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Item 7 (c) of the provisional agenda

Recommendations on Ageing-related Statistics**Summary of comments from the consultation on
Recommendations on ageing-related statistics****Note by the Secretariat***Summary*

This note summarizes the comments by members of the Conference of European Statisticians on the *Recommendations on Ageing-related Statistics*. The secretariat carried out an electronic consultation on the Recommendations in February-March 2016.

A total of 34 countries and 2 organizations replied to the request for comments. There was general support for the main conclusions and recommendations made in the report and for the proposals for future work. Countries and organizations also provided detailed comments that are summarized in this document.

The Conference is invited to:

- express its views on the Recommendations;
- ask the Task Force to review in detail the comments and suggestions made, and reflect them in a revised version of the Recommendations;
- ask the Task Force to review the proposals made for further work and report on these to the Bureau;
- agree that the revised Recommendations will be submitted to the 2016 October CES Bureau meeting for final approval.

I. Introduction

1. The present note summarizes the comments by members of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) on the Recommendations on Ageing-related statistics, which were sent for electronic consultation in January-March 2016.
2. The Task Force on Ageing-related Statistics will consider the material presented in this document for revising the Recommendations. The Task Force includes representatives of 15 national statistical offices: United Kingdom (chair), Australia, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Canada, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Mexico, New Zealand, Poland, Slovakia, Switzerland, Tajikistan, and United States. In addition, eight government agencies dealing with ageing from Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Georgia, Italy, Portugal, Serbia and the United States participate in the Task Force. The following international organizations and academic institutes are represented: CIS-STAT, Eurostat, European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, European Centre of Gerontology – WHO Collaborating Centre for Healthy Ageing & University of Malta, and University of Southampton. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) acts as secretariat to the Task Force.

II. Summary

3. In the electronic consultation, responses were received from the following 34 countries and 2 organizations: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Brazil, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Mexico, Montenegro, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Ukraine, the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).
4. Out of the 36 respondents, 26 expressed explicitly that the Recommendations are ready for endorsement at the CES plenary session, subject to incorporation of the comments made in the consultation. No country or organization opposed the endorsement.
5. The comments are summarized in sections III-V.

III. General comments and comments on main recommendations

6. New Zealand proposed that the summary of recommendations should be moved to the beginning of the report. Ireland recommended adding a full list of all the recommended indicators and their periodicity. Poland suggested making the overall aim of the Recommendations more explicit: that is, to state whether they are designed to be primarily for domestic use, or if their principal goal is to foster international comparability. Poland also pointed out the need to adjust the recommendations to the needs and possibilities of statistical production. The Russian Federation mentioned the administrative and survey sources from which they would be able to obtain the recommended indicators.
7. Italy noted the importance and potential cost-effectiveness of tackling a newly-emerging statistical phenomenon internationally, facilitating harmonization and technical collaboration at an early stage. Mexico observed that the document represents a first step in a larger task which must begin domestically with coordination of agencies involved with ageing-related statistics. Tajikistan commented that the Recommendations will be useful to

assist those countries in which population ageing is not yet advanced, to aid the development of policies as their populations age.

8. Several respondents suggested areas requiring greater emphasis. These include greater highlighting of the importance of metadata to facilitate comparability (Ukraine), and more focus on economic data (OECD). OECD also felt that the document could benefit from a greater consideration of the data needed to address the various issues arising in current policy debates (e.g. financial sustainability of pension systems and government finances, labour market imbalances and intergenerational justice).

9. Many respondents called for a greater level of detail. Serbia, for instance, proposed the inclusion of details (or links to such details) of methodology used for obtaining indicators such as prospective age or duration of working life. Romania called for additional detail on the practical problems related to data and methods to address these problems. This view was echoed by Montenegro who called for greater consideration of how to deal with small sample sizes of older populations in existing surveys. New Zealand suggested additional detail regarding definitions, albeit recognizing that in many cases international comparability of definitions is hard to attain. Germany called for more detailed conceptual and practical guidelines for producing the health-related indicators, and Poland for more detailed descriptions and methodological details for all indicators.

10. Several respondents noted that the recommendations are ambitious. Norway was of the opinion that this is a positive attribute, since it provides goals to which NSOs may aspire. Montenegro noted that the recommendations present a significant obligation to produce new indicators. Armenia observed that guidance from countries with more advanced ageing-related statistics will be necessary in order for other countries to fulfil the recommendations.

