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Item 11 (a) of the provisional agenda

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

**Reports on the work of the Conference of European Statisticians,
its Bureau and Teams of Specialists**

Report of the Conference of European Statisticians 2024 February Bureau meeting

Prepared by the Secretariat

Summary

The report presents the key outcomes of the Conference of European Statisticians Bureau meeting which took place in Geneva, Switzerland on 14 and 15 February 2024.

The report is submitted to the Conference of European Statisticians for confirming the decisions.



I. Opening of the meeting

1. The meeting of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) was held in Geneva, Switzerland on 14 and 15 February 2024. The following members of the Bureau attended: E. Dhuli (Albania), A. Arora (Canada), K. Phelan (representing P. Dalton, Ireland), G. Márquez (Mexico), R. Milicich (representing M. Sowden, New Zealand), D. Rozkrut (Poland), I. Diamond (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) and B. Begalov (Uzbekistan). The following permanent observers also attended: K. Laykam (Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-Stat)), M. Kotzeva (Eurostat), A. Kroese (International Monetary Fund (IMF)) and P. Schreyer (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)). In the absence of the Chair, A. Arora (Canada) chaired the meeting.
2. The following persons assisted members of the Bureau: A. Diaz (Mexico), F. Hewitt (New Zealand), K. Newton (United Kingdom), U. Noipov (Uzbekistan), A. Kosarev (CIS-Stat) and M. J. Santos (Eurostat).
3. T. Luige (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)) acted as Secretary of the meeting supported by M. Cwiek (UNECE). C. Boldsen, I. Choi, S. Derivolcov, T. Dimova, V. Etropolska, J. Gessendorfer, T. Gjaltema, T. Kolomiyets, M. Nagy, R. Peltola, P. Valente, A. Vikat, S. Wang and F. Willis-Nunez of UNECE participated. B. Baribeau, S. Dufour and F. Rizzolo (Canada), S. Svantesson (Denmark), U. Lee, K. Kivi and J. Tael (Estonia), P. McElvaney (Ireland), E. Schulte Nordholt and O. Swertz (the Netherlands), F. Lima, M. J. Gaspar Tavares Zilhão and P. Saraiva Dos Santos (Portugal), and T. Garner (United States of America) participated in selected agenda items through online connection at the invitation of the Chair.
4. The United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) sent written comments on selected agenda items. The comments were presented to the Bureau and taken into account in the discussion.
5. The CES Bureau met online with the new UNECE Executive Secretary, Ms. Tatiana Molcean, who took office on 1 September 2023. Ms. Molcean emphasized the importance of official statistics for providing insight and evidence for policymaking. She noted the key role of the Bureau in steering the CES work and ensuring that it focuses on areas where CES can bring the maximum value for the international statistical community.

II. In-depth reviews of selected statistical areas

A. Linking data across domains and sources

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2024/FEB/2 by Canada, and 2/Add.1 by UNECE

6. The in-depth review of linking data across sources and domains was based on a paper by Canada and a note by UNECE. The following points were made in the discussion:

(a) The paper gives a very good overview of the issues related to linking data focusing on strategic and managerial issues: the need for data linking, and the related challenges and opportunities. The proposal to develop a road map would be a constructive way forward in international work on this topic;

(b) Linking data plays a key role in the repositioning of national statistical offices (NSOs) from data providers to producers of relevant statistical indicators and insights in response to the increasing need for multidimensional statistical information. This is an existential issue and requires a cultural change from NSOs but also from the holders of administrative and other data sources. Data linking is not new but the type and number of data sets that can be linked makes a transformative change possible. It will remain a strategically important issue for years to come;

(c) A systematic approach is needed to change the mindset instead of only reacting to requests. NSOs need to have a formalized role in data linking and could become user gateways coordinating data linkages within their national statistical systems;

(d) The level of social acceptability of data linking in countries is different: in some countries it is well accepted while in some others it raises concerns. In countries where there is no system of unique identifiers or no population register, establishing data linkages poses significant challenges. This further emphasizes the importance of communication, transparency and partnerships;

(e) NSOs may be entrusted with linking data from different sources but not allowed to hand over the linked data to other institutions for legal or public acceptance reasons. This asymmetry may be difficult to accept to other parts of the government. The institutional setup between NSOs and the rest of the administration should have the right balance;

(f) Metadata, terminology and classifications need to be better harmonized to facilitate linking data. For example, the term ‘administrative data’ has different meanings in different countries;

(g) Data linking is related to data sharing. They should be addressed at the same level of importance, driven by user demands. The horizontal and demand-specific issues need to be looked at the same time;

(h) Data linking allows to produce integrated data across domains. This increases the need to support users, who may be experts in their own domains, but not in others;

(i) Linking data is a big topic with many aspects, including horizontal issues such as terminology, advocacy, social acceptability, techniques and communication, and domain-specific issues that could be embedded in the agenda of different thematic groups;

(j) Rather than creating a new group, the discussion of horizontal issues and the development of a road map should be considered by the High-Level Group for the Modernisation of Official Statistics (HLG-MOS) and its groups on Applying Data Science and Modern Methods, and on Supporting Standards;

(k) A short questionnaire could be prepared identifying how different countries link data. On this basis case studies and examples could be collected;

(l) In the United Kingdom, data linkage plays an important role in the statistical production across the government and in cooperation with the academia and research. The Office for National Statistics data linkage team would like to be involved in future work on this topic;

(m) CIS-Stat is willing to participate in developing a road map.

