who are just building up their business registers;
- it was recommended to wait for the conclusions from the meeting of the Roundtable in October 2007 and then consider whether a steering group is still needed;
- the next joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD meeting on business registers is already under preparation (18-19 June 2007, Geneva). The steering group working on its preparation should be considered an Organising Committee.

48. In conclusion, the Bureau decided that:

- the joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD meeting on business registers in June 2007 will be prepared by an Organising Committee. The meeting should consider the terms of reference for a possible steering group and come back with a new proposal (or a decision that there is no need for a steering group) for the next meeting of the Bureau;
- the revised terms of reference should make the distinction between the work of the steering group and the Roundtable clear, and include a concrete work plan and outputs;
- the activities should deal with improving quality and international comparability of business registers, implementation of good practices in establishing and maintaining business registers, and facilitating compilation of business demography indicators. The steering group should consider the preparation of a manual, handbook, or collection of best practices.

(Action: UNECE)

(c) Price statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/19 (UNECE).

49. The Bureau reviewed the revised terms of reference of the steering group on price statistics. Instead of a steering group, the proposal was to set up an Organising Committee on Price Statistics. The following comments and recommendations were made:

- several Bureau members expressed disappointment with the process since the decisions made during the October 2006 meeting were not duly reflected in the revised proposal, which was still too vague and general, and lacked a clear description of the deliverables and outputs;
- the proposed sunset clause of a maximum of five years is too long; it should be shortened to one or two years;
- a work programme should be included in order to clarify the direction of work and the topics to be discussed over the next few years. It would also be useful to have more information about the work of the Ottawa Group on Price Indices and the Intersecretariat Working Group on Price Statistics (IWGPS) to see how possible gaps can be bridged and overlaps avoided;
- the proposed terms of reference are, to a great extent, formalizing the existing practice that has been in place for a number of years to organise the joint UNECE/ILO meetings on CPI; the Organizing Committee will only meet during the joint meetings while other communication will be undertaken by electronic means;
- the Bureau supported the joint UNECE/ILO CPI meetings: they are unique, have been well attended by practitioners from NSOs and recognized international experts, and have proved to be extremely useful for the NSOs;
- ILO involvement in the meetings is very important;
- Italy is willing to join the Organizing Committee.

50. In conclusion, the Bureau agreed that:

- revised terms of reference should be prepared to take into account the comments made during the February 2007 and October 2006 meetings and presented to the Bureau in October 2007. The proposal should include a work plan, a list of outputs, clarification, and distinction of the work in relation to the other groups on price statistics. The sunset clause should be reduced to two years.

(Action: UNECE)

(d) Sustainable development

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/19 (WGSSD)

51. The Bureau considered the work of the UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Working Group on Sustainable Development at its October 2006 meeting and gave guidance on how to proceed. The working group followed the advice of the Bureau. The work is on schedule. The working group will report to the Conference in June.

52. The following comments were made in the discussion:

- the working group has acted positively and has made good progress: there is a constructive atmosphere and a good understanding between the different players and countries;
- the work on indicators should not proceed too much ahead of the work on capital approach;

- the work of the working group is a good example of how the teams of specialists under the CES should function: if there is a problem, ask the Bureau for advice, then follow the recommendations given;
- Canada's chairmanship of the group was commended.

53. The Bureau was informed that there are plans to review the System of Economic and Environmental Accounting (SEEA). Concern was raised of revising something that has not been yet adopted and that only a few countries have partially implemented. The issue will be discussed at the UN Statistical Commission meeting.

(e) Steering Group on Management of Statistical Information Systems (MSIS)

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/14 (UNECE)

54. The Bureau members expressed their appreciation of the work done so far by the Steering Group on MSIS.

55. The Bureau supported the plans to update the 1999 guidelines on Information Systems Architecture for National and International Statistical Offices, and to expand the scope to address the interaction between national and international statistical systems. The SDMX developments should be reflected in the guidelines. The generic models of SDMX can be used as a basis for statistical IT infrastructure at national level.

56. It was recommended to involve in the work more CIS and South-East European countries. Learning from topics discussed at the MSIS meetings would be helpful also to developing countries from outside the region. In this connection, it was suggested that the UNSD participate in the steering group and the MSIS meetings provide a link to the countries outside the UNECE region, particularly to the developing countries. It was stressed that the meetings on MSIS already fulfill a role in linking the EU with North America and several other non-EU countries (Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Brazil, etc.).

