



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

ECE/CES/75
16 March 2009

Original: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

STATISTICAL COMMISSION

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Fifty-seventh plenary session
Geneva, 8-10 June 2009
Item 1 of the provisional agenda

**ANNOTATED PROVISIONAL AGENDA
FOR THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PLENARY SESSION¹**

To be held in Salle XVIII, Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

I. PROVISIONAL AGENDA

1. Opening addresses and adoption of the agenda.
2. Meetings of the parent bodies of the Conference of European Statisticians.
 - (a) Sixty-third session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.
 - (b) Fortieth session of the United Nations Statistical Commission.
3. Seminar on balancing principles of professional autonomy and accountability with the mandate to produce policy relevant data.
4. Seminar on strategic issues in business statistics.
5. Coordination of international statistical work in the region of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

¹ Documents for the meeting may be downloaded from the following website:
<http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2009.06.ces.htm> Delegates are kindly asked to bring their own copies of documents with them, as no paper copies will be made available in the meeting room.

- (a) Outcomes of the in-depth reviews by the Bureau held in October 2008 and February 2009.
 - (i) Housing statistics.
 - (ii) Agriculture statistics, including forestry and fisheries.
 - (iii) Statistics on labour cost.
 - (b) In-depth review of statistical dissemination, communication and publications.
6. Principles on confidentiality and privacy aspects of statistical data integration.
 7. Guidelines on the use and dissemination of data on international immigration to facilitate their use to improve emigration data of sending countries.
 8. Manual on victimisation surveys.
 9. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Statistical programme and work of the Conference's teams of specialists.
 - (a) Statistical programme: report on 2008 and plans for 2009;
 - (b) Reports of the Conference of European Statisticians Bureau meetings and progress reports on the teams of specialists working under the Conference.
 10. Selection of topics for seminars to take place during the 2009 plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians.
 11. Election of the Conference of European Statisticians Bureau for 2009-2011.
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II. ANNOTATIONS TO THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA

1. The fifty-seventh plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) is convened at the request of the fifty-sixth CES plenary session (ECE/CES/74) and in accordance with the Rules Governing the Work of the Conference and its Bureau adopted at the 2005 plenary session of the CES (CES/2005/2).

2. The 2009 plenary session of the Conference will continue to follow the format introduced in 2002 by the fiftieth session of the Conference (ECE/CES/62). The plenary session includes a formal session and two seminars. The formal session will deal with the review of general issues such as the international statistical work in the region, while the two seminars will focus on foundational issues of statistical systems and on new emerging issues.

Item 1. Opening addresses and adoption of the agenda

3. Mr. J. Kubiš, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), will address the Conference.

4. The proposed provisional agenda and timetable were agreed upon by the CES Bureau at its February 2009 meeting. The provisional agenda will be presented for the approval of the Conference.

Item 2. Meetings of the parent bodies of the Conference of European Statisticians

(a) Sixty-third session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

5. Information on the discussions held at the sixty-third session of the Economic Commission for Europe (30 March-1 April 2009) and on resolutions and decisions taken that have a bearing on the work of the Conference will be presented.

(b) Fortieth session of the United Nations Statistical Commission

6. Brief information on the outcome of the 2009 Session of the United Nations Statistical Commission (24-27 February 2009) will be presented to the Conference.

Item 3. Seminar on balancing principles of professional autonomy and accountability with the mandate to produce policy relevant data

7. The seminar is organised by the Central Statistics Office of Ireland. The seminar will take place on the first day of the Conference, 8 June 2009.

8. The seminar will discuss how to balance the professional autonomy and accountability with the mandate to produce policy relevant data in the light of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. The Fundamental Principles require that statistics should be relevant and reliable, and produced in an independent and impartial way making use of best scientific practice in a cost-effective manner. The achievement of these objectives in respect of individual statistical outputs is now well understood within the statistical community. However, less attention has been paid to the implications of these objectives for defining the scope and content of the statistical programme itself. A key starting point in this regard is clarity around what defines “official” statistics and distinguishes them from other statistics/indicators.

