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UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS
Expert meeting on measuring poverty and inequality
Vienna, Austria, 29-30 November 2018

CALL FOR PAPERS

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) is organising the *Expert meeting on measuring poverty and inequality* under the auspices of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) in Vienna, Austria, in partnership with Statistics Austria. The meeting will take place on 29-30 November 2018.

2. The meeting is preceded by the Workshop on harmonization of poverty statistics in countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, which UNECE will organize in Vienna on 28 November 2018, with financial support from the United Nations Development Account.

3. The present **call for papers** is prepared by the UNECE Steering Group on Measuring Poverty and Inequality. Experts are invited to contribute papers for the meeting according to the programme below. The agenda will be prepared taking into account the interest expressed, and the proposals offered for contributions.

4. Details on the organization of the Expert meeting will be provided in an information note issued separately by the Secretariat. Information about the Workshop will be provided closer to the meeting date.

5. The call for papers is addressed to statisticians, researchers and analysts from national statistical offices (NSOs), ministries and other government agencies that produce or use poverty statistics and who wish to present their papers. Intention to contribute a presentation without paper would also be considered.

II. PURPOSE

6. The contributions will allow countries to exchange experience and reach conclusions on the challenges in poverty measurement and approaches taken to address them. The objective is to take forward the methodological work on measuring poverty and inequality, achieve greater comparability and reliability of poverty statistics, and strengthen multilateral cooperation.

III. PROGRAMME OF THE EXPERT MEETING

7. The Steering Group proposes the following substantive topics for the 2018 Expert meeting:

Topic A:	Poverty indicators for monitoring the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
Topic B:	Improving response rate and sampling precision in surveys
Topic C:	Assets-based poverty and inequality
Topic D:	Inclusion of social transfers in kind, housing wealth and imputed rent in the measurement of poverty
Topic E:	Coverage of hard-to-reach and potentially disadvantaged population groups in data collection
Emerging issues	Individual level poverty measures, role of differences in cost of living and subjective poverty

8. The Steering Group would also consider papers and presentations on emerging issues, such as individual level poverty measures, role of differences in cost of living and subjective poverty.

Topic A: Poverty indicators for monitoring the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Session organizer UNECE)

9. This session discusses national and international activities in developing comparable and reliable measures for monitoring the first Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) on ending poverty. Currently, the approaches, definitions and data collection methods for poverty measurement vary across countries. Harmonization of data collection and indicators would greatly support the monitoring of progress towards the Goal. In the session, participants will review the current practices of poverty measurement and discuss the progress made towards harmonizing poverty statistics.

10. Among specific issues countries face are the lack of standardized disaggregated measures for a number of SDG indicators. The dimensions recommended by the United Nations Statistical Commission for disaggregation include sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability or geographic location. Furthermore, the dimensions of employment status, housing tenure and receipt of social transfers are deemed highly relevant for poverty measurement. The session will include a discussion on the limits of the information sources, and in particular, of the household survey data to provide information on disaggregation for SDG reporting.

11. Participants are invited to submit examples of national statistical offices' responses to efforts for harmonisation of poverty statistics, or steps taken towards producing disaggregated poverty measures in the context of SDG monitoring.

Topic B: Improving response rate and sampling precision in surveys

12. In this session, participants are invited to address two main challenges in conducting surveys for data collection on poverty – increasing the response rate and improving the sampling precision.

a) Addressing nonresponse

13. Nonresponse error, or bias, occurs if data are not collected from each member of the sample. Nonresponse bias can lead to inaccurate conclusions if data from the non-respondents would have changed the overall results of the survey. The questions of what is the optimum response rate and whether the selectivity of non-response can be assessed are of high importance. In some countries, tailored strategies are being put in place to increase the likelihood of response of each group based on their characteristics and preferred mode of data collection. Experience with population censuses has shown that the use of internet facilitates data collection and a higher number of responses was achieved using online data collection system in addition to doorstep and telephone interviews. New strategies, such as the use of social media and intensifying statistical education in schools, have also been employed.

b) Sampling precision in surveys

14. Nowadays, sample designs of household surveys are usually robust and could offer accurate poverty measurements disaggregated by specific groups of the population such as women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, the indigenous population and the population of migrants or ethnic minorities. To the extent that some specific groups are difficult to capture, the production of disaggregated data with acceptable precision could require larger sample sizes and more complex sample designs. All of this can add to the costs of data collection and is a challenge for compilers of poverty statistics.

