ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE   **STATISTICAL COMMISSION**

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Fifty-fifth plenary session
Geneva, 11-13 June 2007
Item 8 of the provisional agenda

SELECTION OF TOPICS FOR SEMINARS TO TAKE PLACE DURING THE
2008 PLENARY SESSION

Note by the secretariat

I.   BACKGROUND

1.   In May 2007, 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 2008 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 of topics that was sent to countries and international organizations for consultation in May 2007 is reproduced in Annex 1. List of CES seminars held so far is provided in Annex 2.

2.   Member countries and the international organizations were invited to select topics to be discussed. They were also asked to recommend new topics and to indicate whether their office would be willing to be a seminar/session organiser or prepare a paper for a specific topic if selected for discussion in 2008.

II.   RESULTS OF THE SURVEY: PREFERENCES

3.   The following thirty-five countries and six organizations replied to the survey: Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belarus, Brazil, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, United States, IMF, World Bank, FAO, ECB, Eurostat, and UNSD.

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

5.   The countries/organizations who offered to organize a seminar/session or to present a paper are listed under each topic. Two countries: the Netherlands and New Zealand are ready to organize a seminar or a session on most of the proposed topics. Also, IMF is ready to be involved in the organization of a seminar on most of the topics (except the topics 4, 8 and 9).

Topic (3) Measuring population movement and integration in a globalized world

6.   This topic received the most preferences: 22 votes (19 from countries and 3 from IOs).

7.   Contributions offered on this topic:
Seminar/session organizer: Netherlands, New Zealand
Papers: Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, Ukraine, and New Zealand.

8.   Comments made:
(a)   Migration has an increasing impact on labour market and society. From statistical point of view short-term labour in other countries and integration of migrants in society are areas, which have to be developed. Also from political point of view measurement of population movement and integration is a very important issue. Statistics Netherlands had made progress with measuring integration and naturalisation of migrants and is investing in improving the methodology. (Netherlands);
(b)   Integration of migrants is an innovative item with direct link to next population census (Italy);
(c)   Austria supports this topic, especially with regard to the ongoing development of a European Regulation on Migration statistics (Austria).

Topic (8) Organizational models for statistical collection

9.   This topic was the second most frequently selected with 19 votes (17 from countries and 2 from IOs).

10.   Contributions offered on this topic:
Session organizer: Netherlands, New Zealand.
Papers: Australia, Lithuania, Netherlands, New Zealand and Norway.

11.   Comments made:
   (a)   Such a topic would be of broad general interest to CES participants in both economic and social fields of statistics. (Australia);
   (b)   It would be very interesting and valuable to learn from each other's experiences what are the good practices from the different organizational models for statistical data collection. In modern society with much attention for reducing administrative burden, efficiency and cost-effectiveness, a statistical institute must be aware of the positive and negative implications of different organisational models. (Netherlands).

Topic (7) Strategic issues related to on-line dissemination and publication of data and metadata at national and international level

12.   This topic received 13 votes (10 from countries and 3 from IOs)

13.   Contributions offered on this topic:
Seminar/session organizer: Netherlands, New Zealand
Papers: Netherlands, FAO, New Zealand

Topic (5) Strategic issues linked to the measurement of international transactions

14.   This topic received 12 votes (9 from countries and 3 from IOs).

15.   Contributions offered on this topic:
Seminar/session organizer: IMF, Netherlands, New Zealand
Papers: Netherlands, New Zealand
Discussant: Switzerland

Topic (1) Fundamental principles and professional autonomy

16.   This topic received 12 votes (7 from countries and 5 from IOs).

17.   Contributions offered on this topic:
Seminar/session organizer: Netherlands
Papers: Australia, Netherlands, FAO

18.   Comments made:
   (a)   There are already several opinion surveys/questionnaires which NSO's are currently doing like consumer expectations, environmental opinions, European Social Survey (sometimes made by the NSO's, measuring subjective wellbeing, satisfaction or happiness), some NSO's make even exit polls of political elections etc. The demand for these kind of opinion surveys seems to be growing. On what kind of conditions statistical offices should do these, what are the risks and benefits, how should we deal with these kind of requests, impartiality and integrity of the NSO, pro's and

con's etc? According to Statistics Finland's ethical code, we are not doing any exit polls or marketing surveys. Everything else can be done but we do not have any clear policy on this (Finland).

