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Item 10 of the provisional agenda

**SELECTION OF TOPICS FOR SEMINARS TO TAKE PLACE DURING THE
2010 PLENARY SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN
STATISTICIANS**

Note by the secretariat

I. BACKGROUND

1. In May 2009, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe secretariat conducted an electronic survey to consult with the member countries of the Conference and international organizations on the possible topics for discussion at the 2010 plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians. The list of topics sent to countries and international organizations for consultation in May 2009 is attached in Annex 1. The list of Conference of European Statisticians seminars held so far is provided in Annex 2.
2. Following a decision by the Conference in 2002, two seminar sessions are 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. 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.
3. Member countries and the international organizations were invited to select topics to be discussed, to recommend new topics and to indicate whether their office would be willing to organise a seminar/session or prepare a paper for a specific topic if selected for discussion in 2010.

II. RESULTS OF THE SURVEY: PREFERENCES

4. The following thirty-seven countries and six international organizations replied to the survey: Australia, Austria, Belarus, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States, CIS, IMF, OECD, ECB, Eurostat and WTO.

5. The topics that received most votes are presented in the next paragraphs, by decreasing number of preferences. The countries/organizations who offered to organize a seminar/session or to present a paper are listed under each topic.

A. MOST PREFERRED TOPICS

Topic (6) The global financial crisis and the demand for official statistics

6. This topic received the highest number of preferences: 17 votes (14 from countries and 3 from IOs).

7. Contributions offered on this topic:

Seminar organizer: IMF.

Session organizer: Netherlands.

Papers: France, Netherlands, New Zealand, WTO.

8. Comments made:

- Israel suggests making an emphasis on the link between the economic growth and financial stability to living conditions and well-being.
- Netherlands offered the following invited papers:
 - New tools which present and visualize developments of coherent indicator sets,
 - Early indicators;
- Netherlands also suggests to integrate topic (6) “The global financial crisis and the demand for official statistics” with topic (2) “Short term statistics” as they are closely related to each other.
- New Zealand notes that it would be a good time to address these issues when the activity caused by the crisis may have abated somewhat and analysis of the implications for statistics can be distilled better. In addition to discussing coverage and quality issues of economic statistics, it is important also to draw out some wider themes. Managing ever expanding demand for statistics is a crucial issue and this topic should have general applicability on matters of what difference official statistics make to public and private decision-making; what evidence there is that official statistics are used effectively; how are different users needs prioritised, etc.;

- A number of the issues raised under the proposed short-term economic indicators topic (2) (e.g. the need for and nature of short-term services indicators) could be usefully addressed under topic (6) “The global financial crisis and the demand for official statistics”.
- WTO expects the discussion on this topic to bring a better understanding of the link between the financial and real economy, e.g. extending the macroeconomic framework with financial accounts and balance sheets. The WTO is willing to contribute a paper on the international supply chains and the transmission of financial shocks, which develops a stock-flow approach based on an extension of input-output models;
- IMF draws attention to the newly established Inter Agency Group on Economic and Financial Statistics, hosted by the IMF. It is a joint undertaking of the Bank for International Settlements, the ECB, Eurostat, the OECD, the UN, and the World Bank. The Inter Agency Group was created to respond to the global nature of the data needs that arose from the economic and financial crisis. The IMF also works with the Financial Stability Board on data gaps and data collection, as recommended by the G-20 Working Group #2 (Reinforcing International Co-operation and Promoting Integrity in Financial Markets).
- As of April 2009, three major outcomes already emerged from the discussions of the Inter-Agency Group: the launching of an inter-agency website on April 21, 2009, the identification of specific areas of data needs and, in March 2009, the G-20 Endorsement of the new Inter-Agency Group to strengthen finance statistics.
- While the work to date involves mainly international agencies, helping minimizing additional requests for data from individual economies, there is evidence that not all data are readily available or as up-to-date. This would call in the future for involvement of economies to supply data under existing international arrangements. It is important that economies be informed and consulted on the work as it proceeds;
- Eurostat has proposed to postpone the discussion of topic (6) “The global financial crisis and the demand for official statistics” to 2011 as a kind of ex post reflection, as currently there are already a lot of conferences, seminars, etc., dedicated to this topic.

Topic (2) Short term economic indicators

9. This topic received 14 votes (10 from countries and 4 from IOs).
10. Contributions offered on this topic:
Seminar organizer: Eurostat offered to be a co-organizer.
Session organizer: Norway, Eurostat, Netherlands.
Papers: Sweden, Norway, ECB, Netherlands, Slovenia, WTO.
Canada is ready to play a significant role in the preparation of a seminar on this topic.

11. **Comments made:**

- Israel proposes as a priority the following themes:
 - Services statistics
 - Harmonization of wages and salaries statistics;

- Netherlands offers the following papers:
 - Short term indicators: trade off between consistency and stability
 - HEcS (revision of Economic Statistics): use of administrative VAT data for the production of monthly and quarterly statistics;

- Netherlands and New Zealand propose to combine topic (2) “Short term statistics” with topic (6) “The global financial crisis and the demand for official statistics”.

