

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Meeting of the 2015/2016 Bureau
Luxembourg, 9-10 February 2016

For discussion and
recommendations

Item II (a) of the Provisional
Agenda

**COMMENTS ON THE IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF DEVELOPING GEOSPATIAL
INFORMATION SERVICES BASED ON OFFICIAL STATISTICS**

Prepared by the Secretariat

The note provides the comments from UNECE as input to the in-depth review of developing geospatial information services based on official statistics (ECE/CES/BUR/2016/FEB/2).

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The note is based on an internal discussion in the UNECE Statistical Division on geospatial information services.
2. The paper gives an excellent overview of the current state of the art in developing geospatial information services based on official statistics. The case studies from Australia and the United Kingdom are very useful.

II. COMMENTS

3. The following comments were made during the internal brainstorming on the topic in the Division:
 - We agree that there is a clear need to consolidate the various initiatives currently under way (paragraphs 202-203).
 - The paper identifies well the linkages between the development of geospatial information services and statistical modernisation.
 - The geospatial dimension of the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) and the Common Statistical Production Architecture (CSPA) should be further developed. However, it will be a challenge to find resources for this purpose.
 - Geospatial information services can be thought of in terms of both analysis and statistical outputs. When considering traditional outputs (tables, charts etc.), it is difficult to devise a standard geospatial framework for all types of statistics, given the different spatial distributions of different types of statistical units. For example population census output areas are rarely optimal for disseminating enterprise data.
 - Geo-coding basic statistical units in registers provides a good starting point for developing geospatial analyses. Allowing users to produce their own analyses could be a goal. This will require further development of the “confidentiality on the fly” services, created in the context of the implementation of the Common Statistical Production Architecture.

- The use of geospatial information services in the context of environment statistics and ecosystem accounting should be further considered.
- There has not been much progress on some of the conceptual issues (e.g. treatment of different types of statistical units) during the last 10-15 years. The work is done mainly in countries with developed statistical systems and there is not much information about what is happening in other countries. Demand for geospatial data will continue to grow and countries need guidance how to deal with that in the context of official statistics. Therefore concrete actions and advice would be very useful.
- The technology for geo-spatial data has advanced rapidly. The level of skills needed to use the latest technology is not available in many statistical organisations. Therefore, those organizations who have the necessary skills and resources should aim to develop generic solutions that can be shared with the whole statistical community. The Common Statistical Production Architecture provides a good basis for this.

III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

4. As the paper highlights, the development of geospatial information services links to many current UNECE activities. As well as modernisation, the paper mentions the Sustainable Development Goals, population census guidelines, Big Data, data integration, and linked open metadata.

5. Given these strong links with key UNECE activities, the suggestion in paragraph 203 that the UNECE could provide oversight of all of the different international activities, and support their consolidation, is logical.

6. In addition, the integration of the geospatial dimension into key modernisation standards is clearly needed.

7. In principle, the UNECE is well placed to take on this work, however, this would not be trivial, and resources would need to be found. Furthermore, before committing to any action, we would need to know the outcome of the discussion of the United Nations Economic and Social Council in April 2016 on a renewed mandate for United Nations work on Geospatial Information Management.

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