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For information

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Agenda

**INFORMATION REQUESTED BY EXCOM FOR THE ECE REVIEW.
SUBPROGRAMME 3 – STATISTICS**

DRAFT

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This document and its annexes are prepared in response to the request from the Executive Committee of UNECE as specified in the paper on "Modalities of the 2011-2012 review of the 2005 ECE Reform".

A. POSSIBILITIES FOR STREAMLINING AND SYNERGIZING ACTIVITIES

- 1. The UNECE Statistical Programme is driven by demand from four sources:** (i) the UNECE member countries through the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) - the UNECE Committee on Statistics; (ii) the UNECE agenda and recommendations; (iii) the UN Statistical Commission that meets annually in New York; (iv) global mandates from the UN General Assembly. The Conference and its Bureau pay particular attention to avoiding duplication of work with other organizations, and to streamlining activities for possible synergies with other programmes in UNECE and with other international organizations. The UNECE Statistical Division provides the secretariat for the work of the Conference and its Bureau.
- 2. The Conference does not have any standing Working Parties.** The UNECE statistical programme is reviewed annually in detail, to ensure it reflects the priorities and emerging needs of the member countries. New activities are launched and those which have completed their tasks are discontinued. UNECE countries are represented in the Conference at the highest level - the Heads of National Statistical Offices. This ensures efficient discussions at the Conference and the Bureau which take decisions on the annual programme of work. The Conference attracts participation also from countries outside the UNECE region - these are the OECD member countries (Australia, Japan, Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, Chile) as well as Brazil, Mongolia, China and South Africa. In 2011, the CES annual plenary session was attended by representatives of 56 countries and 16 international organizations, and in 2010 by 55 countries and 14 international organizations.
- 3. The Conference is a driving force in developing guidelines and recommendations, often with global impact.** There are examples of standards adopted by the UNECE which later were also adopted by the UN Statistical Commission in New York as global standards. Furthermore, the Conference undertakes work on new emerging issues in statistics that lead to

manuals, guides and recommendations recognised and used by countries beyond the UNECE constituency. Some examples include: *Guide on Impact of globalisation on national accounts*; *Manual on gender statistics*, *Population census recommendations*, *Principles of managing statistical confidentiality and microdata access*, *Measurement of quality of employment*, *Measurement of sustainable development* - to mention just a few most recent. This is because the countries with most developed statistical systems are all represented and participate actively in the work programme. Moreover, in recent years, the contributions of experts from UNECE countries with less developed statistical systems have significantly increased, which is an indication of the useful work conducted by the Conference in helping these countries to catch up with the developed statistical systems in the region.

4. **Streamlining of work and finding synergies takes place on two levels:** (i) with international organizations active in statistics in the UNECE region; (ii) across programmes in UNECE.

Synergies in international statistical work

5. The Conference of European Statisticians and its Bureau are recognised by countries and other international organizations for their role in coordinating the statistical activities undertaken by international organizations in the UNECE region to avoid duplication of work, identify gaps where work is needed and find synergies among the main international partners in the region. **The Chief Statisticians of the Statistical Office of European Union (Eurostat), OECD, IMF, World Bank, Statistical Committee of the CIS countries (CISSTAT) and UN Statistics Division (UNSD) in the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) participate in the work of the CES Bureau. This allows for finding synergies between these organizations.**

6. The CES Bureau meets three times a year. Among other tasks, it reviews the progress of work of various Teams of specialists, results achieved and possible new activities to be launched. The Bureau comprises the Chief Statisticians of 8 countries participating in the work of the Conference, including Australia and Brazil, and the Chief Statisticians of OECD, Eurostat, IMF, World Bank, CISSTAT and the UN Statistical Division (UNSD/DESA).

7. **Many of the activities in the statistical programme are undertaken jointly with the UNECE's main partners - Eurostat and OECD.** This ensures efficient use of resources and know-how in these organisations. Work targeting the EECCA countries, especially capacity building projects, is conducted in close cooperation and coordination with the CIS Statistical Committee and other major partners, such as the World Bank, Eurostat, EFTA, UNFPA and a number of other UN agencies.

8. **Streamlining international statistical work is achieved through in-depth reviews of selected statistical areas** which the Conference and its Bureau regularly carry out to identify topics where methodological work is needed. The reviews make use of an annually updated Database of International Statistical Activities maintained by the UNECE Statistical Division. The database contains information on the work programmes of more than 30 international organizations active in statistics in the region. This database is maintained by the UNECE

Statistical Division. The in-depth reviews are particularly useful to ensure the effective coordination of work and efficient use of resources between UNECE and other international organizations.