57. The Bureau supported the continuation of the work.

(f) Common Metadata Framework

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/15 (UNECE)

58. The Bureau reviewed the progress of work of the Task Force on Common Metadata Framework. The Task Force has accomplished the majority of its original goals. Therefore, it was proposed that the Editorial Board established at the April 2006 Work Session on Statistical Metadata take over the responsibility for finalising and regular maintenance of the Framework on the Internet.

59. The Bureau suggested that the future work on statistical metadata should not be limited to the purely technical issues but should also include advocacy and technical assistance activities to promote the good practices. There would still be a role for a group in this area as such work is not done elsewhere. The members of the Task Force are experts who have completed successful national implementations of metainformation systems and are therefore well equipped to develop a strategy for introducing metadata systems.

60. In this connection, the Bureau recommended to discuss metadata also at a CES plenary

session to raise the awareness of the top-level management of metadata related issues and to promote the Framework.

61. In conclusion, the Bureau:

- thanked the task force for the work done on preparation of the first release of the Common Metadata Framework;
- decided to establish a Steering Group on Statistical Metadata (a) to fulfill the editorial tasks of the Common Metadata Framework, and (b) to promote the implementation of meta-information systems by developing advocacy and implementation strategies;
- asked the UNECE secretariat to prepare, for electronic consultation by the Bureau, the terms of reference for the steering group along the lines of document ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/15 and the comments made above.

(Action: UNECE)

(g) Task Force on UNECE Gender Database

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/16 (UNECE)

62. The Bureau approved the Terms of Reference of the Task Force on the UNECE Gender Database. To prepare analytical products as an output based on the database was also suggested by the team of experts evaluating the UNECE gender and economic databases. The proposal by OECD and UNECE to work closer together to produce a unique report on gender statistics was welcome.

63. The Bureau noted that UNSD is planning to develop a network on gender data dissemination and a set of training materials on gender statistics, and that OECD has launched a gender Fact book.

IX. FOLLOW-UP ON HEALTH STATISTICS

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/20 (UNECE and the Steering Group on Measuring Health Status (J. Madans))

64. The Bureau was informed about the follow-up to the discussion on coordination of health statistics in October 2006.

65. The Bureau appreciated the finalization of the survey module on health status (BI-MARK 1) developed by the Task Force on Measuring Health Status (the so-called Budapest Initiative). The module is to be used in the CES member countries to ensure comparability across countries. The survey module is expected to be delivered to Eurostat by the end of February to allow the EU countries to include it in their forthcoming health interview surveys. Eurostat is not in agreement that the set of questions could not be broken into parts. OECD supports the inclusion of the questions in the countries' surveys. The module will be presented to the June 2007 CES Plenary Session for final endorsement with the recommendation to approve it as a whole (not to consider individual questions separately). Countries and international organizations would also be encouraged to use the full module.

66. The Task Force will continue to refine the survey instrument, to be finalized within 2-3 years. The Bureau asked the Task Force to consider the collection of comparable data by a regional or international organization.
67. The Bureau welcomed the progress made by the Washington Group.
68. Disappointment was expressed with the slow progress of work of the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Health Statistics (ISWGHS). The Bureau suggested scheduling a meeting at the forthcoming OECD meeting in Istanbul between the Director General of WHO and representatives of the CES Bureau to discuss cooperation in health statistics and express concerns of the national statistical offices.
69. A one-day meeting of the ISWGHS will be held in connection with the UN Statistical Commission meeting in March. However, this is not sufficient and the group would need its own meeting with the participation of experts in health statistics. UNSD was encouraged to look for a mechanism to better engage WHO and to make clear what value-added is expected from the ISWGHS. Its aim is to bring WHO into dialogue with NSOs and other international organizations; therefore, it is essential that countries participate in the ISWGHS.
70. The Bureau recommended to keep health statistics on the agenda of the Conference for at least a year to maintain the pressure for better cooperation. It would also be useful to have a statement of encouragement from the Conference to better involve the WHO in the work of the ISWGHS.

(Action: Task Force on Measuring Health Status, UNSD)

X. PROPOSAL FOR AN EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT OF THE UNECE TRANSPORT STATISTICS DATABASE

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/17 (UNECE).

