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Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of European Statisticians

Sixty-ninth plenary session
Geneva, 23-25 June 2021

Report of the sixty-ninth plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians

I. Introduction

A. Attendance

1. The Conference of European Statisticians (CES) held its sixty-ninth plenary session on 23-25 June 2021. The meeting was held in two parts: an informal joint session of CES and OECD Committee on Statistics and Statistical Policy (CSSP) on 23 June (online), and a formal hybrid meeting on 24-25 June 2021. Some participants attended in person while most attended through remote connection.

2. The meeting was attended by representatives from Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, Mongolia, Montenegro, Netherlands, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America, and Uzbekistan.

3. The Conference was attended by representatives of European Commission (Eurostat), United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UN ECA); United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UN ECLAC), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), United Nations Regional Cooperation Office (UN RCO) in Kyrgyzstan, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UN Women, United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), International Labour Organization (ILO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Health Organisation (WHO), Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC), European Free Trade Association (EFTA) Interstate Statistical Committee of the CIS (CIS-Stat), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Statistical Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) and the World Bank.

4. University of Coimbra and South African Reserve Bank were also represented.

B. Opening and adoption of the agenda

Documentation: ECE/CES/100 and 100/Add.1

5. Mr. A. Arora, the Chair of CES, chaired the plenary session.
6. An informal joint session with the OECD CSSP was held on 23 June in English only and considered agenda item 2. ‘Post-Covid: sustaining organisational and product innovation in national statistical offices’. The informal session was held in two parts:
 - (a) Data innovations to support post-COVID-19 recovery policies (organised by OECD Statistics and Data Directorate and Centre on Well-being, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunity (WISE));
 - (b) Innovation in National Statistical Offices’ (NSOs) organization and working arrangements (organised by New Zealand, Poland and UNECE).
7. The formal part of the CES plenary session on 24-25 June considered the following agenda items:
 - (a) Item 1. Opening;
 - (b) Item 2. ‘Post-Covid: sustaining organisational and product innovation in national statistical offices. Innovation in National Statistical Offices organization and working arrangements’ (decision only);
 - (c) Item 3. Official statistics for climate action;
 - (d) Item 4. Coordination of international statistical work in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region: outcomes of the recent in-depth reviews carried out by the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians;
 - (i) New forms of employment and quality of employment;
 - (ii) Measuring circular economy;
 - (e) Item 5. Work of the High-level Group for the Modernisation of Official Statistics;
 - (f) Item 6. How national statistical systems adhere to the core values of official statistics;
 - (g) Item 7. Reports, guidelines and recommendations prepared under the umbrella of the Conference.
 - (h) Item 8. Programme of work of the Statistics subprogramme of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe;
 - (i) Item 9. Election of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians.
8. Mr. Arora opened the CES 69th plenary session and welcomed the participants. The provisional agenda (ECE/CES/100) was adopted.
9. The decisions taken under individual agenda items, as well as a summary of discussion are presented in this report. The Chair’s conclusions from 23 June informal session are provided in the Annex.

II. Innovation in National Statistical Offices organization and working arrangements

Documentation: ECE/CES/2021/18-24 and 31

10. The Conference confirmed the outcome of the informal session ‘Innovation in National Statistical Offices organization and working arrangements’, which took place on 23 June. The decision is below (para 11-13). The summary of discussion is provided in the Annex under Chair’s conclusions.

Action taken by the Conference

11. The Conference agreed that the Capability and Communication Group under the High-level Group for Modernising Official Statistics (HLG-MOS) will take on board the outcome of the informal CES session ‘Innovation in national statistical offices organization and working arrangements’ in the work on human resources and communication. All interested countries are encouraged to participate in this work.

12. The Conference asked the Bureau to reflect on what further activities may be needed to reinforce and disseminate the lessons learned from the pandemic, identifying which changes can have positive impacts over the longer term, and what role the international community can play in consolidating these.

13. The Conference asked the Bureau to decide on possible further steps at its next meeting.

III. Official statistics for climate action

Documentation: ECE/CES/2020/21 and ECE/CES/2021/25-27

14. The discussion was organized by the Steering Group on Climate Change-Related Statistics. G. Peterson (Canada) chaired the session. The discussion was informed by papers from the Netherlands, Eurostat, IMF and OECD, and UNFCCC. B. Kroese (Netherlands), B. Hackmann (UNFCCC), M. Kotzeva (Eurostat), L-M. Ducharme (IMF) and P. Schreyer (OECD) presented their perspectives on the role of NSOs in providing statistics for climate action and addressing the large information needs in a coherent and sustainable way.