9. **The UNECE Statistical Programme includes activities that emerge from the decisions of the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC)** which coordinates the development and implementation of global statistical standards. The UNSC programme is implemented by the Statistics Division of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in cooperation and coordination with the Statistical Committees of all 5 Regional Commissions, which act as "regional arms" for the implementation of important projects. UNECE also actively cooperates with other Regional Commissions mainly in capacity building projects, where similar needs of countries have been identified, in areas such as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), migration, gender statistics and violence against women.

10. **Synergies are also sought with other UN agencies.** One example is the work towards achieving the MDGs. UNECE has launched a regional MDG database following a mandate from the Economic Commission for Europe. This database provides up-to-date indicators for monitoring progress towards all eight MDGs related to poverty, education, gender, child mortality, maternal health, diseases, environmental sustainability and global partnerships. UNECE works in close cooperation with the UN Development Programme, UNICEF, UN Population Fund and the UN Statistics Division, to improve the availability and quality of MDG indicators for member countries. Several capacity building activities on MDGs have been organized to address existing data gaps and data quality issues related to the MDG indicators.

11. Another example is the recent UNECE survey of national statistical offices on climate change related statistics. At the request of the UN Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (established by the UN Statistical Commission) and the UN Statistics Division, the survey was extended to cover countries outside the UNECE region to be used as an input to a report to be reviewed by the UN Statistical Commission.

Synergies with other programmes in UNECE

12. In response to recommendations by the Economic Commission for Europe several cross-sectoral activities have been undertaken.

13. A good example is the **Task Force on Environmental Indicators created jointly with the Environment Policy Committee** to strengthen the capacity of EECCA and SEE countries in producing environmental indicators. Furthermore, experts from the Statistical Division have started to participate in and contribute to the Environmental Performance Reviews conducted by the Environment Policy Committee and to contribute to the European Neighbourhood Policy Initiative for promoting the Shared Environment Information System.

14. **The UNECE Statistical Division maintains a database and has developed data production tools that are also used by other UNECE programmes** to store and disseminate their statistical data. Currently the Transport Division and the Forestry Section of the Trade

Division use this service. An internal mechanism ensures the coordination of data work between programmes.

15. **There is potential for further synergies with regard to statistical data work of other programmes in UNECE.** In recent years there have been requests by Environment, Energy and Forestry programmes for joint work in relation to environmental indicators, energy efficiency indicators, sustainable development and trade. Currently these requests are on hold due to lack of resources.

16. **Examples for synergies are also available in other areas of UNECE work,** such as sustainable development, MDGs and gender policies. The Statistics Programme contributes regularly to the regional analytical reports on MDGs and gender policies using the data available in the Statistical Database as well as by providing expert knowledge. Statistical Division experts contribute in substance to the preparations of the UNECE Rio+20 report on regional challenges in sustainable development. The secretariat has been also approached for closer cooperation in tackling international trade imbalances, capacity gaps in transport statistics and problems in acquiring or analysing statistical data.

17. In January 2011, the Population sub-programme was moved to the Statistical Division. This has inspired ideas for cross-sectoral activities involving the Statistics and Population programmes on the statistical measurement of population ageing and its consequences.

B. WAYS OF IMPROVING EFFICIENCY AND METHODS OF WORK

18. **Annual review of the programme of work:** The programme of work of the Conference is reviewed annually, is flexible and reflects the emerging demands and priorities of the member countries. The work programme is result oriented. Expert meetings are held in support of the development of concrete outputs in the form of manuals, guidelines and recommendations as mandated by the Conference and its Bureau. The Conference and its Bureau are constantly improving the efficiency of work to meet the growing demands of users despite limited resources.

19. **Flexible way of work:** Flexibility is ensured by using Teams of Specialists to address current priorities instead of standing working parties. The CES has not had any standing bodies (Working Parties) since 1997. The Teams of Specialists are created for a particular task with detailed terms of reference, including a concrete timetable, deliverables and a sunset clause. The Conference and Bureau regularly review the work of all Teams of Specialists and when necessary adjust their work plans. When the teams complete their work they cease to exist. Within the UN context, the Conference is often given as an example of efficient and flexible way of working without any standing intergovernmental bodies.

20. **Use of new technology:** The Teams of Specialists work mainly via electronic communication and telephone or video conferencing. The wiki infrastructure available via the UNECE website provides a common working space to share documents and develop outputs. The principle of using electronic means for the work to the maximum possible extent is included in the Terms of Reference for the groups.

