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Matters arising from the 47th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission

Matters arising from the United Nations Statistical Commission – implications for the work of the Conference of European Statisticians

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The note presents the key outcomes of the 47th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission, held from 8 to 11 March 2016 in New York. It focuses on the discussions and decisions of the Statistical Commission that have a bearing on the work of the Conference of European Statisticians. The note reflects in more detail the discussions related to Sustainable Development Goals indicators, modernization of statistical production and climate change-related statistics. Other issues covered are the National Accounts, System of Environmental-economic Accounting, International Comparison Programme and refugee statistics.

The note is submitted to the Conference of European Statisticians for information.

I. Introduction

1. The document presents the outcome of the 47th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC), held from 8 to 11 March 2016 in New York, and its implications on the work of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES).
2. The agenda of the Commission session included the following issues with strong links to the CES work that are discussed in more detail in sections II-IV of this note:
 - (a) Data and indicators for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
 - (b) Transformative agenda for official statistics¹, including a report by the UNECE High-Level Group for the Modernisation of Official Statistics (HLG-MOS); and
 - (c) Climate change statistics, including a report by the UNECE Steering Group and Task Forces.
3. Furthermore, other relevant points raised at the Statistical Commission are presented in section V of this note on the following issues:
 - (a) National accounts;
 - (b) Environmental-economic accounting;
 - (c) International Comparison Programme; and
 - (d) Refugee statistics.
4. The following sections include summaries of key decisions of the Statistical Commission. The shortened text below reflects the issues that have a direct link with the activities of CES. For the full text, please consult the report of the 47th session of the Statistical Commission, available at: unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/47th-session/documents/

II. Data and indicators for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

5. *Under Decision no.1, the Statistical Commission agreed as a practical starting point with the proposed global indicator framework for the 2030 Agenda as reflected in the list of indicators presented in Annex IV of the document E/CN.3/2016/2/Rev.1, subject to future technical refinement. The Commission emphasized among other issues that:*

(a) The development of a robust and high-quality indicator framework is a technical process that will need to continue over time, including by making use of expertise in other related expert processes. The Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) will take into account proposals for refinement made by United Nations Member States at the Session, and will present its proposals and plan for reviews of the indicator framework to the 48th session of the Statistical Commission;

(b) The global indicators are intended for global follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda, and are not necessarily applicable to all national contexts. Indicators at

¹ The Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics is an initiative of the United Nations Statistical Commission, which aims to modernize and strengthen the global, regional and national statistical systems.

regional, national and subnational levels of monitoring will be developed at the regional and national levels;

(c) *The implementation of the indicator framework will be a challenge in many countries and efforts to strengthen national statistical capacities will need to be made;*

(d) *The compilation of global indicators will be based to the greatest extent possible on comparable and standardised national official statistics, provided by countries to the international statistical systems. When other sources and methodologies are used, these will be reviewed and agreed by national statistical authorities and presented in a transparent manner;*

(e) *Coordination between national statistical systems and international organizations is important to ensure transparency and efficiency in reporting, and to avoid duplications;*

(f) *As data disaggregation is fundamental for the full implementation of the indicator framework of the 2030 Agenda, a working group to work on data disaggregation will be established as a subgroup of the IAEG-SDGs.*

6. Work is underway under CES in support of the global process.

7. The Conference has been working on statistics on sustainable development since 2005. The first UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Working Group (led by Canada) prepared a publication *Measuring sustainable development* (2009) which identified the common principles of measuring sustainable development. The work continued with a UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Task Force (led by the Netherlands) that prepared the *Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations on measuring sustainable development*, adopted by the Conference in 2013. The Recommendations, agreed by about 60 countries and the major international organizations, provide a framework for measuring sustainable development combining a strong theoretical basis and a clear link with policy needs.

8. The Conference considered challenges in measuring sustainable development on several occasions. The most recent was the seminar on response of official statistics to SDGs in 2015.