15. The following points were raised by the Conference:

(a) The Paris Agreement requires all countries to submit every five years nationally determined contributions (NDCs) including information on planned mitigation and adaptation actions. Countries should regularly track progress in NDC implementation while they have flexibility in how the targets are set, and on the indicators chosen to track progress. This information is critical to drive policies, set targets, engage the broader public and assess progress. The scope, depth and frequency of reporting under the Paris agreement require strong institutional arrangements. Common statistical guidance for tracking NDCs would allow to harmonise approaches and improve comparability between countries. Currently many countries are reassessing their reporting arrangements which is an opportunity for statistical offices to get involved;

(b) The national statistics systems (NSS) have an essential role to play as they already have much of the needed information and can provide it in a holistic way. NSOs may take the leadership within NSS by helping policymakers to identify relevant indicators and measurement approaches, bringing together data produced by other organizations, tapping into new data sources, and developing funding bids for data;

(c) Collaboration within NSS and with other organizations is crucial to provide a complete picture of climate action, well-being, sustainable development and the general situation of the country. Such collaboration may not be easy and requires finding a common language. Of particular interest are interactions between the economic activities and climate, and the economic and social consequences of climate policies;

(d) Key avenues to strengthening climate change-related statistics and the role of NSOs are improving timeliness, frequency, accessibility, granularity, geographical coverage and international comparability of data to the level needed by policy makers, analysts and the public at large. User needs should be central to this work;

(e) Some countries produce quarterly emissions of greenhouse gases to provide data with better timeliness and frequency. Other countries do not see the value in infra-annual estimates and consider other information needs more urgent;

(f) International cooperation is critical to develop and reconcile international standards, manuals and frameworks, and coordinate capacity development programmes. Common classifications and definitions facilitate cooperation and allow for harmonizing

measurements and reporting. Many joint international activities are already in place, but more should be done. The activities should be aligned with the updates of international statistical standards;

(g) Several new international activities have been mentioned. Among others, OECD is expanding collection of information on climate-related policy instruments and financing, and an International Program for Action on Climate is launched on the initiative of France. Eurostat is expanding climate change-related statistics in relation to the European Green Deal and reviewing how these statistics meet the evolving user needs. IMF has launched the Climate Change Dashboard and is preparing a concept note on a possible new Data Gaps Initiative (DGI) under G20, with climate change as one of four priorities. In March, the United Nations Statistical Commission has approved the Ecosystem Accounting in the System of Environmental-economic Accounting (SEEA). UNSD plans to submit the Global Set of Climate Change Statistics and Indicators to the 2022 UN Statistical Commission for adoption. These initiatives may use different ways of communicating climate change-related statistics catering to different audiences, but the underlying data should be as coherent as possible;

(h) Co-investment by international organizations and groups of countries in tools, platforms, and methodologies should be explored to use scarce resources better and accelerate progress, especially in the context of using alternative sources of data, including Earth observation data. Further engagement with the geospatial community, financial community and central banks is needed. Standardising reporting by corporations will help to show the contribution of the private sector to climate action.

Action taken by the Conference

16. The Conference recognized the increasing need for climate change-related statistics and data, and the key role national statistical offices must play in meeting this need. Producing such data requires systemic approaches, linking various statistical fields, innovation, collaboration across the national statistical system, and effective communication with users.

17. The Conference underlined the importance of timely data and the critical role of the System for Environmental-economic Accounting (SEEA).

18. The Conference called for strengthening of international collaboration to develop classifications and manuals, and link different standards to ensure comparable data across countries. The work should take into account the global and regional indicator sets and other ongoing initiatives. Co-investment in relevant tools and data sources is needed.

19. The Conference asked for a close collaboration with the policy process, including for developing guidance on using statistics for reporting under the Enhanced Transparency Framework of the Paris Agreement.

20. The Conference considered necessary to discuss the use of statistical and geospatial data for climate change (possibly at the 2022 plenary session).

21. The Conference supported the work of the CES Steering Group on Climate Change-Related Statistics, and asked the Bureau to discuss the follow-up to this session and decide on further steps at its next meeting.