(b) It is the practice of the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE) not to conduct any exit pools of political elections or marketing surveys, nor direct public policy evaluation surveys. IBGE has been refusing systematically to conduct this kind of surveys because they are not considered as part of the IBGE mission. The public policy evaluation surveys are those with more demand. They are refused because of their character subject to fiscal control, they usually require access to identifiable microdata and their results may associate the official statistics with specific government policies. An example is the "Bolsa Família" that is a Brazilian government program of direct transfer of income that benefits families in poverty. IBGE refused the demand to conduct a survey to evaluate the program together with the beneficiaries. (Brazil)

(c) NSOs (especially those in developing countries) have been asked by their governments to conduct opinion surveys (reaction to policies, subjective assessments of well-being etc). It is not exactly clear if output from opinion surveys would fall under the realm of 'official statistics'. There is no clear guidance, not is there a framework for NSOs to decide one way or another. The implications of conducting policy-related opinion surveys, especially in the context of Fundamental Principles on Official Statistics, have also not been explored. The only opinion surveys that have been accepted as 'official' are the business expectation surveys. It would be useful to have a discussion on this so that the boundaries of official statistics could be clarified and refined. (UNSD)

(d) The suggestion concerning the opinion surveys looks being very interesting too and would be worth to be discussed. (Russian Federation)

(e) Italy suggests to focus on the issue of "non-official statistics". (Italy)

Topic (2) Accountability of national statistical offices and national statistical systems

19. This topic received <u>12 votes</u> (8 from countries and 4 from IOs).

20. Contributions offered on this topic:
Session organizer: New Zealand
Papers: Australia, New Zealand

Topic (6) The role of metadata in the management of official statistics

21. This topic received <u>8 votes</u> (6 from countries and 2 from IOs).

22. Contributions offered on this topic:

Papers: Czech Republic, Lithuania, and Sweden

23.   Comments made:
There is already quite a bit going on with respect to this topic, and the general policy level discussions have taken place (United States)

Topic (9) Cooperative development of software applications by National Statistical Offices

24.   This topic received 8 votes (7 from countries and 1 from IOs).

25.   Contributions offered on this topic:
Session organizer: Netherlands
Papers: Netherlands

26.   Comments made:
Like in many other fields intensified cooperation and specialisation can lead to more powerful and robust systems. Sharing tools is one possibility, as well as collaborating in network environments. (Netherlands)

Topic (4) Official statistics on discrimination

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

28.   Contributions offered on this topic:
Papers: France

29.   Comments made:
In the U.S., we have been working in this area for quite some time. As implied, this is extremely complex, and while the U.S. would be in a position to contribute to such a seminar, it is not certain the CES is the most appropriate venue for this topic. (United States)

III.   PROPOSALS TO COMBINE TOPICS

Challenges of data collection from households (proposed by Finland):

30.   Instead of supporting directly any of the topics in the list, Finland would like to combine two of the topics, namely one part from the topic 1 (fundamental principles) and another part of the topic 8 (models for data collection) into a new topic which to be named as "Challenges of data collection from households". It could include the following subtopics:

(a) Organization of survey data collection. For example, some offices do all telephone interviewing using interviewers operating from their homes who also do personal interviewing, other offices have developed separate call centers for telephone interviewing. Some offices integrate their call centers and personal interviewing operations in the regional offices, others set up centralized call centers. It would be very useful to understand the principles, experiences and issues that are driving the decisions to use a specific

organizational model for data collection. A number of countries with widely different models could be asked to present their models, the rationales for the current model, benefits and drawbacks and plans for the future.

(b) Survey participation. Non-response is a major concern of survey data collection in many countries. How do the NSI's cope with the issue? How do they try to influence in general data collection atmosphere? What measures are put in place to improve response rate?

(c) Increasing demands for opinion surveys (such as, public policy evaluation surveys, consumer expectations, environmental opinions, measuring subjective well-being and happiness, exit polls of elections, etc.) - pros and cons, risks and benefits, effects on perceptions of the NSO's impartiality and integrity.

