

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

For discussion and  
recommendations

Meeting of the 2016/2017 Bureau  
Geneva (Switzerland), 14-15 February 2017

Item III (k) of the Provisional  
Agenda

UNECE INVOLVEMENT IN GEOSPATIAL WORK

Prepared by the Secretariat

*The document informs the Bureau about the developments concerning further work on statistics and geography and geospatial information management. **The Bureau discussed and provided recommendations on the follow-up actions on geospatial work.***

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Bureau discussed geospatial statistics in October 2016, following the decisions of the 2016 CES plenary session on geospatial information and statistics, the ECOSOC resolution (E/2016/L.28) and the request of UNECE Executive Committee (EXCOM). The Bureau asked the Secretariat to prepare a proposal for joint activities by statisticians and the geospatial community under the Conference.
2. This note summarizes the current situation regarding the involvement of the UNECE Secretariat in work relating to geospatial information management.

II. BACKGROUND

3. ECOSOC adopted in July 2016 a resolution on strengthening institutional arrangements on geospatial information management (E/2016/L.28). The Resolution “requests that the regional commissions provide relevant support, upon request and as appropriate, to the work of the regional bodies of the United Nations Initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management, and that the outcomes and benefits of the activities of those bodies be equally disseminated to all Member States in each region”. The implications of the Resolution for UNECE are summarized below.
4. In 2011 ECOSOC established the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (GGIM), to provide a forum for coordination and dialogue between Member States. Five regional geospatial expert groups have since been established, including the Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for Europe (UN-GGIM: Europe - created in autumn 2014).
5. The secretariat for UN-GGIM: Global is provided by the Statistical Division of the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). The intention is that the Regional Commissions will provide the secretariat to the regional groups. This is already the case in Africa. In the other regions, the issue is under discussion. In the UNECE region, the links with UN-GGIM: Europe have been weak so far. However, requests for support have come from the

UN-GGIM: Europe Chair (Sweden), and the then co-chair of the global UN-GGIM group, who both visited Geneva in 2015.

6. The UN-GGIM: Europe group meets in plenary every year. The next meeting will be in Brussels in June 2017. UN-GGIM: Europe has an Executive Committee, which operates as a Bureau between plenary sessions. Topics of discussion include integrating statistical and geospatial data, and how geospatial data can support the monitoring of the outcomes of the sustainable development goals.

### **III. CURRENT SITUATION**

7. On 12 January 2017, the Director and the Regional Advisor of the UNECE Statistical Division participated in the meeting of the Executive Committee of UN-GGIM: Europe to discuss possible modalities for closer collaboration with UNECE with the goal of preparing a concrete proposal for UNECE EXCOM's consideration.

8. The following members of the UN-GGIM: Europe Executive Committee were present: Sweden (Chair), Spain (Vice-Chairs), Denmark, Germany, Italy, Poland, and Slovenia. Eurostat and the European Environment Agency participated as permanent observers. UNECE was an invitee.

9. Netherlands is responsible for secretariat support to UN-GGIM: Europe through EuroGeographics, a non-governmental organisation based in Brussels.

10. In summary, the following can be reported as an outcome of the UNECE participation:

- UN-GGIM: Europe Executive Committee confirmed their interest in working closer with UNECE.
- It was clarified that for UNECE the long-term aim should be to provide a sustainable secretariat for UN-GGIM: Europe, as part of a specific work programme on geospatial information management. A possible approach discussed at the meeting would be a gradual transition, with a period where the secretariat for UN-GGIM: Europe is provided jointly by UNECE and EuroGeographics. The details of how such a mechanism would operate are still to be agreed.
- UNECE underlined to the UN-GGIM: Europe Executive Committee that any collaboration and its outputs must follow UN rules and regulations. The outputs must be made available to all UN Member States as specified in the ECOSOC resolution.
- UNECE further noted that the topics under discussion were somewhat EU-centric, whilst the ECOSOC Resolution requests that "the outcomes and benefits of the activities of those bodies be equally disseminated to all Member States in each region".

### **IV. UNECE INVOLVEMENT AND ROADMAP FOR CHANGE**

11. Subject to the approval of EXCOM, UNECE could provide a sustainable secretariat for UN-GGIM: Europe. This will facilitate the involvement of all UNECE countries in the geospatial work as requested by ECOSOC. Moreover, geospatial information is of particular importance in the context of reporting on SDGs where the indicators often have a strong geographic dimension. A UNECE secretariat would also ensure that all countries in the region benefit from the work on geospatial information. Furthermore the secretariat would facilitate the

link of UN-GGIM: Europe to UN-GGIM: Global based on the good experience that already exists in statistical work.

12. A first practical step to increase collaboration and to follow-up on the decision of CES Bureau in October 2016, is the organisation of a **joint UNECE/UN-GGIM: Europe workshop on statistical and geospatial standards**, which will be held **in Sweden in November 2017**, and will bring together experts from both the statistical and geospatial standards communities.

13. Further activities that were agreed include:

- Share information of common interest. Thus for example at present both the UNECE Statistical Division and the UN-GGIM: Europe have Working Groups on Data Integration but from two different perspectives. It was agreed to collaborate on this.
- UNECE to support the work of the UN-GGIM: Europe with relevant information on UN Rules and procedures. In this context, the secretariat recently forwarded information on UN treatment of disputed boundaries.

## V. CONSIDERATION AT UNECE COMMISSION SESSION AND EXCOM

14. At the 86th meeting of EXCOM in September 2016, it was concluded that “EXCOM expresses support for UNECE to provide relevant support, upon request and as appropriate, to the work of the regional bodies of the United Nations Initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management. In this regard, EXCOM requests the secretariat to prepare a proposal, in collaboration with UN-GGIM: Europe, to further describe the scope of such work, possible partnerships on this work, and to elaborate different options for mobilizing additional resources for such work, to be presented for consideration at its next meeting.”

15. The development of such a proposal was delayed because UN-GGIM: Europe informed that they would need to discuss the issue at their January 2017 Executive Committee and later at their plenary session in June 2017.

16. **Further to ECOSOC Resolution E/2016/L.28, a new mandate for UNECE would be required for UNECE to engage in a sustainable way with the UN-GGIM: Europe. Such mandates can only be created by the Commission.**

17. A draft decision for the UNECE Commission session in April 2017 will be discussed by EXCOM on 16 February. The current draft reads as follows:

“The Commission decides to request UNECE to continue its engagement with UN-GGIM: Europe, within existing resources, to gain a better understanding of how geospatial information can complement and support existing UNECE activities, particularly in the area of monitoring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, and to present a detailed proposal for collaboration between the two bodies for the approval of the UNECE Executive Committee before December 2017.”

18. The secretariat will develop a more concrete plan for next steps concerning UNECE involvement in geospatial activities following the EXCOM decision and the UNECE Commission session in April 2017.