Conclusion

7. HLG-MOS will consider including horizontal issues related to linking data in its work programme and in the agenda of its groups – namely those on Applying Data Science and Modern Methods and on Supporting Standards – as far as possible and whenever those issues are related to the mandates of the respective groups.

8. The Bureau invites HLG-MOS to develop a road map on linking data, based on the outcomes of the in-depth review.

9. Issues related to linking data across sources and domains should be mainstreamed in the programme of work of subject-matter groups working under CES and included in the agenda of expert meetings whenever relevant. This could entail collecting examples from countries to be shared and disseminated.

10. Canada will update the paper to reflect the points raised in the discussion. The updated paper will be sent for electronic consultation to all CES members in March–April 2024.

11. The Bureau will follow up on the progress on this topic in the coming years.

B. Timeliness, frequency and granularity of official statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2024/FEB/3 led by Canada and Portugal

12. The Bureau reviewed in depth the topic of timeliness, frequency and granularity of official statistics based on a paper prepared by Canada and Portugal. Countries and organizations who contributed to the in-depth review include Colombia, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and OECD.

13. A seminar on this topic was held during the seventy-first CES plenary session in June 2023. The paper summarized the key findings from the CES seminar and incorporated further inputs and responses collected through a questionnaire to present a thorough overview of the subject and formulate recommendations for further steps.

14. The following points were made in the discussion:

(a) Many NSOs have been striving to produce more timely, frequent and granular data. An important challenge for NSOs in addressing the evolving data needs lies in effectively obtaining and using new data sources;

(b) The new data sources should be considered as important as traditional sources, considering both their advantages and associated risks. This requires an internal culture change to foster innovation and risk-taking, and leadership with strategic foresight;

(c) It is crucial for NSOs to ensure the reliability, regularity and sustainability of data to be able to build the new sources into a regular production cycle. The new sources have cost implications and possible limitations on their use, but they may allow for obtaining new data and achieving timeliness, frequency and granularity that were not possible before;

(d) Collaboration and knowledge sharing within the organization, as well as effective communication and strong partnerships with data providers are needed. NSOs can opt to establish a dedicated unit for innovation which could be more open to experimentation. At the same time it is important to integrate innovation across the organization. For example, communities of practice can generate a lot of enthusiasm and grassroot innovation;

(e) It is essential to maintain a steady and regular supply of granular data not only during emergency situations like earthquakes and pandemics but also during normal times. There is a rising demand for local data by local leaders to inform local decision-making processes;

(f) The use of new data sources often requires investment and may be costly to put in place, even when the data are or seem to be accessible for free. However, there are not many other options to meet the increasing data needs and improve data timeliness, frequency and granularity;

(g) It was suggested to merge the recommendations at international level and at national level into one section in the paper, as they are interconnected and relevant to all statistical organizations;

(h) The issues raised in the paper are relevant to all domains of official statistics. Therefore, the paper should be also brought to attention of the current expert groups working under CES.

Conclusion

15. The CES Bureau supported the recommendations in the paper. Canada and Portugal may wish to update the paper to take into account the points raised in the discussion. The paper will be sent for electronic consultation to all CES members in March–April 2024.

C. Selection of topics for in-depth reviews in 2024–2025 and the 2024 plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2024/FEB/5 and 5/Add.1 by UNECE

16. The Bureau discussed the topics to be reviewed in-depth in 2024–2025, and the topics to be discussed at the 2024 CES plenary session, based on the outcomes of the electronic consultation in January 2024 and a proposal prepared by the Secretariat. The following comments were made:

(a) Both seminar topics were supported;

(b) OECD will also consider Artificial Intelligence (AI) at its Committee on Statistics and Statistical Policy (CSSP) meeting but from a different angle. It is important to ensure complementarity of the two meetings;

(c) An in-depth review on ageing-related statistics presents a good opportunity for synergies between the statistical and policy work. The Population Unit in the UNECE Statistical Division stands ready to support the review from policy side.

17. The proposed new topics could be grouped together as follows:

(a) Innovative methods and approaches to enhance the production of official statistics – this topic could cover alternate data sources, differential intersectional approaches, methods to improve response rates to household surveys, and mixed mode surveys;

(b) Engaging citizens, and effective communication to enhance societal participation in national statistical systems – the topic could cover decreasing response rates, respondent burden, citizen generated data, and effective communication with respondents in digitalized world.

