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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 2023 October 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 Cardiff, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on 9 and 10 October 2023.

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



I. Opening by Pádraig Dalton

1. The meeting of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) was held on 9 and 10 October 2023 in Cardiff, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, at the kind invitation of the Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom. The following members of the Bureau participated: E. Dhuli (Albania), S. Mnatsakanyan (Armenia), A. Arora (Canada), P. Dalton (Ireland), A. Zigure (Latvia), G. Márquez (Mexico), M. Sowden (New Zealand), D. Rozkrut (Poland) and N. Shearman (representing I. Diamond, United Kingdom). The following permanent observers also attended: A. Khrenov (representing K. Laykam, Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-Stat)), M. Kotzeva (Eurostat) and P. Schreyer (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)). P. Dalton (Ireland) chaired the meeting. Part of the delegates were present in Cardiff while others participated through an online connection.

2. The following persons assisted members of the Bureau: V. Simoni (Albania), A. Safyan (Armenia), K. Phelan (Ireland), I. Zemeskalna (Latvia), A. Diaz (Mexico), R. Milicich and C. Jones (New Zealand), B. Mulcahy (United Kingdom) and M.-J. Santos (Eurostat). T. Luige (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)) served as Secretary of the meeting supported by M. Cwiek (UNECE). C. Boldsen, I. Choi, 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.

3. E. Morgan (United Kingdom) for agenda item 2a, G. Eding (the Netherlands) for item 3a, A. Klintefelt (Denmark) for item 3c, U. Lee (Estonia) and T. Dufour (Canada) for item 3e, A. Dennemann (the Netherlands) and M. McMillan (Canada) for item 3f, A. Ferruzza (Italy) for item 3g, E. Lucey (Ireland) for item 5a, and S. Whitworth (United Kingdom), M. Beaulieu (Canada) and F. Rotundo (Italy) for item 5b participated 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.

II. In-depth reviews of selected statistical areas

A. Use cases for alternative population bases

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2023/OCT/2 by Poland and United Kingdom

5. The Bureau reviewed in depth the topic of use cases for alternative population bases, based on a paper by the United Kingdom, Poland and the Secretariat with contributions from nine countries and organizations.¹

6. The following points were raised in the discussion:

(a) The paper was found excellent, including its exploration of the rationale for using usual residence as the main basis for population counts.

(b) The continued centrality of usual residence as the ‘anchor’ was emphasized, both conceptually and for the continuity of time series.

(c) The new set of CES census recommendations should reflect the suggested clarifications relating the meaning and use of alternative population bases, and the distinction between alternative bases and alternative sources, provided in the paper.

(d) There is a clear need for counts with alternative bases such as workday populations, including for analyses related to climate change and disaster response as well as

¹ Albania, Canada, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Poland, Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and Eurostat.

for transport planning. For many purposes it may be more useful to know about movement and dynamics than to try to assign people to one place.

(e) The word ‘alternative’ may be erroneously interpreted as offering a competing count, suggesting that the usual residence count is not correct. It was recommended to consider using the word ‘supplementary’ instead, to emphasize that these are additional counts to be considered as well as the standard ones.

(f) The emphasis on user engagement was welcomed. The practical challenge will be to identify the most pertinent alternative/supplementary bases demanded by users across a large number of countries, to make it worthwhile to undertake international work on their further development.

(g) The strong links to migration statistics were noted. People who move regularly, especially those who move across borders, may always fall below whatever arbitrary length-of-stay threshold is applied, and therefore not be counted anywhere even in a classical usual residence count.

7. Any further work on this topic must engage closely with other international organizations as well as with CES work streams on related topics, such as hazardous events and disasters.

Conclusion

8. As an interim step, the Bureau requested the Secretariat to ensure that the current CES Census Task Forces on population concepts and definitions, and on migration and mobility, consider the in-depth review paper in their deliberations and add, expand or revise any corresponding definitions and explanations accordingly. In particular, the CES *Recommendations for the 2030 round of population and housing censuses* should clarify terms including ‘alternative (or supplementary) population base’ and should emphasize that this is different from questions related to alternative data sources.

9. Issues about supplementary population bases will be explored further in the CES work related to population and migration statistics.