- Sweden could contribute to this agenda item with their experience on the monthly index for service industries, called the Swedish Index of Service Production (SE-ISP). The index has been created to be a current indicator of production growth in the service industries, measured in constant prices. SE-ISP is published on a monthly basis from 2008 onwards and is available in a database from 2005. SE-ISP is also an example of a survey where the statisticians use, and try to increase the use, of administrative VAT data in combination with an ordinary survey in order to reduce the response burden;

- Sweden also suggests to share its experience on the work for developing a monthly index for household consumption in retail trade. The monthly index has been created to be an indicator of the household consumption for retail trade products but also an indicator of the total household consumption and savings, measured in both current and constant prices.

- ECB could make a contribution from a users’ perspective on the requirements on the need of good statistics on services, on requirements for Principle European Economic Indicators in general and on their role model for Principle Global Economic Indicators. ECB is also interested in the theme on harmonisation of wages and salaries statistics, but in view of resource constraints they cannot offer a contribution at this stage;

- WTO can contribute a paper on the high frequency trade statistics: merchandise and services, and other issues related to prices and quantum, as well as gaps such as trade finance.

Topic (11) Statistical quality assurance

12. This topic received 12 votes from countries.

13. Contributions offered on this topic:
Session organizer: Netherlands, United States.
Papers: Netherlands, New Zealand, United States.

14. **Comments made:**

- Netherlands is willing to submit two papers: a paper on the quality assurance: more focus on output measurement using the interrelationships within the statistical system and a paper by its Division of Methodology and Quality;
- New Zealand considers managing quality, balanced with cost, relevance and timeliness, core to official statistics. This topic would provide valuable opportunity to understand how other NSOs are weighing up quality versus other expectations, and dimensions of quality against one another, i.e. the reputation-threatening calculation risk issues against some of the other dimensions of quality such as response rates where users appear more inclined to tolerate deterioration.

Topic (9) Spatial statistics / Role of a spatial dimension in official statistics

15. This topic received 10 votes (9 from countries and 1 from IOs).

16. Contributions offered on this topic:

Seminar organizer: Eurostat to be a co-organizer.

Session organizer: Eurostat, Austria, Brazil, United States.

Papers: Austria, United States.

17. **Comments made:**

- Austria finds this topic especially interesting as there have been many new developments in this area in the past years. Furthermore this theme is a cross-cutting topic and in addition the different status of the national statistical institutes regarding their respective development in this field would allow for fruitful discussions and interesting exchange of experiences;
- Australia believes this would be very timely topic given the rapidly increasing affordability for many users of geographic information system (GIS) software and the growing interest of many policy and service delivery agencies in spatial data generally;
- Israel proposes as a priority the following themes:
 - Integration of characters data with geo data,
 - Use of dereference for record-linkage,
 - Use of dereference to improved spatial distribution of samples and reducing response burden,
 - Costs and benefits;

B. TOPICS THAT RECEIVED LESS SUPPORT

Topic (8) Organization of data collection and data sharing

18. This topic received 9 votes from countries.
19. Netherlands, Slovak Republic, and Slovenia offered to contribute a paper.
20. **Comments made:**
 - Israel proposes as a priority the following themes:
 - Outsourcing data collection operations,
 - NSO as data users and data auditors of administrative data sources;
 - Netherlands could contribute the following papers:
 - Organizational models for statistical collection,
 - Multi-modal data collection;

Topic (1) Environment statistics

21. This topic received 8 votes from countries.
22. Contributions offered on this topic:
Seminar organizer: Poland
Papers: Sweden, Poland (possibly), Portugal, Finland.
Canada is ready to play a significant role in the preparation of a seminar on this topic.
23. **Comments made:**
 - Israel suggests to make an emphasis on the following themes:
 - The organization of environment statistics: integrating environment statistics into the system of official statistics.
 - Setting priorities in statistics development process;
 - Portugal is willing to contribute a paper on the relationship between users' needs and Environmental Accounts System;
 - Sweden is willing to contribute a paper on the use of environmental accounts in policy monitoring: integrating economy and environment information in a web-tool;

Topic (3) Labour and social security statistics, labour migration

24. This topic received 6 votes (5 from countries and 1 from IOs).
25. Contributions offered on this topic:
Seminar organizer: Netherlands possibly
Session organizer: Netherlands (on labour market dynamics)
Papers: Netherlands

26. **Comments made:**

- Australia considers this topic an area of growing importance in member countries, not only because of the current economic challenges but also because of the implications of current demographic trends in many countries;
- Germany supports the topic in view of the discussion at the last UN Statistical Commission and the European Task Force 2 "Statistical Challenges", Krakow Action Plan;
- Israel suggests to make an emphasis on the following themes:
 - Measuring quality of employment,
 - Cost and benefit analysis regarding development of internationally agreed set of indicators for measurement of quality of employment,
 - Harmonization of data of different sources - adapting existing household surveys (LFS & others) or developing new ones;
- Netherlands considers that the topic might not be sufficient for a one day seminar;