Conclusion

18. The following topics were selected for discussion at the CES 2024 plenary session:

(a) Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Large Language Models (LLM) in official statistics (organized by Canada and Germany);

(b) Implementation of the 2025 System of National Accounts (SNA) in the CES member countries (organized by Canada, the Netherlands, Eurostat, IMF and OECD).

19. The following topics were selected for in-depth reviews in February 2025:

(a) Building social acceptability through improving statistical literacy (possibly led by Ireland (tbc); countries offering contributions: Albania, Belgium, Canada, Ireland, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, Poland);

(b) Halfway to 2030 – lessons learned from providing statistics for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (lead country to be identified; countries offering contributions: Belarus, Israel, Kyrgyzstan, Poland, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan);

(c) Ageing-related statistics (lead country to be identified, United Kingdom is one possibility (tbc); countries/organizations offering contributions: Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia and UNECE Population Unit).

20. The Secretariat will follow-up with countries and organizations to confirm the leaders for the reviews.

21. The Secretariat will also group some of the proposed new topics together, as suggested, to be put on the list of topics for the CES seminars and in-depth reviews in the next cycle.

III. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe statistical work and the Conference of European Statisticians teams of specialists

A. Migration and mobility (terms of reference)

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2024/FEB/6 by UNECE

22. The Bureau discussed the proposed terms of reference for a Task Force on defining and measuring new forms of international migration. The following points were made in the discussion:

- (a) There was universal support to the terms of reference;
- (b) The new Task Force should build upon the work being carried out at the global level, including the revision of the recommendations on international migration;
- (c) Links with discussions on new sources and new types of data were pointed out. For instance, data on passports, passenger information, mobile phone use and credit card transactions could be used to provide information on length of time out of the country, or on motivations behind the travel;
- (d) Canada and Ireland expressed willingness to join the Task Force;
- (e) IMF is working on forced displacement with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and expressed willingness to contribute to the Task Force;
- (f) OECD confirmed its willingness to contribute to the Task Force, in particular on the measurement of short-term movements.

Conclusion

23. The Bureau approved the terms of reference of the Task Force on defining and measuring new forms of international migration, subject to amendments to reflect the work being carried out at the global level.

24. The work plan of the new Task Force will be presented at the meeting of the UNECE Group of Experts on Migration Statistics in Geneva on 7 and 8 May 2024 where interested countries will be invited to join the Task Force.

B. Data stewardship (terms of reference)

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2024/FEB/7 by UNECE

25. CES endorsed the report *Data stewardship and the role of national statistical offices in the new data ecosystem* in June 2023. In October 2023, the Bureau highlighted the importance of continuing work on data stewardship and asked for draft terms of reference for a task force on this topic to be submitted in February 2024.

26. The Bureau reviewed the draft terms of reference for a Task Force on the changing role of national statistical offices in data ecosystems prepared by the Secretariat in consultation with members of the previous Task Force and countries who have indicated interest in the work. The Bureau also discussed the priorities in this work.

27. The following points were made in the discussion:

- (a) It is important to align the workplans between regional and global initiatives and ensure that the outputs complement each other. Having discussions at different fora has an added value of considering issues from different perspectives and taking into account the different situations in countries;

(b) The collaboration between the global working group on data stewardship and the new CES Task Force on refining the glossary of terms should continue. The key definitions must be applicable in the different country contexts;

(c) The Task Force should look at specific statistical areas for which system-wide data stewardship is essential. One of such examples is climate change-related statistics, as the relevant data is distributed across many national stakeholders;

(d) Mexico noted the following themes as priority areas of work:

(i) For work stream “Identifying core responsibilities of NSOs as data stewards”: challenges/barriers and opportunities for a leadership role in data stewardship by NSOs; scaling up the role that NSOs perform for the national statistical system to the data ecosystem more broadly; and partnerships and collaboration with stakeholders in the data ecosystem;

(ii) For work stream “Providing a forum for systematization and exchange of experience”: data stewardship-related best practices, guiding principles, frameworks, examples of policy instruments, implementation activities and data literacy promotion; and data governance operating models.

Conclusion

28. The CES Bureau approved the terms of reference of the Task Force on the changing role of national statistical offices in data ecosystems. The priorities identified in this work will be considered when the Task Force develops its work plan. Estonia will chair the Task Force. Poland will be added to the list of Task Force members.

C. Population and housing censuses (progress report)

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2024/FEB/8 by the Steering Group on Population and Housing Censuses

29. In February 2021, the Bureau approved the work plan for developing the Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations on Population and Housing Censuses for the 2030 round (ECE/CES/BUR/2021/FEB/6), prepared by the Steering Group on population and housing censuses. The work plan included the establishment of 13 thematic Task Forces to develop specific sections of the Recommendations.

30. The Bureau discussed the progress of work of the 13 Task Forces and the Steering Group since the commencement of their work in 2022, and the plans for 2024. The Recommendations are planned to be submitted to CES for endorsement in 2025.

