

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Meeting of the 2020/2021 Bureau
Geneva (online), 15-16 October 2020

REPORT

I.	Introduction	2
II.	In-depth reviews of selected statistical areas	2
	A. Measuring circular economy	2
	B. Role of statistical community in climate action.....	3
III.	Follow-up to the 2020 CES plenary session	4
	A. Measuring digital transformation – proposal for further work	4
	B. New roles for statistical and geospatial agencies in emerging national data ecosystems - proposal for further work	4
	C. Data stewardship – proposal for further work	5
	D. Evaluation of the 68th plenary session	6
IV.	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Statistical Programme 2021.....	6
	A. Value of official statistics – issues for discussion in light of Covid-19.....	6
	B. Poverty measurement (further work and renewal of Terms of Reference).....	7
	C. Consumer price indices (renewal of Terms of Reference)	7
	D. Gender statistics and the Covid-19 pandemic.....	7
	E. Statistics on children, adolescents and youth (work plan).....	8
	F. New data sources – accessibility and use	8
	G. Statistical programme for 2021	9
V.	Preparation of the CES 2021 Plenary session.....	9
	A. Format and possible topics for the 2021 plenary session	9
	B. CES guidelines and recommendations for endorsement in 2021: Social exclusion	10
VI.	Dates and venue of next meetings	10
VII.	Other issues	10

I. Introduction

1. The meeting of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) was held on 15 and 16 October in Geneva as an online meeting. The following members of the Bureau participated: S. Mnatsakanyan (Armenia), A. Arora (Canada), M. Bruun (Finland), P. Dalton (Ireland), J. Santaella (Mexico), D. Rozkrut (Poland) and M. Kovacevic (Serbia). The following permanent observers also attended: A. Kosarev (representing V. Sokolin, CIS-Stat), M. Kotzeva (Eurostat), L.-M. Ducharme (IMF), P. Schreyer (OECD) and L. Bratanova (UNECE). M. Bruun (Finland) chaired the meeting.
2. The following persons assisted members of the Bureau: M. Nikic (Serbia) and M.-J. Santos (Eurostat). T. Luige (UNECE) served as Secretary of the meeting supported by M. Cwiek (UNECE). C. Boldsen, S. Derivolcov, T. Dimova, V. Etropolska, T. Gjaltema, K. Jeffers, M. Nagy, R. Peltola, S. Vale, P. Valente, A. Vikat, and F. Willis-Núñez of UNECE participated.
3. M. Mägi (Estonia), J. Pakarinen (Finland), O. Thunus (Luxembourg), A. Potter (UK) and T. Renwick (USA) participated in selected agenda items at the invitation of the Chair.
4. New Zealand and UNSD sent written comments on the agenda items. The comments were presented to the Bureau and taken into account in the discussion.

II. In-depth reviews of selected statistical areas

A. Measuring circular economy

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2020/OCT/2 by Finland et al.

5. The Bureau made an in-depth review of measuring circular economy based on a paper prepared by Finland (lead), Belarus, Canada, Netherlands, the European Environment Agency (EEA), Eurostat and OECD. Colombia, UNECE, UNSD and UNEP contributed to the paper.
6. The following issues were raised in the discussion:
 - (a) The paper summarises well the main international activities and measurement challenges in this area and should be shared widely;
 - (b) There are many international and national activities on measuring circular economy and it is not easy to find common ground. Coordination and alignment of activities of the various actors is important, including with communities outside official statistics;
 - (c) Measuring circular economy is a cross-cutting area which requires harmonisation across statistical systems and statistical domains. Using the SEEA-Central Framework as a starting point for this was considered useful;
 - (d) A special challenge is the harmonisation of terms and definitions used;
 - (e) The work on measuring circular economy should prioritise the information requirements of important policies, such as the EU Green Deal, climate change, innovation, plastic waste, etc. Circular economy is also the topic of the next UNECE Commission session in spring 2021;
 - (f) Establishing a repository of good practices and providing practical guidance on the measurement would be useful, e.g. on how to use the existing tools and questionnaires to obtain the necessary data;
 - (g) Further work should build upon the outcomes of the UNECE Task Force on waste statistics;
 - (h) The Bureau recommended to set up a Task Force on measuring circular economy and invite experts and organisations who contributed to the in-depth review to

participate. To the extent possible, the activities of the Task Force should be aligned with the related work of UN Committee on Environment Economic Accounts (UNCEEA) to ensure global relevance.

Conclusion

7. The Bureau agreed with the recommendations for further work proposed in the paper by Finland et al. The paper should be widely shared.

