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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Conference of European Statisticians

**Fifty-ninth plenary session**

Geneva, 14-16 June 2011

Item 2 of the provisional agenda

**Matters arising for the Conference of European Statisticians**

## **Matters arising from the meetings of the parent bodies of the Conference of European Statisticians**

**Note by the secretariat**

### *Summary*

The note provides an overview of the main outcomes of the recent meetings of the two parent bodies of the Conference of European Statisticians: the United Nations Statistical Commission and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. The note focuses on the decisions of these meetings that have implications for the Conference of European Statisticians and for developing the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Statistical Programme 2012.

## **I. Outcomes of the 42<sup>nd</sup> session of the United Nations Statistical Commission**

1. The forty second session of the Statistical Commission (UNSC) was held in New York from 22 to 25 February 2011. The note focuses on the main topics discussed at the session that are related to the work of the Conference of European Statisticians and have implications for its programme of work.

### **A. World Statistics Day**

2. The World Statistics Day was celebrated in Geneva with a successful conference entitled "Measuring a Globalized World: the Geneva Contribution". The Conference served to raise public awareness about official statistics and their value, stimulate dialogue between users and providers of statistics, advocate visibility and support for statistical projects, and reinforce ties among the Geneva international organizations engaged in the production of statistics. The event had a positive impact on strengthening the cooperation between the nine Geneva-based international organizations undertaking statistical work.

### **B. Programme review of gender statistics**

3. The Statistical Commission expressed its appreciation for the work on gender statistics carried out by the regional commissions and other entities, and requested them to further strengthen their work in this area. Furthermore, the Statistical Commission requested the regional commissions, among other entities, to work intensively with Member States to develop appropriate in-country support and to assist them in establishing a sound national programme on gender statistics (E/CN.3/2011/37, decision 42/102).

4. The Conference of European Statisticians (CES) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Statistical Division have been actively working in gender statistics for many years. The gender statistics activities planned in the UNECE Statistical Programme are in line with the UNSC decisions. The "Manual on gender statistics" endorsed by the CES in 2010 will be a good basis for developing global manuals and methodological guidelines for the production and use of gender statistics, as requested by the UNSC. The CES Bureau recently set up a Task Force to develop indicators of gender equality for the UNECE region. This work can feed into the establishment of a minimum set of gender indicators at the global level, as decided by the UNSC.

5. Furthermore, the UNECE Statistical Division is undertaking capacity building activities in gender statistics and maintains a gender database that helps to improve the availability of gender statistics, especially for the countries of South-East Europe (SEE), Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA).

### **C. National Accounts**

6. The Statistical Commission noted the experiences of Member States and their difficulties in implementing the 2008 SNA, recognized the need for capacity-building through technical assistance and training, and expressed appreciation for the activities of international and regional organizations to facilitate implementation of the 2008 SNA, especially the regional implementation strategies (decision 42/103).

7. The UNECE promotes the implementation of the System of National Accounts (SNA) in the UNECE region with an emphasis on SEE and EECCA countries. UNECE contributes to the work of the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts (ISWGNA) on development of the global implementation strategy for the 2008 SNA and its adaptation to the needs of the EECCA and SEE countries. In close cooperation with partner organisations, UNECE provides technical assistance to the SEE and EECCA countries on the implementation of 2008 SNA, improvement of the availability and quality of national accounts data, and implementation of other international standards related to national accounts (e.g. economic classifications). Furthermore, UNECE undertakes methodological research that supports the implementation of 2008 SNA at regional and global level and develops guidelines and recommendations in this area, such as the Guide Impact of Globalization on National Accounts.

#### **D. Development indicators**

8. The Statistical Commission commended the progress made in enhancing the dialogue between countries and international agencies and in resolving inconsistencies in data sources and discrepancies between national and international Millennium Development Goals (MDG) data (decision 42/109).

9. The UNECE is working on establishing a regional MDG database, as requested by the ECE reform in 2005, to provide data and extended metadata for EECCA countries that are not currently available from international sources and include: (i) additional indicators relevant for the region and (ii) additional disaggregation by sex, region and ethnic group, where possible. UNECE is also actively participating in organizing regional workshops on MDG indicators (jointly with other agencies of the United Nations) to provide training to countries in MDG indicator monitoring, and to bring together different agencies producing data for monitoring the achievement of MDGs.

