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Seminar on the measurement of well-being
Geneva, 8-9 July 2024

Report of the seminar on measurement of well-being Geneva, 8-9 July 2024

Summary

The present document is the report of the seminar on measurement of well-being. The report is provided to inform the Conference of European Statisticians of the organization and outcomes of the seminar.

I. Introduction

1.   The seminar was organised by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) task force on measurement of well-being.

2.   The meeting was attended by experts from Belarus, Canada, Ireland, Israel (Chair), Italy, Korea (Republic of), Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

3.   The meeting was also attended by representatives from the following organizations, Eurostat, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), International Labour Organization (ILO), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG), World Health Organization (WHO), Women and Men in Environment and Artificial Intelligence (WOMENVAI), World Federation of United Nations Associations, and National Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics.

4.   The meeting was chaired by Amit Yagur-Kroll, Central Bureau of Statistics of Israel.

II. Organization of the seminar

5.   The seminar was organised in the following sessions:

    (a)   Session 1. Conference of European Statisticians initiatives on measurement of well-being 'here and now'

    (b)   Session 2. Country reports and case studies

    (c)   Session 3. Guidelines on measurement of well-being draft chapters

    (d)   Session 4. Conclusion

6.   The main outcomes of the sessions are summarised in section III.

7.   The proceedings of the seminar are available on the UNECE website https://unece.org/info/Statistics/events/386045

III. Summary of sessions

A. Session 1. Conference of European Statisticians initiatives on measurement of well-being

8.   The session included two presentations, one on the in-depth-review of measurement of well-being and another one on the work of the UNECE Task Force on Measurement of Well-being.

9.   Israel (Chair) introduced the in-depth review (ECE/CES/2023/7), conducted by the Bureau of Conference of European Statisticians (CES) in February 2023 based on a paper prepared by Israel, Netherlands, Mexico, OECD, and UNECE. The paper outlines the current national practices for measuring well-being and highlights the associated challenges. The CES Bureau supported the paper's recommendation on establishing a Task Force on Measurement of Well-being to develop guidelines for countries that produce or consider producing well-being indicators. A Task Force was subsequently created in October 2023 by the CES Bureau.

10.   Israel (Chair) presented the mandate, objective, scope, membership, and timeline of the established Task Force on Measurement of Well-being, as outlined in the Terms of Reference (ECE/CES/BUR/2023/OCT/6) endorsed by the CES Bureau in October 2023. The presentation also highlighted the ongoing progress of the task force's work. The final draft

Una Giltsoffof the guidelines on measurement of well-being is expected to be submitted for endorsement at the 73rd CES plenary session in June 2025.

B.   Session 2. Country reports and case studies

11.   The session featured discussions on various country experiences and case studies with national/international well-being measurement frameworks and processes. The session included presentations by Office for National Statistics (the United Kingdom), Central Statistics Office (Ireland), Statistics Korea, Statistics Netherlands, Statistics Canada, National Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics (Morocco), ILO, and Eurostat.

12.   The United Kingdom introduced the Office for National Statistics (ONS)'s Measuring National Well-being Programme, launched in 2010. The national debate on "what matters most?" in the UK led to a framework comprising 10 domains and 60 measures of well-being. The presentation also highlighted a review of national well-being conducted by the ONS in 2022-2023 to assess the continued relevance of the measures and the dashboard. The review identified several important factors considered by users, including inequality, tracking changes and progress in each measure, and having a more comprehensive set of measures. Additionally, the ONS provided an overview of the various qualitative research methods used in the establishment and review of the United Kingdom's measures of national well-being.

13.   The presentations given by Ireland outlined the development, lessons learned, and challenges of the interactive well-being dashboard – the Well-being Information Hub, launched by Central Statistics Office (CSO). Ireland also detailed the approach taken to incorporate sustainability into its well-being framework and gave an overview of its implications for the well-being dashboard maintained by CSO.

14.   Korea presented its quality-of-life indicators, developed by the Statistics Research Institute (SRI) of Statistics Korea. The presentation outlined the rigorous process of developing these indicators, the current status of quality of life in Korea relative to international trends, the analysis of quality-of-life indicators over time to pinpoint areas for improvement and their root causes, and the utilization of quality-of-life measures within the Korean context.

15.   Netherlands introduced its well-being framework, "Monitor of Well-being", which was developed based on the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) Recommendations on Measuring Sustainable Development and was further adapted and expanded. The dimensions of the "Monitor of Well-being" encompass well-being "here and now", well-being "later", and well-being "elsewhere", all of which align with the CES Recommendations. The presentation emphasized the visualization methods used to communicate the results of well-being measures and discussed future challenges.

16.   The second presentation from Netherlands explained how Statistics Netherlands has actively formed a community of practice within a network of meaningful relationships among government-serving institutions, and how these institutions collaborate to develop a common language, share experiences, exchange information, and train policymakers at all levels to apply the concept of sustainable and inclusive well-being in their work. Statistics Netherlands shared lessons learned which could benefit other national statistical agencies facing similar challenges.

17.   The presentation from Canada aimed to contribute to ongoing dialogues among National Statistical Organizations (NSOs) and multilateral collaborative efforts on advancing societal progress measurement "beyond GDP". The presentation emphasized the growing demand for more timely, granular, and intersectional data to meet evolving policy needs amid rapid societal changes and fiscal limitations. It also stressed the importance of regular updates of social indicators to monitor trends and assess policy outcomes effectively.

18.   The study conducted by the National Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics in Morocco examined the convergence of various regions in Morocco and OECD member countries from 2000 to 2019 concerning social well-being. The findings of the study reveal notable absolute convergence among these regions in terms of social well-being, albeit at a

relatively slow pace. These findings underscore the necessity for greater emphasis from less developed countries on national public policies that foster territorial social cohesion.

