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## Economic Commission for Europe

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Item 8 (c) of the provisional agenda

**Programme of work of the Statistics subprogramme of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe:  
Programme planning documents for the Statistics subprogramme of the United Nations Economic Commission  
for Europe**

## Statistical Programme 2021

Prepared by the Secretariat

### *Summary*

The document presents the statistical programme of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe for 2021. It is closely linked to the Programme of Work of the Statistics subprogramme for 2021 (ECE/CES/2020/16), adopted by the Conference of European Statisticians in June 2020 and approved by the Executive Committee of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe in January 2021.

The Statistical Programme for 2021 was approved by the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians at its October 2020 meeting. The document is presented to the Conference for adoption.

The list of meetings held or planned to be held in 2021 is annexed to this document.



## **I. Introduction**

### **A. Purpose of this document**

1. This document presents the activities which the Statistical Division of United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) will carry out in 2021. The document is in line with the Programme of Work for 2021<sup>1</sup>, which is the main official document in the United Nations' planning and budgeting system providing the basis for allocating the budget and planning the necessary United Nations support services for the substantive work programmes.

2. While the official work programme presents the work at an aggregated level, the current document describes the work in more detail, explaining:

- The main activities in 2021
- Why the activities are needed, and the issues they address
- The expected results and impact of these activities.

### **B. Objective and strategy of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Statistical Programme**

3. According to the UN proposed programme budget for 2021 (A/75/6 (Sect.20)), the objective of the UNECE Statistical Programme is “to advance official statistics at the national and international levels for evidence-based policymaking and assessing progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and to ensure the coordination of statistical activities in the UNECE region under the Conference of European Statisticians (CES).”

4. UNECE strives to achieve this objective through four interconnected streams of work carried out in close cooperation with UNECE member States (see Figure 1): (1) streamlining international statistical work in the UNECE region; (2) methodological work to develop and promote guidelines and recommendations to enhance the quality of statistics; (3) capacity development, in particular to measure progress towards SDGs; and (4) the UNECE statistical database. The work of the Statistical Division is governed by the Conference of European Statisticians to ensure that it focuses on the priorities of member countries. It is carried out in close cooperation with other international organizations active in statistics, such as the statistical office of the European Union (Eurostat), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT) and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD). The work also responds to the guidance provided by the UNECE Executive Committee (EXCOM) and global initiatives of the United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC).

5. UNECE EXCOM considered the work of CES in December 2019. EXCOM appreciated the work of the Conference and supported the planned activities for 2020 and beyond. EXCOM noted that the work of CES was of high quality making an important contribution at both the regional and global levels. The work often led to the development of international norms and standards for the global statistical system. Countries commended the CES' effective use of results-oriented task teams, in which many governments actively participate, and noted that the success of CES was due to the contributions of experts from member States and to the excellent coordination and partnerships with other international actors active in the region such as Eurostat, OECD, CIS-Stat, etc.

6. EXCOM emphasised that the work is also critical for the development of strong national statistics required to measure progress towards SDGs. It appreciated the work on updating the *CES Roadmap on Statistics for SDGs* as a valuable source facilitating country-led reporting on SDGs taking into account emerging challenges and lessons learned.

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<sup>1</sup> A/75/6 (Sect.20)

EXCOM members noted with appreciation the work on national accounts (especially in the areas of digital economy, globalization, sustainability and well-being), measuring quality of employment (especially in the areas of worker safety, fair treatment in employment, work-life balance, security of work and social protections); migration, poverty, strengthening interconnectivity, and digitalization. The initiative on developing geospatial information was considered to be of utmost importance to the entire UN community.

Figure 1.

**Interconnected work streams of the Statistical Division of UNECE**



7. UNECE supports the streamlining of international statistical work in the region by providing the secretariat for CES.

8. Guided by the priorities and needs of the member States expressed through CES, UNECE carries out methodological work by establishing and servicing teams of national experts to develop international statistical standards, guidelines, recommendations and repositories of best practices.

9. Upon the request of member States, UNECE assesses gaps in national statistical systems of the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and undertakes capacity development activities to support the implementation of international guidelines and standards, with a particular focus on the guidelines developed under CES.

10. Finally, UNECE operates an online statistical database focusing on areas of high political importance, including SDGs, offering insights into policy issues and measurement challenges. Gaps or areas of limited harmonization in the database enable identification of priorities for UNECE methodological work to improve the quality and comparability of national statistics and help UNECE in targeting support for the development of statistical systems in countries.

11. All CES work is guided by the United Nations *Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics*<sup>2</sup>, a standard developed by CES and endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2014 (resolution A/RES/68/261).

12. UNECE statistical work is strongly anchored in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which calls for a follow-up and review of the achievement of the goals and targets “based on evidence, informed by country-led evaluations and data which is high-quality, accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migration status, disability and geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.unece.org/stats/archive/docs.fp.e.html>

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>, para. 74

13. UNECE works on statistics for SDGs in three main ways. First, it supports national statistical offices in their role as coordinators and providers of statistics for SDGs. Second, it undertakes methodological and national statistical capacity development work in demographic, social, economic, and environment statistics, supporting the production of statistics and indicators for measuring progress towards SDGs in specific subject areas. The collection and dissemination of data on SDG indicators constitute the third component of this work. In 2021, UNECE will continue to maintain a regional knowledge hub on statistics for SDGs launched in 2020, including a platform providing data on SDGs for the UNECE countries.