11. A number of comments on the overall recommendations (Austria, Croatia, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, New Zealand, Poland, Sweden and Switzerland) drew attention to the practical difficulty of fulfilling all the recommendations exactly as they are formulated in chapter 9, and/or the large amount of work that would be entailed in order to do so, due to country-specific and/or survey-specific limitations and priorities. These include in particular the unavailability or poor validity of data for five-year age groups at older ages (especially for data from sample surveys), and the lower relevance of such groups for countries with lower life expectancy; sampling challenges specific to older persons; small cell sizes and resulting issues of representativeness and confidentiality for older age groups and for other relatively uncommon characteristics; the use of household registers rather than person registers; the high costs involved in increasing sample sizes and revising existing survey instruments; the need to enhance coordination between NSOs and other organizations; and the issue of avoiding the use of proxies in all surveys. Spain mentioned that fulfilling some of the recommendations would be difficult without further guidelines on how to proceed (e.g. oversampling of older age groups in multi-stage sampling).

12. New Zealand and Israel both noted that some countries have obligations to highlight certain attributes other than age, e.g. disaggregation by indigenous status, origin or religion. Ireland suggested that disaggregation by native and foreign-born status is of more relevance to some countries than to others. In view of these various observations, New Zealand proposed the recommendations to include phrases such as 'where relevant' and 'where feasible', and Finland proposed changing the phrase 'NSOs should' to 'it is recommended that NSOs...'

13. Sweden considered that the formulation of the recommendations could be revised to avoid any apparent suggestion that ageing-related statistics should be prioritized over other thematic areas and that this should be done irrespective of cost and respondent burden:

countries must make their own decisions about priorities. New Zealand stated that the need to oversample indigenous groups may be given a higher priority than the need to oversample older age groups in sample surveys in their case. Poland added that targeted sampling of older persons would create high additional costs for surveys. Similarly, Poland stated that they could not verify statistics based on data produced by agencies other than the national statistical office and proposed that the report should be clear in identifying who should be responsible for fulfilling the recommendations in a given country.

14. Serbia and Latvia particularly welcomed the recommendations regarding clear definition of institutional population and their inclusion in surveys. On the other hand, Poland argued that the relevance of this recommendation depends on the theme of the survey, and on a case-by-case weighing of the costs and benefits in relation to the subject matter.

15. Poland proposed that any exploration of possibilities for incorporation of additional variables into Labour Force Surveys (LFS) must be undertaken in conjunction with the European Union's harmonization and modernization process for social statistics. Connected with this, Sweden pointed out that the new European Framework Regulation on Social Statistics (IESS) will have repercussions relevant to these Recommendations, such as limiting samples to private households only. Armenia called for special attention to non-EU countries in the design, implementation and testing of methodology across UNECE member countries given that such countries do not have sources such as EU-SILC and SHARE. The Republic of Moldova observed that many of the indicators draw upon surveys in which the country does not participate.

16. Poland observed that the Recommendations call for the use of administrative data, but such sources cannot provide information on certain topics such as social inclusion and subjective well-being.

17. Hungary suggested that the document could include a consideration of the possibilities offered by 'Big Data'.

18. Montenegro noted that the main challenge in applying the recommendations would be human capacity.

19. Tajikistan called for a Russian version of the document. They also requested the organization of training events to support the use of the recommendations.

IV. Chapter-specific comments

20. Several respondents provided more detailed comments on specific parts of the Recommendations. These are summarized by chapter in the following subsections. Some respondents also provided specific editorial feedback which will be taken into account in revising the Recommendations.

A. Introduction

21. New Zealand suggested two aspects to add to the opening paragraph. First, population ageing, if understood as an increase in the median age of a population, can occur when cohorts older than the median age are growing, without there necessarily being an increase in the cohorts of 'older people'. Second, it is important to distinguish between structural and numerical ageing—i.e. ageing resulting only from changes in fertility and mortality versus that resulting from differential migration flows. They proposed referring to this distinction in the introduction.

B. Demographic measures of ageing

22. The chapter was widely supported. Croatia and Mexico observed that fulfilment of the recommendations in this chapter would help to provide a better picture of the ageing status of a population. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia noted that at present the only indicators it would be able to produce would be those contained in this chapter.

23. Armenia proposed that the table of recommended demographic indicators be moved to the end of the chapter as a summary.

24. Finland noted that the suggested new demographic indicators are well justified in the chapter, although New Zealand considered that prospective measures may be of less relevance for countries with low life expectancy at birth. They proposed the additional inclusion of the median age of the portion of the population that is aged 65 years and older and suggested including modal age at death on the grounds that it is easier to obtain than a prospective life expectancy measure.