31. The following points were raised during the discussion:

(a) The plan to review the main typology of census methods and to adjust terminology to accurately reflect the growing diversity of census models is timely and welcome. Current shifts towards significant changes, such as annual administrative-data-based censuses, must be captured and described within any new typology of the main census approaches;

(b) While the CES work pertains to a subset of all the world’s countries, there may be value in connecting with other countries to benefit from their experiences, especially where cutting-edge techniques are being employed to make up for shortfalls in conventional statistical infrastructure such as in some countries of sub-Saharan Africa;

(c) The Task Forces should not feel constrained by tradition and may wish to explore possibilities for censuses to gather information on a broad range of topics and issues, while remaining within the boundaries of what is understood by the term ‘census’;

(d) It will be important for the new Recommendations to give comprehensive guidance on the means of assuring and maintaining continuity when using multiple and external sources. The importance of building strong partnerships for data acquisition should be emphasized in the Recommendations;

- (e) The Recommendations should reflect the growing share of censuses and of census data gathered using digital technologies and/or produced from administrative sources;
- (f) The changes underway in many countries must be accompanied by efforts to secure and bolster public support. Public consultations are crucial in this regard.

Conclusion

- 32. The Bureau supported the progress of the work as described in the report.
- 33. The proposals for both interactive online and paper/pdf format for the two publications (Census Recommendations and Practices in Censuses of the 2020 Round) were supported. A paper version of both documents must be made available for those who still prefer this format, while an interactive tool will greatly enhance the utility of the material. The Bureau took note of the limitations posed by resource constraints which will impact the possibilities for the format of the final products.

D. Modernization of official statistics – report on 2023 and plans for 2024

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2024/FEB/4 and Add.1 by HLG-MOS

34. The Bureau reviewed the outcomes of work of the High-Level Group for the Modernisation of Official Statistics (HLG-MOS) in 2023 and plans for 2024, including the selected priority projects. The Bureau members strongly supported the work of the HLG-MOS and highlighted its important impact for a broad community. The Bureau also commended the co-chairs of the Executive Board, S. Dufour (Canada) and J. Banim (Ireland), as well as the UNECE Secretariat for the excellent work.

35. The following points were raised during the discussion:

- (a) Bringing people together and delivering outputs without any legal obligations or structure proves the usefulness of HLG-MOS;

- (b) The Generic Statistical Information Model (GSIM) is more complex than the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) or Generic Activity Model for Statistical Organizations (GAMSO). While this important model helps ensuring that information systems are well interconnected, there is room for making the benefits of GSIM more known and understandable;

- (c) Many LLM examples are not necessarily relevant to official statistics. We need to identify strong use cases for official statistics and work together to develop concrete solutions that can be used. There are currently a lot of fears and concerns around LLM, we need to focus on making it work instead of being impeded by the risks;

- (d) The official statistics community should be more open for collaboration with other communities, e.g., government institutions (including central banks), universities and private sector. The concerns about ethics go beyond the statistical community. It would be important to foster a better mutual understanding with the external stakeholders such as civil society to explain why we are working on it and what we are discussing;

- (e) In the context of growing constraints on budget, the work under HLG-MOS is even more important. Working together allows both to save money and improve quality. Something can be developed on GitHub and shared across the community;

- (f) HLG-MOS work combines the top-down and bottom-up approaches. The Bureau plays an important role of guiding the HLG-MOS work. At the same time, HLG-MOS has a well-working bottom-up approach, and its expert networks are well connected across various NSOs to identify emerging collaboration needs;

- (g) It is important to maintain the approach of making the HLG-MOS projects time-bound, otherwise people may start disengaging;

- (h) Many ideas from HLG-MOS have sparked discussions and stimulated work within statistical organizations, extending its impact beyond direct participants. Concrete

metrics (e.g., global usage of GSBPM) and monitoring how different organizations are using HLG-MOS outputs (e.g., not just how many, but how) would provide useful insights.

Conclusion

36. The Bureau approved the report on the implementation of the HLG-MOS work programme in 2023, and the plans for 2024.

E. Environmental Statistics and Indicators

37. Since 2009, a UNECE Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators has been meeting as a joint body under two UNECE Sectoral Committees: the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) and the Conference of European Statisticians. In February 2023, the CES Bureau decided to convert the group into a standing body under CES and CEP, called a Joint Working Group on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, and approved its terms of reference (TOR). The CES plenary session endorsed the TOR in June 2023.

38. However, the Committee on Environmental Policy at its November 2023 session did not approve the TOR of the group and requested more detail on its operating modalities. The Bureau was informed about the developments.

Conclusion

39. The Bureau emphasized the importance of environment statistics and asked the Secretariat to identify the best way forward to ensure the continuity of this work while making sure that it does not duplicate work done elsewhere.

