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Outcomes of the in-depth reviews carried out by the Conference of European Statisticians Bureau

Outcome of the in-depth review of statistics on political and other community activities, including volunteering

Note by the secretariat

Addendum

Summary

This note provides information on the outcome of the in-depth review of political and other community activities, including volunteering, conducted by the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians in February 2013.

The in-depth review paper was prepared by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico. The updated in-depth review paper incorporating the comments from the Bureau is available as document ECE/CES/2013/10.

I. Introduction

1. The Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) reviews selected statistical areas in depth each year. The purpose of the reviews is to improve coordination of statistical activities in the region of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), identify gaps or duplication of work, and address emerging issues. The review focuses on strategic issues and highlights concerns of statistical offices of both a conceptual and coordinating nature.

2. At its February 2012 meeting, the CES Bureau selected statistics on political and other community activities, including volunteering, for an in-depth review to be carried out in February 2013. The National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico drafted the paper to provide basis for the in-depth review. Additional notes were submitted by the International Labour Office (ILO), Eurostat and the United States. Following the February 2013 CES Bureau meeting, the review paper was updated to reflect the discussion. The updated version is presented as document ECE/CES/2013/10.

II. Conclusions of the in-depth review paper

3. The paper outlined existing methodological work relevant to the area of political and other community activities, such as definitions of volunteering used in the World's Volunteerism Report 2011, and the ILO definition of volunteer work, with reference to the ILO-Johns Hopkins University manual on measuring volunteering. This manual represented an output, inter alia, of the UNECE Task Force on Measuring Volunteer Work.

4. Considering that the ILO's definition of volunteer work is restricted to the System of National Accounts (SNA) production boundary, the paper outlined a broader concept of volunteerism that includes activities denoted as participatory actions.

5. In the broader context of activities and actions intended to improve the situation of others, the paper also discussed the possibility of measuring donations of money. The rationale for conceptualising donations together with other voluntary activities would be its role in social involvement.

6. Relevant national experiences in measuring volunteer work were reviewed, and questions that would need to be addressed to better define volunteering were posed.

7. The paper proposed the topic "Statistics on political participation and other community activities, including volunteer work" for a seminar to be held during the CES plenary session in April 2014, to be considered in a wider context linked to social capital and human well-being.

III. Summary of the Bureau discussion

8. In the in-depth review discussion, the Bureau raised the following points:

(a) The Bureau welcomed the in-depth review as it brings clarity to the concepts related to political and other community activities. Some of the concepts are new and need more precise definitions, such as active solidarity, active empathy and participatory solidarity. Furthermore, the concept of common good is not applicable to all political activities, as they sometimes serve limited interests;

(b) At times of economic crises, data on volunteerism are extremely important, yet challenging to obtain. The paper should elaborate further on the various statistical measures of volunteering beyond hours worked, on activities outside the SNA production boundary, and on the effects of volunteering. Other possible data sources in addition to the Labour Force Survey (LFS) should be reviewed;

(c) The paper makes a useful link between the framework for volunteer work and the 2008 SNA, time use surveys and other statistical tools. A link should also be made with the recent work by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on well-being and social capital, by Italy on the measurement of relational goods¹, and by ILO on the forthcoming definition of work;

(d) More information is required in order to decide whether there is a need to launch work in this area. The Bureau proposed to organise a CES seminar on political and other community activities and related topics to bring together information about the work in related areas and discuss a possible road map for the way forward.

IV. Conclusion

9. Mexico has updated the paper to take into account the comments received and the Bureau discussion. The updated paper is submitted to the CES 2013 plenary session for information as document ECE/CES/2013/10.

11. OECD and Mexico, together with the secretariat, will prepare an outline for a possible CES seminar on political and other community activities and related topics. The outline will be sent to all CES members as part of the electronic consultation on the CES 2014 seminar topics (document ECE/CES/2013/13).

V. Proposal for the Conference

12. The Conference is invited to endorse the outcome of the in-depth review of political and other community activities, including volunteering, and take note of the updated in-depth review paper (ECE/CES/2013/10).

13. The CES 2013 plenary session will decide about the topics for the 2014 CES seminars under agenda item 9.

¹ Relational goods are goods that cannot be enjoyed alone. Examples would include participation in a choir, sports team, or some group volunteer activity.