9. In 2015, the Conference decided to “launch work on a road map for the development of official statistics for monitoring SDGs”², that “could contribute to a future action plan at a global level to succeed the Busan action plan for statistics adopted in 2011”.

10. The 2015 CES plenary session also adopted the *Declaration on the role of national statistical offices in measuring and monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals*³. The Declaration:

(a) Calls upon national governments to support national statistical offices in their key role in measuring and monitoring SDGs in countries and also recognizes the importance of cooperation at local, national, sub-regional, regional and global levels in monitoring SDGs; and

(b) Emphasizes the importance of efficient coordination of SDG monitoring and reporting at regional level between relevant international organizations and between international organizations and national statistical offices.

² Report of the CES 2015 plenary session, ECE/CES/89, para 23,

http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/ece/ces/2015/Rep_1512361E.pdf

³ ECE/CES/89/Add. 1,

http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/ece/ces/2015/CES_89_Add.1-E.pdf

11. In 2015, the Conference set up a small task force to adjust the CES Recommendations to SDGs so that they could be used in measuring SDGs in the region.
12. In February 2016, the CES Bureau established a Steering Group on Statistics on SDGs to coordinate the work under CES. The Steering Group is preparing a CES road map for statistics on SDGs.
13. The CES road map (ECE/CES/2016/19) and the report by the Task Force on adjusting the CES framework to SDGs (ECE/CES/2016/18) will be discussed at the CES plenary session on the morning of Thursday, 28 April 2016.

III. Modernization of Official Statistics

14. *Under the Decision no. 3, the Statistical Commission reconfirmed that modernizing and strengthening statistical systems at the national, regional and global levels is necessary, and emphasized that:*

(a) Modernization efforts should be built around a standard-based architecture and take into account national specificities;

(b) The goal of modernization should be to respond effectively and efficiently to emerging users' needs and address the data demand in relation to the 2030 Agenda and related initiatives;

(c) Regional Commissions should be closely consulted and existing programmes and activities for integrating and modernizing statistical systems should be taken into account when formulating regional road maps for a Transformative Agenda for official statistics.

15. *The Statistical Commission acknowledged the good work done by the UNECE High-Level Group on the Modernisation of Official Statistics (HLG-MOS) and suggested that the HLG-MOS contribute to the global action plan prepared by the High-level Group for Partnerships, Coordination, and Capacity Building for statistics for the 2030 Agenda.*

16. *The Statistical Commission agreed that the progress of the HLG-MOS be reported regularly to the Commission.*

17. *The Statistical Commission requested the Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics to undertake more pilot projects in big data and make use of the Big Data Sandbox in these projects, and to link the work with the work of the HLG-MOS.*

18. Under CES, HLG-MOS has overseen the development of several products to modernize statistical production. These include the Generic Statistical Business Process Model⁴ (GSBPM), which provides a standard framework and harmonized technology to help statistical organizations to modernize their statistical production process. The Generic Statistical Information Model⁵ accompanies the GSBPM and describes the different objects that flow through the different stages of the statistical production process. In addition, the Common Statistical Production Architecture (CSPA)⁶ provides the “industry architecture”

⁴ Generic Statistical Business Process Model:

www1.unece.org/stat/platform/display/GSBPM/Generic+Statistical+Business+Process+Model

⁵ The Generic Statistical Information Model:

www1.unece.org/stat/platform/display/gsim/Generic+Statistical+Information+Model

⁶ Common Statistical Production Architecture:

www1.unece.org/stat/platform/display/CSPA/Common+Statistical+Production+Architecture+Home

for official statistics and sets common principles and standards that are designed to promote interoperability between statistical organizations.

19. In 2015, the UNECE big data project⁷ found that big data sources have considerable potential as complementary sources of data when used in conjunction with surveys or administrative data. Software tools developed to analyse big data were also found useful for analysing traditional data. In some cases, big data tools can help cut processing times considerably. The ‘sandbox’ environment was proven a valuable tool for the international statistical community to facilitate collaborative research and development activities.