25. Some countries noted that the suggestion to provide data in five-year age-groups would be difficult to implement even for the basic demographic indicators. Some were in favour (Mexico and Hungary) and others (Latvia, Lithuania, New Zealand, Switzerland) drew attention to the practical, statistical and/or financial challenges of providing data at this level of detail.

26. Mexico supported the suggestion to provide demographic indicators broken down by sex, and also noted that in their case demographic projections are produced by a separate institution from the NSO.

27. Mexico and New Zealand noted that country of birth is limited as an indicator of diversity, since it fails to capture native-born diversity. Ethnicity and/or descent should be mentioned, in addition to birthplace.

28. New Zealand supported the explanation of the limitations of age-based dependency ratios and the recommendation to complement them with economic dependency measures. They expressed doubts about proposing a higher age threshold for the lower bound of age-based ratios. New Zealand also suggested that the recommendation to use life expectancy at birth and at various other ages should be augmented by clarifying that these are to be given for males and females separately.

29. Israel suggested that information on in-home care or domestic employees should be included in the consideration of living arrangements. New Zealand called for a mention of elderly homelessness and institutionalisation.

30. Potential confidentiality problems arise when detailed national origin breakdowns are given of small numbers of people in the older age groups. New Zealand proposed that the use of regional geographic groupings could provide a solution.

C. Longer working life

31. Mexico noted that they could produce some indicators from national employment surveys and further work would be necessary in order to produce indicators for several of the sub-topics.

32. Lithuania pointed out that it could be difficult to produce reliable employment statistics for the older age groups due to coverage and sample size. They suggested lowering the upper age category to 75+.

33. Israel noted that some of the indicators presented in this chapter have been more fully developed as part of previous work on Quality of Employment, on which subject UNECE has published a handbook.
34. Romania stated that it would have the necessary labour market data to produce the recommended indicators, whereas Armenia noted that many of the requisite indicators would require data from sample surveys which depend upon scarce funds and resources.
35. Israel stated that it uses the same method for institutional populations described for Switzerland in labour force surveys, namely that they are taken from other sources than surveys, weighted and added to the data from the current sample.
36. Italy emphasized that in order to reflect genuine labour market flexibility, the indicator on part-time employment should be defined to include only cases where part-time work is a voluntary choice.
37. Finland questioned the relevance of data on employment of those aged more than 74 years, stating that even if increasing, the numbers remain low and also that the data are difficult to obtain, whether through sample surveys or registers. Indeed, the maximum age in labour force surveys is 74.
38. Finland mentioned that the content of ad hoc modules of the LFS sometimes changes, as new data needs emerge and as improvements are called for.
39. Spain commented that the definition of 'excessive' working hours, given as more than 48 hours per week in accordance with the ILO's Decent Work Indicators, can be seen as extreme. They proposed changing the threshold to 42 hours. Poland proposed a change to the definition of 'unsocial hours', since they do not collect information in the LFS about working on public holidays, and their question on working at night does not specify the hours to be counted as night work. Poland also noted that other indicators relating to healthy working conditions are available from ad hoc modules of LFS, and suggested a revision of the text to clarify this. Poland also noted that while the report states that European Statistics on Accidents at Work are compiled largely from administrative data, in their case they are from a non-administrative data source.
40. Spain mentioned that the suggestion of using a reference period of 12 months for participation in lifelong learning will be considered in future European Labour Force Surveys.
41. Poland noted that not all of the listed work-life balance indicators are in fact available from the ad hoc module on reconciliation between work and family life for both 2005 and 2010. They proposed also that the indicator 'parental leave taken over the last 12 months for own children' be omitted from a consideration of ageing-related statistics. Similarly they pointed out that not all of the indicators of discrimination in the labour market are in fact available in the EU-LFS ad hoc module on the transition from work to retirement for both 2006 and 2012. They mentioned that indicators on healthy working conditions are not available from the EU-LFS, but from the EU ad hoc module on accidents at work and other work-related health problems.
42. Poland made several suggestions regarding definitions of labour market indicators. The indicator 'labour market participation' could be referred to as 'activity rates' to reflect the terminology used in some countries. The definition of 'employment rates' should be clarified as the 'percentage of employed people of a given category in the total population of a given category', along with a more detailed definition of the numerator (i.e. of what constitutes 'employed') on the basis of the definition used in the EU-LFS which in turn is based on ILO recommendations, namely that 'among the employed are included all persons aged 15 and over who during the reference week performed work, even for just one hour a week, for pay, profit or family gain or who were not at work but had a job or business from

which they were temporarily absent'. Furthermore they suggest altering the definition of 'long-term unemployment rate' to 'percentage share of unemployed persons (for 12 months and longer) in the total number of economically active population in the given age group'.