Netherlands could submit two papers: on the demand and supply indicators for labour market dynamics, and a paper Methodology and Quality;

Topic (4) Health statistics

27. This topic received 5 votes from countries.

28. Contributions offered on this topic:
Session organizer: Norway, Netherlands.
Papers: Norway, Netherlands

29. **Comments made:**

- Australia considers the topic an area of growing importance, not only because of the current economic challenges but also because of the implications of current demographic trends in many participating countries;
- Israel suggests to make an emphasis on the following themes:
 - Special surveys on pre and post retirements population,
 - Lifestyle indicators,
 - MDG indicators;
- Netherlands is willing to organise a session, for instance on health accounts, morbidity statistics, and health interview surveys. Netherlands could also contribute the following papers:
 - Cognitive test of the health care module and the health determinants module of the European Health Interview Survey,
 - Paper from the division of Methodology and Quality,
 - The system of Health Accounts in the Netherlands,
 - Developing a Health Statistics database based on individual health files,

- Measuring health status using household surveys;

- Switzerland suggests to discuss the topic from the economic point of view;

Topic (5) Crime statistics and perceived security of citizens

30. This topic received 5 votes (4 from countries and 1 from IOs).

31. Contributions offered on this topic:

Session organizer: Netherlands.

Papers: Netherlands, Lithuania.

32. Comments made:

- Israel suggests to make an emphasis on the following aspects:
 - Insurance coverage and insurance claims motivating crime reports,
 - Voluntary participation in community crime prevention activities,
 - Improving data on domestic violence,
 - Use of health statistics sources to improve victimization statistics;
- Netherlands offers to be a session organizer on victimization surveys and beyond; could possibly contribute the following papers:
 - Police effectively survey and victimization survey in one,
 - Small area estimation of violent crime victim rates in the Netherlands,
 - Producing integrated performance indicators on national and local security;

Topic (7) Challenges in managing the information and communication technologies (ICT) in statistical offices

33. This topic received 5 votes from countries.

34. Contributions offered on this topic:

Session organizer: Netherlands

Papers: Sweden, Finland, Netherlands.

35. Comments made:

- Israel suggests to make an emphasis on the following themes:
 - Change management, technology push,
 - User perspective - internet data collection, virtual databases;
- Sweden suggests to highlight the user perspective and focus more on communication issues. The following themes for discussion are proposed: communication - customer service and communication with social media.
- United States is concerned that these topics may be too “technical” to be of interest for a day-long seminar at the chief statistician level, though some working group initiatives could be of interest to some countries.

Topic (10) The role of metadata in the management of official statistics

36. This topic received 4 votes (3 from countries and 1 from IOs). Netherlands offered to contribute a paper.

37. Comments made:

- Israel suggests to make an emphasis on the role of meta-information and on metadata management strategies.

III. NEW TOPICS PROPOSED

38. Members of the Conference were also invited to propose new topics. Two new topics were proposed:

(a) **Measurement of non-observed economy with an emphasis on illegal activities (proposed by Slovak Republic).**

(b) **Government statistics (proposed by the IMF).**

39. This topic is especially relevant given the increasing role that governments take in economies affected by the financial crisis. As well, outside the European Union, there are data gaps and problems in the comparability of government finance statistics, with wide differences in coverage and definitions in national fiscal data. For example, for one country data may cover only budgetary institutions, while for another it may include extra-budgetary units and social security funds.

40. The IMF would be willing to be a joint organizer with Eurostat.

IV. POSSIBLE CES SEMINAR IN 2011

41. Eurostat proposed that a **CES seminar on agriculture statistics be held in 2011**, following the global discussions planned on this topic during 2009-2010 (Rome meeting, ISI, UN Statistical Commission). The CES Bureau strongly supported the organisation of such a seminar in 2011.

42. During the 2009 consultation, the following countries and organizations offered contributions on this topic:

Seminar organizer: Eurostat co-organizer.

Session organizer: Eurostat.

Papers: Portugal (on the impact on the agricultural economic accounts resulting from changes in this area, e.g. activities related to rural tourism), Netherlands.

V. CONCLUSIONS

43. 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 9 June. The proposals will be presented to the Conference on 10 June under agenda item 10.

ANNEX I

The following list of possible topics for the seminar at the 2010 CES plenary session was circulated to countries and international organizations for consultation:

1. **Environment statistics**
2. **Short term economic indicators**
3. **Labour and social security statistics, labour migration**
4. **Health statistics**
5. **Crime statistics and perceived security of citizens**
6. **The global financial crisis and the demand for official statistics**
7. **Challenges in managing the information and communication technologies (ICT) in statistical offices**
8. **Organization of data collection and data sharing**
9. **Spatial statistics / Role of a spatial dimension in official statistics**
10. **The role of metadata in the management of official statistics.**
12. **Agriculture statistics** (proposed as a topic for the CES seminar in 2011).

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
- 2008 Strategic issues linked to the measurement of international transactions
Measuring population movement and integration in a globalized world
- 2009 Balancing principles of professional autonomy and accountability with the
mandate to produce policy relevant data
Strategic issues in business statistics

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