9. The counterpart of professional autonomy is accountability to the government, to parliament and to the general public or taxpayer for making good use of the public funds allocated for the production of official statistics. The seminar will discuss the methods for achieving this and how they differ between national statistical offices (NSOs) and other producers of official statistics. A related issue is the need to manage public perceptions of the accuracy of official data and the integrity of the statistical production system.

Session 1. Relationships between statisticians and policy makers: maintaining independence while addressing demands

10. The session is organised by United Kingdom. Invited papers are prepared by Australia (to be confirmed), Canada, Chile, Ukraine, United Kingdom and Eurostat (to be confirmed).

11. The session will be based on the following two components:

(a) Drawing the 'boundaries' of official statistics: Is there a boundary? Who defines the boundary? According to what criteria?

12. A very narrow (and perhaps traditional) view of official statistics would see them limited to being quantitative information based on empirical measurement, required to meet the clearly articulated needs of policy makers and produced by a professional statistical agency to precisely specified standards. The reality in the modern information age is quite different in most countries. For example, many public authorities produce statistical information in an unstructured manner in relation to the activities that they administer. In addition, national statistical offices (NSOs) have broadened their range of sources to include qualitative type information and also data based on model estimation and forecasts.

13. The session will, therefore, focus on examining situations where countries have explicitly attempted to define and separately identify official statistics, including experience with certification and labeling systems.

(b) Maintaining professional autonomy in an era of increasing demands for information for policy advocacy and public opinions: pros and cons, risks and benefits.

14. NSOs have increasingly seen their role as meeting the needs of society at large and not just those of policy makers. Policy advocates and interest groups appreciate the value of information, particularly when labeled as "official statistics", in advancing their cases. This environment brings along increased demands for more information but also pressure to influence what is measured and how the results are presented. The status and role of the NSO is usually enhanced in these circumstances but the challenge to maintain professional autonomy and to be perceived as impartial is also increased.

Session 2. Beyond the production of official statistics: creating synergies, avoiding conflict

15. The session is organised by Austria. Invited papers are prepared by Latvia, Norway and UNECE.

16. This session will deal with performing functions beyond collecting and disseminating official statistics: forecasting and scenario-building; managing administrative registers for multiple uses; hosting computer centers, etc. The session will consider actual examples of NSOs engaging in such activities.

17. The seminar will deal with the following topics:

(a) Analysis: economic and other analysis; modelling, forecasting and scenario-building;

(b) Statistical activities beyond official statistics (e.g. opinion collection);

(c) Non-statistical activities: managing registers; interaction between registers and statistics and using administrative data for multiple purposes; management of electoral procedures; computer centres management etc.

18. The main focus of the session will be on synergies and potential conflicts created by these activities, and how to avoid them.

Session 3. Accountability 'beyond the budget': measuring and addressing public expectations

19. The session is organized by France. Invited papers are prepared by Sweden, Australia and Bulgaria.

20. This session will examine issues such as accountability – the relationship of NSOs with parliament, the official status of statistical offices, budgetary independence, and the existence of statistical commissions and boards. It will consider how feedback is obtained from stakeholders and the public, whether there are specific examples of assessments of NSOs, and how NSOs interact with the public to manage perceptions. According to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, statistical agencies are entitled to comment on erroneous interpretation and misuse of statistics. The question will be posed as to what extent statistical offices should enter into discussion when data are misused.

Session 4. General discussion and conclusions

21. The session is organised by Ireland.

22. This session will take the form of a general discussion. It will focus on the recommendations and possible proposals for future work that may arise during the course of the seminar.

Item 4. Seminar on strategic issues in business statistics.

23. The seminar is organised by Statistics Canada and Eurostat. The seminar will take place on the second day of the Conference, 9 June 2009.