F. Information about recent outputs by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Statistical Division

1. Annual report on progress assessment on Sustainable Development Goals in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region

40. At the request of the sixty-eighth session of UNECE, the UNECE Statistical Division has been preparing annual reports on assessing progress towards SDGs in the UNECE region since 2020. The report is based on the data from the United Nations global SDG database and the UNECE statistical database and includes contributions from different United Nations regional agencies and Country Teams. A [dashboard of SDG indicators](#) is available in English and Russian. The report provides an important input to the UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development.

41. The Bureau was informed about the 2024 report, that was to be issued just after the CES Bureau meeting. It showed that the region is on track to achieve only 20 targets (17 per cent of the 117 measurable targets) by 2030. For 80 targets (up from 79 last year), progress needs to accelerate, and for 17 targets (up from 15 last year), the current trend must be reversed. For 52 targets the assessment is not possible, either because there is no data, or a desired quantitative target value cannot be set.

42. It was noted that for the users it may be difficult to orient among the many available databases, dashboards and reports with SDG indicators. On the other hand, organizations often have explicit mandates to prepare reports and dashboards on SDGs. Having many sources available makes data more easily accessible. There is a good convergence around the global indicator database which is the official source of SDG indicator data.

43. The abundance of sources becomes a problem when those sources tell a different story or show developments in different directions. Tracking progress does not mean ranking countries which may be of concern, especially if different approaches lead to different rankings.

44. NSOs should have a central role in providing SDG data and ensuring data comparability. It is the task of official statisticians to simplify things and differentiate a signal from the noise.

45. OECD publishes annually a report on distance to SDG targets which has a somewhat different approach, covering OECD countries, and using additional information from OECD databases to cover gaps in SDG indicators. It can be useful to contact the OECD experts who prepare the report to see whether something could be done jointly, or additional features could be included in line with the OECD report.

2. Online inventory of thematic and extended accounts

46. The Bureau was informed about an online inventory of thematic and extended accounts prepared by UNECE as a follow-up to an in-depth review on this topic in 2019. The inventory provides information about 950 accounts from almost one hundred countries, covering nearly 40 different topics. It serves as an easy route for statistical offices wishing to learn from others as they compile their own accounts. For comprehensiveness, the inventory also presents information and links to the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA). The inventory is updated in close cooperation with UNSD and integrates the results from the Global Assessments on Environmental-Economic Accounting. Work with Eurostat and OECD on improving the coverage of selected types of accounts is underway.

47. The Bureau considered the inventory a very useful tool for sharing experience, including for the work towards the 2025 SNA. It was noted that, though the inventory serves a different purpose, cooperation with United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (CEECA) on presentation of the results is important to provide consistent information. It was also mentioned that support from other regional commissions could be useful in updating the inventory.

IV. Strategic developments in official statistics – follow-up to discussion in October 2023

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2024/FEB/9 by UNECE

48. In October 2023, the Bureau had an open discussion about issues of strategic importance for official statistics, the work of NSOs and the Conference of European Statisticians. A short summary paper on strategic directions will be presented to the CES 2024 plenary session, along with a paper from the geospatial experts, as a basis for a joint discussion.

49. The Bureau considered how to take on board the outcome of this discussion in the work of CES and Bureau, based on a proposal by the Secretariat. The Bureau also noted that it is healthy to regularly consider priorities to ensure that we are spending our limited resources on the right things. A number of issues raised are already taken on board in the current work. The discussion focused on these issues that are not explicitly addressed in the work programme.

50. The following points were raised concerning the three topics identified in the paper:

(a) Partnership with academia and researchers:

(i) The issue is strategically important for official statistics and continuing with close cooperation and partnership with the academia is imperative. There are two sides to the issue: what statistics can offer to the academia, and how academia can be more involved in statistical work;

(ii) The topic needs to be refined – there are many angles to that theme, such as the collaboration modalities, which thematic areas are best suited for collaboration, how to create a win-win situation, innovation (related to work of HLG-MOS and AI), access to microdata, etc.;

(iii) Poland offered to lead any future work on this topic;

(b) Decreasing response rates and difficulties to reach respondents:

(i) This topic can be bundled with a number of issues under the theme of engaging citizens and effective communication to enhance societal participation in the national statistical system. It can be combined also with the proposals for new topics by Italy

and the United Kingdom under the consultation on topics in January (see document ECE/CES/BUR/2024/FEB/5/Add.1). The United Kingdom is interested to contribute to a discussion on this topic;

(ii) Similar topics are considered by the OECD Committee on Statistics and Statistical Policy (CSSP), it will be useful to coordinate with them;

(iii) This theme is also related to linking data and new sources. It was noted that mixing with other sources and collaborating with other data providers can help to cope with the falling response rates;

(c) State of trust in and awareness of official statistics in the society:

(i) A broader theme could be formulated around the whole notion of state of trust in official statistics, linked also with social acceptability, statistical literacy, engaging citizens and effective communications;

(ii) There is in general good trust in official statistics, but the issue is the decreasing relevance. Users go to other sources because these are quicker, more granular, more flexible and appealing.