31.   If this kind of topic will be selected, Finland could contribute with a paper.

Combining Topic 1 (fundamental principles) and Topic 2 (accountability) (proposed by Australia and Eurostat)

32.   Australia would be very interested to be part of a topic that brought the key elements of the issues raised under Topics 1 and 2. Comparison of the experience of, and mechanisms developed by, different nations in seeking to set an appropriate balance between maintaining the independence and professional autonomy of their national statistical office (and more broadly national statistics systems) and their accountability for the effective and efficient use of public funds for official statistics would be a very welcome follow up to the UN seminar earlier this year to mark the 60th anniversary of the Statistical Commission.

33.   Eurostat also proposes to combine topic 1 and 2 into one session.

IV.   TOPICS TO BE ADDED TO THE LIST

34.   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)
- Definition of response burden: total response burden, actual versus perceived response burden
- Concepts, methods and experience of measuring response burden:
  - Completion time
  - Cost models
- Response burden caused by Official Statistics versus response burden caused by other statistical institutes, such as professional organizations, universities
- Statistical response burden versus overall administrative response burden
- Perception and awareness of response burden in the European and the national statistical systems
- Response burden as an issue for total quality management

- 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.

35.   This seminar could be organized by Statistics Austria.

Organisational models for data sharing across institutions (proposed by ECB)

36.   Data sharing (e.g. use of administrative data for statistical purposes, alignment of different standards such as supervisory, accounting and statistical ones, multipurpose surveys and harmonised response forms) can be seen as important means to reduce administrative burden. A related seminar could for example aim at comparing the situation in different countries, identify best practices, analyse the preconditions for efficient data sharing and the necessary measures to foster it.

V.   GENERAL COMMENTS PROVIDED

37.   Australia:
It would be useful if for each CES Plenary session the choice of topics sought to provide one seminar on a range of statistical subject topics (e.g. possible Topics 3, 4 and 5 on the list) and another on organisational and managerial topics (e.g. Topics 1,2,6, 7,8 and 9 on the list).

38.   We need to ensure that each seminar focuses on strategic topics and takes account of the topics that are being canvassed in other international fora.

VI.   CONCLUSIONS

39.   The 50th Conference delegated to the Bureau of the Conference the organization of the seminars, including the selection of topics. The Bureau will discuss the results of the survey at its meeting on 11 June. The proposals will be presented to the Conference on 13 June under agenda item 8.

ANNEX I

The following list of possible topics for the seminar at the 2008 CES plenary session was circulated to countries and international organizations for consultation in May 2007:

1. **Fundamental principles and professional autonomy**
    - The relationship between statisticians and policy makers, relevance of statistics for policy, and issues of professional autonomy;
    - Balancing relevance and independence in the selection and publication of official statistics;
    - Maintaining independence in light of policy makers' interest in specifying areas to be covered by official statistics (and perhaps the measurement tools as well);
    - Balancing principles of professional independence and impartiality with indicators developed for policy advocacy at the national and international levels;
    - The role of perception indicators in official statistics;
    - Addressing increasing demands for opinion surveys (such as, public policy evaluation surveys, consumer expectations, environmental opinions, measuring subjective well-being and happiness, exit polls of elections, etc.) – pros and cons, risks and benefits, effects on perceptions of the NSO's impartiality and integrity.

2. **Accountability of national statistical offices and national statistical systems**
    - The counterpart of professional autonomy is accountability to the taxpayer, the Parliament and the general public for making good use of public funds for official statistics;
    - What ways of being accountable are used by various countries, and what feedback is received?
    - Do the methods for accountability differ between the NSOs and other producers of official statistics?
    - The issue was raised at one of the commemorative events around the 60th anniversary of the Statistical Commission. No exchange of experience between countries on this question has ever taken place.

3. **Measuring population movement and integration in a globalized world**
    - Increased short-time and long-time movements of people across borders impose challenges to NSO to measure the size, the flows and the characteristics of the population. New approaches are needed in order to account for national and international movements that are difficult to capture in administrative records (undocumented migrants, short-term movements);
    - Traditional statistical units related to population such as households are increasing their transnational nature: this requires new methods to identify the units of social and demographic interest and the development of new analytical frameworks;
    - What could official statistics contribute to statistics on integration of migrants? Is it possible to select a set of topics (role in the labour market, enrolment in formal education, naturalizations, etc.) in order to monitor the

process of adaptation of immigrant communities to the host societies? Is it possible to identify a minimal set of demographic, social and economic indicators at country level?