B. Linking data across domains and sources

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2023/OCT/3 by Canada and Poland

10. The Bureau decided in February 2023 to carry out the in-depth review on linking data across domains and sources in two stages: a preliminary discussion in October 2023 to decide on the focus and gather input, and a full review on this topic in February 2024. The review is led by Canada, with inputs from Poland and other contributors who will receive a questionnaire to inform the review. The preliminary discussion was based on a paper by Canada and Poland.

11. The following comments were made in the discussion:

(a) Linking data is not a new topic but its importance has increased as national statistical offices (NSOs) evolve from being providers of data to providers of services, and are expected to meet the user demand by linking and integrating data from many sources.

(b) Many problems for NSOs can be solved by data linking. However, the work should be not only problem-driven (reactive) but also opportunity-driven (proactive).

(c) NSOs should adopt a systematic approach to linking data, so that when a new data source is adopted there is understanding from the very beginning of how and why that source can be linked to other data sources.

(d) Data linkage and integration are closely connected to data quality. We cannot provide data services if they are not based on good quality data.

(e) NSOs may have a competitive advantage when they are legally allowed and technically capable to link data while others may not be. However, public acceptance of

linking data and trust in NSOs are of crucial importance. This can be achieved and maintained by working closely with privacy groups, research community and other stakeholders.

(f) Various components of data linking should be investigated: 1) reasons for linking – what is the driving force, 2) methods of linking, 3) the required infrastructure.

(g) The questionnaire to collect information from countries should be based on the issues and questions presented in paras. 44–45 of the paper.

Conclusion

12. The Bureau supported moving forward with the full in-depth review as planned, including the collection of information on the topic from countries through a questionnaire, taking into account the outcomes of the discussion summarized above. The Bureau will discuss the full review paper in February 2024.

C. Maintaining relevance through providing products meeting user needs

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2023/OCT/4 by the High-Level Group for the Modernisation of Official Statistics (HLG-MOS)

13. The topic was supported by a number of CES members for an in-depth review or a CES seminar in the e-consultation in January 2023. Before proceeding with the review, the Bureau requested information on related work under HLG-MOS to identify potential gaps requiring review.

14. The Bureau discussed the way forward based on a paper by the Secretariat summarizing the HLG-MOS work on communication. During the discussion, the following comments were made:

(a) The user-centric approach impacts both the production and dissemination processes. Adopting a user-centric approach holistically, throughout all production and communication is vital to address the user needs.

(b) Different user groups require different approaches for engagement. For example, asking policymakers about policy challenges and related data needs would be more effective than simply asking “what are your data needs”.

(c) User-centric approach means also thinking in an inclusive way, to take into account the voices of underrepresented groups.

(d) Communicating the trustworthiness, quality and value of official statistics to users is critical.

(e) The primary challenge in trying to embed user-centric approaches is often in budget constraints rather than a lack of will. Recent budget reductions could have an impact on user engagement initiatives and jeopardize the progress made so far in this area. User needs and budget constraints should be carefully balanced to ensure the continued relevance and reliability of statistical products.

(f) Effective communication requires specific skill sets which may not be always available in NSOs.

(g) As much as looking at new needs and new users, it is important to reflect on existing ones as the old products might not be fit for purpose anymore. Regular analysis of statistical products – old as well as the new ones – would allow to identify the most relevant products.

(h) The importance of using metrics to understand and measure the patterns across different products was highlighted. Performance indicators to measure the effectiveness and utility of statistical products gives the possibility to reorient resources towards new products and new needs. Such metrics and indicators could help prioritize products and user needs effectively.

(i) Countries have made significant investments in communication, user engagement and trust centres. These efforts have led to greater user advocacy and partnerships with statistical agencies. The metrics providing information on return on investment in official statistics would help to strengthen the advocacy and partnerships.

(j) It is important to discuss these topics at the top managerial level, as well as at the expert level, as their perspectives and priorities might differ.

Conclusion

15. The Bureau supported an in-depth review in this area. Taking into consideration the points raised in the discussion, the Secretariat will contact countries to collect practical examples of measurement initiatives targeting various user groups, usability and usefulness of statistical products. This could offer insights for the formulation of metrics for assessing efficiency of allocation of resources on engagement and communication.

III. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Statistical Programme

A. National Accounts (extension of terms of reference)

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2023/OCT/5 by UNECE

16. In 2009, the Bureau established the Steering Group on National Accounts to guide UNECE work on national accounts and related economic statistics. The Steering Group has been organizing Expert Meetings on national accounts for many years. In view of the importance of the work and following a CES recommendation, the UNECE Executive Committee converted the Expert Group on National Accounts into a standing body with its own terms of reference (ToR) in December 2019.

17. The Bureau reviewed the updated ToR for the group that reflect the new priorities related to the finalization of the 2025 System of National Accounts (SNA) and the development of implementation guidance. The ToR also specify more clearly the objectives and tasks of the Steering Group (that acts as a steering body for the work; currently chaired by G. Eding, the Netherlands) and the Group of Experts on National Accounts.

Conclusion

18. The Bureau highlighted the importance of the work on national accounts and thanked the Steering Group for its role in promoting implementation of the SNA, and contribution to the SNA update. The Bureau approved the terms of reference of the Group of Experts and the Steering Group on National Accounts.

B. Measuring well-being (terms of reference)

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2023/OCT/6 by Israel and UNECE

19. The Bureau discussed the proposed terms of reference for the Task Force on measurement of well-being (chaired by A. Yagur-Kroll, Israel). The following points were raised during the discussion:

(a) The work of the Task Force should build on existing frameworks with focus on providing operational and practical guidance.

(b) The Task Force should take into consideration ongoing work in this area (e.g., Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the SNA update, beyond GDP, work of the Friends of the Chair Group on Economic Statistics and on Social and Demographic Statistics, etc.).

(c) It is important to take into account inequalities, and language and cultural differences as well as how such differences might impact measurement of well-being.

(d) The Guidelines should provide principles and criteria for the selection of core indicators to allow flexibility for countries to customize based on national circumstances.

(e) When developing its recommendations, the Task Force should also consider resource implications for countries.

Conclusion

20. The Bureau supported the work and approved the terms of reference of the Task Force on measurement of well-being. Eurostat will become a member of the Task Force, in addition to the other members listed in the ToR.

C. Hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2023/OCT/7 by UNECE

21. As an outcome of the review on hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources, the CES decided to set up a task force on this topic, taking into account the feedback from the electronic consultation and the discussion during the CES 2023 plenary session.

22. The Bureau reviewed the terms of reference of the Task Force on hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources (chaired by A. Klintefelt, Denmark). The following comments were made in the discussion:

(a) The focus should be on policy relevant groups in administrative sources, keeping in mind that different groups can have different policy relevance in different countries.

(b) An important population group is the immigrants, for which the possibility of sharing aggregate mirror data among countries could be considered.

(c) The indigenous population is an important group in Canada, and probably in some other countries.

(d) Sometimes the people missing in administrative sources are also missing in surveys, sometimes they are not. If it is not possible to reach certain groups in administrative sources, alternative sources could be suggested.

Conclusion

23. The Bureau approved the terms of reference of the Task Force on hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources. Poland will participate in the Task Force, in addition to the countries and organizations listed in the terms of reference submitted to the Bureau.

D. Migration statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2023/OCT/8 by the Steering group on migration statistics, and 9 and 9/Add.1 by UNECE

24. In February 2023, the Bureau requested the Steering Group on migration statistics to prepare terms of reference for a Task Force on measuring emigration. Furthermore, in February and June 2023, the Bureau raised the question of the definition of international migration. The current definition comes from the 1998 *United Nations Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration* and is based on a threshold of twelve months that is considered difficult to implement and not in line with user needs.

25. The following comments were made in the discussion on measuring emigration:

(a) There was support to the establishment of a Task Force on measuring emigration. Its terms of reference should specify that the aim is to develop guidance for measuring emigration in an internationally comparable way.

(b) Albania, Latvia, Mexico, Poland and UNSD expressed willingness to join the Task Force. The United Kingdom confirmed willingness to chair.

26. In the discussion concerning the definition of international migration, the Bureau considered the following ongoing international activities in migration statistics (described in documents ECE/CES/BUR/2023/OCT/9 and 9/Add.1):

(a) Revision of the 1998 *United Nations Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration* by the United Nations Expert Group on Migration Statistics, for which the United Nations Statistical Commission endorsed the *Conceptual frameworks and related statistical concepts and definitions on international migration* in 2021.

(b) Revision of the 2018 *Guidelines concerning statistics of international labour migration* by the International Labour Organization.