Conclusion

51. The Secretariat will reformulate the topics based on the issues raised in the discussion and linking also with the possible topics for further work under point II(c).

V. Preparation of the 2024 plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians

A. First seminar session at the 2024 plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2024/FEB/10 by UNECE

52. Based on the results of an electronic consultation on topics for the CES 2024 seminars carried out in January 2024, the topic with the highest number of preferences was “**Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Large Language Models (LLM) in official statistics**” (45 votes).

53. The following ten countries and one organization volunteered to contribute to the seminar: Brazil, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Mexico, Norway, Türkiye, United Kingdom, IMF. Canada is ready to lead or co-lead the seminar, and Germany is ready to organize the first, general part.

54. The outline of the seminar, formulated based on the description of topics as consulted with the CES members in January 2024, was presented for the consideration to the Bureau. The following points were raised in the discussion:

(a) The topic is incredibly important for the future of NSOs, it can fundamentally change the way NSOs work and improve productivity, thus allowing to provide better services to citizens;

(b) The topic is, by nature, technical. However, it would be important to bring in the strategic and leadership aspects – how to navigate through misinformation and disinformation era where other players could portray themselves as ‘official statistics provider’, how to influence discussions in the public and private sectors (e.g., giving more prominence to good quality official statistics), how to manage people who might fear losing their job, and how to effectively operate within a pace of change beyond one’s control;

(c) Other aspects that can be considered include statistical legislation (to use AI in the production of official statistics), infrastructure (e.g., what are the basic elements in infrastructure that could support the implementation of AI) and their inclusion in GSBPM;

(d) The seminar could potentially cover various themes and aspects. However, if the scope of the seminar is overly broad, it may result in a general discussion lacking depth. Conversely, if the scope is too narrow, the seminar might overlook the multifaceted impacts and aspects of the topic;

(e) The seminar should be focused on three–four areas that are most important and relevant to statistical organizations and start with examples showing the real possibility of machine learning (ML)/AI when done responsibly. On this basis can build further discussion around institutional arrangements, skills and other issues. Suggested focus areas are around the improvement of analysis, automation and communication;

(f) It will be also important to balance between the first topic (ML) which can go into technical details and the second topic (generative AI) which is at a more general level;

(g) Unlike in the past where statistical organizations developed solutions that were ready for implementation, it takes more time to implement ML/AI-based solutions and there are many failures. An important message to convey is that this journey will be long, and countries are welcome to bring examples that are not finished or had challenges;

(h) NSOs should engage with partners in the national statistical system which are on a similar journey such as central banks;

(i) There is potential to work together on universal use cases (e.g., AI-powered dissemination tool based on Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX)), but these should not only be developed together but also maintained together.

Conclusion

55. The Bureau selected the “Use of Artificial Intelligence and Large Language Models in official statistics” as a topic for the first seminar at the 2024 CES plenary session. The seminar should focus on areas where AI has positive impacts on the statistical organizations while looking at the strategic and managerial aspects. The seminar structure will be developed in collaboration with the seminar leads (Canada and Germany) and the UNECE Secretariat and taking into account that it takes place during the joint day with the Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for Europe (UN-GGIM: Europe). The seminar will be held on 20 June.

B. Second seminar session at the 2024 plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians

Documentation: ECE/CES/ BUR/2024/FEB/11 by UNECE

56. Based on the results of an electronic consultation on topics for the CES 2024 seminars carried out in January 2024, the topic with the second highest number of preferences was “**Implementation of the 2025 SNA in the CES member countries**” (32 votes). The following seven countries and one organization volunteered to contribute to the seminar: Australia, Canada, Ireland, Lithuania, New Zealand, Russian Federation, United Kingdom and IMF.

57. The outline of the seminar, formulated based on the description of topics as consulted with the CES members in January 2024, was presented for consideration for the CES Bureau. The following points were raised during the discussion:

(a) The updated SNA will be formally adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2025. However, the list of main recommendations for the update was approved already in March 2024 (except for the recommendation on marketing assets). The seminar would be an opportunity to bring Chief Statisticians up to date with major changes and discuss priorities, challenges and resources needed for the implementation;

(b) The seminar should also address the update of the Balance of Payments Manual, which is done in parallel and in close coordination with the SNA update. It should also build on lessons learned from the implementation of the previous updates of the two macroeconomic standards;

(c) The seminar will consist of two parts. The first part, to be organized by Eurostat, IMF and OECD, would inform the Chief Statisticians about the expected key changes in the 2025 SNA and about any recent activities undertaken by international organizations with respect to developing implementation guidance, outreach and early testing of the draft recommendations;

(d) The second part would focus on the implementation challenges in countries and the support countries would need from international organizations, in particular the role that CES could play in this process. Canada and the Netherlands will take lead in organizing the second part of the seminar;

(e) The seminar should also include a discussion on the role of international data sharing. Data sharing is key for the proper implementation of several new elements in the SNA. If NSOs are not able to share data, reducing asymmetries will be very difficult;

(f) It is important to also involve countries with less developed statistical systems. This would help to understand their specific challenges and to leave no country behind.