8. The Bureau decided to create a Task Force on measuring circular economy and will review the terms of reference at its February 2021 meeting. Authors of the in-depth review paper are invited to participate and all other interested countries and organizations are welcome to join. Statistics Finland will chair the Task Force.

B. Role of statistical community in climate action

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2020/OCT/3 by the CES Steering Group on climate change-related statistics

9. The Bureau discussed the follow-up to the in-depth review of the role of statistical community in climate action, carried out in February 2020. The following issues were raised in the discussion:

- (a) NSOs should respond to information needs on environmental policy issues, such as climate change, in an integrated manner. Addressing the varied policy questions requires large datasets that link environment and climate information with social and economic data, while the resources are limited. A broader discussion on linking the efforts happening across the statistical systems is needed.
- (b) It is important to develop strategic partnerships with policymakers and academia to get attention and support, also because of shrinking budgets. For example, there is an active debate in Europe on green taxonomy. Statisticians should get involved to define measurable concepts and anticipate the information needs.
- (c) Statistics on climate change adaptation are an important work area which is currently less developed than statistics on climate mitigation.
- (d) The ongoing revisions of SNA and Balance of Payments manual should consider the issue of climate change. There is also a strong connection with SEEA. The existing tools should be reused and adapted to make quick progress in this area.
- (e) Some initiatives to provide climate change related data in an integrated manner are undertaken in countries. For example, Canada is creating a national registry of environmental assets that can help with providing information on climate change impacts and climate risk information.
- (f) There is increasing interest in the financial implications of climate change. IMF has started to integrate climate mitigation and adaptation in the surveillance in countries and plans to launch a climate change indicator dashboard in February 2021. The IMF Statistical Forum in 2021 will focus on climate change.
- (g) A priority should be to look into green finance, green investment and financial sustainability, and more generally the links between climate change and economy. Green finance has implications for other statistical domains, such as government finance and business statistics, and the related statistical classifications. IMF, OECD and BIS could provide an avenue to engage with the financial community related to climate change.
- (h) There is a lot of demand for information on environmentally and socially responsible companies but currently no internationally agreed way to identify such companies. This could be done using existing concepts developed by statisticians, e.g. from SEEA and SNA.

- (i) Concerning quarterly greenhouse gas emissions, some countries have found them useful but not all countries can produce such estimates. For example, Finland does not consider these data very relevant because of the fluctuating energy consumption.

Conclusion

10. The Bureau supported the follow-up activities proposed by the Steering Group. The CES expert fora on climate change related statistics should continue to provide a platform for sharing experience on climate change related statistics, including on experimental approaches.

11. In terms of focus areas, the Bureau recommended to prioritize climate change adaptation, green finance and green investment, and more broadly linkages between climate change and economy. A wider discussion on how to respond to environmental policy information needs in an integrated manner is needed.

III. Follow-up to the 2020 CES plenary session

A. Measuring digital transformation – proposal for further work

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2020/OCT/4 by UNECE

12. The Bureau discussed possible further initiatives related to digital transformation based on a proposal by the Secretariat. The following points were raised in the discussion:

- (a) Digitalisation impacts all spheres of life and raises many challenges and measurement problems in relation to well-being, including subjective well-being.
- (b) Distinction should be made between the impact of digitalisation on society that official statistics need to measure, and the challenges and opportunities for improving existing or developing new statistics that come with digitalisation.
- (c) Statistical offices should explore and utilise digital data sources and digital data infrastructures to improve and extend data collection.

Conclusion

13. The Secretariat will report to the next Bureau meeting about outcomes of the UNECE workshop ‘Data collection and the impact, challenges and opportunities of the Covid-19 pandemic’, convened under HLG-MOS.

14. CES should continue to provide a platform for exchanging experience and good practices, and for coordination of international activities related to digitalization. The Secretariat will follow the developments in digitalisation and raise relevant issues with the Bureau.

B. New roles for statistical and geospatial agencies in emerging national data ecosystems - proposal for further work

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2020/OCT/5 by UNECE

15. The Bureau reflected on the discussions and decisions on this topic during the informal joint plenary session of CES and UN-GGIM: Europe on 23 June 2020, and particularly the proposals for future work outlined in the Chair’s Conclusions for that session. The following points were raised in the discussion:

- (a) Activities of the UNECE Secretariat to connect the statistical and geospatial communities are appreciated;
- (b) Integrating statistical and geospatial data is important to support local decision making;

- (c) Better aligning the statistical and geospatial standards is very important to improve interoperability;
- (d) A future joint plenary session could focus on the value-added of collaboration between the two communities;
- (e) Canada, Mexico, Poland and Eurostat volunteered to join a Task Team on better aligning statistical and geospatial standards.