24. The seminar is organized around the two main challenges that business statistics will be facing over the coming years. Firstly, there is a need to continue reducing the statistical burden on enterprises. Secondly, the strong integration of world markets is changing the structure of the economy. New phenomena linked with the process of globalisation have to be described by statistics.

25. The two challenges of reducing the response burden and the needs for better statistics are not contradictory. Responding to new data requirements can go hand in hand with a reduction of respondent burden through the use of new data collection methods and other technological innovations, as well as by simultaneously eliminating old data collections that are no longer needed.

Session 1. Reduction of respondent burden

26. The session is organised by Statistics Slovenia. Invited papers are prepared by Eurostat, Portugal and Slovenia.

27. The session will highlight and discuss current endeavours around the world to further reduce response burden. This would include efforts to more effectively use business registers and administrative data to avoid duplication in the collection of information from businesses. This does not only mean avoiding the survey of businesses when administrative data exist but also standardizing the concepts to reduce data heterogeneity and the burden of their collection.

28. Reduction of response burden has already been discussed at the latest conference of the International Association of Official Statistics (IAOS) held in Shanghai in October 2008, as well as at the conference of Director Generals of NSOs of the EU member countries held in Vilnius in September 2008. The session will summarize the available information and then discuss further the following issues: differentiating between actual and perceived response burden; trade-off between response burden and quality of statistics; costs and benefits of using administrative data as a substitute to surveys.

Session 2. Emerging areas, new developments and user needs in business statistics

29. The session is organised by Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques (INSEE), France. Invited papers are prepared by Norway, Spain and the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. The keynote address is delivered by Tom Mesenbourg (U.S. Census Bureau).

30. The session will identify and discuss the issues and challenges facing statistical agencies to respond to user needs in the emerging areas of business statistics where new developments are occurring. Over the past decades, economic and technological changes have affected the structure of the national economy and made them more integrated in global markets. This development is likely to continue in the future. In this context, the challenges for statistical agencies to reflect and measure the new phenomena are numerous. The issues that will be covered in this session relate to the strategic challenges of collecting information from businesses on the following issues: structure and activities of multinational enterprises; business and innovation strategies and intangible assets (e.g. knowledge, 'goodwill'); and emerging trends in entrepreneurship.

Item 5. Coordination of international statistical work in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region

31. This agenda item is concerned with the coordination of international statistical work in the UNECE region and the decisions and recommendations that the Conference is expected to take on the respective issues.

32. The Conference will be informed about the regular in-depth reviews of selected statistical areas made by the CES Bureau. The reviews look at strategic issues in statistics in the next five

years or so, and deal with issues of concern to statistical offices of a conceptual and coordinating nature.

(a) Outcomes of the in-depth reviews conducted by the Bureau in October 2008 and February 2009

(i) Housing statistics

33. The Bureau made an in-depth review of housing statistics in February 2009. The Conference will be informed about the outcomes of the discussion.

34. Furthermore, the Bureau asked the secretariat to find out which are the priority issues in housing statistics in CES member countries where work at international level could be considered useful. To this end, the secretariat will consult the CES members to identify the priority areas for future international work. The Conference will discuss possible future work on housing statistics based on the outcome of the consultation.

(ii) Agriculture statistics, including forestry and fisheries

35. The topic was reviewed in depth by the Bureau in October 2008. Following the decision of the Bureau, the in-depth review paper was circulated to the CES members for written comments in January 2009. The CES Bureau discussed in February 2009 the future work in agriculture statistics in the UNECE region based on a proposal by Eurostat and comments by countries and international organizations.

36. The Conference will be informed about the outcome of the review and will consider a proposal for future work in agriculture statistics in the UNECE region prepared by Eurostat.

(iii) Statistics on labour cost

37. The topic was reviewed in depth by the Bureau in October 2008. Following the decision of the Bureau, the in-depth review paper was circulated to the CES members for written comments in December 2008. The outcome of the consultation was reviewed by the Bureau in February 2009.