- What are the experiences of countries in measuring the integration, including feedback on published results.

4.   Official statistics on discrimination

- There is a need to start a dialogue between statisticians, users of statistics, researchers and policy makers on the role of official statistics in measuring discrimination. The objective would be to improve the relevance of information produced by national statistical systems to meet the increasing demand for statistics to analyze discrimination;
- Discrimination can happen in different environments and the mechanisms are also very different: they can be very explicit and direct or they can be indirect and difficult to be recognized: only a small percentage of cases are officially reported to the authorities, and therefore administrative records could provide a biased measurement of discrimination;
- It is difficult to define an objective statistical measurement of discrimination since individuals perceive unequal treatments in different ways.

5.   Strategic issues linked to the measurement of international transactions

- Difficulties of recording of international transactions in globalised economy;
- Increased growth in the volume of financial services and the impact of financial innovations on the international transactions;
- Bilateral country comparisons, better understanding of differences in concepts and methods between partner countries and improving and aligning existing practices;
- Changes in the international accounting standards and their impact on the measurement of international transactions;
- What data sources will be available in future for measuring the various types of international transactions (e.g. international trade in goods and services, FDI)?
- What will be the repercussions on the system of business statistics?
- Addressing the increased demand for workers remittances statistics, developing better ways of collecting these statistics and other international statistics involving households.
- Implementation of changes in the revised BPM5 and SNA93 related to the international transactions.

6.   The role of metadata in the management of official statistics.

- Role of metainformation systems in the overall management of the statistical offices;
- Core principles of metadata-driven management –quality considerations, requirements on availability, life-cycle and interoperability of metadata between different phases of the statistical cycle, training;

- Metadata management strategies – a global vision of the statistical office/statistical system is a pre-condition of success. This vision combines goals, actors, concepts and rules of the metadata organization;
- Good practices of governance of metainformation systems –responsibilities are shared across all parts of the statistical office/statistical system, including subject matter statisticians as well as processing methodologists. These responsibilities involve creation, harmonisation, maintenance of metadata, setting internal standards and coordination of all metadata related activities.

7.   Strategic issues related to on-line dissemination and publication of data and metadata at national and international level

- Consequences of new forms of electronic dissemination and data sharing on the pricing of access to data and metadata from official statistics and on the possibility to impose conditions of use or re-dissemination
- Relationship between the needs for dissemination in official statistics and the general rules for dissemination in national administrations and international organizations
- Is there a need for standardizing the structures and contents of websites of official statistics, or specific parts thereof like metadata?
- Good practices in preventing conflicting data on the same topic to be released:
  - *within the same national statistical system*
  - *between national and international sources*
  - *between international organisations*

8.   Organizational models for statistical collection (topic proposed by Canada).

- There is a big diversity across statistical offices in the organizational model for data collection. For example, some offices do all telephone interviewing using interviewers operating from their homes who also do personal interviewing, other offices have developed separate call centers for telephone interviewing. Some offices integrate their call centers and personal interviewing operations in the regional offices, others set up centralized call centers. Some agencies have completely separate collection operations for business and household surveys.
- It would be very useful to understand the principles, experiences and issues that are driving the decisions to use a specific organizational model for data collection.
- A number of countries with widely different models could be asked to present their models, the rationales for the current model, benefits and drawbacks and plans for the future.

9.   Cooperative development of software applications by national statistical offices (topic proposed by Canada).

- This type of cooperation offers the opportunity to leverage the always scarce financial and human resources to create much more powerful and robust systems for all phases of statistical production. Availability of such software

could accelerate advancement of the statistical systems of developing countries.

- It would be interesting to inventory the existing instances: Blaise, PC-Axis, etc.
- Strategic risks of this type of development could be discussed (e.g. strategic re-direction of host agencies that puts the development at risk, as in Blaise) and methods of mitigation of the risk considered.
- The opportunity and means to expand this type of development could be considered.

ANNEX II
CES SEMINARS HELD SINCE 2003

2003   Statistical confidentiality and microdata
      Globalisation

2004   National statistical systems
      Measuring process and volume of the service sector

2005   Improved data reporting
      Sustainable development

2006   Population and housing censuses
      Human resources and training

2007   Increasing the efficiency and productivity of statistical offices
      Measuring capital – beyond the traditional measures

* * * * *