14. The global Covid-19 affected the work of the Division in 2020 and may continue in 2021. Starting from March 2020, physical meetings and workshops were replaced by virtual meetings and webinars. A web platform was urgently set up to provide support to countries on reorganizing their statistical work in the conditions of the pandemic. Work in all subject areas of statistics was affected. In 2021, the Division will continue to explore possibilities and try new approaches to make the best use of the advantages offered by the digital platforms of communication and minimise the disadvantages. The aim is to provide efficient support to countries and to adapt the working methods to the post-pandemic environment.

### **C. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Statistical Division and Conference of European Statisticians in the international statistical community**

15. UNECE provides the secretariat for CES, which is the highest-level intergovernmental statistical body of the UNECE region and a platform for the regional coordination of international statistical work.

16. CES comprises the Heads of national statistical offices of 56 UNECE Member states, OECD member countries and some other countries outside the region (for example, Brazil, China, Mongolia and South Africa). According to the Rules governing the work of CES, any United Nations Member State which regularly participates in CES activities can become a member. The Heads of statistical services of international agencies also participate actively in CES work.

17. CES and its Bureau pay particular attention to avoiding duplication of work with other international organizations active in the region, and to making efficient use of available resources. CES undertakes work on emerging topics to support the development of statistics and brings together experts to develop products, such as statistical standards, guidelines, recommendations and repositories of good practice, which often have a global impact. Through CES countries share resources for statistical development by exchanging expertise and using an international pool of experts.

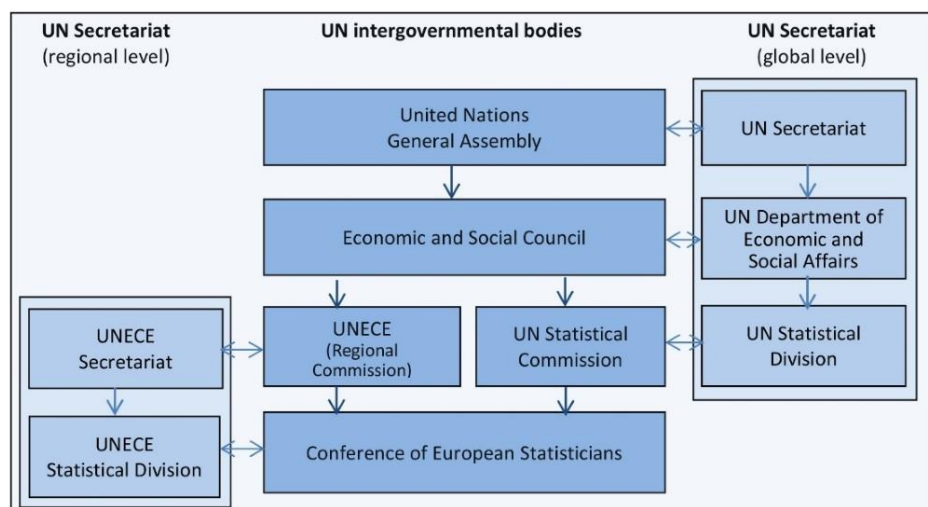
18. The UNECE statistical work is driven by the priorities of CES member countries, as well as by the decisions and recommendations of the United Nations Statistical Commission.

19. In addition, general guidance is given by UNECE EXCOM, the UN Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly.

20. A diagrammatic representation of the UNECE Statistical Division and CES within the United Nations institutional structure is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

### Conference of European Statisticians and the UNECE Statistical Division in the United Nations intergovernmental structure



21. UNECE cooperates closely with other international and supranational organizations active in the region, such as OECD, Eurostat, EFTA, CIS-Stat, IMF, the World Bank, as well as United Nations specialized agencies, programmes and funds, related organizations or other United Nations bodies wherever relevant.

22. The UNECE region is diverse, comprising both developed and developing statistical systems. This diversity provides a good basis to deal with new and emerging issues while ensuring that the results of the work are applicable in countries with different levels of statistical development. The exchange of knowledge, practices, new developments and challenges provided by CES is enriching to all participants. There are several examples of issues that have first been raised in the countries with developing statistical systems which have turned out to also be of high interest to countries with more advanced systems, and which have resulted in tools that are useful for all countries in the region and beyond (e.g. the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, the Generic Law of Official Statistics).

## II. Annual programme of work

23. In 2021 UNECE statistical work will focus on the following priorities: statistics for SDGs; economy and globalization; population and migration, gender, poverty and inequality; environment, climate change, hazardous events and disasters, circular economy; modernization of official statistics, and strategic and managerial issues. Capacity development will focus on areas highlighted by assessments of statistical systems.

### A. Streamlining international statistical work in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region

24. Coordination of international statistical work in the region is a key task for CES aiming to avoid duplication of work, find synergies, use resources efficiently and reduce the burden on national statistical offices. CES and its Bureau regularly discuss international statistical work in the region, carry out in-depth reviews and organize seminars to explore foundational issues and emerging topics in official statistics. At its annual plenary session, CES endorses the main outputs, guidelines and recommendations prepared under its work programme.

25. At its annual plenary session, CES discusses selected emerging topics of high interest to the heads of NSOs. In view of the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on official

statistics, the topics for the 2021 plenary session will be selected by the CES Bureau in February 2021 taking into account the latest developments and most urgent priorities.

26. The CES Bureau will steer the statistical work under the Conference and will meet twice in 2021 to review selected statistical areas in depth, including new forms of employment, and subjective poverty measures. Some of the in-depth reviews carried out earlier by the Bureau will lead to follow-up work in 2021:

- With the growing demand for data on migration and cross-border mobility, the international statistical community is seeking new data sources to improve the collection and analysis of migration data. For example, the use of mobile phones and Internet-based platforms (email, Google, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) make it possible to fill some of the information gaps that traditional data sources do not cover. However, these sources present problems of data quality and access. Work has been launched on new data sources for measuring migration and cross-border mobility to consider sustainable access and quality of these sources, and linkages between using new data sources and traditional ways of compiling migration statistics.
- The number of stakeholders in climate action is growing and many of them use official statistics. To be able to anticipate and address the upcoming information demands, producers of official statistics will need to actively partner with policymakers, scientists, NGOs and international organizations. Following the review of the role of statistical community in climate action, work will focus on strengthening the role of the statistical community in this changing, multi-stakeholder environment, increasing the visibility of official statistics in supporting climate action, taking stock of developments related to green finance and advancing climate change adaptation statistics.