20. The project on the implementation of CSPA⁸ developed mechanisms to strengthen the implementation of the common architecture. Main products include a new governance model, a catalogue on investment intentions of statistical organizations and a new version of CSPA with enhanced guidance documentation for users. Another recent output is the Generic Activity Model for Statistical Organizations⁹ (GAMSO), which extends GSBPM by adding non-data activities that take place in a typical statistical organization.

21. HLG-MOS has chosen data integration¹⁰ and promoting and implementing models and standards as the two main projects for 2016.

22. The Conference will consider the work of HLG-MOS under agenda item 4 on 27 April. More detail about the work is provided in document ECE/CES/2016/10.

IV. Climate change-related statistics

23. *The Statistical Commission expressed its appreciation of the UNECE work on climate change-related statistics, in particular efforts to develop a set of indicators. The Commission requested the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) to consider it as a basis for developing a global set of climate change indicators, and emphasized among other things that:*

(a) Countries should develop and strengthen environment statistics that are necessary for effective monitoring of key aspects of climate change;

(b) The international statistical community should expand their regional, sub-regional and national capacity-building efforts in climate change statistics;

(c) National statistical systems are encouraged to invest adequate resources in the development of climate change statistics, in particular the underlying environment, energy, agriculture and industry statistics, and environmental-economic accounts;

(d) Climate change statistics should appear on the multi-year program of the Statistical Commission with higher frequency and UNSD is to develop a work plan for submission to the Commission at its 48th session.

24. Work on climate change-related statistics was first launched under the Conference of European Statisticians in 2011. As a result, the CES plenary session endorsed the *Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations on Climate Change-Related*

⁷ The Big Data project: www1.unece.org/stat/platform/display/bigdata/2015+project

⁸ The project on the implementation of CSPA:
www1.unece.org/stat/platform/display/hlgbas/2015+CSPA+Project+Results

⁹ Generic Activity Model for Statistical Organizations:
www1.unece.org/stat/platform/display/GAMSO/GAMSO+Home

¹⁰ www1.unece.org/stat/platform/display/hlgbas/Data+Integration

*Statistics*¹¹ in 2014. The Recommendations were the result of a collaborative effort of national statistical offices, agencies in charge of emission inventories, international statistical organizations and climate organizations.

25. In the course of work, a close link was established between statisticians and key climate organizations, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), etc.

26. A UNECE Steering Group (led by Norway), established in October 2014, provides direction to countries in implementing the CES Recommendations and promotes further harmonization between the greenhouse gas inventory data and official statistics. The Steering Group organizes Expert Forums for producers and users of climate change-related statistics that bring the various stakeholders together to share experience and agree on further work. The next UNECE Expert Forum will be held in Geneva, on 5-7 October 2016.

27. The Steering Group finalized a narrative for communication with stakeholders to help demonstrate the added value that official statisticians offer to the monitoring of climate change. Currently, the Steering Group is:

- Developing a road map to assist countries in prioritizing their actions to implement the CES Recommendations;
- Establishing a repository of countries' good practices in informing climate policies;
- Reviewing the countries' challenges and consider mechanisms for capacity building.

28. A UNECE Task Force (led by Italy) is developing a set of key climate change-related statistics and indicators using the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics and other statistical frameworks as a source of information. The work takes into account the relevant needs of the monitoring of progress under the UNFCCC and SDGs. The Task Force plans to finalize the set of key indicators by the end of 2016.

29. Another UNECE Task Force (also led by Italy) aims to clarify the role of official statistics in measuring extreme events and disasters. It plans to identify practical steps for national statistical offices in support of disaster management and risk reduction. The work is carried out in coordination with national agencies responsible for disaster management, and is coordinated closely with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), UNSD and the ESCAP Expert Group on Disaster-related statistics.