Conclusion

16. The Bureau supported the decision of the joint CES/UN-GGIM: Europe plenary session on the need for future work in the following areas:

- (a) Renewal of the collaboration agreement between UN-GGIM: Europe and UNECE;
- (b) Establishing a joint Task Team to determine where geospatial and statistical standards need to be better aligned to ensure greater interoperability;
- (c) Coordinating capacity development activities, e.g. on implementing international standards and promoting data integration;
- (d) Holding another joint plenary session in June 2022.

C. Data stewardship – proposal for further work

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2020/OCT/6 by the Secretariat in consultation with Estonia and Ireland

17. The CES 2020 session “Data stewardship – NSOs in the changing world” concluded with a proposal to set up a Task Force to turn the considerations in the paper from Estonia et al. into a roadmap and action plan to support NSOs.

18. The Bureau considered the proposal and raised the following issues in the discussion:

- (a) The situation in every country is different depending on the political, institutional and cultural context. It will be useful to share best practices applied in different country situations;
- (b) Analysing the risks associated with different maturity levels of data stewardship will be useful;
- (c) The work should link with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics;
- (d) The Task Force should explore emerging areas of modern data management and practices, and how these are challenged by digital and technological innovation;
- (e) Providing guidance for implementation of a data stewardship role may be premature, this should be left for a second stage of the work;
- (f) It would be good to bring a central government perspective in the work of the Task Force. Eurostat and OECD can help to make the connection with experts who could represent this community.

Conclusion:

19. The Bureau decided to create a Task Force to take the work forward and asked the terms of reference for the work of the Task Force to be submitted to the February 2021 Bureau meeting. The work should be done in two stages: first, defining the concepts and looking at possible tasks/responsibilities, and in a second stage developing recommendations. It will be good to involve also representatives from the government side in the Task Force.

20. Canada, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, New Zealand, Poland, Eurostat and OECD expressed willingness to be members of the Task Force.

D. Evaluation of the 68th CES plenary session

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2020/OCT/7 by UNECE

21. The Bureau was informed about the results of the evaluation questionnaires of the 2020 CES plenary session. This year's plenary session was evaluated third highest since 2004. The session on data stewardship organised by UNECE during the joint day with OECD CSSP was considered the most helpful session at the meeting, as well as the session on 'Business continuity of official statistics' organised by OECD, and 'New roles of NSOs and geospatial communities' (joint session with UN GGIM: Europe).

22. Many participants asked for providing the online connection to the meetings also in future so that more people can participate. The chat option was well appreciated as it allowed to make the meeting more interactive.

IV. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Statistical Programme 2021

A. Value of official statistics – issues for discussion in light of Covid-19

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2020/OCT/8 by the Task Force to test and further develop the framework for measuring the value of official statistics

23. The Bureau reviewed the progress made by the Task Force and its proposals for moving forward. The Bureau expressed strong support for the work and reiterated the importance of the topic, which has become even more relevant in light of the pandemic.

24. The following issues were raised in the discussion:

- (a) Some of the basic questions about value that were tackled in the earlier work merit being considered again in the new circumstances. Nevertheless, the focus on *measuring* value is important, and the promotion and communication aspects are playing a supporting role.
- (b) The usefulness of different measures of value will depend on the purposes for which they are wanted.
- (c) Participation in the work of the Task Force itself is already proving useful to countries, due to the internal discussions it has prompted within NSOs.
- (d) The pandemic has highlighted that timeliness is a dimension of quality and therefore of value. Relevance and precision can have different impacts on value according to who is using the statistics and for what purposes. In addition, there is increasing demand for more granularity of data, particularly in geographical terms.
- (e) The work of the Task Force might help to reduce the apparent trade-offs between these dimensions of quality or guide us better when deciding where to aim within the trade-offs.
- (f) Statistical services should be also taken into account when measuring the value of official statistics. The service role of both NSOs and international organizations has increased with the pandemic. For example, the ability of international organizations to produce guidance very rapidly has been important.
- (g) A valuable contribution of official statistics is providing sampling frames that are used in the production of statistics, including those outside official statistics. This value is often overlooked when attempting monetary valuations and comparing non-official with official statistics, since the former could not be produced to the same quality without the benefit of the sampling frames of the latter.
- (h) In addition to the objective/subjective/monetary framework for measuring value inherited from the preceding work, the Task Force is exploring the use of another

framework organized around user-oriented attributes of value (relevance, reliability, accessibility and relationships).