27. The CES Bureau is the custodian of the widely used *Classification of Statistical Activities*. In 2021, UNECE will work on the review of the classification to take into account the emergence of new statistical areas, such as climate change-related statistics and statistics on governance.

## **B. Methodological work on statistical standards, guidelines and recommendations**

28. The aim of the methodological work is to develop and promote international standards, guidelines and recommendations to respond to countries' demands to improve the quality and comparability of official statistics and efficiency of statistical production. The areas of methodological work are presented in summary form on Figure 3.

29. The methodological work is conducted by teams of specialists set up by CES or its Bureau for a particular task with concrete terms of reference, membership, output, timeframe and a sunset clause. The Statistical Division of UNECE convenes, mobilizes and manages these groups, working with them to facilitate turning their knowledge and experience into international statistical standards, guidelines, recommendations and repositories of best practices. UNECE acts as the secretariat for the teams and provides tools such as wikis (which allow common working spaces and discussion forums) and teleconferences to connect experts and foster collaboration. Some teams of specialists use modern working methods such as sprints to deliver results in a short time frame. The use of virtual forms of collaboration has been steadily increasing and has proven especially useful during the Covid-19 pandemic. This trend will continue but will be complemented by face-to-face meetings as soon as physical meetings become possible to maintain team spirit and motivation.

30. To ensure high quality and relevance, the standards, recommendations and guidelines developed by the CES teams of specialists are consulted among all CES members (close to 70 countries from the UNECE region and beyond) before endorsement by the Conference.

31. The following three task forces plan to finalize their work and submit their recommendations for endorsement to the CES plenary session in 2021: assessing the quality

of administrative sources for use in censuses, approaches to measuring social exclusion, and framework for waste statistics.

Figure 3.

### Methodological work by the UNECE Statistical Division



## 1. Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals

32. The statistical work of UNECE encompasses all SDGs, supporting national statistical offices to facilitate country-led reporting of statistics for SDGs. In 2021, work will continue to enhance the UNECE regional platform for data on SDG indicators launched in 2020.

33. UNECE work in this area is steered and coordinated through the CES Steering Group on Statistics for SDGs. Its flagship publication, the *CES Road Map on Statistics for SDGs* (UNECE, 2017)<sup>4</sup> is widely used by countries and international organizations alike. UNECE is currently developing a second edition of the Road Map to reflect new information, lessons learned and emerging challenges, to be released in 2021. UNECE is also maintaining a knowledge hub on statistics for SDGs where more detailed information about its work in this area, as well as useful resources for experts, is available<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> See: <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/publications/2017/ECECESSTAT20172.pdf>. The Road Map is available also in Russian and Spanish.

<sup>5</sup> <https://w3.unece.org/sdghub/>

34. Drawing on UNECE practical guidance for online national reporting platforms (NRPs) for statistics for SDGs<sup>6</sup>, an increasing number of countries are using such platforms to provide national data for the SDG indicators. The work will continue to facilitate SDG data transmission from NRPs to custodian agencies through exchanging knowledge and experiences in using the Application Programming Interface (API) and the Standard for Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX).

35. A Task Team on communicating statistics for SDGs will prepare guidance on how countries can most effectively communicate SDG statistics to stakeholders, including through the Voluntary National Reviews to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

36. A Task Team on statistical capacity development has prepared a matrix as a self-assessment tool for statistical offices to identify their needs and priorities for capacity development. The Task Team will test the matrix and incorporate the guidance and lessons learned in using the matrix into the second edition of the Road Map. This work aligns with the UNECE statistical capacity development strategy endorsed by CES in 2018.

37. In 2020, UNECE launched its regional platform for data on SDG indicators, which consists of a dashboard and database of selected SDG indicators, and a knowledge hub. In 2021, the dashboard and database will be further enhanced by extending the coverage of indicators, adding new features with assessment of the UNECE region's progress towards the goals and targets, and implementing the Russian version of the interface (released in March 2021).

38. The Statistical Division also undertakes methodological work and national statistical capacity development on demographic, social, economic, and environment statistics to inform policy decisions related to SDGs. The thematic work is described below in the respective sections.

## **2. Economy, globalization and well-being**

39. UNECE works with countries to apply international standards and recommendations to improve the quality and comparability of economic statistics, which are a prerequisite for the compilation of many global SDG indicators, including all those with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the denominator. The main priority areas for 2021 include measuring economic growth, well-being and sustainability; globalization; digitalization; statistical business registers and entrepreneurship; quality of employment; and prices. UNECE will support countries in producing statistics during the Covid-19 pandemic by providing business continuity notes and methodological guidance.

40. UNECE promotes the implementation of the 2008 System of National Accounts (2008 SNA) to enable the provision of high-quality data for economic analysis and policies under the Global Implementation Programme, and contributes to the global effort of updating the SNA. The meetings of the Group of Experts on National Accounts (organized jointly with Eurostat and OECD) will inform countries of the progress achieved, seek feedback and facilitate the testing of the draft recommendations developed by the task teams working on the SNA research agenda in measuring globalization, digitalization, well-being and sustainability, informal economy and communication. UNECE will continue to support the implementation of the 2008 SNA in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) and South East Europe (SEE) in cooperation with other regional partners. As a follow-up to previous activities, a special session and a workshop for EECCA and SEE countries will be organized in 2021 to promote joint work among statistical offices and central banks on the consistency and overall quality of economic statistics.

