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Item 9 of the provisional agenda

**SELECTION OF TOPICS FOR SEMINARS TO TAKE PLACE DURING THE NEXT
PLENARY SESSION**

Note by the secretariat¹

I. BACKGROUND

1. In May 2006, the UNECE secretariat conducted electronically a survey to consult with the member countries of the Conference and international organizations on the possible topics for discussion at the 2007 CES plenary session. In 2002, the 50th Conference decided that two seminar sessions will be organized at the annual plenary sessions - one to deal with foundational issues of the statistical systems and the second one to deal with new emerging issues. Since then, the list of possible topics to be discussed at future plenary sessions has been regularly updated, based on the proposals from countries and recommendations by the Bureau. The list that was sent to countries and international organizations for consultation in May 2006 is reproduced in the Annex.

2. Member countries and the international organizations were invited to select two topics to be discussed. They were also asked to recommend new topics and to indicate whether their office would be willing to be a session organiser for a specific topic if selected for discussion in 2007.

II. RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

3. The following thirty-two countries and seven organizations replied to the survey: Australia, Austria, Armenia, Belarus, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France,

¹ After the paper was distributed, two more replies were received from countries. These are reflected in the Revised version.

Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, CIS, ECB, Eurostat, FAO, IMF, ILO, and the World Bank.

4. The topics that received most votes are presented in the next paragraphs, by decreasing number of preferences.

Topic (4) Ways to increase the productivity of the statistical office and to conduct statistical programs more efficiently and effectively.

5. This topic is a clear leader and received the most preferences: 28 votes (24 from countries and 4 from IOs).

6. Comments made on this topic:

(a) The issue of effectiveness is related to the ways of improving the statistical offices' responsiveness to the emerging demands of key clients (Australia).

(b) Productivity is a very important topic, but it is full of pitfalls. Total survey design, generic methods and business architecture are becoming increasingly important for effective and efficient work processes. (Netherlands).

7. Session organizer – volunteers: Finland, the Netherlands, Romania, Israel.
Contributors – the Netherlands, Kazakhstan, Israel, United Kingdom.

Topic (5) Measurement of capital: measuring intangibles.

8. This topic was the second most frequently selected with 16 votes (14 from countries and 2 from IOs).

9. Comments made on this topic:

(a) While the Canberra Group has already given this topic some attention, it would perhaps be useful to surface it at the CES for a higher-level strategic discussion. Under this general heading fall such topics as "the knowledge / information economy", "human capital", "R&D stocks and flows", "advertising / marketing / brand names / corporate good will", "software and databases" and "environmental services". Some prominent voices are arguing that these types of assets or service flows are vital to the proper understanding of the modern economy, and yet our current measurement systems are not doing much to capture them. (Canada)

(b) Measurement in these areas does not lend itself as readily to our traditional survey methodologies and seems, rather, to require a lot more assumptions, rough estimation and modelling, which makes us statisticians uneasy in this domain. Yet can we afford to remain on the sidelines as issues in these areas are increasingly the focus of policy debate? (Canada)

(c) For us the fundamental and practical question is whether, and if so: how, the application of models and their results may or should be integrated in statistics. (Netherlands)

10. Session organizer – volunteers: Finland and the Netherlands.

Contributors – the Netherlands (paper on Research and development and ICT, including software capital), Kazakhstan, United Kingdom.

Topic (1) Fundamental principles, official and non-official statistics and the importance of independent and high-quality statistical information

11. This topic received 14 votes (11 from countries and 3 from IOs).

12. Comments made on this topic:

(a) Germany proposed this theme already last year. Since the topic would also deal with issues of independence, it perfectly fits to the implementation of the code of practice in the European Union. (Germany)

13. Session organizer – volunteer: Romania.
Contributors – no volunteers.

Other topics of interest

Topic (2) Social statistics

14. This topic received 8 votes (5 from countries and 3 from IOs)

15. Comments made on this topic:

(a) In the context of the European System of Social Statistics, key variables are currently in the process of being harmonised. The topic "Common core content" and how this should be put into practice from a statistical-technical point of view would seem a useful topic for next year. "Reviving the System of Social and Demographic Statistics" could be a related topic in this respect. Statistics Netherlands' experiences with its Social Statistics Database may serve as input for this: one umbrella system or not? Microdata and/or meso/macrodata? Theory driven or data driven? (the Netherlands)

(b) At this stage this theme is in an upheaval on the national level . But from our point of view it is too early to discuss this subject in 2007 because developments should be more progressed to do this. **Perhaps we could take this subject for discussion in 2009 onwards.** (Germany)

(c) It is an interesting topic but I wonder if we have ongoing work that is far enough along at this stage. We should capitalize on the ongoing efforts and time our seminars accordingly (United States).

16. Session organizer – no volunteer.
Contributor – the Netherlands

Topic (6) Migration statistics.

17. This topic received 7 votes (4 from countries and 3 from IOs).

18. Comments made on this topic:

- (a) Such a seminar could give impulses for the solution of open questions with regard to the implementation of the planned EU regulation on Migration (Germany).
- (b) It remains a relevant political topic, especially within Europe. A possible theme could be how we could improve the measurement of migration flows. The European framework regulation currently under discussion is not very helpful from a statistical point of view. Censuses, too, provide only limited and often incidental information (the Netherlands).
- (c) We should plan to capitalize on the working group efforts and time our seminars accordingly. If the migration work is far enough along, we would favor that as a topic for 2007 (United States).