Conclusion

58. The Bureau selected “Implementation of the 2025 SNA in the CES member countries” as the topic for the second seminar at the 2024 CES plenary session. The Bureau highlighted the importance of informing Chief Statisticians of the main changes in the 2025 SNA and discussing the resource implications and challenges countries with the different capacities will face. The seminar should also reflect on how international organizations and CES countries could join efforts to provide the needed support. The seminar structure will be developed in collaboration with the lead organizers (Canada, the Netherlands, Eurostat, IMF, and OECD) and the UNECE Secretariat. The seminar will be held on 21 June.

C. Draft agenda and timetable for the 2024 plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians

Documentation: ECE/CES/ BUR/2024/FEB/12 by UNECE

59. The Secretariat presented the draft provisional agenda for the 2024 CES plenary session.

Conclusion

60. The CES 2024 plenary session will take place in Geneva on 20 and 21 June 2024, back-to-back with the OECD CSSP meeting (which will be held in Paris on 17 and 18 June, allowing 19 June for transfer between Paris and Geneva).

61. On 20 June there will be a joint day with the European regional committee of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM: Europe).

VI. Conference of European Statisticians’ guidelines and recommendations for endorsement in 2024

A. Role of national statistical offices in achieving national climate objectives

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2024/FEB/13 by the Task Force

62. The Bureau reviewed the *Guidance on the role of national statistical offices in achieving national climate objectives* developed by a dedicated Task Force (chaired by O. Swertz, the Netherlands). The Bureau expressed support for the report, which provides a comprehensive overview of the reporting requirements related to the enhanced transparency framework under the Paris Agreement and emphasizes the importance of high-quality climate change-related statistics. The following comments were made:

(a) The document will provide valuable guidance for NSOs and other producers of climate change-related statistics. More information could be provided on how NSOs can collaborate with other stakeholders such as civil society organizations and the private sector, to produce high quality climate change-related statistics;

(b) Climate change is a mainstream issue with serious economic implications. Information needs are big and concern not only environment ministries but also finance ministries and central banks, which need data about risks, subsidies, mitigation and adaptation. NSOs should respond to these needs through cooperation, communication, capacity development and exercising a leadership role as data stewards. NSOs are not exclusive data providers in this area but they can bring together data from various agencies and make them useful;

(c) IMF informed about mainstreaming of climate change throughout the organization and its work on the third phase of the G20 Data Gaps Initiative (DGI-3), which is open to all who would like to contribute.

63. Further, the Bureau was informed about the outcomes of the UNECE COP28 side event “Enabling climate action through data, transparency and finance” and the general takeaways from the COP28. The following comments were made:

(a) COP28 is one avenue of increasing engagement with policymakers, but a holistic, multiprong approach using consistent messages is needed to make a difference with the limited resources available. It is not enough to produce reliable data and statistics – statisticians need to be visible and active in the fora where the policymakers are present. We should build on what has already been achieved by the statistical community in other areas to answer the big cross-cutting environmental questions;

(b) There is general recognition of what statistical community can do. However, statisticians need to be part of the policy dialogue to understand what is really needed and develop our products in close cooperation with policymakers. There are already good examples, such as the G20 DGI-3 – based on what the ministers of finance and central bank governors need. For example, at a national level, the Canadian Centre for Energy Information is a place of regular dialogue with energy producers and ministries of environments;

(c) Organizations who are involved more directly can open the doors for others. Official statistics has to work its way in, prove relevance and earn recognition. It is important to get on the ground, understand what questions need answer, who is best placed to provide it, and what is NSOs role alongside other stakeholders;

(d) NSOs should also be part of a solution in very practical ways, at all levels – from interacting with citizens, through national to international. Citizen science is a good example where official statistics can bring in strong statistical methodology and turn the collected data into useful and policy-relevant information.

Conclusion

64. The Bureau emphasized the importance of climate change-related statistics. The draft *Guidance on the role of national statistical offices in achieving national climate objectives* will be sent for an electronic consultation to all CES members. Subject to a positive outcome of the consultation, the document will be submitted to the 2024 CES plenary session for endorsement.

65. A strategy should be developed on how to improve visibility and involvement of the statistical community in the climate policy dialogue at all levels, leverage the work of existing groups for maximum impact, and monitor the effectiveness of action taken. The Bureau asked the Secretariat to prepare a proposal on how to take it forward.

B. Subjective poverty measures

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2024/FEB/14 by the Task Force

66. In February 2022, the CES Bureau established a Task Force to develop a guide on measuring subjective poverty, including a set of subjective poverty indicators that could be used for international comparison.