21. **Holding expert meetings back-to-back with other fora:** When Teams of Specialists need to meet face-to-face, in many cases this is done back-to-back with other international meetings to save time and resources and create synergies with other initiatives.

22. **Efficient use of time:** Electronic communication is extensively used to increase the efficiency of the work of the Conference and its Bureau. Important documents submitted for decision to these bodies are consulted with countries electronically in advance to reduce the time necessary for their consideration at the meeting. The formal business part of the CES plenary session is limited to half a day, leaving more time for substantive discussion of current and emerging problems of interest to the heads of statistical offices. Two days are dedicated to substantive discussions on topics selected by the CES members, often leading to follow-up work to develop standards, guidelines and recommendations. The way the CES works has been adopted by other organizations and often is referred to in the international community as "the CES format".

23. **Electronic publications:** As a measure of cost reduction, the publication programme was reviewed and most publications will be produced only in electronic format from 2012.

24. **Efficiencies in data work:** A number of improvements were introduced in the work on the UNECE statistical database to ensure efficiency gains and more efficient use of resources. The production processes were reviewed and automated applications were developed to respond to new data needs. These improvements have freed some resources for methodological work, and facilitated the addition of new data, such as MDG indicators and a forthcoming set of globalization indicators. Further efficiencies will be introduced as resources allow.

25. **Efficient use of secretariat resources:** The current resources of the secretariat are frequently adjusted to meet the priorities of countries expressed through the Conference and its Bureau and in response to UN global mandates. Since the Conference does not have any standing working parties, the programme is very dynamic. This requires a great deal of flexibility in the way the secretariat resources are used. It also requires finding synergies within the secretariat. Unfortunately, according to the currently planned budget cuts, the Statistical Division will lose two professional posts from 1 January 2012 (over 10% of the professional staff resource in the Division). This creates additional pressures to find ways to streamline activities within the Division.

C. EXPECTED RESULTS AND RELATED ACTIVITIES THAT MAY NEED TO BE REORIENTED/REFOCUSED TO BETTER REFLECT PRIORITY DEMANDS OF MEMBER STATES

26. As stated earlier, the Statistical Programme is formulated in response to mandates from 4 sources: member countries, the UNECE session, UN Statistical Commission, resolutions of UN General Assembly. **The annual review of the programme often leads to reorienting or refocusing of the activities.** Thus for example, UNECE has undertaken new activities on measuring sustainable development, in environment statistics and time use surveys, to name a

few, to respond to current and emerging needs defined by member countries. Correspondingly, other activities were discontinued.

27. **A leading principle in the work of the Conference is that its programme includes activities that matter to countries.** This statement has been repeatedly expressed by member countries. The work programme is defined by the member countries and the agenda is set by them.

28. **Recent reviews of the programme have resulted in new activities** to develop guidelines for time-use surveys, on statistical literacy, setting up a knowledge base on the use of secondary sources for official statistics. At the end of 2011, several other topics will be reviewed that are expected to lead to concrete follow-up work related to global production, household surveys, and education statistics.

29. Under resource constraints, **new tasks to meet priority needs of countries can only be achieved by internal efficiency gains or downsizing or discontinuing activities of lower priority.** Some reorientation of resources can be foreseen in certain areas of economic statistics (short-term statistics and rapid estimates, and the use of administrative sources and business registers) and in social statistics (in gender statistics and health statistics). The cut of two P-2 level posts effective January 2012 will necessitate a reduction of the planned activities.

D. POSSIBLE OPTIMIZATION OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAMME OF WORK

30. The programme of work is structured around 4 main clusters:

(i) Coordination of international work in the UNECE region by serving the Conference, the Bureau, in-depth reviews, database of statistical programmes of international organizations;

(ii) Methodological work that leads to the development of manuals, guidelines and recommendations in the following areas:

Economic statistics,
Social and demographic statistics,
Sustainable development, environment and climate change statistics and MDGs,
Streamlining of statistical production processes;

(iii) UNECE Statistical database; and

(iv) Capacity building activities.

31. This structure allows the Conference and secretariat to cover a broad range of activities depending on emerging needs.

32. A challenge will be to optimize the work programme to absorb the loss of two professional posts as a result of the UN cost-cutting measures. Further changes to the

organizational structure are necessary, in particular to enhance the work related to environment and climate change statistics and sustainable development.

33. Consideration is being given to merging the work on business registers together with the work on streamlining statistical production processes and use of administrative data, to create efficiency gains in using the resources.

