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Outcomes of the in-depth reviews carried out by the CES Bureau: Banking, insurance and financial statistics; population ageing; and political and other community activities including volunteering

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

Note by the secretariat

Summary

This note summarizes the comments by members of the Conference of European Statisticians on in-depth review of statistics on political and other community activities, including volunteering. The secretariat carried out the electronic consultation on the outcome of the review in March-April 2013.

A total of 18 replies were received in response to the request for comments: from 16 countries and 2 international organizations. The responses contained comments supportive of the decision to examine this area of review, or of the proposed outcomes from the discussion of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians. No country or organization rejected the endorsement of the outcome. Furthermore, several comments and amendments were proposed, including specific proposed changes, which are detailed in this note.

In view of the general support, it is proposed that the Conference endorses the outcome of the in-depth review of statistics related to population ageing, subject to acknowledging the proposed modifications.

I. Introduction

1. This note summarizes the comments by members of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) on the in-depth review of statistics on political and other community activities, including volunteering. The CES Bureau carried out the in-depth review in February 2013. The electronic consultation on the outcome of the review was conducted by the secretariat in March-April 2013.

II. Summary

2. A total of 18 replies were received in response to the request for comments on the in-depth review. Sixteen countries and two international organizations responded: Belarus, Finland, Georgia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United States, Eurostat and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

3. The responses supported the work undertaken for this review and/or the proposed organization of a CES seminar on this topic. No country or organization opposed the endorsement of the review.

4. Italy and the OECD agreed to contribute to the CES seminar on this topic, if such a seminar should be held during the 2014 plenary session, and Italy expressed interest in contributing to a road map for improving statistics in this area.

5. Norway cautioned against extending data collection further (either new or existing surveys) in the context of reduced budgets of national statistical offices, and called for a more strategic assessment of which elements could be justified to proceed with. Latvia expressed doubt about the funding of a new volunteer survey due to cost reasons. Portugal cited limited resources as constraining its ability to participate actively in the current phase of work on measuring volunteering, despite its enthusiasm for further international work to be done in this area.

6. In addition to commenting on the cost and benefits on embarking on further methodological work on volunteering, a number of countries supplied background information on national circumstances regarding availability of data relevant to volunteering, or on their experiences with collection of such data.

7. Many countries supplied comments on the conceptual or methodological aspects of measuring volunteering, which are summarised in section III below.

III. Conceptual and methodological aspects of measuring volunteering

8. Several countries (Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United States) felt that further clarification or discussion was needed of the concepts outlined in the in-depth review, while there was general support for a broader umbrella concept that was wider than the International Labour Organization's (ILO) definition of "volunteer work".

9. Many comments related to the definition of the concept of "participative solidarity" that had been proposed in the review document. Finland cautioned against having too many conceptual layers and felt that the term "participative solidarity" seemed somewhat idealistic, proposing that the concept of "volunteerism" could instead be modified to

encompass donations. Portugal pointed out that donations may not always be financial, and may include other forms, such as blood donation.

10. Portugal also argued against including initiatives undertaken for oneself within the definition of participative solidarity, while Finland preferred using the household concept to exclude initiatives undertaken for family members. This is because the concept of family is less precise between different countries, and because welfare systems may function to a different extent in different countries.

11. Finland further stated its support for the “third person criterion” for the definition of volunteer work, such that volunteer work falls under the definition of work itself, and other elements of participative solidarity are characterised as actions or activities.

12. The United States requested more guidance regarding the 4 week reference period, suggesting 12 weeks as a possible alternative. Portugal questioned whether the one hour cut-off used to define volunteer work would also be applicable to participative solidarity. Finland felt that the time element of the definitions of volunteerism, volunteer work, and voluntary actions may be problematic for deriving quantitative measurements.

13. Portugal raised the possibility of changing the ILO definition of volunteer work, given the parallel methodological activities being undertaken by the ILO. The United States suggested confirming and possibly refining the ILO’s conceptualization.

14. Another significant theme emerging from the comments was the most appropriate measure of participative solidarity with regard to measuring time spent, and/or its value. Norway commented that time spent does not reflect impact, and suggested building up measures of the value of participative solidarity through satellite accounts, in one of two possible ways:

(a) Satellite accounts of non-profit institutions, gathering data directly from them, which could be linked to labour force or time use surveys;

(b) Household satellite accounts, utilising time use surveys.

15. Hungary stated its support for efforts to standardise satellite accounts. Norway also suggested examining the value of goods produced *within* the SNA production boundary in existing national accounts, on the basis that these would already reflect some of the outputs of volunteer work. In addition, Norway suggested looking at paid for services, such as care-home employment, since in some countries, a large part of such types of work are done within the formal economy. This might indicate how much work is being done through volunteerism in other countries.

16. Regarding methods for collecting data through surveys, Latvia outlined a number of practical reasons why it could not use the labour force survey as a vehicle for collecting volunteer data in that country. One of these was overloading of that survey with too many questions, a concern that was also brought up by Finland, which described how telephone survey interviewing constrain the number of questions that could be asked in that case.

17. The United States cited several challenges in conducting separate surveys, and suggested that they may lead to multiple or inconsistent estimates of volunteering. The benefit of using a single survey was in the linking of respondents and examining correlates for both types of volunteerism, and their relationship.

18. The United States also made a number of other points:

(a) They called for recommendations for the survey frequency (e.g. every 5 years);

(b) They stated that concerns about quality of proxy responses required empirical evidence;

(c) They expressed a wish to examine social and community factors that could explain variation within countries, as well as between them.

IV. Proposal

19. **In view of the support expressed during the electronic consultation, the Conference is invited to endorse the in-depth review of statistics on political and other community activities, including volunteering, acknowledging the comments summarised in this note.**

20. One of the outcomes of the review was a proposal to organise a CES seminar on political and other community activities in 2014. The topic was included in the list of possible CES 2014 seminar topics that was consulted with all CES members in April 2013. Based on the outcome of this consultation, the Conference will decide the topics for the 2014 CES seminars under agenda item 9 on 12 June 2013.