(c) Development of migration and mobility-related recommendations for the *Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations for the 2030 Censuses of Population and Housing* by the Census Task Force on migration and mobility.

27. The following issues were raised in the discussion:

(a) A radical and ambitious approach is needed for developing definitions of migration and mobility that reflect the current reality and consider use of administrative data sources.

(b) It is important to bring the known needs of policymakers and other users to the attention of the international groups currently working on concepts and definitions of international migration, and ensure their consideration through participation in those groups.

(c) The concepts and definitions developed under the existing international initiatives would need to be expanded with definitions of specific population groups and types of migration and mobility, proposing more detailed definitions and developing concepts for new forms of migration and mobility.

Conclusion

28. The Bureau approved the terms of reference of the Task Force on measuring emigration subject to specification that the developed guidance is for measuring emigration in an internationally comparable way. United Kingdom (L. Cheatham) will chair the Task Force. Albania, Latvia, Mexico, Poland and UNSD will be added to the list of Task Force members.

29. A new task force would need to be established for defining and measuring new forms of migration. The Steering Group on migration statistics and the UNECE Secretariat will prepare the terms of reference for the Bureau's review in February 2024, in cooperation with the countries and organizations that supported this new initiative — Albania, Mexico, Poland, United Kingdom and OECD.

E. Data stewardship (further work)

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2023/OCT/10 by Estonia, Canada and UNECE

30. The CES endorsed the report *Data stewardship and the role of national statistical offices in the new data ecosystem* in June 2023, prepared by the CES Task Force on data stewardship (chaired by U. Lee, Estonia). The Conference requested the CES Bureau to decide on priorities for further work in this area taking into account the discussions at the 2023 CES plenary session and the results of the global consultation on the report.

31. The Bureau discussed a proposal for further work, prepared by Estonia, Canada and UNECE. It is proposed to set up a new CES Task Force with the following two priority areas of work:

(a) Identifying core responsibilities of NSOs as data stewards.

(b) Providing a forum for systematization and exchange of experience in implementing data stewardship.

32. The following points were made in the discussion:

(a) The focus of further work should be on how to implement the data stewardship role in practice. Of special interest are the implications of taking on this role outside the national statistical system, carefully considering the associated opportunities and risks. A balance needs to be found between allocating the resources to data stewardship and other core tasks of the NSO.

(b) Identifying the core responsibilities of a data steward will be important to focus on the essential tasks of NSOs as data stewards to remain relevant in the evolving data ecosystems. Making the stewardship concept too wide can turn away the attention of the need for change.

(c) NSOs in different countries are stepping into this role in different ways, not necessarily calling themselves a data steward. It may be done through the services NSOs offer, having an impact on the standards and classifications used which will finally benefit official statistics working with the data.

(d) It is important to coordinate with other ongoing initiatives on the topic. The United Nations Global Working Group on Data Stewardship recently carried out a survey focusing on data stewardship within national statistical systems. The responses can give ideas for further work. They will be presented to the United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2024 for information. OECD has a Working Party on Data Governance and Privacy in the Digital Economy from a general government perspective. The new Task Force may need to coordinate or align the work with them.

(e) The proposal for further work is in line with the ongoing work in the Global Working Group, which plans to develop a framework for data stewardship in the National Statistical System. The proposed CES work primarily focuses on a data stewardship role beyond the National Statistical System.

(f) The collaboration of CES initiatives on Data Stewardship and the Global Working Group and on the Data Stewardship Glossary should continue.

Conclusions

33. The Bureau highlighted the importance of continuing work on data stewardship and supported the establishment of a task force to work on the proposed priority areas. The draft terms of reference for this Task Force should be submitted to the CES Bureau in February 2024 for approval.

F. Climate change-related statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2023/OCT/11, 11/Add.1 and 11/Add.2 by the Steering Group and UNECE

34. The Bureau reviewed the progress report of the Steering Group on climate change-related statistics for 2018–2023, and the updated terms of reference of the Group. The Bureau was also informed about the upcoming side event at COP28 “Enabling climate action through data, transparency and finance” co-organized by UNECE.

35. The following comments were made in the discussion:

(a) Emphasis on adaptation-related statistics is very welcome. At this point, policymakers realize that adaptation to climate change is necessary. They already need the information on how the economy is adjusting and will want to compare it internationally.