E. AREAS IDENTIFIED FOR ENHANCEMENT OR ABOLITION, IF ANY

Areas for enhancement

34. Several activities from the current work programme could be identified for enhancement given their increasing importance.

a) **Implementation of the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics**, a standard that was adopted by UNECE in 1992 and the UN Statistical Commission in 1994. The Conference will hold one day seminar on this topic in 2012 in response to a call by the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) for regional assessments of the implementation of the Principles. The purpose will be to identify good practices and to provide support to national authorities in providing relevant and impartial information about their economic, demographic, social and environmental situation. It is expected that concrete follow-up work will be initiated by the seminar.

b) **Streamlining statistical production** - a new activity with global impact undertaken in response to countries' demand, and overseen by the recently created High-level Group for Strategic Developments in Business Architecture in Statistics. For example, new work and an expert group meeting on issues relating to data collection and data sources.

c) **Measuring sustainable development**. In March 2011 the Commission emphasized the importance of good quality statistical data as a basis for addressing the growing concern about sustainable development, and requested the Conference of European Statisticians to develop a common framework and guidance for measuring sustainable development within the realm of official statistics. Several of the indicators on sustainable development are closely linked with measuring the achievement of MDGs.

d) **Environmental indicators**: The Commission called for addressing methodological discrepancies, data gaps and the lack of clear guidance related to the production of environmental indicators. The UNECE Task Force on environmental indicators in the EECCA and SEE countries has, over the course of its work, collected a substantial number of environmental indicators. These data are not readily available in any international database. Using the expertise and technical resources of the Statistical Division, the data could be uploaded in the UNECE Statistical Database. The European Environment Agency is interested to link these data to their Shared Environmental Information System that would provide good synergies at international level.

e) **Globalization and its impact on economic statistics:** In the preparation of the guide *Impact of globalization on national accounts* (2011) global production was identified as a priority area for further work. Global production in terms of international outsourcing, globally arranged production chains and complex ownerships of multinational enterprises makes it increasingly difficult to compile relevant and accurate national economic statistics, such as national accounts. Different methods are applied in countries, and international recommendations or guidelines are lacking causing discrepancies and a lack of international comparability in core economic statistics. The group of experts has, therefore, suggested further work to develop international guidelines for the statistical treatment of global production.

f) **Time use surveys:** Time use data has a particularly important role in measuring social progress beyond the use of GDP. Several reports, including that of the Stiglitz Commission, have highlighted that the international coordination of time use surveys needs to be improved. Better comparability across countries and over time would enhance the use of this survey, which is very resource-intensive for national statistical offices. The Conference created a Task Force to develop guidelines in this area.

g) **Energy statistics:** The secretariat has been requested to contribute to work on energy statistics by the International Energy Agency, particularly concerning data collection in the EECCA countries. In addition, the UNECE Committee on Sustainable Energy requested the Conference to undertake an assessment of indicators on energy vulnerability and to work on indicators on energy efficiency. Due to lack of resources, the UNECE Statistical Division has not been able to undertake these tasks.

h) **Indicators to monitor gender equality:** The Conference has established a Task Force to improve indicators to monitor gender equality. Gender statistics cut across traditional statistics. UNECE is promoting engendering of statistical systems to improve the measurement of the realities of the lives of women and men and to support policymaking for gender equality and empowerment of women.

Areas for abolition or downsizing

35. A leading principle in the Conference work is that Task Forces are created with a concrete mandate, and cease to exist once they complete their task, normally within 2-3 years. The following activities could be discontinued or reduced:

a) **Reduce activities on income measurement:** After publication of the *Canberra Group Handbook on Household Income Statistics* (2011) the activities in this area should be reduced or discontinued. It should be noted that the 2009 report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress (the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission) called for the development of more and better statistics on households' income, consumption and wealth and significant gaps remain in the statistics between statistically developed and less developed countries.