Conclusion

25. The Bureau extended the mandate of the Task Force for one year to take into account the new perception of the value of official statistics, and agreed with the proposed timeline for activities.

B. Poverty measurement (further work and renewal of Terms of Reference)

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2020/OCT/9 by the Steering Group on measuring poverty and inequality

26. The Bureau reviewed the progress report and updated terms of reference of the Steering Group on measuring poverty and inequality. The following points were raised in the discussion:

- (a) The Steering Group should focus on the methodological needs arising from the Covid-19 crisis to respond to the new data requirements and the growing demand for timelier and more disaggregated statistics on poverty.
- (b) Access to public services (e.g., health care, education, internet) have become critical to the well-being of people. The Bureau encouraged further efforts in valuation of public services, including social transfers in kind, and linking them with related activities undertaken in national accounts.
- (c) Countries are interested in continuing to share experience in this area, including at expert meetings.
- (d) CIS-STAT expressed interest in becoming a member of the Steering Group.

Conclusion

27. The Bureau approved the updated terms of reference of the Steering Group on measuring poverty and inequality until 2025 and supported CIS-STAT to become a member of the Group.

C. Consumer price indices (renewal of Terms of Reference)

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2020/OCT/10 by UNECE

28. The Terms of Reference for the Steering Group on Consumer Price Indices (CPI) were submitted to the Bureau for approval via written consultation. All responding countries and organizations supported the extension of the mandate of the Steering Group. There were very positive remarks and support to the work of the Group. The Terms of Reference may be reviewed in future depending on the outcome of the work of the Friends of the Chair Group on economic statistics.

Conclusion

29. The Bureau extended the terms of reference of the Steering Group on Consumer Price Indices until 2025.

D. Gender statistics and the Covid-19 pandemic

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2020/OCT/11 by UNECE

30. In May 2020, the Steering Group on gender statistics started to develop a minimum set of questions that can be added to household surveys to measure the differentiated impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on women and men. The aim is to agree on a set of survey questions on gender equality issues that national statistical offices and other data producers could use.

31. The proposal was sent to the Bureau for comments via written consultation and for expressing interest to participate in the work.

Conclusion

32. The Bureau supported the proposal. Eurostat and OECD provided useful additional information. Finland, Canada, New Zealand, Eurostat, and OECD expressed interest in participating in this activity under the Steering Group on gender statistics.

E. Statistics on children, adolescents and youth (work plan)

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2020/OCT/12 by the Task Force on children, adolescents and youth

33. The Task Force on statistics on children, adolescents and youth submitted its work plan for approval to the Bureau via written consultation. All responding countries and organizations supported the work plan.

Conclusion

34. The Bureau approved the work plan of the Task Force on children, adolescents and youth.

F. New data sources – accessibility and use

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2020/OCT/13 by UNECE

35. Following the CES 2019 seminar “New data sources – accessibility and use”, an informal task team led by Switzerland and the United States developed an action plan on access to data and acquiring the necessary skills. The Bureau asked the Secretariat to contact the groups mentioned in the plan to clarify whether they can take up the proposed tasks. The Secretariat prepared a paper providing information on the ongoing activities to address different items from the action plan which was sent to the Bureau members for written consultation.

36. The Bureau considered the action items from the plan well covered. Some additional points mentioned were:

- (a) The work related to legal hurdles to access to new data sources is still in initial stage. It is important for the UNECE Expert Meeting on statistical legislation and HLG-MOS to address these issues;
- (b) It will be important to maintain a platform on success stories and training on machine learning. The UK Data science campus may provide support to continue the HLG-MOS machine learning community;
- (c) Modern data ethics, opportunities and challenges in accessing and using new data sources need to be considered;
- (d) There is room for cooperation and synergies with the European Statistical System Partnership Group Task Force on access to privately held data;
- (e) It would be useful to make an inventory of the emerging initiatives to access new data sources as a result of Covid-19.

37. Eurostat and OECD provided information on their related work and additional points to the paper. New Zealand proposed two case studies. These will be included in the HLG-MOS virtual strategic communication framework platform.

Conclusion

38. The Secretariat will update the paper with additional information provided and make it available on the web. The Bureau considered the action items from the plan well covered and did not find it necessary to continue to update the document in future.

G. Statistical programme for 2021

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2020/OCT/14 by UNECE

39. The Bureau reviewed the Statistical Programme for 2021.
40. The Secretariat informed about the changes in the way of working due to Covid-19. Physical meetings are replaced by virtual/online meetings, and the possibility for online connection to meetings is expected to remain in place after the Covid-19 pandemic is over. UNECE is currently discussing at the political level the implications of the changes in working methods on holding the formal intergovernmental meetings.