(b) A lot of actors are involved in this domain and it is not easy to make progress, even within the scope of official statistics.

(c) The Directeurs Généraux des Instituts Nationaux Statistiques (DGINS) Conference on 18 and 19 October 2023, in Cork, Ireland focused on official statistics in the context of climate change and energy crisis; the high-level focus reflects the importance of this topic.

36. The work and commitment of the Steering Group members and its Chairs (A. Denneman, Statistics Netherlands and O. Thunus, Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (STATEC) Luxembourg) was highly appreciated. From November 2023, the Steering Group will be chaired by Canada (M. McMillan).

Conclusion

37. The Bureau approved the progress report and the updated terms of reference of the Steering Group on climate change-related statistics until 2028.

G. Measuring hazardous events and disasters (terms of reference)

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2023/OCT/12 by the Task Force

38. The Bureau reviewed the progress report and the updated work plan of the Task Force on measuring hazardous events and disasters (chaired by A. Ferruzza, Italy). In the discussion the importance of alignment and coordination of work with climate change-related statistics was emphasized.

Conclusion

39. The Bureau approved the progress report and the updated terms of reference of the Task Force on measuring hazardous events and disasters until 2026.

H. Social cohesion (work plan)

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2023/OCT/13 by the Task Team

40. The Bureau carried out an in-depth review on social cohesion in February 2023 based on a paper by Canada with input provided by Ireland, New Zealand, Poland, the United Kingdom and OECD (document ECE/CES/2023/8). As an outcome of the review, the CES Bureau established a task team (chaired by G. Schellenberg, Canada) to collect information on how the concept of social cohesion is measured in different countries and to identify good practices and data gaps. The task team has a one-year mandate.

41. The Bureau supported continuing the work on social cohesion and the approach taken. Having an international perspective on this topic is of high value.

Conclusion

42. The CES Bureau endorsed the work plan of the task team. UNSD expressed interest in joining the task team.

I. Statistical programme for 2024

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2023/OCT/14 by UNECE

43. The Bureau reviewed the Statistical Programme 2024. The good cooperation between the major international organizations was commended keeping the work well coordinated and avoiding duplication. For example, the OECD Centre on Well-being, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunity (WISE) directorate is launching work on child well-being that can be coordinated with UNECE work on statistics on children.

Conclusion

44. The Bureau adopted the Statistical Programme 2024. The programme will be presented to the UNECE Executive Committee for approval in February 2024.

IV. Strategic developments in official statistics

A. Open discussion on strategic developments in official statistics

45. In October 2022, the Bureau decided to have every year an open discussion on issues of strategic importance for official statistics, the work of NSOs and the Conference of European Statisticians. This may cover challenges, opportunities and changes of internal or external origin.

46. The discussion on strategic developments this time evolved around the following main issues:

(a) The role of official statistics in the new digital world

(i) It is important to find the right niche for official statistics in the changing world, it cannot be everything for everybody.

(ii) Data is a strategic asset and the competition with other data providers (from private sector, government, academia, etc.) is increasing.

(iii) A division of tasks in taking on a data steward role in the government sector has to be worked out. It is important to avoid the risk of blurring the lines between administrative and statistical use of data.

(iv) The same things that give legitimacy and mandate to NSOs can be also limiting factors. Official statistics is making progress but slowly. It is of critical importance to get agility and speed without sacrificing quality.

(b) Access to data

(i) Ensuring access to data is key, including administrative and privately held data.

(ii) Falling response rates and difficulties to reach respondents are of concern. These can be partially compensated by using other data sources but part of the data will always be collected directly from the respondents through surveys.

(c) Public trust

(i) Maintaining public trust is a challenge when moving to new data sources (including data held by private data holders) and linking and integrating data from different sources. It is important to convince the public that statistical offices do it in the public interest and in an ethical manner.

(ii) As NSO is a government agency, the general trust in government and the political climate can have an impact on public trust in official statistics (including on willingness to provide data and public acceptance of using new approaches and data sources).

(d) Communication

(i) Not enough resources are allocated to communication. There is a lot of good will and ideas how to communicate better but these need resources for implementation.

(ii) Official statistics are measuring increasingly complex economics and societies which can be difficult to communicate even to experts.