- b) **Discontinue work on health statistics.** UNECE, Eurostat and WHO have been working together with member countries to achieve internationally comparable measurement of the health status of populations. This activity will be completed in 2011.
- c) **Discontinue some time series in the statistical database:** The use of UNECE Statistical Database is constantly monitored. Less popular statistical indicators are replaced or discontinued, to ensure efficient use of resources. For example, data on interest rates were recently discontinued.
- d) **Put on hold work related to short-term statistics and rapid estimates** due to lack of resources. The topic is one of the priorities of the UN Statistical Commission and part of the G-20 Data Initiative of the Group of Twenty Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors. The Statistical Division no longer has the resources to maintain this work due to the loss of a P-2 post that was allocated to this area.
- e) **Reduce activities related to gender and migration statistics.** With the loss of a second P-2 post, activities have to be reduced in areas where UNECE has a successful track record of leading international methodological work - gender and migration statistics. UNECE will not be in a position to continue work on the use of the new survey model it recently developed on violence against women. Similarly, the work by two task forces on migration statistics will be limited. Capacity building initiatives in gender and migration statistics may be reduced.
- f) **Involvement in joint activities with other international organizations** will be cut or reduced, where these activities do not align with the priorities of the Conference of European Statisticians. For example, UNECE will relinquish the leadership role of a task team on the use of imputation and non-official data by international organizations.

F. Ways of improving communication and public outreach

36. Communication and public outreach are important aspects of the statistical sub-programme in all its main work areas. There are three main types of activities:

- a) **Promoting the guidelines and recommendations prepared under the Conference:** All statistical guidelines and recommendations developed under the Conference are available free of charge on the UNECE website to promote their use among experts as well as other audiences interested in statistics, such as government agencies, academia, non-governmental organisations and the private sector. An online library of training materials was recently created to bring together all training materials prepared by the secretariat for different capacity building activities. The library can be used by statisticians and non-statisticians alike for improving knowledge about statistical methods and best practices. Several knowledge bases using wiki technology have been established to enhance sharing of information between UNECE and member states across statistical domains. The UNECE updates annually an online compendium of international statistical activities, which contains the work programmes of all international organizations active in statistics in the UNECE region.

37. The UNECE is also studying the feasibility of using the social media for improving communication and public outreach. The experience of national statistical offices and other international organizations suggests that the new media need careful consideration where their use may be most effective taking into account the specifics of our work. The UNECE cooperates actively with other leading public and private sector organisations (e.g. Google and various media organisations) to improve communication with current and potential users of official statistics.

b) **Working together with country statistical offices to improve methods of statistical communication and dissemination:** The UNECE supports national statistical offices to improve their dissemination and public outreach. A series of guides published under the title “Making Data Meaningful” has proved to be very popular, with several reprints and country initiatives to translate them into a national language. Capacity building workshops have been held to improve statistical dissemination in EECCA countries. As a result, Albania, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Mongolia have started using a dissemination software recommended by UNECE, PC-Axis, to improve availability of national official statistics. This non-commercial software is widely used in European national statistical offices. Other regional commissions have also relied on the UNECE expertise on dissemination tools in their capacity building projects.

c) **Disseminating products based on the data in UNECE statistical database:** The UNECE Statistical Database provides a basis for several popular products that help to improve the visibility of the UNECE:

- The UNECE Statistics Division regularly provides short articles on economic development in member countries, published in the “UNECE Weekly” newsletter. These articles are currently the only regular communication to countries and the general public on economic progress in the region.
- The biennial *Countries in Figures* publication provides a short overview of each UNECE country both in a printed and in an electronic format. This publication is widely appreciated by participants of various UNECE meetings, other international organizations, and reference libraries.

38. Public outreach is analysed by an annual user survey and through regular monitoring of web site use. The results are used for improving the quality and user-friendliness of products and dissemination channels. Data downloads from the UNECE Statistical Database are constantly increasing. The type of data most requested by users is regularly analysed to help to determine priorities for data collection work.

39. The UNECE plays a leading role in the initiative “Geneva – Hub of International Statistics” launched in partnership with the Swiss government. This initiative aims to improve collaboration and make synergies between the organisations engaged in statistical work in Geneva, including joint promotion of their outputs.

G. ANY OTHER COMMENTS

40. Good quality official statistics are an important tool for the functioning of democratic societies and a necessary condition for the smooth running of market economies. The availability of impartial, reliable, timely and internationally comparable data is essential for planning, implementing and monitoring policies, indispensable for understanding major developments in our societies and necessary for making comparisons in an increasingly globalised world. Statistics do not only focus on traditional domains of our economies and societies but must be continually developed and adapted in order to meet emerging needs.

41. The UNECE, as a multilateral platform with the mandate to facilitate greater economic integration of its member countries, has highlighted the necessity of coherent and comparable statistical information on its Member States. As such, the UNECE statistical programme is commonly regarded as essential to support the smooth implementation of major UNECE policies in areas such as economic cooperation and integration, energy, environment, gender, population, trade and transport. UNECE supports member countries with less developed statistical systems to help them catch up with those with more advanced systems, which is vital for their economic integration.

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