IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF EDUCATION STATISTICS

Prepared by UNESCO Institute for Statistics

I.   INTRODUCTION

1.   With this note the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) would like to complement the in-depth review of education statistics. The UIS appreciates having the opportunity to take part in the review.

2.   The review has to capture a wide range of issues from the needs of individual countries within the UNECE region to influencing the work programmes and plans of international organizations. This note, therefore, adds information on the work plans of the international organizations, so as to help capture the richness of the respective programmes as well as the current and future priorities of different organizations.

II.   INTERNATIONAL STANDARD CLASSIFICATION OF EDUCATION (ISCED)

3.   One of the priorities identified in the paper is the setting of common standards and methods. The UIS has recently completed a major revision of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) which is expected to be adopted in November by the UNESCO General Conference. Clearly it will be an important standard-setting tool in ensuring and improving the cross-national comparability of education statistics. The revision was undertaken in close collaboration with international organisations (Eurostat, OECD, UNICEF and UNESCO) as well as national and regional experts on education statistics.

4.   The international organisations will continue to collaborate in assisting countries to implement the new ISCED in their data collection and/or reporting systems. The UIS will be producing training and guidance materials as well as operational manuals. The joint UNESCO/OECD/Eurostat (UOE) data collection will continue though it will be revised and the UIS will continue to collaborate on the production of ISCED mappings of programmes and qualifications.

5.   The UIS will be launching a review of the fields of education part of the current version of ISCED (ISCED 1997) with the view to adopting a revised classification – and separating it from ISCED – in 2013. Furthermore, National and Regional Qualification Frameworks being developed in several parts of the world may also provide a means by which to compare qualifications obtained by e-learning means.

6.   The new ISCED includes for the first time a classification of qualifications, from which educational attainment can be derived, as well as a revised classification of education

programmes by levels. In addition, the final ISCED 2011 text contains more descriptive material aimed at a better distinction between the two categories of early childhood education. The way coding is presented in the ISCED 2011 has been changed in the final draft compared to the codes presented in the in-depth review paper.

7.   As the custodian of the classification, the UIS is of course very interested to be involved in future work in this area. The UNECE countries will continue to have access to several fora (UN, OECD, EU, Council of Europe etc) in which to have regular dialogue on major issues affecting education statistics.

III.   SOURCE DATA ISSUES

8.   In projects related to data linkage, data protection issues need to be discussed. In some countries this type of linking is very difficult if not impossible to achieve. If new systems have to be established with this purpose in mind, at the same time, complying with data protection legislation may be costly. Whilst data linkage approach would reveal very rich information more work will be needed to have internationally comparable outputs.

9.   Education is one of the areas which currently makes most use of administrative data. The joint UNESCO, OECD and Eurostat education data collection (UOE) is based on administrative data – in particular the school level records of pupils and teachers. Not all relevant data can be collected via household surveys, for instance information on public education expenditures, teacher deployment, school facilities/conditions, recent entrants or graduates. Some administrative data are more detailed than survey data. Their main drawback is that they cannot always be cross-classified with other important variables of interest – especially socio-economic variables.

10.   Some of the issues of how e-learning should be measured, depend on the purpose for which data are being gathered. The UOE questionnaires already provide instructions on the reporting of participation in programmes offered by institutions based abroad. Although this is not the instrument for collecting international attainment data similar approaches could be adopted. Most attainment data are collected via household surveys and are not directly concerned with the place/country of attainment. The interest is usually to know the level of attainment of residents in the country undertaking the survey.

IV.   OTHER PRIORITY AREAS

11.   In addition to the ISCED classification and source data there are other areas also amongst the priorities of the UIS. Although not all of these topics may be priorities in the UNECE region. These include:
- quality of educational institutions;
- school facilities and processes;
- teaching staff;
- the impact of cross-national mobility;
- modes of delivery, including e-learning and
- early childhood education.

12.   For example, the UIS has recently collected new data on access to basic services in schools in Africa, the extent of multi-grade teaching and average class sizes. There are plans

to collect information on instructional hours and more details on teachers. Eurostat and OECD have also done work in these areas and in addition can derive a wealth of information from surveys like PISA on the learning environment. All three organisations are doing work on measuring student mobility in higher education.

13.   Some of the other priority areas are probably better handled by OECD or Eurostat or other partners than by UIS, even if some of these areas may be of interest in the UIS work. This kind of areas include:

- the development of human capital;
- social inclusion;
- the matching of different datasets;
- the development of longitudinal surveys.

14.   The focus of UIS on issues like social inclusion is more closely linked to Education For All and the Millennium Development Goals mentioned in the in-depth review. Whilst important for all countries, these are likely lower in the list of priorities for most countries in the UNECE region than in other parts of the world. OECD and Eurostat are working in these areas from which the UNECE countries can also benefit and participate in.

15.   The challenges presented in the in-depth review appear mainly to be those faced at the country level – which might benefit from the exchange of ideas and solutions among countries. But there could also be areas of common interest which would benefit from international standardisation. We could benefit from more discussion on the roles of or inputs expected from the international organizations. The international organizations have a role in sharing of knowledge and experience and of meeting the joint needs of their member states for data analysis and collection. The promotion of new products should be based on the needs identified by countries.

16.   The measurement and classification of human capital, social inclusion and early childhood education are mentioned as areas requiring further development and collaboration in the in-depth review. It will be important to confirm that these areas are also priorities for several countries in the UNECE region.

* * * * *