V. Other issues discussed at the Statistical Commission

30. A number of other issues discussed at the Statistical Commission that relate to CES activities are briefly summarised below.

A. National accounts

31. *The Statistical Commission expressed its appreciation for the activities to facilitate the implementation of the 2008 System of National Accounts (SNA) and supporting statistics undertaken by the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts, regional commissions such as UNECE, other regional organizations and countries. The Commission*

¹¹ The Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations on Climate Change-Related Statistics: www.unece.org/index.php?id=37166

expressed appreciation for the guidance provided on issues emerging from the implementation of the SNA.

32. In June 2015, the CES plenary session endorsed the *Guide to Measuring Global Production*¹² to support the implementation of the 2008 SNA with respect to global production. This Guide provides further support to deal with global manufacturing arrangements, as a follow-up to research agenda identified in the previous publication *The Impact of Globalization on National Accounts*¹³.

33. Currently, the work continues with expert meetings on global production organized under the Group of Experts on National Accounts and coordinated by the UNECE Steering Group on National Accounts. Work is underway to review national experiences in the exchange and sharing of economic data, both nationally and internationally.

B. The System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA)

34. *The Statistical Commission asked the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting to coordinate the work at global, regional and national level to support the implementation of SEEA, taking into account existing inter-agency mechanisms. The Statistical Committee noted the importance of developing and strengthening basic environment statistics to compile environmental-economic accounts, and the importance of capacity building in national accounts.*

35. Since 2015, UNECE and OECD have started to organize joint seminars on SEEA implementation under CES. Furthermore, a number of capacity building activities have been organized both in the area of environment statistics and SEEA for the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia.

C. International Comparison Programme

36. *The Statistical Commission emphasised the need to link ICP capacity building activities with efforts to enhance statistical capacity for the monitoring SDGs, suggested exploring closer alignment of ICP price surveys with Consumer Price Index (CPI) compilation, and encouraged involving existing working groups engaged in price statistics.*

37. UNECE organizes meetings of the Group of Experts on Consumer Price Indices jointly with the International Labour Organization. The next meeting will be held in Geneva, on 2-4 May 2016. One of the sessions will share country experiences in ICP and CPI integration. UNECE also provides IPC and CPI data in the UNECE Statistical Database for all UNECE countries.

D. Refugee statistics

38. *The Statistical Commission established an Expert Group on Refugee Statistics, and suggested that it builds on existing technical work, such as the UN Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration, and the UNECE Recommendations for the 2020 Censuses of Population and Housing. The Expert Group should submit its recommendations to the Commission at its 49th session in 2018 for adoption.*

39. In June 2015, the CES plenary session endorsed the *Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations for the 2020 Censuses of Population and Housing*¹⁴. The main objective of the Recommendations is to provide guidance and assistance to countries in the planning and execution of their population and housing censuses; and to facilitate and

¹² Guide to Measuring Global Production: www.unece.org/index.php?id=42106

¹³ Guide on Impact of Globalization on National Accounts www.unece.org/index.php?id=28890

¹⁴ Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations for the 2020 Censuses of Population and Housing: www.unece.org/index.php?id=41398

improve the comparability of census at the regional level and the harmonization of concepts, definitions and classifications. UNECE and Eurostat jointly organize meetings of the Group of Experts on Population and Housing Censuses. The next meeting will be held in Geneva on 26-30 September 2016.

40. Over the years UNECE has published practical guidance on different aspects of measuring migration, for example the latest in 2015 on *Measuring Change in the Socio-Economic Conditions of Migrants*¹⁵. This guidance may provide substantive input to the global work on refugee statistics. UNECE and Eurostat jointly organize Work Sessions on Migration Statistics. The next one will be held in Geneva, on 18-20 May 2016.

¹⁵ Measuring Change in the Socio-Economic Conditions of Migrants: www.unece.org/index.php?id=40542