41. Better measures are needed to assess how skills and knowledge acquired through education and training influence economic growth and productivity. In 2020, UNECE published a Compilation Guide, which aims to help countries construct internationally comparable Satellite Accounts on Education and Training. In 2021, UNECE will facilitate

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<sup>6</sup> As of March 2021, 42 UNECE countries have set up national reporting platforms for disseminating national data on SDG indicators.



the use of the Guide in countries, which will ultimately enable the measurement of human capital. In addition, UNECE will launch an online inventory of satellite accounts produced by countries to facilitate sharing experience and best practice.

42. In a globalized world, enterprises operate in complex value chains that span multiple countries, making “national” accounting increasingly challenging. The exchange of economic data between countries for statistical purposes is, therefore, becoming a necessity, as identified in the *Guide to Measuring Global Production* (UNECE, 2015). In June 2020, CES endorsed the *Guide to Sharing Economic Data in Official Statistics* produced by the UNECE Task Force on Exchange and Sharing of Economic Data. The Guide highlights the importance of data sharing to capture economic stocks and flows correctly in official statistics and introduces practical ideas and common tools to make data sharing possible. In 2021, UNECE will follow up with activities in this area. The Group of Experts on National Accounts will serve as a forum for the network of experts on multinational enterprise groups.

43. UNECE will continue to collaborate with other international expert groups dealing with the impact of globalization on economic statistics, such as the United Nations Committee of Experts on Business and Trade Statistics; the UN Friends of the Chair Group on Economic Statistics; the Integrated Global Accounts project of Eurostat, and various OECD expert groups.

44. UNECE, in cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO), Eurostat, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), OECD and other partners, promotes the implementation of international recommendations on the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which plays an important role in policymaking and is widely used for indexation of wages, pensions and social security allowances. The biennial meeting of the Group of Experts on CPI will discuss a range of topics, including new data sources, the role of CPI in measuring the digital economy and well-being, methodological issues and meeting user needs. Based on the experiences from the Covid-19 pandemic, a special session will be devoted to the production of the CPI during lockdown to identify recommendations and good practices that countries may use under lockdown conditions.

45. Together with Eurostat and OECD, UNECE supports the development of statistical business registers which are indispensable for efficient data collection and production of economic statistics. UNECE will continue to support the implementation of the *Guidelines on Statistical Business Registers* (UNECE, 2015) and *Guidelines on the use of statistical business registers for business demography and entrepreneurship statistics* (UNECE, 2019) in national statistical offices. UNECE will begin preparation of the biennial meeting of the Group of Experts on Business Registers in 2022, organized jointly with Eurostat and OECD. A special session will discuss the challenges in producing statistical business registers in EECCA and SEE countries.

46. UNECE, jointly with Eurostat, ILO and OECD, leads the international work on measuring quality of employment which aims to respond to the demand for data on the qualitative aspects of employment beyond traditional labour force statistics. The Steering Group on Measuring Quality of Employment will propose changes and amendments for updating the *Handbook on Measuring the Quality of Employment* (UNECE, 2015) to reflect revisions of ILO standards, country experiences and emerging issues. These amendments will be discussed at the meeting of the Group of Experts on Measuring Quality of Employment in the second half of 2021.

### **3. Population and migration, gender, poverty and inequalities**

47. There is an increasing policy demand for data on people's well-being, social environment and demographic change. The work in 2021 will focus on poverty and inequalities, migration, gender and population censuses. Many challenges relate to the need to increase the use of administrative data and to measure hard-to-reach population groups. This area of work is of particular importance for monitoring progress towards SDGs since many indicators require population data in the denominator and should be disaggregated by sex, migratory status and other variables.

48. UNECE supports countries' preparations for population and housing censuses. Censuses represent the very foundation of statistical systems. They provide the

baseline information used to plan public infrastructure and services, and to produce SDG indicators and many other statistics where population is the denominator. Censuses cover the entire population and allow the production of statistics for various small population groups whose measurement is essential to ensure that “no one is left behind” in working towards the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

49. The resolution of the Economic and Social Council *2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme* provides a global mandate for this work. The Covid pandemic has profound impacts on censuses that are planned or taking place in 2020 or 2021 in most countries of the UNECE region, and many countries have postponed their census. The impacts need to be examined and opportunities have to be provided to learn from each another. To address these concerns, in 2021 UNECE will organize an expert meeting and a workshop to support implementation of the *Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations for the 2020 Round of Population and Housing Censuses* (UNECE, 2015). A UNECE task force will complete in 2021 the *Guidance on the measurement of the quality of administrative sources for use in censuses*.