19. Session organizer – the Netherlands.

Contributor – IMF (paper on remittances).

Topic (3) Performance measures.

20. This topic received 6 votes (4 from countries and 2 from IOs).

Contributor – Sweden

Topic (7) Health and Safety Statistics.

21. This topic received 3 votes (2 from countries and 1 from IOs).

22. Other comments on this topic:

(a) Health and safety statistics is a very interesting topic for a seminar, as on the one hand the demand for statistical data on health and health care appear to be increasing continually, (growing share of care in GDP, ageing etc.), while on the other hand the possibilities of producing statistics with the aid of administrative sources are strongly increasing as a consequence of the increasing use of computers in health care. Statistics Netherlands is one of the international forerunners with regard to the implementation of the System of Health Accounts, and is also making a great effort to develop statistics on individual health and consumption of care on the basis of administrative sources (Netherlands).

(b) The topic Health and safety statistics from our point of view is not ripe for discussion yet. There are multiple developments with regard to data quality and comparability which are only at their beginning at this stage. The discussion should be more progressed to be in the position to report on the potentials of Health and safety statistics. Nevertheless we could perhaps foresee this point for 2009 or later (Germany).

23. Contributors – the Netherlands, Sweden

III. NEW TOPICS

24. Members of the Conference were also invited to propose new topics. These are listed below:

The challenge of measuring and reducing response burden (proposed by Austria):

- (a) Definition of response burden: perceived versus actual response burden, total response burden.
- (b) Perception and awareness of response burden in the European and the national statistical systems.
- (c) Response burden as a component of total quality management.
- (d) Concepts, methods and experience of measuring response burden:
 - Completion time
 - Cost models
- (e) Response burden caused by Official Statistics versus response burden caused by other statistical institutes, such as professional organisations, universities.
- (f) Statistical response burden versus overall administrative response burden.
- (g) Methods and experience to reduce response burden, e.g. by provision of electronic questionnaires, use of administrative data and registers, multiple use of data surveyed, review of the statistical programme, etc.

Ways to integrate price collection for the purpose of temporal and spatial price comparison (comparison HICP-PPP) (proposed by Germany)

Both statistics require extensive and time-consuming data collections. Consumer price statistics collect approximately 350.000 prices per month. But according to present standards these prices are not suitable for regional price comparisons. Although the use of this source for regional price comparisons would induce an enormous burden on consumer price statistics, we could reach a significant reduction of costs compared to a possible introduction of an independent collection for regional price comparisons.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

25. The 50th Conference delegated to the Bureau of the Conference the implementation of the new structure of organizing the seminar sessions, including the selection of topics. The Bureau will discuss the results of the survey at its meeting on 14 June. The proposals will be presented to the Conference on 15 June under agenda item 9.

ANNEX

The list of possible topics for the seminar at the 2007 CES plenary session circulated to countries and international organizations for consultation in May 2006

1. Fundamental principles, official and non-official statistics and the importance of independent and high-quality statistical information

- *the relationship between statisticians and policy makers, relevance of statistics for policy and issues of independence;*
- *official and non-official statistics, both on national and international level;*
- *building the awareness of the importance of independent and high quality statistical information, promotion of official statistics.*

2. Social statistics

- *linking outcomes to the determinants of those outcomes;*
- *reviving the system of social and demographic statistics;*
- *identifying areas where there are needs for improved standards that could be used internationally;*
- *common core content for social statistics - key social issues common to a number of countries that could potentially be better illuminated by a common or standardized measurement instrument.*

3. Performance measures

- *Political and statistical issues in their selection and publication.*
- *Including the measurement of public sector output (e.g. hospitals, schools and public administration) - the measurement of public sector output considered in a broad framework -- where the output of hospitals is health improvement, and that of schools is learning gain.*

4. Ways to increase the productivity of the statistical office and to conduct statistical programs more efficiently and effectively

These issues are relevant to many statistical offices because of financial constraints to cut down expenses, improvement of output and performance in general, and streamlining of the processes. The seminar could focus on

- *different approaches to realize cost savings (e.g. consolidation of data collection or computer operations, substitution of tax for survey data, use of new, more efficient computer technologies, data warehousing, electronic data reporting, etc.).*
- *measurement of productivity of the statistical agency;*
- *effectiveness – the responsiveness to disseminated data and to the work of the statistical office in general (e.g., maintaining response rates).*

The various lessons learned could be compiled as an output of the seminar.

5. Measurement of capital: measuring intangibles

The seminar would deal with such topics as measuring

- *knowledge / information economy,*
- *human / social capital,*
- *R&D stocks and flows,*
- *advertising / marketing / brand names / corporate goodwill,*

- *software and databases,*
- *environmental services.*

These types of assets or service flows are important to the proper understanding of the modern economy, and yet our current measurement systems are not doing much to capture them. Furthermore, some of these issues are related to the update of the SNA and sustainable development.

Measurement in these areas does not lend itself as readily to traditional survey methodologies and seems, rather, to require a lot more assumptions, rough estimation and modelling, which makes statisticians uneasy in this domain. Official statistics can not afford to remain on the sidelines as issues in these areas are increasingly the focus of policy debate.

6. Migration statistics

7. Health and safety statistics

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