71. The Bureau discussed the draft terms of reference for a review of UNECE data work in transport statistics. The proposal is in line with the suggestion of the UNECE Reform Plan to increase cross-sectoral activities. It is a joint proposal by the Inland Transport Committee (ITC) and the Conference of European Statisticians.
72. The following comments were made:
- the ITC approved the proposed terms of reference at its meeting on 5 February 2007, with one minor change - the last sentence in paragraph 13 (c) was deleted;
 - the external assessment team should look at alternative sources of data and whether there are overlaps in data collection.
73. The Bureau approved the terms of reference, subject to the two comments above. Members of the Bureau are welcome to suggest experts to be on the assessment team.

XI. REPORT ON DONOR ACTIVITIES IN TECHNICAL COOPERATION IN CENTRAL ASIA

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/22 and ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/22/Add.1

74. The discussion was based on a survey of donor activities in Central Asia carried out by the UNECE, following the decision of the February 2006 Bureau meeting (ECE/CES/BUR/2006/6). The Bureau appreciated the results of the survey.

75. The following comments were made:

- the report should notify the European Commission as the donor partner for the European Union since Eurostat is no longer the organization providing funds for donor activities;
- be more forward looking in future surveys and look also at the capacity of countries to absorb the technical assistance;
- it is important to carefully coordinate the technical assistance in the CIS countries and to promote the same approaches and methodology in countries so as not to harm comparability of data;
- include in the paper information on the Committee for Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA), Task Team 1 on improving reporting mechanisms of statistical capacity building.

76. The Bureau approved the proposals made in the report. The report will be updated taking note of the comments by the Bureau (**Action: UNECE**)

XII. REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2006 UNECE STATISTICAL PROGRAMME

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2006/18 (UNECE)

77. The UNECE secretariat reported that most activities are carried out as planned. The percentage of joint activities with other international organizations is high. The increase in technical cooperation activities was made possible through extra-budgetary funds. Item 1.4 (Monitoring the implementation of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics) was cancelled and redefined with the agreement of the Bureau. Items 3.2 (Statistical information processing) and 3.5 (Statistical metadata (METIS)) are delayed. In relation to technical cooperation, UNECE informed the Bureau that no global assessments of national statistical systems were carried out in 2006. There is some potential for such assessments in 2007 if partner organizations, notably Eurostat, are ready to join forces.

78. The Bureau approved the evaluations presented in the report.

XIII. DATES AND VENUE OF THE NEXT BUREAU MEETINGS

79. The next CES Bureau meeting will take place on **18-19 October 2007**. The venue is to be decided.

80. The February 2007 Bureau meeting was, exceptionally, held with interpretation. The Bureau members had varying views on whether this added to the effectiveness of the meeting. The Bureau will consider whether interpretation at its next meetings is desirable (**Action: CES Bureau**).

XIV. INFORMATION ITEMS

(a) Recommendations for organising the CES seminars

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/24 (UNECE)

81. The Bureau endorsed the recommendations for organizing the CES seminars, with the understanding that it is a working document that may be amended in future. It would be useful to better define the outline of a seminar in the recommendations. Once the seminar topics are selected, a more detailed Bureau discussion could be useful on what issues should be considered under the topics.

(b) Improving understanding of the CES role

82. The Bureau discussed how to improve the understanding of the CES place and role among other international organizations, especially in the European context. One possibility could be a briefing session before the CES plenary session or during lunch breaks, as is done for the UN Statistical Commission.

83. The following points were made in the discussion:

- the influence of the changing European political landscape on international statistical work needs to be clarified; it may imply changes to the way the Conference works;
- some Bureau members would prefer a brochure to the presentation.

84. The Bureau decided that a brochure should be prepared and circulated to the Bureau for electronic discussion, to have a draft ready by the October 2007 meeting (**Action: UNECE**).

(c) Selection of the international organization to present its activities in October 2007

85. OECD volunteered to present its statistical activities at the 2007 October CES Bureau meeting (**Action: OECD**).

(d) Preparation of the 2007 version of the Database of International Statistical Activities (formerly called Integrated Presentation)

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/23 (UNECE)

86. The UNECE secretariat informed the Bureau of the release of the 2007 version of the database and the plans to test the remote updating facility.

(e) Follow-up to decisions taken by the Bureau

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/25 (UNECE)

87. The note was presented for information. Concerning culture statistics, Eurostat is still considering the organization of a meeting. Another open point is the coordination of the international activities on quality frameworks. The Bureau decided to wait for the outcome of the CCSA initiative on this topic to see if any follow-up action on this is still necessary. Eurostat and OECD could prepare a paper for the Bureau February 2008 meeting, if necessary.

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