67. The CES Bureau reviewed the draft *Guide on subjective poverty* and expressed strong appreciation for the work of the Task Force. The Bureau welcomed the proposed recommendations and considered the document as an important and useful practical guide to countries. The following points were made in the discussion:

(a) The guide contains a number of poverty measures that are important for various purposes and data demands. It has been a successful complementary work to the already existing guidance on poverty measurement, including the *Guide on Poverty Measurement* and *Poverty Measurement: Guide to Data Disaggregation*;

(b) Standard survey instruments may sometimes miss marginalized groups, such as Roma and the travelling community who do not live in a standard housing. Even in the lowest decile, poverty is not uniformly distributed, therefore, statisticians need to make sure that they do not miss any major groups. The Bureau underlined the need for qualitative work to build survey questions in this context and highlighted the importance of the recommendation on considering the survey mode;

(c) It is important to recognize that there could be a disjunction between different communities in understanding poverty as often a lived experience of poverty is needed to understand what poverty is. At the lowest end of the income distribution people may work at several jobs to survive. They need to make hard decisions about where to buy and what to buy to make ends meet in a period of high cost of living. Subjective and qualitative measures can help find better ways of understanding people's lived experiences and the strategies they use when faced with financial challenges;

(d) It is important to assess the effectiveness of subjective measures for policy formulation. With the view towards ensuring the continuity of this work, it is critical to specify the kind of information gap that subjective measures fill and the way in which subjective measures allow policymakers make better decisions.

Conclusion

68. The Bureau expressed strong support to the work on measuring subjective poverty. The *Guide on subjective poverty* will be sent to CES members for an electronic consultation. Subject to a positive outcome of the consultation, the document will be submitted to the CES 2024 plenary session for endorsement.

C. The Generic Statistical Information Model (GSIM, version 2.0)

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2024/FEB/15 by the Task Team

69. The Bureau considered the latest update of the Generic Statistical Information Model (GSIM). The GSIM version 2.0 was prepared to take into account feedback from several sources, including from a CES-wide consultation in summer 2023. It was released in a GitHub repository at the end of 2023. The previous version, GSIM 1.2, was endorsed by the Conference in 2019. The Bureau was invited to comment on the new version of GSIM and decide whether it could be submitted to CES 2024 plenary session for endorsement.

70. The following points were made in the discussion:

(a) GSIM complements other standards such as SDMX. There is an ecosystem of different standards, and work is currently underway to enhance their integration and interoperability;

(b) GSIM is relevant to the automation of processes for producing statistics and is therefore relevant to the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM);

(c) The release of GSIM version 2.0 in GitHub presents opportunities for collaborative development on its future updates;

(d) GSIM and the Common Statistical Production Architecture (CSPA) are more complex to use than GSBPM and the Generic Activity Model for Statistical Organizations (GAMSO), and therefore need more supporting and explanatory materials.

Conclusion

71. The GSIM 2.0 will be submitted to CES 2024 plenary session for endorsement.

VII. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Statistics programme of work documents

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2024/FEB/16, 17, 18 by UNECE

72. The Bureau reviewed three documents related to the implementation of the UNECE Statistics subprogramme prepared in the context of the United Nations Secretariat's planning and reporting process: the report on the implementation of the Statistical Programme 2023, the draft programme of work for 2025 and the outline of key components of the UNECE Statistics Subprogramme for 2026.

Conclusion

73. The Bureau approved the Report on the implementation of the Statistics Programme 2023 (ECE/CES/BUR/2024/FEB/16) and the draft Programme of Work for 2025 (ECE/CES/BUR/2024/FEB/17). Both documents will be submitted to the CES 2024 plenary session for adoption.

74. The outline of key components of the UNECE Statistics Subprogramme for 2026 (ECE/CES/BUR/2024/FEB/18) was sent to the Bureau for possible comments and suggestions after the meeting (with a deadline of two weeks). There were no suggested changes to the text, so this document is also approved and will be submitted to the CES 2024 plenary session.

VIII. Dates and venues of next meetings

75. The Bureau confirmed the dates and venues of the next CES Bureau meetings as follows:

- (a) 9 and 10 October 2024 in Poland (hosted by Statistics Poland);
- (b) 12 and 13 February 2025;
- (c) 15 and 16 October 2025;
- (d) 11 and 12 February 2026.

76. The seventy-second CES plenary session will take place on 20 and 21 June 2024 in Geneva, back-to-back with the meetings of the UN-GGIM: Europe (19 and 20 June, Geneva, with a joint day on 20 June) and the OECD Committee on Statistics and Statistical Policy (17 and 18 June, Paris).

77. The seventy-third CES plenary session will take place during the week of 16–20 June 2025 (exact dates and venue tbc).

IX. Other business

78. After the retirement of Ms. Aija Zigure, the Kingmaker for CES and its Bureau, Mr. Stepan Mnatsakanyan (Armenia) is the most senior former Vice-Chair of the Bureau. According to the *Rules and procedures governing the work of the Conference of European Statisticians and its Bureau* (ECE/CES/2019/2), he is now taking up the task of being a Kingmaker for CES.