IV. Coordination of international statistical work in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region

Action taken by the Conference

22. The Conference agreed with the topics of the upcoming in-depth reviews:

- (a) Subjective poverty measures (October 2021, led by Poland);
- (b) Measuring the non-observed/informal economy (October 2021, led by Mexico);

(c) Collaboration with private sector data providers (February 2022, led by Poland with contributions from Canada, Mexico, United Kingdom, Eurostat, IMF and ILO);

(d) How national statistical organizations adhere to the core values of official statistics (February 2022, led by Ireland and Canada).

A. Outcome of the in-depth review on new forms of employment and quality of employment

Documentation: ECE/CES/2021/9 and 9/Add.1

Action taken by the Conference

23. The Conference endorsed the outcome of the in-depth review on new forms of employment and quality of employment (ECE/CES/2021/9), including setting up a Task Force, and thanked Canada and CIS-Stat for translating the document into French and Russian.

B. Measuring circular economy

Documentation: ECE/CES/2021/1, 8 and 8/Add.1

24. The session was chaired by A. Arora (Canada). J. Pakarinen (Finland) presented the main outcomes of the in-depth review of measuring circular economy, and the ongoing work of the Task Force on Measuring Circular Economy which was established by the CES Bureau in February 2021.

25. L. Bratanova (UNECE) informed about the outcome of the discussions on circular economy at the UNECE Commission session in April 2021.

26. The Conference considered the in-depth review document excellent, stressed the importance of the topic and welcomed the work of the Task Force. The elaboration of practical guidelines, including clarification of key terms and definitions was supported.

Action taken by the Conference

27. The Conference:

(a) Endorsed the outcome of the in-depth review of measuring circular economy (ECE/CES/2021/8);

(b) Took note of the outcome of the discussion on promoting circular economy and sustainable use of natural resources during the UNECE Commission session in April 2021;

(c) Requested the Task Force on measuring circular economy to contribute a progress report to the UNECE Commission Session in 2023.

V. Work of the High-level Group for the Modernisation of Official Statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/2021/10, 10/Add.1 and 11

Action taken by the Conference

28. The Conference approved the annual report of the High-Level Group for the Modernisation of Official Statistics (HLG-MOS), including the outcomes of the activities carried out in 2020 and plans for the rest of 2021 (ECE/CES/2021/10 and Add.1).

29. The Conference supported the continuation of the work on modernization of official statistics. National and international statistical organizations were invited to support the HLG-MOS work programme and to become partners in the Statistical Modernization Community.

VI. How national statistical systems adhere to the core values of official statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/2021/17, 28-30, 32, 33

30. The session was organised by Ireland and Canada and was chaired by P. Dalton. The discussion was informed by papers from Ireland, Mexico, Norway, Colombia and Canada, as well as the summary of a preparatory chief statisticians' sprint session by Ireland and the Secretariat. A panel comprised of J.-L. Tavernier (France), J. Petrauskiene (Lithuania), M. Sowden (New Zealand) and G. Axelsen (Norway) gave their perspectives and reacted to comments from participants.

31. The following points were raised in the discussion:

(a) Core values were key to being able to respond quickly while retaining trust during the COVID-19 pandemic. They provide a strong foundation for official statistics in times of change. They are part of the DNA of official statistics and statisticians;

(b) It would be useful to develop a generally agreed list of core values. Professionalism, independence, impartiality, relevance, timeliness, granularity, innovation, trust, transparency, credibility, confidentiality, competence, integrity, benevolence and ethics have been mentioned, as well as human values such as tolerance and respect for diversity;

(c) Transparency has been particularly important during the pandemic as the balance between quality dimensions has seen a strong shift towards timeliness;

(d) Core values should be anchored in statistical legislation. National statistical offices have a role as guardians of core values within the national statistical systems;

(e) Core values need to apply to both products and services, and both to traditional official statistics and products for specific users and purposes;

(f) The core values can provide a basis for discussions with other producers of official statistics at the national level, and there should be benefits for other data producers of adhering to the core values and the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. The core values are also important in the context of discussions on the evolving roles of national statistical offices and data stewardship;

(g) Core values need to be communicated effectively both externally to users and other stakeholders, and internally to the staff of the statistical offices;

(h) While the Fundamental Principles and core values should be seen as relatively stable, a set of behaviours to "live the values" could evolve over time in response to changing circumstances. Collecting case studies and specific examples of behaviours based on the core values would be useful;

(i) The relationship between the Fundamental Principles, core values, codes of practice and quality frameworks should be further explored. In this connection also codes of ethics are becoming increasingly important;

(j) Several countries and organisations were interested in further work on this topic. Some related topics are discussed under the High-Level Group for the Modernisation of Official Statistics.