(iii) Revising already published data (e.g., on national accounts) is a regular procedure but users may see this as an error.

(e) Resources

(i) Many offices are currently undergoing budget cuts (all speakers raised this issue while it was not at all prominent in the discussion last year). The cuts can result in widening the gap between developed and less developed countries in the statistical world.

(ii) NSOs are constantly asked to do more with the same (or less) budget. We have to ensure that this does not result in lowering the bar on quality, ethics, inclusivity and protection of privacy. Some offices rather cut whole programmes (cancelling or postponing surveys) not to sacrifice quality of these programmes that are maintained.

(iii) At the same time there is a lot of funding for data initiatives outside official statistics. Partnerships for data products (e.g., with research community) may help to tap into that resource.

(iv) At international level we should do more to pool resources and work collectively (co-invest) on issues of common interest. Developing internationally agreed standards that ensure comparability can be one of such areas from which everyone will benefit. Being part of international statistical community adds value and can help in dealing with the continuous challenges.

(f) Human resources management

(i) High turnover of staff, talent management and retention of staff is a challenge. The new generation has different expectations for their career and working conditions. Maintaining work culture and engagement in the new conditions, including the blended working environment, requires attention and new approaches.

(ii) There is a need to develop skills and capacities for new areas, e.g., Artificial Intelligence (AI), machine learning, data science. At the same time there are not enough young people with the right conventional skills that are required for, e.g., SNA update, review of the International Comparison Programme etc. Many emerging areas are cross-cutting but we should not forget traditional statistics.

(g) Innovation

(i) Everybody agrees that innovation is needed but when resources are allocated, often something else has a priority.

(ii) Partnerships with research community could be explored more to boost innovation.

(iii) A new topic to consider are the implications of the rapid expansion of use of AI for official statistics. One challenge is how to ensure that official statistics could be an authoritative data source for AI.

Conclusion

47. The issues identified during the discussion will provide input for considering topics for the next in-depth reviews and CES seminars.

48. A short summary paper on strategic directions will be presented to the CES 2024 plenary session as a basis for a joint discussion with the geospatial experts.

B. List of possible topics for the next Conference of European Statisticians seminars and the in-depth reviews to be carried out in October 2024 and February 2025

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2023/OCT/15 by UNECE

49. The Bureau discussed the list of topics for the next CES seminars and the in-depth reviews to be carried out in October 2024 and February 2025, based on a proposal by the Secretariat.

50. There were some concerns about the topic A. “Strategic management tools and techniques for NSOs”: it is not clear what will be the outcome of a review or discussion on this topic.

Conclusion

51. Ageing-related statistics will be added to the list. The list will be sent out to all CES members in January 2024 to collect their preferences and indication of interest to contribute.

52. The Bureau will decide on the topics in February 2024 taking into account the feedback from the consultation.

V. Follow-up to the 2023 Conference of European Statisticians plenary session

A. Moving towards open-source technologies

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2023/OCT/16 by Ireland

53. A seminar on “Moving toward open-source technologies” was held at the CES plenary session in June 2023. The Conference asked HLG-MOS and the CES Bureau to discuss the follow-up to this session and decide on further steps.

54. The Bureau discussed a proposal for further work in this area based on a paper by the seminar organizer, Ireland and the UNECE Secretariat. The paper also provides updates on the new developments from HLG-MOS, Eurostat and other initiatives related to open-source technologies since the CES discussion.

55. The following comments were made in the discussion:

(a) The benefits of open-source technologies in official statistics include increased efficiency, transparency, reproducibility, improvement of quality and reduction of costs. Challenges in adopting open-source technologies are often non-technical, such as change management, competency building, leadership, strategic planning, communication and cultural shift.

(b) The advantage of open-source solutions is that once developed, they scale up with little cost.

(c) Ensuring cybersecurity and security in general is an important issue.

(d) We should distinguish between using the existing open-source tools for statistical production and dissemination and developing open-source based tools ourselves. The latter is more complex as it requires setting up a community and sharing the needed resources (e.g., financial investments).

(e) Collaboration and knowledge sharing among statistical offices are essential, and best practices and solutions need to be scaled up. Sharing the experience both on the usage of open-source technologies and tools, and on the transition to them (from SAS to R or Python, for example) is key.