#### **E. Implementation of Fundamental Principles of official statistics**

10. The Statistical Commission encouraged the undertaking of regional assessments of the implementation of the Fundamental Principles, and requested the United Nations Statistics Division, the regional commissions and other relevant organizations to provide support to Member States as they implement the Principles (decision 42/109).

11. The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics were first adopted by the Conference of European Statisticians in 1991, and at the political level by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe in 1992. The United Nations Statistical Commission adopted the Principles in 1994 for the official statistical community at the global level.

12. As the custodian of the Fundamental Principles, UNECE has been promoting implementation of the Principles, in particular in EECCA and SEE countries. UNECE carried out a survey on the implementation of the Fundamental Principles in these countries in 2009. UNECE has also been following up on the practical implementation of the Principles through the Global Assessments of national statistical systems carried out in several EECCA countries (Kazakhstan, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan) jointly with Eurostat and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA).

13. The UNECE will continue to pay special attention to the implementation of the Fundamental Principles. The UNECE is ready to contribute to the revising of the preamble of the Fundamental Principles and share with other regions the questionnaire used in the survey in 2009.

## II. Outcomes of the sixty-fourth session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

### A. New directions and initiatives in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe programme of work

14. The 64<sup>th</sup> Commission Session discussed the priorities of the UNECE under the general segment “**New directions and initiatives in the ECE programme of work**”.

15. The UNECE Statistical Division contributed with a paper presenting the work in three areas. The first one focused on **measuring sustainable development** and the recent developments in measuring societal progress from a broader perspective than just gross domestic product (GDP). Specific examples of measurement difficulties were described. For example, the calculation of the economic wealth for capital stocks that do not have a market value, i.e. natural resources like clean air cannot be given a price. Other issues like measuring stocks of human and social capital and the international aspect of sustainable development were also mentioned.

16. Furthermore, the Statistical Division put a special emphasis on the need for **high quality environmental statistics** and on the work to promote comparability of environmental statistics in the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. The work has revealed many methodological discrepancies, data gaps and lack of clear guidance when it comes to the production of concrete environmental indicators.

17. The final part of the paper discussed the need to develop better **statistics on climate change**. In this context, the Statistical Division has undertaken a survey among the ECE members and beyond to assess the degree to which national statistical offices (NSOs) are involved in producing emission inventories and other climate change related statistics.

### B. Decision of the Commission

18. The following important decisions were adopted by the 64th session of the Economic Commission for Europe in relation to the work of the Statistical Division:

“The Economic Commission for Europe,

(a) Emphasizes the importance of good quality statistical data as a basis for formulation of adequate and evidence-based policies to address the growing concern about sustainable development and environment-related quality of life, and requests the Conference of European Statisticians to develop recommendations and agree, after taking into account existing statistics at regional, subregional and national levels, on a common framework for measuring sustainable development within the realm of official statistics;

(b) Supports the work with national environmental experts and official statisticians on addressing methodological discrepancies, data gaps and lack of clear guidance related to the production of environmental indicators in key areas such as clean air, energy, drinking water, waste, forest biodiversity, and sustainable transport;

(c) Recognizes the need for robust, timely and comparable statistics on environmental indicators e.g. on climate change, and for strengthening the capacity of the National Statistical Offices in producing statistics on environmental indicators.”

### **C. Review of the 2005 United Nations Economic Commission for Europe reform**

19. UNECE underwent a substantive review and reform in 2005. An external evaluation of all programmes was carried out, including interviews with government officials in countries and questionnaires to the government agencies and international organizations, etc. As a result of the external evaluation, statistics was ranked by Member States as the third most important subprogramme in UNECE (out of seven), after the Environment and Transport subprogrammes.

20. In 2011, six years after the reform, the ECE Executive Committee will undertake a review of how the decisions of the 2005 reform have been implemented by the subprogrammes. As a first step, the secretariat has been asked to provide detailed information on the methods of work, outputs, coordination and cooperation with other agencies within and outside the UN system, relevance and value added of the work, etc.

21. According to the approved modalities of the review, the second step will include collecting information from Member States. It will be important that the Chief Statisticians will provide information and express their views on the work of the Conference through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of their country. This process will continue from June 2011 until March 2012.

22. Based on the outcome, the ECE Executive Committee will develop recommendations concerning the work of each of the ECE subprogrammes that will be submitted to the ECE session in March 2013.

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