Action taken by the Conference

32. The Conference noted the importance of explicitly recognising, upholding and demonstrating the core values of official statistics, and requested:

(a) The Secretariat to initiate a conversation within the official statistics community to elaborate a list of core values of official statistics;

(b) The Bureau to oversee this work, including mapping the core values to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, and defining behaviours that support the core values and implementation of the Fundamental Principles;

(c) The Secretariat to report on progress at the 70th CES plenary session in 2022.

VII. Reports, guidelines and recommendations prepared under the umbrella of the Conference

Documentation: ECE/CES/2021/3, 3/Add.1; ECE/CES/2021/4, 4/Add.1; ECE/CES/2021/5, 5/Add.1; ECE/CES/2021/6, 6/Add.1; ECE/CES/2021/7, 7/Add.1, and ECE/CES/2021/7

33. The Conference endorsed the following documents subject to the amendments presented in the summaries of electronic consultations:

- (a) Second Edition of the *Road Map on statistics for SDGs* (ECE/CES/2021/6 and 6/Add.1);
- (b) *Waste statistics framework* (ECE/CES/2021/4 and 4/Add.1);
- (c) *Guidelines for assessing the quality of administrative sources for use in censuses* (ECE/CES/2021/3 and 3/Add.1);
- (d) *Approaches to measuring social exclusion* (ECE/CES/2021/5 and 5/Add.1).

34. The Conference welcomed the *Guide on producing CPI under lockdown*.

35. The Conference encouraged countries to implement the materials, supported the directions for future work identified in the documents, and asked the CES Bureau to consider how to implement the proposals for future work.

36. The Conference took note of the rotation of the members of IAEG-SDG and HLG-PCCB from UNECE region for the 2021-2023 term. The nominations were sent to UNSD in May 2021.

VIII. Programme of work of the Statistics subprogramme of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Documentation: ECE/CES/2021/1, 12-16, 14/Addenda, 15/Add.1, 16/Add.1 and INF.1

37. The Conference confirmed the decisions of the CES Bureau as reflected in their meeting reports, and approved the report on the implementation of the 2020 UNECE Statistical Programme (ECE/CES/2021/14 and Addenda).

38. The Conference adopted the UNECE Statistical Programme for 2021 (ECE/CES/2021/15), including changes to the publications programme (ECE/CES/2021/15/Add.1).

39. The Conference adopted the Programme of Work for 2022 (ECE/CES/2021/16), including lists of planned publications and meetings (ECE/CES/2021/16/add.1). The meetings on gender, migration, and poverty and inequality are denoted in the list as Groups of Experts (previously denoted as work sessions or expert meetings), which corresponds to the status of these meetings and reflects a harmonized approach to meeting names. The Conference recommended the documents to be submitted to the UNECE Executive Committee (EXCOM) for approval.

40. The Conference agreed with the outline of key components of the programme of work of Statistics subprogramme for 2023 (ECE/CES/2021/INF.1).

41. The Conference welcomed the annual report of the Regional UN Coordination Group for Data and Statistics in Europe and Central Asia (ECE/CES/2021/13), and requested the Group to continue reporting annually on its work.

42. The Conference requested the CES Teams of Specialists to regularly report to the Conference, in particular when they have completed an important part of work, and present summaries of electronic consultations on their final outputs.

43. The Conference emphasized the importance of translating into English, French and Russian the main documents for the CES plenary session and the meetings of its Groups of Experts. The main documents include a provisional agenda, a report and one main document

for each agenda sub-item. For the CES plenary session, the main documents include in addition six documents for each sub-session.

44. The Conference emphasized the importance of providing interpretation in English, French and Russian for the CES plenary session and the meetings of the Groups of Experts, and of recording all meetings listed in the meeting calendar.

45. The Conference took note of the decisions of the 69th session of the Economic Commission for Europe and 52nd session of the United Nations Statistical Commissions that have implications for its work, as presented in document ECE/CES/2021/1.

IX. Election of the Conference of European Statisticians Bureau

Documentation: ECE/CES/2021/2

46. The Conference decided to include the ‘Kingmaker’ (the most senior previous Chair or Vice-Chair of the Conference) as a permanent observer in the Bureau.