Topic C: Assets-based poverty and inequality (Session organizer Canada)

15. Poverty and inequality measures are typically based upon disposable income concepts. There are potential concerns with this which motivate experts to also consider measures of asset (or wealth) based poverty and inequality. Disposable income is volatile; hence a single, annual reading of household income might not reflect the degree to which the household is subjected to straightened circumstances, particularly if there are savings or other assets that can be readily converted to cash. In addition, it is widely recognised that poverty and inequality are concepts that stretch beyond disposable income.

16. Poverty and inequality measures that incorporate household wealth would reflect the economic situation of households more fully. Yet, approaches to the measurement of asset based poverty and inequality vary greatly from application to application. Proposals for papers that discuss the conceptual and methodological approaches to measuring of poverty that integrate income and wealth are welcome. Papers could address the questions: What are the approaches to measure asset poverty or inequality? How to integrate asset based and income based poverty or inequality measures? Do measures of income and wealth poverty or inequality identify different groups to be at risk of poverty? What are the relationships between income and wealth vulnerability? How do we best account for wealth components such as public or private pensions? Is it important to distinguishing between classes of wealth, such as liquid versus fixed household assets, or "good" versus "bad" debt? How do we best account for wealth components as they arise in income measures, such as net value of owner-occupied housing services? What policy tools can be used to encourage the accumulation of wealth?

Topic D: Inclusion of social transfers in kind, housing wealth and imputed rent in the measurement of poverty (Session organizer United States)

17. The Canberra Group Handbook (2011) defines social transfers in kind (STIK) as goods and services provided by government and non-profit institutions that benefit individuals but are provided for free or at subsidised prices. The topic of inclusions of STIK is critical to measuring poverty and inequality. While cash income is an important measure of the ability to meet basic human needs, STIK are also very important especially from policy perspective. For example, in the United States, the most federal anti-poverty assistance is delivered as in kind benefits (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), housing assistance, school lunch, Medicaid). Failure to reflect the impact of these programs in a poverty measure weakens public and political support for these efforts.

18. While taking the STIK into account is important, the methodologies for incorporating these resources into a poverty measure differ widely across countries and these methodological choices can have a significant impact on poverty measurement. For example, in the United States to include Medicare (health insurance program for individuals age 65 and older) expenditures in the resource measure, one could erroneously conclude that there is no poverty among the older population. There are also many different ways to incorporate housing wealth and imputed rent.

19. The session will discuss how STIK, including intra-household transfers, household wealth or rental income are taken into consideration when determining the poor. Although they are commonly excluded from measures of income and consumption expenditure, due to the challenges associated with measurement, a number of countries have produced some estimates, at least on an experimental basis. Countries are invited to present their approaches in accounting for STIK, housing wealth and imputed rent.

Topic E: Coverage of hard-to-reach and potentially disadvantaged population groups in data collection (Session organizer UNDP)

20. When measuring poverty through household surveys, certain categories of people who may be among the most likely to be poor are frequently omitted from the sample. These marginalized groups, such as homeless people (including street children), drug users, sex workers, people in institutions (including elderly care homes, children's homes, and mental health institutions), people in temporary accommodation or hostels, prisoners, and refugees in camps or illegal immigrants, are difficult to assess systematically.

21. In addition, some populations are less represented in household surveys because they live in remote areas, enclaves or in families or communities whose presence is illegal and unregistered, for example Roma populations. Others are involved in seasonal migration or in marginal or excluded communities (e.g., refugees) that may not be included in surveys. Children may be omitted from household responses due to the reluctance of the respondent to recognize as household members foster children, trafficked children, or children who are engaged in hazardous child labour.