Conclusion

41. The Bureau approved the UNECE Statistical Programme 2021.

V. Preparation of the CES 2021 Plenary session

A. Format and possible topics for the 2021 plenary session

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2020/OCT/15 by UNECE

42. The Bureau discussed the organization and possible topics for the CES 2021 plenary session.

43. The exact details of organization of the 2021 CES plenary session cannot be decided yet as the situation is uncertain due to the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the rules currently valid for all UNECE subsidiary bodies, to count as a formal meeting that can take decisions, CES must meet physically so that in-person participation is possible. Interpretation in English-French-Russian must be provided and main documents should be available in the three languages. As it is very unlikely that in summer 2021 all participants can travel to the meeting in person, the possibility for online connection must be offered.

44. The CES plenary session is planned to take place back-to-back with the meeting of the OECD Committee on Statistics and Statistical Policy (CSSP). Therefore, the arrangements need to be discussed with OECD. Furthermore, the CES participants evaluated highly the joint day between CES and CSSP in 2020 (in the evaluation questionnaire the joint sessions were considered first and second among the list of most useful sessions). The joint sessions were suggested to continue.

45. The Bureau discussed the main topics for the CES plenary session in 2021 based on the results of an electronic consultation with the CES members in June-July 2020 and a paper by Ireland. The highest number of votes by countries (31 out of 39 replies) was given to the topic 'Resilient and agile NSOs in the changing society'. Poland and New Zealand offered to organise the discussion on this topic, and eleven countries volunteered papers. At the same time, the Bureau considered this topic quite wide and suggested to focus it better, e.g. on sustaining innovations introduced during Covid-19 pandemic to make NSOs more resilient and agile.

46. The second preferred topic was 'Collaboration with private sector' with 15 votes. In addition, three new topics were suggested, including 'Adhering to core values of official statistics'. Ireland raised a number of issues relevant to the Heads of statistical offices in paper number 17.

Conclusion

47. The Secretariat will update and narrow down the list of the main topics to be considered during the CES 2021 plenary session based on the discussion and will send it to the Bureau for their comments and agreement. It was proposed that the Secretariat could organize 'Chief Statisticians' sprints' leading up to the discussion at CES in June 2021 on some of the issues raised in the paper by Ireland.

B. CES guidelines and recommendations for endorsement in 2021: Social exclusion

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2020/OCT/16 by the Task Force on measuring social exclusion

48. The Bureau reviewed the document *Approaches to measuring social exclusion* via written consultation. The following points were raised in the discussion:

- (a) The consultation with all CES members will be an opportunity to get a wider range of comments from national experts that will help to finalize the work.
- (b) It will be very useful to share good practices and include further country examples, e.g. additional examples in Chapter 5 on groups at risk of multiple disadvantages.
- (c) The inventory of data availability on social exclusion should be extended to all CES countries to complement the information presented in Chapter 7 which currently relies on inputs from the Task Force members.
- (d) Social exclusion has a multi-dimensional nature. The Bureau suggested to work further to develop a common framework, and a set of minimum requirements for data collection on social exclusion, including best practice examples. Mexico supported the proposal to use the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a unifying framework for the different approaches.
- (e) Eurostat provided references to their ongoing work and future projects on hard-to-reach groups, including minorities, homeless and persons living in communal establishments to be added in the document.

Conclusion:

49. The draft document will be sent for consultation to all CES members in early 2021, after reflecting the comments from the Bureau. The inventory of data availability on social exclusion will be extended to all CES members using the opportunity of the wide consultation.

VI. Dates and venue of next meetings

50. The Bureau confirmed the dates of its next meetings as follows:

- 17-18 February 2021
- 13-14 October 2021
- 16-17 February 2022
- 12-13 October 2022.

51. The meeting venues will be decided when the physical meetings will again become possible.

52. The 69th CES plenary session will take place on 23-25 June 2021, back-to-back with the OECD Committee on Statistics and Statistical Policy. The meeting is planned to take place in Paris. The venue will be confirmed in spring 2021.

53. The 70th CES plenary session is proposed to take place on 20-22 a.m. June 2022 in Geneva (tbc).

VII. Other issues

54. The Chair of CES, Marjo Bruun informed that she would retire at the end of January 2021. The Bureau thanked Ms. Bruun for her inspiring and forward-looking leadership of the Conference.

55. According to the *Rules Governing the Conference and its Bureau*, one of the co-chairs of the Bureau (all Bureau members are co-chairs) will be asked to chair the Bureau, and a new person will be co-opted as a Bureau member until the new Bureau elections in June 2021.