38. The Conference will be informed about the outcome of the in-depth review.

(b) In-depth review of statistical dissemination, communication and publications

39. Statistical dissemination, communication and publications will be discussed at the CES plenary session in June 2009, prior to the in-depth review by the CES Bureau in October 2009.

40. The aim of the discussion is to seek input from all CES members for an in-depth review of international work in statistical dissemination, communication and publications. The discussion should identify challenges for statistical offices in this area and determine what the international statistical community and international organizations can do to assist national statistical offices

in meeting these challenges. The focus should be on raising issues that are not yet addressed, or not sufficiently addressed, at international level and identifying possible areas of duplication of work.

41. The outcomes of the discussion will serve as input to the in-depth review, to be conducted by the CES Bureau in October 2009.

Item 6. Principles on confidentiality and privacy aspects of statistical data integration

42. The Task Force on Confidentiality and Privacy Aspects of Statistical Data Integration was set up by the CES Bureau in 2007 to produce a set of principles and annotated guidelines for addressing confidentiality and privacy aspects of statistical data integration projects. The Bureau discussed the Principles at its February 2009 meeting. Following the Bureau decision, the Principles will be sent to CES members for electronic consultation prior to the CES 2009 plenary session.

43. Subject to the results of the consultation, *Principles on confidentiality and privacy aspects of statistical data integration* will be submitted to the Conference for endorsement.

Item 7. Guidelines on the use and dissemination of data on international immigration to facilitate their use to improve emigration data of sending countries

44. The CES Task Force on Measuring Emigration has prepared the *Guidelines on the use and dissemination of data on international immigration to facilitate their use to improve emigration data of sending countries*. The Bureau reviewed the Guidelines at its February 2009 meeting. The Guidelines have been updated to take into account the comments by the CES Bureau members. The Bureau decided that the Guidelines should be sent to the CES members for electronic consultation prior to the CES 2009 plenary session.

45. Subject to the results of the consultation, the Conference will be invited to endorse the Guidelines.

Item 8. Manual on victimisation surveys

46. The Task Force on Victim Surveys has developed a *Manual on Victimisation Surveys*. The CES Bureau discussed the Manual at its February 2009 meeting. The Bureau decided that the Manual should be sent to CES members for electronic consultation prior to the CES 2009 plenary session.

47. Subject to the results of the consultation, the Conference will be invited to endorse the Manual.

Item 9. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Statistical programme and work of the Conference's teams of specialists

(a) Statistical Programme: report on 2008 and plans for 2009

48. The UNECE Statistical Programme for 2009 and the report on the implementation of the 2008 Programme will be presented briefly for information.

(b) Reports of the Conference of European Statisticians Bureau meetings and progress reports on teams of specialists working under the Conference

49. The reports from the CES Bureau meetings in October 2008 and February 2009, the progress reports of the teams of specialists (Steering Groups, Task Forces) working under the auspices of the CES, and the reports from experts' meetings held since June 2008 will be presented for information.

Item 10. Selection of topics for seminars to take place during the 2010 plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians

50. A list of possible topics for seminars to take place during the 2010 plenary session will be distributed by the UNECE secretariat in advance of the plenary session to consult the CES member countries and international organizations. The Bureau will submit a proposal, taking into account the survey results, for discussion and approval by the Conference.

Item 11. Election of the Conference of European Statisticians Bureau for 2009-2011

51. The current term of all members of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians expires at the closing of the 2009 plenary session, on 10 June 2009. At the 2009 plenary session, therefore, elections for a Chairman and for the members of the Bureau will be held for the two-year period June 2009 to June 2011.

Item 12. Other business

52. Any additional issues that the Conference needs to be informed of can be taken up under this agenda item.

Item 11. Adoption of the report

53. The Conference is expected to adopt the report of the 2009 plenary session before it adjourns. The report will be limited as far as possible to decisions taken by the Conference during the course of the plenary session. The final report of the plenary session will be produced within two weeks or so after the plenary session and will be made available on the UNECE Web site.

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