50. UNECE promotes exchange of experience and methodological work on measuring poverty and inequalities. Measuring progress towards SDGs on the reduction of poverty (Goal 1) and inequalities (Goal 10) requires comparable data and a coherent set of indicators. In 2021, UNECE will hold an expert meeting dealing with the application of two recently published guides: *Guide on Poverty Measurement* (UNECE, 2017) and *Poverty Measurement: Guide to Data Disaggregation* (UNECE, 2020). It will also address regional needs for new methodological work, and challenges in measuring the SDG indicators on poverty and inequality under the new pandemic circumstances. A particular focus on timely provision of statistics and sharing best practices would help government’s policy response to COVID-19, especially in building back better their social protection, social security and employment policies as well as addressing pressing needs of vulnerable population (SDGs 1, 8, and 10). The task force on measuring social exclusion will complete its work in 2021. UNECE will continue to promote the use of the harmonized survey module for measuring poverty in countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

51. UNECE aims to improve the availability, quality and international comparability of migration statistics. This responds to the strong demand for collecting and using data on migration, expressed, among others, in the first objective of the *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration* adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2018. Ten SDG indicators are directly related to migration and a further 24 need to be disaggregated by migratory status. The 2021 UNECE work session on migration statistics will discuss changes in the definitions of various categories of migrants, integration of data from multiple sources, use of longitudinal data for measuring migration, and measurement of hard-to-reach groups of migrants. A task force will develop guidance on the use of new data sources for measuring migration and cross-border mobility. To enhance the use and exchange of migration data, UNECE will continue to update and improve its *Clearing House on Migration Statistics*. A further test will be carried out of the harmonized survey module for measuring migration and remittances in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

52. UNECE work on gender statistics aims to share knowledge and experience and to develop capacity in areas where data and indicators of gender equality are insufficient or lacking. Better gender statistics is needed for the monitoring of SDGs, particularly to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (Goal 5). In the Covid crisis, gender issues attracted attention from the outset, as women make up a large proportion of the care and service staff on the front lines of the immediate crisis response. Questions surrounding the economic impact on women and men, the burden of childcare amidst school closures, and the link between social isolation measures and gender-based violence placed high demand on timely gender statistics. The 2021 UNECE work session on gender statistics will discuss the national statistical offices’ responses to these challenges and address emerging issues. A team of experts will continue the collection and analysis of emerging practices in measuring gender identity. UNECE will continue to promote the national application of its *toolkit for training users of gender statistics*.

53. UNECE launched, jointly with UNICEF, new work to improve the availability, quality, and comparability of statistics on children, adolescents and youth. In 2021, the work

will provide an inventory of the international databases in this area, and analyses of selected national contexts with the aim of making recommendations for best practices for definitions, collection, and reporting. The focus topics are (a) violence against children, adolescents, and youth; (b) children and adolescents in institutional care; and (c) children, adolescents and youth with disabilities.

#### 4. Environment, climate change and hazardous events and disasters

54. UNECE activities in this domain aim to improve statistics that are of high relevance to environment policies and required to derive many SDG indicators. The main priorities in 2021 will include climate change-related statistics and indicators, environment statistics, the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA), statistics related to hazardous events and disasters (including the Covid-19 pandemic) and measuring the circular economy.

55. Among the three pillars of sustainable development – economy, society and environment – data availability for the environmental pillar is the lowest. UN Environment estimates that for about 68 per cent of the environment-related SDG indicators there is insufficient data, making it very difficult to assess progress and understand the environmental challenges<sup>7</sup>. Providing data on environment-related SDGs (such as Goals 6, 14 and 15) is a challenge for all countries, especially those with less developed statistical systems. The Joint Task Force (JTF) of the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy and CES will continue to support the improvement of the production and quality of environment statistics in EECCA and SEE countries, in line with the *UNECE Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia*.<sup>8</sup> In 2021, JTF will continue to review the Guidelines to align them with SDG indicators, the United Nations Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (FDDES) and SEEA. This work may result in a revised set of indicators and statistics recommended for regular production in the region, for example by adding some core climate change-related indicators endorsed by CES in June 2020 or by replacing some of the indicators with similar SDG indicators. The work contributes to the pan-European Shared Environmental Information System and is carried out in close cooperation with the European Environment Agency, Eurostat and UNSD.

56. UNECE supports the use of the global System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) in the region, jointly with OECD. This includes building capacity in support of SEEA, providing a forum for exchange of knowledge and experience, assessing data availability and developing methods and sources for the necessary data. In 2021 the work will focus on identifying new techniques and data sources for compiling SEEA accounts (including Experimental Ecosystem Accounts), policy uses, communication strategies and coordination of work in the region. UNECE will also support building capacity for environment statistics and SEEA in countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

57. As climate change is affecting all aspects of the economy and society, more and more data from national statistical offices are needed for climate-related policies and analyses. In 2021, UNECE will organize the annual Expert Forum for producers and users of climate change related statistics - a platform for collaborating, sharing ideas and experience, discussing concepts and measurement issues, and identifying areas where practical guidance is needed. The UNECE Steering Group will continue to collect good practices in climate change-related statistics through a wiki platform. A specific focus of the work in 2021 will be taking stock of developments related to green finance and advancing measuring climate change adaptation. The Steering Group will continue to support the implementation of the *CES Recommendations on Climate Change-related Statistics* proposing holistic and systemic approaches to the development of climate change-related statistics. The Group will also

<sup>7</sup> 'Measuring Progress: Towards Achieving the Environmental Dimension of the SDGs' (UNEP, 2019). <https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/report/measuring-progress-towards-achieving-environmental-dimension-sdgs>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.unece.org/env/indicators.html>

follow on the implementation of the set of core climate change-related indicators, endorsed by CES in June 2020.

58. UNECE brings together statisticians and disaster risk experts, including from the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), to develop official statistics for hazardous events and disasters. The *Recommendations on the Role of Official Statistics in Measuring Hazardous Events and Disasters* (UNECE, 2019)<sup>9</sup> endorsed by CES in 2019, identify practical steps for NSOs to support disaster management and risk reduction. The Recommendations also call for statistical operationalization of terms, definitions and classifications used in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the establishment of a regional forum for exchange of knowledge and experience. In 2021 the work will focus on the development of a set of recommended core indicators, implementation guidelines and statistical operationalization of the new hazard definition and classification presented in the ‘UNDRR/ISC Sendai Hazard Definition and Classification Review Technical Report’<sup>10</sup>.