22. It can be argued that the same social characteristics and constraints that hinder access to these individuals may also impair their willingness or ability to answer survey questions. These types of bias led to significant underestimation of poverty rates in EU-SILC, for example (Nicaise and Schockaert, 2014). With support from the European Union, the UNDP Istanbul regional hub is currently conducting regional quantitative survey 2017 among marginalized Roma and non-Roma living in Western Balkans and Turkey. Qualitative studies use micro-narratives as a data collection method to generate, process and disseminate evidence on income, personal development and living conditions among marginalized Roma communities.

23. In this session, participants will take stock of different approaches and innovative strategies for sampling, identifying, locating, contacting and interviewing of the "hard to sample", "hard to identify", "hard to find or contact", "hard to persuade" or "hard to interview" categories of respondents. Participants are invited to present their country experience in addressing coverage issues and discuss how comparability and integration of group-specific data collections could be attained.

IV. EMERGING ISSUES

24. Based on discussions at the 2017 Expert meeting, the Steering Group identified three emerging issues, on which it invites participants to share their views and experience:

a) Individual level poverty measures

25. Traditional poverty measures take the household as the unit of observation, which assumes equal sharing of resources among household members. As this assumption may not hold, it is important to obtain poverty measures also at the individual level. This requires variables that depict the acquisition and expenditure of resources within the household. Such variables would allow measuring the unequal sharing of resources within the household and account better for the differing consumption needs of different population sub-groups, such as children, older people or those with disability.

b) Role of differences in cost of living

26. To examine poverty and inequality, one needs a measure of material well-being. Ideally, this measure should correspond as closely as possible to the way a person experiences his or her standard of living. In theory, any welfare measure should include material well-being, health, leisure, social capital, and other factors that contribute to welfare. In practice, however, because of measurement and valuation difficulties, the focus in microdata analysis is only on material well-being, using information on consumption of goods and services by a household. However, even such "simplified" measures are, in practice, complicated to capture well the differences within and across countries, as for example, the survey components of income or consumption would not be comparable or the availability of items would differ across countries. Thus, more systematic work needs to be done in this area.

c) Subjective poverty

27. The 2015 UNECE survey on methods of poverty measurement in official statistics showed great variation across countries in the understanding and measurement of subjective poverty. The questions used in surveys used can be grouped as follows:

- Ability to meet various needs – financial restrictions faced by the household,
- Considering oneself as poor –individual self-assessment,

- Income necessary to make ends meet –households' minimum perceived needs.

28. The obtained estimates vary significantly due to different methods and cultural perceptions of well-being and poverty. Large variations have also been observed within countries by age, gender, and region.

29. Information based on subjective poverty is important as it could contribute greatly to the understanding of poverty and complement both monetary and non-monetary poverty measures. Moreover, measuring the social perception of poverty is yet another key aspect of subjective poverty that could help create adequate policies in addressing the poverty phenomenon and the associated intergenerational transmission of the disadvantage.

V. INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS AND IMPORTANT DEADLINES

30. Papers can be submitted in English or Russian. Authors of papers submitted in Russian are encouraged to provide a short abstract in English (maximum one page). Papers and slides provided in Russian will be translated to English to the extent possible if they were delivered by the deadlines listed below. A limited number of papers will be translated from English to Russian.

31. Papers will be made available at the following website: http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2018.11.poverty.seminar.html.

32. Please take note of the following deadlines:

29 June 2018	Indicate **intention** to contribute a paper and/or presentation. Please send a short **abstract**, which will be reviewed by the session organizers and the Steering Group. Include author's name, e-mail address and institutional affiliation.
15 October 2018	Submission of full final versions of **papers**. It is recommended not to exceed 10 pages, including charts, annexes and references. The papers should be submitted in Word format.
15 October 2018 (participants funded by UNECE by **20 August**)	Meetings registration
15 November 2018	Submission of PowerPoint presentations

VI. INFORMATION AND CORRESPONDENCE

33. The UNECE Secretariat is available to respond to inquiries and provide additional information. All submissions should be sent to the UNECE Secretariat at the following addresses:

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