(f) An important consideration is to raise awareness and promote the already available open-source repositories across statistical offices as it can reduce the costs and efforts of individual NSOs.

(g) The United Kingdom has positive experiences with using the Reproducible Analytical Pipeline (RAP) as it concerns culture and transformation and would be ready to share the experiences and lessons learned.

Conclusion

56. The CES Bureau supported further work in this area to be conducted within the framework of HLG-MOS. The specific forms and modality will be subject to further discussion during the formulation of the 2024 work programme of HLG-MOS.

B. Data ethics – a key enabler of social acceptability (next steps)

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2023/OCT/17 by Canada and United Kingdom

57. The CES seminar “Data ethics – a key enabler of social acceptability” was held on 28 June 2023. The Conference asked the Bureau to discuss follow-up to the seminar, taking into account the work currently undertaken under HLG-MOS.

58. The Bureau discussed the proposal for further work prepared by the seminar organizers Canada and the United Kingdom. The future work proposal included (i) collecting best practices; (ii) developing a common international definition of data ethics; (iii) developing a principle-based international data ethics framework; and (iv) developing guidance and online training to understand and use the framework in statistical production processes.

59. In June 2023, the Conference underlined that working together to develop guidance and share best practices will allow to pool resources as many countries lack resources to work on data ethics. The Ethical Leadership Task Team under the HLG-MOS Capabilities and Communication Group is in principle well positioned to initiate the follow-up work on data ethics including the discussion at the upcoming Workshop on Ethics in Modern Statistical Organisations. However, more Task Team members are required to deliver the proposed outputs.

60. The following points were raised in the discussion:

(a) Data ethics is long established topic, but it has a new conceptual meaning in the current data environment.

(b) Communication of data ethics is important to maintain trust in official statistics. Official statistics can demonstrate what is ethical to do and what not, to give the public confidence about ethics.

(c) Ethics is an important component of data stewardship.

(d) Working on ethics is not optional but mandatory. It is at the heart of official statisticians’ work that everything should be done with the ethical lens.

Conclusion

61. The Bureau approved the proposal for further work. Ethical Leadership Task Team under the Capabilities and Communication Group is well positioned to take on this work, but more members are needed in the group to cover the different aspects of ethics.

62. Workshop on Ethics in Modern Statistical Organisations, that will take place on 26–28 March 2024 in Geneva, will be a good platform to address some of the proposals above. New Zealand expressed interest to contribute to this workshop virtually.

C. Evaluation of the seventy-first plenary session

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2023/OCT/18 by UNECE

63. The Bureau was informed about the results of the evaluation questionnaire of the 2023 CES plenary session.

64. The 2023 plenary session received about the average of CES plenary evaluations since 2004. The content was evaluated as ‘good’ or ‘very good’ by all respondents. All substantive sessions were evaluated highly and voted as ‘the most useful’ ones by a number of participants which shows a good balance between different agenda items. Learning from experiences of other countries, seeing the practical examples that can be used as best cases was highly appreciated.

VI. Preparation of the Conference of European Statisticians 2024 plenary session: preliminary agenda

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2023/OCT/19 by UNECE

65. The Bureau discussed the draft preliminary agenda of the CES plenary session in 2024 based on a proposal by the Secretariat.

Conclusion

66. The CES 2024 plenary session is planned to take place during the week of 17–21 June 2024, back-to-back with the OECD Committee on Statistics and Statistical Policy (CSSP) meeting and the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management: Europe (UN-GGIM:Europe) plenary session. The meeting is planned in such a way that the delegates could travel between Paris and Geneva on Wednesday, 19 June, if needed.

67. In addition to the items listed in document ECE/CES/BUR/2023/OCT/19, the Conference will have a discussion on strategic developments in official statistics and in geospatial work. The Bureau will agree on the final provisional agenda in February 2024.

VII. Dates and venues of next meetings

68. The Bureau decided on the dates and venues of the next CES Bureau meetings as follows:

- 14 and 15 February 2024 in Geneva
- 15 and 16 October 2024 in Poland (the Central Statistical Office of Poland offered to host the meeting)
- 12 and 13 February 2025, in Luxembourg (tbc, Eurostat offered to host the meeting)
- 15 and 16 October 2025.

69. The seventy-second CES plenary session is planned to take place during the week of 17–21 June 2024 (exact dates and venue tbc).

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