59. The Covid-19 pandemic falls into the category of a biological disaster according to the Sendai Framework terminology. Since the beginning of the pandemic NSOs have been playing a crucial role in supporting the management of this disaster by providing the required statistics for policy makers and the general public. The UNECE Statistical Division will continue to maintain the wiki-platform “Covid-19 and official statistics”<sup>11</sup> and organize webinars for NSOs to increase capacity and knowledge and share experience in producing the statistics that is required.

60. Waste statistics are of high policy interest in the context of SDGs, green economy, resource efficiency, circular economy, sustainable consumption and production, climate change and many other policy areas. However, there are important conceptual and methodological problems in this area that lead to incomparability of data. There is no international classification of waste statistics outside the European Union. Important aspects of waste management related to informal and illegal activities are not included in official waste statistics and are difficult to capture in statistics. A UNECE task force, involving experts from countries, professional and international organizations (such as the Basel Convention Secretariat, Eurostat, OECD and UNSD) has been working to develop a conceptual framework for waste statistics. The framework will provide a basis for harmonizing the concepts and definitions, developing standard classifications and providing methodological guidance to produce better quality information for important waste-related policies. It is planned to present the framework to CES in June 2021 for endorsement.

61. The policy initiatives aiming to establish a circular economy are increasing in many countries and the European Union. However, there is no single internationally agreed upon definition of a circular economy and how to measure it. In 2021, UNECE Statistical Division, in close collaboration with UNSD, OECD, Eurostat and other international organisations, will explore how to harmonize approaches for measuring the circular economy, and provide a platform for exchange of experience and knowledge in this area.

## 5. Strategic and managerial issues of official statistics

62. The first Fundamental Principle states that “official statistics provide an indispensable element in the information system of a democratic society, serving the government, the economy and the public with data [...]. To this end, official statistics that meet the test of practical utility are to be compiled and made available on an impartial basis by official statistical agencies to honour citizens’ entitlement to public information.” To be able to honour this commitment, official statistics need a strong legal and institutional basis. As the landscape of information producers is rapidly changing, the legislative and institutional infrastructure must support the development of new business models, engagement in partnerships and use of new data sources and technologies to allow modernization of official

<sup>9</sup> <https://unece.org/statistics/publications/recommendations-role-official-statistics-measuring-hazardous-events-and>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.undrr.org/publication/hazard-definition-and-classification-review>

<sup>11</sup> <https://statswiki.unece.org/display/COV/Home>

statistics. UNECE activities in this domain aim to strengthen the responsiveness, accountability and transparency of statistical institutions to ensure access to high quality information, as enshrined in SDGs (Goal 16).

63. In 2021, UNECE will continue to provide a platform for national statistical offices to share experience in modernizing legal and institutional frameworks of official statistics and discuss emerging issues posing legal challenges to national statistical systems. The work will focus on the legal aspects of data access, use and exchange, and accessing new data sources during the Covid-19 pandemic. National and international legal experts will be able to deepen the discussion initiated in the 2020 virtual expert meeting and identify needs for supporting materials and practical guidance.

64. Following up on the *Recommendations for promoting, measuring and communicating the value of official statistics* (UNECE, 2017), in 2021 the Task Force on developing a framework for measuring the value of official statistics will continue gathering and analysing examples of ways in which countries attempt to track and quantify the value of their statistical products. The Task Force aims to develop guidance to help countries prioritize among possible measures of value in a strategic way. The work is heavily influenced by the changing understandings of the value of statistics and the shifting balance among aspects of this value brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic.

65. The growing importance of integrating statistical and geospatial information calls for closer partnerships between geospatial experts and statisticians. An Economic and Social Council resolution (E/2016/L.28) “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 (UN-GGIM).” In 2021, UNECE and UN-GGIM: Europe will continue to promote dialogue between national bodies responsible for geospatial and statistical information. In 2021, further joint activities are envisaged, including a joint workshop with Eurostat. The aim is to bring together experts from national statistical, mapping and geospatial agencies to share good practices.

66. UNECE co-chairs the Regional Coordination Group on Data and Statistics for Europe and Central Asia, which was established in 2020 as part of the UN reform process. This group brings together data and statistics focal points from UN agencies active in the region, as well as from UN country teams. Its main focus is on coordinating statistical capacity development activities in the region. In 2021, the group will be expanded to include representatives of non-UN organisations actively providing statistical capacity development in the region.

## 6. Modernization of official statistics

67. Producers of official statistics are facing many challenges and operate in a continuously changing environment. New, timelier and more disaggregated statistical data have to be produced. At the same time, budgets are under pressure and new producers enter the arena with non-official statistics, which compete with official statistics. UNECE is working with countries to create models, standards, frameworks and guidelines to assist them in their modernization and collaboration efforts. The UNECE High Level Group for the Modernization of Statistics (HLGMOS) actively steers the modernization of statistical organizations. HLGMOs provides a common platform for experts to develop solutions in a flexible and agile way integrating various expert groups, projects, workshops and other activities.

68. UNECE provides the secretariat for this work, which is carried out by four Modernization Groups (Supporting Standards, Sharing Tools, Capabilities and Communication, and Blue Skies Thinking Network), through annual projects and several modernization and sprint workshops throughout the year. A series of workshops are also organized with an innovative focus on dissemination and communication, data collection, statistical data editing and statistical confidentiality. Due to the dynamic nature of this work, the main activities of the four Modernization Groups, as well as the topics of HLGMOs projects for 2021 are identified in an annual HLGMOs conference by the end of 2020.

