CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

For discussion and recommendations

<u>Meeting of the 2017/2018 Bureau</u>
Yerevan (Armenia), 10-11 October 2017   <u>Item III (h) of the Provisional Agenda</u>

DEVELOPING CAPABILITIES IN STATISTICS

Prepared by the Secretariat

The Bureau discussed the priorities in developing capabilities in official statistics in all CES member countries, in the context of a range of challenges, including the requirements to produce data for reviewing progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

I.   INTRODUCTION

1.   At its meetings in February and October 2016, the CES Bureau strongly supported proposals that the UNECE Secretariat should continue to develop and implement statistical capacity building activities to respond to new developments at global level in the context of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), geospatial information and modernisation of statistical production.

2.   The UNECE Expert Meeting on Statistics for SDGs in April 2017 emphasised that all countries require improvement of their statistical capacity in the context of measuring SDGs. The meeting decided that conceptual work is needed to identify what capacities/capabilities need to be improved in statistical offices, and to clarify the related definitions and terminology. A Task Team was established to prepare a concept paper by December 2017.

3.   Taking account of these developments, this note considers the possible scope and priorities for UNECE statistical capacity building in the next three to four years.

II.   CURRENT SITUATION

4.   According to the UNECE Strategic Framework for 2018-19, the statistical work programme will:

> *"support statistical capacity building of ECE member States, particularly of those with less developed statistical systems. It will promote the implementation of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and other United Nations standards and best practices, and provide advice on legal and institutional frameworks of official statistics. This work will be demand-driven and address national priorities identified through global assessments of national statistical systems. It will focus on*

> *modernizing statistical production, population censuses, SDGs indicators, gender-disaggregated statistics, economic statistics, environmental accounting and indicators."*

5.   Statistical capacity building is a cross-cutting responsibility for all staff of the UNECE Statistical Division. It is closely tied to the development and implementation of standards and guidelines in many areas of official statistics. Within the UNECE, statistical capacity building activities are coordinated by the Regional Adviser – a senior statistician post currently held by Mr Steven Vale. In most cases, capacity building activities are carried out in collaboration with other national or international statistical organisations.

6.   In the past, almost all capacity building activities were focused on the countries in the Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia sub-region. However, recent developments such as the SDGs and the need to modernise statistical production affect all UNECE member countries. Few countries can currently produce more than about half of the indicators needed for measuring SDG. Other related challenges include the growing importance of integrating statistical and geospatial information, demands for many new types of statistics, and the appearance of potential new data sources. Statistical capacity building is, therefore, urgently needed in all UNECE countries, though the nature, type and form will naturally vary from country to country. A new approach to capacity building is needed.

III.   A NEW APPROACH TO CAPACITY BUILDING

7.   In the past, capacity building focused mainly on providing training workshops, mostly related to specific subject-matter domains. In this way, the focus was more on people than on the organisation. In statistical organisations that struggle to pay a competitive salary, and hence have a high staff turnover, this has meant that capacity building has not always been as effective as it should be. In some cases, it has been brought to the attention of the secretariat that some activities have had a kind of "negative" impact, in that training has made staff more attractive to other potential employers.

8.   PARIS21 (the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century) recently convened a group of experts from national and international statistical organisations to tackle these issues, based on the discussion paper "Realising the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development: Towards Capacity Development 4.0"[1]. UNECE actively participates in this group, and is benefiting from the sharing of ideas.

9.   However, there are other developments and ideas from the UNECE work on the modernisation of official statistics that can also be used to provide frameworks and directions for future capacity building work. The three main ones are as follows:

*   Capabilities – a capability is defined as the "ability that an organisation, person, or system possesses. Capabilities typically require a combination of organisation, people, processes, and technology to achieve". A practical example of a capability in a statistical organisation is seasonal adjustment. This requires a combination of people, methods, technology, and institutional framework – rather like the economic concept of factors of production. Just addressing one or two of these dimensions, e.g. training

---

[1] http://www.paris21.org/sites/default/files/CapacityDevelopment4.0_FINAL_0.pdf

the people, or providing the tool, does not ensure that an organisation has the capability.

- Maturity models – for any given area or topic, an organisation should be able to identify two levels of maturity – the current level, and the target level to be reached at some point in the future. Maturity can be defined as the extent to which a particular standard or guideline has been applied within the organisation. It is measured using a matrix of levels of maturity by dimensions. The dimensions are basically similar to those for capabilities, as described above. The maturity model approach has been adapted for official statistics from an external information technology standard[2]. In 2016, teams of experts under the High-Level Group for the Modernisation of Official Statistics developed maturity models for four of the key modernisation standards[3], as well as for risk management in statistical organisations. Initial results from these pilot exercises are very promising. This approach is conceptually quite simple, and it highlights which capabilities need to be developed to reach the target maturity level.

- The management and organisational dimension – in the UNECE work on modernisation of official statistics, it is often clear that the main barriers to development are not technological. They are more often linked to organisation and management culture. Training technical experts will not have the required impact if the organisation and management cultures do not support development and change. Therefore providing training for managers in topics such as change and risk management, human resource planning and capability development should be a higher priority than it has been in the past.

IV.   TOWARDS A NEW STRATEGY FOR STATISTICAL CAPACITY BUILDING

10.   The UNECE Secretariat proposes to base future statistical capacity building activities on the following principles:

- Capacity building for all – Statistical capacity building is needed by all countries in the context of data for SDGs and modernising statistical production, regardless of the level of development of their statistical systems
- Links to UNECE's normative work – capacity building activities should promote the implementation and use of CES standards and guidelines
- Selectivity – related to the above point, capacity building activities should focus on areas where UNECE has recognised expertise, to ensure optimal use of limited resources
- Results oriented – capacity building activities should be planned and implemented to maximize their impact. This impact should be assessed, and the results of assessments used to improve the efficiency of future activities
- Demand driven – capacity building activities should respond to needs identified by countries, including through global assessments of national statistical systems
- Cooperation and partnership with others – capacity building activities should be coordinated with other "provider" organisations, to avoid duplication and ensure coherent and consistent advice to countries

---

[2] http://www.opengroup.org/soa/source-book/osimmv2/index.htm
[3] GSBPM, GAMSO, GSIM, CSPA

- Sustainability – capacity building activities should result in sustainable increases in capabilities in beneficiary countries

11.   Based on observation of recent trends, likely priority topics for capacity building activities over the next three to four years include:

- Statistics for SDGs – including "tier 3" indicators, and institutional issues
- Geospatial information management, including integrating statistical and geospatial information
- Population and housing censuses
- Environment statistics and environmental-economic accounting
- Modernising statistical production
- Modernising management and organisational capabilities – including topics like change and risk management, capability and resource planning

******