19.   ILO's presentation underlined the renewed emphasis on measuring unpaid care work in official statistics, reflecting its critical role in sustaining societal functioning and well-being. The presentation gave an overview of recent developments, including new tools (e.g., "light time-use" module of the labour force survey) and guidelines from ILO which aim to enhance the measurement of unpaid care work, integrating it with total work assessments in labour force surveys. It also discussed the potential of these advancements for statistical analysis and their implications for well-being focused policies and initiatives.

20.   Eurostat introduced its quality-of-life framework, with the EU statistics on Income & Living Conditions (EU-SILC) serving as the core instrument for measuring most dimensions within the framework. The presentation covered Eurostat's recent activities and efforts in gathering data on subjective well-being, the latest changes in data collection, as well as the various communication methods employed, such as interactive dashboards, publications, and datasets.

21.   In summary, the presentations on country reports and case studies enabled the task force to grasp the key factors and challenges countries face in their national well-being measurement processes. These insights are crucial for the task force's work in developing international recommendations, as they help create comprehensive and impactful guidelines that resonate with the populations they are meant to serve.

C.   Session 3. Guidelines on measurement of well-being draft chapters

22.   The session consisted of presentations and discussions of the draft chapters of the guidelines on measurement of well-being. The following comments and suggestions were made:

Chapter 2 Measurement frameworks

23.   Chapter 2 provides an overview of the historical developments in measuring well-being and synthesizes the concepts and principles that inform the recommendations in the subsequent chapters. It primarily builds on the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi (2009) report and the OECD framework for measuring well-being and progress.

24.   The following principles were highlighted: applying a multidimensional approach that covers all aspects of life; taking the perspective of individuals and households; focusing on well-being here and now while clarifying its distinction from well-being in the future and elsewhere; including distributions and inequalities as part of well-being; incorporating both objective and subjective indicators; focusing on outcome indicators rather than drivers where possible; and recommending dashboards as the preferred method for communicating well-being indicators

25.   It was suggested to include a section or a text box that offers a broader and more theoretical view on various approaches and perspectives of well-being, including discussions on the intrinsic value of nature and culture.

26.   The historical context may be expanded to provide a more comprehensive background for the recommendations in the guidelines.

Chapter 3 Other well-being measurement frameworks and initiatives

27.   The purpose of the chapter is to provide information on existing measurement frameworks and planed initiatives that are linked to the measurement of well-being. Several participants expressed doubts about the structure and content of the chapter. A clearer link between this chapter and the recommendations in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 is needed. The focus should be on existing frameworks and drawing from them rather than on planned initiatives. It was suggested that the section on the System of National Accounts (SNA) be shortened and that the SNA and System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA) be considered as data sources rather than frameworks related to the measurement of well-being.

Chapter 4 Dimensions and core indicators

28.   The draft chapter proposes four main clusters of well-being, 11 dimensions, some of which are broken down into subdimensions, and 75 indicators. These indicators are divided into three groups: achievements, deprivation and distributional. The following comments were made:

29.   The guidelines should target a broad group of countries, some of which have very limited experience in producing well-being indicators. Hence, the guidelines should also provide advice to countries with less developed statistical systems on how to engage in the development of well-being indicators.

30.   It is important to elaborate on and present the criteria for selecting indicators. Availability in all countries should not be a criterion, as the list of indicators in some countries will drive the development of statistics.

31.   Countries may have different views on the inclusion of nature and cultural aspects. It was suggested to consider providing guidance on different approaches. Since the guidelines will adopt the perspective of humans (individuals, households) as one of its principles, the treatment of nature and culture should also be addressed in Chapter 2.

32.   The number of indicators should be reduced and presented in two groups, such as ideal indicators and "good-enough" indicators. To the extent possible, the level of aggregation/detail of the indicators should be consistent.

33.   It was suggested to provide guidance on the possible breakdown of indictors, such as by age or socio-economic groups, and on the interpretation of changes in indicators over time.

34.   A lack of indicators for measuring the provision of public services (e.g., health) was mentioned.

Chapter 5 Data sources

35.   Eurostat indicated that they could provide input on long-term strategies for filling data gaps and developing indicators which have been used in the past 10 years. Case studies and examples to this end would also be helpful.

36.   Guidance on data sources should take into consideration existing material (e.g., guidance and metadata) provided by organizations such as the OECD.

Chapter 6 Composite indices and dashboards

37.   The recommendations should emphasize the compilation of composite indices based on the recommended indicators in Chapter 4. Further guidance on selecting indicators for a composite index could be included.

38.   More practical guidance on the normalisation of indicators and the development and production of scoreboards should be provided. Some of the material on dashboards could be moved to the chapter on communication.

39.   The OECD informed that its guidelines on composite indicators will soon be updated.

40.   Korea informed that equal weighting worked well in their case.

Chapter 7 Communication

41.   The chapter should focus on issues related specifically to the communication of well-being indicators, rather than on the general communication of official statistics. If helpful, references to existing material on the communication of official statistics can be made.

Chapter 8 Developing a national framework for measuring well-being

42.   The chapter provides guidance to countries on how to develop a national framework, drawing on the recommendations of previous chapters and other relevant materials.

43.   Additional guidance on the selection of dimensions and indicators should be included, addressing how to handle unwarranted external attempts to influence indicator selection. Issues related to data sources should also be covered, and the section on testing and pilots

should offer more detailed guidance. Potential overlaps with Chapter 7 on communication strategy should be considered.

D. Session 4. Conclusion

44. The comments and suggestions raised will be taken into consideration in the further drafting of the chapters of the guidelines on measuring well-being.

45. Countries and organisations were encouraged to submit their comments to UNECE.

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