69. To work together within and between offices, it is a must to use the same models and standards. The Supporting Standards Modernization Group supports the use of models and standards developed under HLG-MOS to facilitate modernization activities such as the

*Generic Activity Model for Statistical Organizations (GAMSO)*, the *Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM)*, and the *Generic Statistical Information Model (GSIM)*. In 2020 the group finalized the statistical metadata glossary and continued to consolidate materials and practical examples to better communicate the models and provide an integrated view of the various models. It also started to produce a guidance on how to use GSBPM for geospatial enabled data and started revising GSIM based on implementation experiences from countries and the findings of the group working on linking the model to GSBPM. These topics will continue in 2021. Additional areas will be decided upon in December by the HLG-MOS. The annual 2021 UNECE ModernStats World Workshop will discuss and advance the work.

70. Reusing statistical tools developed by colleagues, or developing such tools jointly, increases efficiency. The Sharing Tools Modernization Group supports and encourages practical implementation of the *Common Statistical Production Architecture (CSPA)*, a blueprint for statistical organizations which makes sharing easy. In 2021 the group will continue helping organizations to share services in a pragmatic way. New services will continuously be added to the *CSPA Service Catalogue*.

71. Without developing complementary skills and creating a modern flexible and agile workforce, statistical organizations are not able to increase and improve the production of statistics. The Covid-19 pandemic has made this even more apparent. The UNECE Modernization Group on Capabilities and Communication supports statistical organizations by providing guidelines on competency profiles, training, management issues, and other aspects needed to increase their efficiency (for example lean management). In 2020, the group started working on emerging issues in human resource management in statistical offices such as Social Media strategies, ethical leadership, culture change and skills and capability frameworks. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic the work was refocused and shifted to crisis management, internal communication, and remote working, training and recruitment. The focus of the HRMT Workshop and the Workshop on Statistical Dissemination and Communication was refocused on the Covid-19 responses in these areas. The exact work programme for 2021 will be decided at the end of 2020 but it is expected to be mainly in response to the pandemic or on consolidating new ways of working and communicating and on the lessons learned from and the legacy of the drastic change in how offices operated during the crisis.

72. The field of official statistics must ensure that it remains adaptive to the changing environment and shifting landscape of challenges and opportunities. The UNECE Blue Skies Thinking Network is the innovation hub of the modernization work programme. It assesses emerging opportunities in the modernization of statistics. In 2020 a core group of high-level experts discussed and assessed various emerging areas of work in modernisation of official statistics. Topics such as synthetic data sets, secure multi-party computation, data science labs, chatbots, integrated platforms to support IT production as well as several modern IT technologies were considered. The discussion focused on areas that had most potential to help statistical agencies confront the Covid pandemic. Several subgroups were set up, for example, on sharing experience in designing synthetic data methodologies and aspects of using, assessing and communicating synthetic data, which can be used to share sensitive information, for example on medical records of Covid-19 patients. In 2021, the network will continue to consider new and emerging topics and start collaborative teams to jointly embark on new areas of work.

73. Every year UNECE supports two modernization projects. HLG MOS selects these topics at the start of each year to ensure that they address the most urgent matters facing statistical offices. For example, in 2020 many countries worked jointly in the Machine Learning project on pilot studies in the areas of classification and coding, editing and imputation, and imagery processing. Quality aspects of processing traditional as well as non-traditional data sources were defined, including issues such as the business process, costs and the time required to perform a process. In 2020, the project on Input Privacy-Preservation techniques started where countries work on developing ways to make privacy sensitive data available for analysis and for producing meaningful statistics for policy makers and the general public. The projects for 2021 will only be determined at the end of 2020 or beginning of 2021.

74. Several aspects of statistics are not domain specific. UNECE is one of the few organizations that delivers workshops in important cross-cutting areas of statistical production, bringing together experts from various domains for joint work and exchange of practices. In 2020, a workshop on Dissemination and Communication of Statistics and a Workshop on Data Collection were focused on Covid19 response. For 2021, UNECE is planning workshops on Statistical Data Collection, Dissemination and Communication of Statistics, and Work Session on Statistical Data Confidentiality, and will start the preparations for the 2022 Workshop on Data Editing.

### C. Capacity development

75. UNECE aims to enhance the capacity of national statistical systems in all member countries, and particularly those in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, to implement international standards and guidelines and to meet the challenges of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The capacity development is directly related to SDG 17 “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development” (targets 17.18 and 17.19).

76. Special attention is paid to promoting the *United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics*, which provide the basis for a sound legal and institutional framework for national statistical systems. In June 2018 CES endorsed a new *UNECE Statistical Capacity Development Strategy*<sup>12</sup>, which reinforces the principle that capacity development activities should be user driven.

77. UNECE capacity development activities include:

- Global Assessments of national statistical systems and sector reviews of specific areas of official statistics at the national level
- Capacity development workshops
- Advisory services to address country-specific needs
- Field projects implemented in partnership with national statistical offices and UN country teams
- Development of methodological guidance and training materials.

78. Capacity development activities are carried out in partnership with other international organizations, in particular Eurostat, EFTA, United Nations country teams, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), UNSD, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Bank, the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT) and other bilateral and multilateral partners.

79. UNECE capacity development activities are based on the findings and recommendations of Global Assessments of national statistical systems. Global Assessments are carried out in cooperation with Eurostat and EFTA and are used by various donors active in the region, such as the World Bank. The reports provide a clear picture of the state of development of official statistics in a country. They help national authorities to better programme the long-term development of statistics, and international donors to focus their technical cooperation activities on the identified needs. Global Assessments have resulted in action plans to improve national statistics in all countries where they have been conducted. In 2021, UNECE, with the partner organizations Eurostat and EFTA, expects to complete a Global Assessment of Kyrgyzstan. A Global Assessment of Turkmenistan will be started.