47. According to the *Rules governing the work of the Conference and its Bureau* and based on the proposal put forward by A. Zigure (Latvia), the Kingmaker, the Conference elected the following Heads of National Statistical Offices to serve on the Bureau for the 2021-2023 term of office:

Padraig Dalton (Ireland) as Chair;
and the following Vice-Chairpersons of the Bureau:

Stepan Mnatsakanyan (Armenia)

Anil Arora (Canada)

Julio Santaella (Mexico)

Mark Sowden (New Zealand)

Dominik Rozkrut (Poland)

Miladin Kovačević (Serbia)

Ian Diamond (United Kingdom); and

Aija Zigure (Latvia), the Kingmaker as a permanent observer.

X. Other business

48. The seventieth CES plenary session is planned to take place on 20-22 a.m. June 2022 (dates to be confirmed) in Geneva. The meeting will be held back-to-back with the OECD Committee on Statistics and Statistical Policy (CSSP). Following the decision in 2020, the meeting will also be held back-to-back with the plenary session of UN-GGIM: Europe with a common session of CES and UN-GGIM: Europe.

49. The Conference asked the CES Bureau to discuss how to celebrate at its 2022 plenary session the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics by UNECE. Countries are invited to volunteer to participate in preparing the anniversary (ECE/CES/2021/12). Albania, Poland and Switzerland expressed willingness to participate in the preparations. Other interested countries are invited to inform the Secretariat (please send an e-mail to: fiona.willis-nunez@un.org).

Annex

Chair's conclusions from the informal session on 23 June

Summary of the discussion on agenda item 2(b): Innovation in National Statistical Offices organization and working arrangements

Documentation: ECE/CES/2021/18-24 and 31

50. The session was organised by New Zealand, Poland and UNECE, and was chaired by D. Rozkrut (Poland). The session was based on papers from Australia, Finland, Germany, Lithuania, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, as well as the summary of a preparatory chief statisticians' sprint session by Poland and the Secretariat. A discussion panel consisted of J. Santaella (Mexico), J. Petrauskiene (Lithuania) and M. Sowden (New Zealand).

51. The session examined how statistical organizations innovated in their working arrangements to adapt to Covid-19, and how to transition to a 'new normal' working environment coming out of the crisis. The session considered the key organisational enablers that allowed NSOs to react quickly, the related obstacles and challenges, and how to sustain staff motivation and the innovations after the pandemic. The following points were raised in the discussion:

(a) The traditional strengths of statistical organizations such as strong data management, technical and statistical capabilities and user support served as key enablers of quick reaction to the crisis. Statistical organizations already held a lot of relevant data which together with new sources and partnerships allowed rapid development of 'frontier' or experimental statistics. These kinds of statistics are not perfect and often not traditionally produced by NSOs but in high demand by users;

(b) The guidance by international organizations and exchange of international experience on how to maintain business continuity in the pandemic conditions was highly appreciated;

(c) During the pandemic timeliness and frequency had a high priority, sometimes at the expense of other quality dimensions. What will be for users the acceptable balance between the quality dimensions after the pandemic needs continued discussion;

(d) Maintaining health, safety and wellbeing of staff, and the utilization of remote and flexible working options was another key enabler, supported by a risk management approach. The role of managers was critical in maintaining motivation of staff when there was little or no physical contact. There is concern that all the long-term effects of the changed mode of work are still not visible;

(e) The Covid-19 pandemic has been a catalyst and accelerator for innovation and statistical organizations have experienced an unprecedented level of change. Some staff adapted to the changes more easily than others. Even though it was sometimes difficult to work remotely, the overall flexibility, creativity and enthusiasm increased;

(f) The legal environment under which the statistical organizations operate was for some countries an obstacle while financial constraints were not so much of an issue. It was noted that the legal framework for official statistics may be too narrow to enable NSOs to take on new roles. A risk averse organizational culture, reputational risk and bureaucracy can also be obstacles;

(g) Central to the theme of innovation are the increased levels of communication and more intensive relationships with customers, researchers and academia that are required to make innovations successful;

(h) Statistical organizations have proven that they can innovate across a broad spectrum of initiatives. Now efforts have to focus on maintaining this ability and sustain willingness to take risks beyond the immediate crisis response phase. The issues that NSOs

must address include: how to keep new sets of products, sustain access to data sources (at no or low costs), continue partnerships, maintain flexible internal processes (including procurement), hybrid teams with staff teleworking as well as present within the NSOs premises, and keep up staff motivation and the sense of providing a critically important public service.