<sup>12</sup> See:

[http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/ece/ces/2018/CES\\_10\\_rev1\\_\\_Statistical\\_capacity\\_development\\_strategy\\_rev.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/ece/ces/2018/CES_10_rev1__Statistical_capacity_development_strategy_rev.pdf)

80. A United Nations Development Account Programme on Statistics and Data will complete its activities in 2021, to support the production of indicators to measure progress towards SDGs. UNECE is involved in the project in six statistical areas: means of implementation (institutional environment), environment, population, gender, poverty, and economic statistics. A range of workshops and other capacity development activities will be carried out under the Programme.

81. The Steering Committee of the Multi-Donor Programmatic Trust Fund to Support Statistical Capacity Building in Eastern Europe and CIS Countries (ECASTAT) will continue to finance a UNECE-led capacity development programme for the implementation of the 2008 SNA and to support statistics in the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. The programme, which runs from 2017 to 2021, consists of regional workshops and other training activities in the areas of national accounts, statistical business registers, prices, migration and remittance statistics. The Programme also supports the participation of experts from the target countries in statistical expert group meetings.

82. A capacity development project funded by the Russian Federation will continue in 2021 to support the CIS countries to provide high quality statistics and indicators to monitor progress towards SDGs, with a special emphasis on environment statistics.

#### **D. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe statistical database**

83. UNECE operates a statistical database offering key statistics on member countries via free online interfaces in English and Russian. This work promotes open access to, and use of, data for evidence-based decision making, as requested in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

84. Emphasis is placed on providing data on areas of high political importance to governments and to the United Nations system, such as SDGs, migration, globalization, gender equality, population, education, employment, work-life balance, road traffic accidents, inland transport, and forest resources. The compilation of data on these topics gives insights into measurement issues and helps to identify priorities for UNECE methodological work to improve the quality and comparability of national statistics, and to provide targeted support for the development of statistical systems in countries.

85. The SDG dashboard launched in 2020 will be further enhanced by extending the coverage of indicators, adding new features with assessment of the UNECE region's progress towards the goals and targets, and implementing the Russian version of the interface. The dashboard provides quickly and easily information on the UNECE countries' progress in achieving SDGs to a broad non-specialist audience in both PC- and mobile-friendly formats. The data are stored using the existing infrastructure of the UNECE statistical database, allowing users to build customized tables and graphs and to consult the metadata.

86. To reduce the response burden on countries, data are collected from, or in cooperation with, other international organizations when possible. UNECE has continued its work to streamline the database activities, which has increased efficiency of data collection and facilitated more timely update and release of statistical data series. Further improvements are expected in the work related to the database maintenance, such as automated generation of gender questionnaires, easier maintenance of the macroeconomic database and usage of various Python-based statistical software packages.

87. The database provides the source data for publications such as the report for the annual UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, *UNECE Countries in Figures*, as well as for preparing regular short articles on economic and social development in the UNECE region, published in the *UNECE Weekly* newsletter and on the UNECE website. Annual user surveys are conducted to ensure relevance and to identify new user needs. Improvements to the efficiency of data processing tools will continue in 2021.

88. The UNECE statistical database is also used to disseminate data for UNECE policy work. In this respect, the database is a strategic resource for the whole UNECE and beyond.



## Annex

### List of meetings from January to December 2021

Note: Meetings planned for the second half of 2021 may take place in hybrid or online format depending on the Covid-19 situation.

<i>Jointly with</i>	<i>Meeting (venue)</i>	<i>Date</i>
	CES Bureau meeting, online	17-18 February
OECD	Joint Seminar on SEEA Implementation, online	9-11 March
	Workshop on Measuring Informal Economy, online	22-26 March
	Workshop on Measuring Poverty in Pandemic Times, online	25-26 March
UNSD	Fifth Workshop on Statistics for SDGs, online	29 March-1 April
	Fifth Expert Meeting on Statistics for SDGs, online	29 March-1 April
OECD, Eurostat	Group of Experts on National Accounts, online	17-26 May
	Group of Experts on Population and Housing Censuses, online	19-20 May
	Group of Experts on Consumer Price Indices, online	2-10 June
	Expert Forum on measuring hazardous events and disasters, online	7, 8, 10 June (tbc.)
	69 <sup>th</sup> Plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians, online	23-25 June
	Expert Forum for Users and Producers of Climate Change-related Statistics (Geneva, Switzerland or hybrid)	2-3 September
	Workshop on Gender Statistics (Bern, Switzerland, hybrid)	28 September
	Work Session on Gender Statistics (Bern, Switzerland, hybrid)	29 September
	Expert Meeting on Statistical Data Collection, online	27-30 September
	CES Bureau meeting (venue tbd.)	13-14 October
	Expert Meeting on Dissemination and Communication of Statistics (Lisbon, Portugal)	13-15 October
Environment Division	Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators (Geneva, Switzerland or hybrid)	18-19 October
ILO	Group of Experts on Measuring Quality of Employment, online	October/November (tbd.)
	Workshop on Migration Statistics (Geneva, Switzerland)	25-26 (am) October
Eurostat	Work Session on Migration Statistics (Geneva, Switzerland)	26(pm)-28 October
	Workshop on Statistical Data Confidentiality (tbd.)	October/November (tbd.)
	Workshop on Modernization of Official Statistics (Geneva, Switzerland)	15-16 November
	Expert Meeting on Modernization of Statistical Legislation (Geneva, Switzerland or hybrid)	18-19 November
	Workshop on harmonization of poverty statistics to measure SDG 1	30 November
	Expert meeting on measuring poverty and inequality: SDGs 1 and 10	1-2 December