D. Social inclusion including subjective well-being

43. Poland suggested clarifying the table of key indicators and accompanying text, including more detailed definitions. They suggested that definitions should include information on whether an indicator concerns persons or households, including how households containing older persons are defined. They observed that many of table entries are subdomains rather than indicators (e.g. discrimination, leisure activities, availability of transport). Given existing differences in methodology (e.g. differences between Eurostat and OECD in measuring relative poverty), they noted that the chosen methodology should be explicitly stated. This point was also made by New Zealand with regard to the indicator 'severe housing deprivation'. Lithuania considered that the 'S80/S20 ratio' and the at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate are not useful as indicators of financial security in old age. The former measures inequality within the older age group but not financial security, since there is no comparison with the population as a whole. The latter is an aggregate of three indicators, of which one—low work intensity—is calculated for persons younger than 60 years of age. Lithuania also suggested that the indicator 'pension expenditures' could be produced by estimation for five-year age groups from age 55 to 85+ for men and for women.

44. Poland felt that NSOs should use their own data sources where available, and resort to externally-produced sources such as EQLS and ESS only where their own data are not available. They proposed that the Recommendations should state only the recommended variables, indicators and periodicity and leave NSOs to decide on the source.

45. New Zealand acknowledged the importance of data on elder abuse and neglect and drew attention to the difficulties inherent in collecting data on this topic through surveys. The carer may be present when the questionnaire is completed, or they may be the person completing the survey on behalf of the older person. Administrative data may provide limited information on this and abuse is likely to be underreported in surveys.

46. Mexico highlighted the salience of the topic of institutional populations and remarked that some institutions do not permit direct contact with residents, yet data on topics such as subjective well-being can only be obtained through direct interviews with respondents.

E. Health and independence of older persons

47. Germany stated that it would be difficult for them to produce all the indicators presented. This is partly due to a shared responsibility for the production of health-related statistics with another institution, but also because the report presents tier 3 indicators requiring further conceptual and methodological development. Similarly, Mexico reported that it would currently be able to produce some of the indicators but others would require further development.

48. Germany observed that while the health of older persons is of great policy interest, statistics on the health of younger generations should also be a priority since health behaviours and preventative actions affect future outcomes.

49. Israel called for further methodological details for healthy life expectancy, years of life with disability by cause and years of potential life lost, and for the mental health indicators.

50. Lithuania remarked that a detailed analysis of the reliability of health survey data for the older age-groups would be required. New Zealand felt that while indicators drawn from administrative data might refer to five-year age-groups of older persons, this might not be appropriate for survey data. Pooling may help but may not be suitable for infrequent surveys or those where measures change significantly over time.

51. Poland noted a disparity between comments made about comparability of data in EU-SILC and EHIS and related comments made in chapter 4. New Zealand felt that the recommendations for enhancing comparability of tier 1 indicators would be difficult to implement. They added that there are other potential sources of difference such as mode and survey context.

52. New Zealand suggested that the table on domains, topics and indicators should be accompanied by a call for caution in the interpretation of multi-response indicators, such as disability cause and health impairment. They felt that the table also lacks indicators of formal and informal care, of unmet need for support and of characteristics of carers, type and frequency of care, and care impact.

53. New Zealand noted that the collection of information on diagnosis with dementia or Alzheimer's disease would probably require proxy information from households and institutions.

F. Intergenerational solidarity

54. Mexico observed that in their case there are existing survey questions that would permit measurement of material transfers between generations, but there would be obstacles to measuring intergenerational transfer of knowledge in the workplace. For the latter, more examples would be needed in order to help identify the formal and informal channels for such transfers and to develop definitions.

55. New Zealand agreed that there is a need to define clearly what is meant by voluntary work, and to use a standard definition such as that of the ILO.

G. Institutional population

56. Many countries welcomed the discussion and agreed with the importance of considering institutional populations when producing ageing-related statistics. Several issues were raised.

57. Switzerland and Mexico stated that some or all of their current surveys, sampling methods or administrative records do not include those in institutions. Sweden mentioned also that if the new European framework regulation on social statistics (IESS) is adapted in its current form, EU countries might be required to limit their surveys to those living in private households.

58. Latvia observed that the recommendation to include institutional populations in the samples of existing surveys carries risks, especially relating to the use of new data collection methods such as CATI and CAWI. Such methods may not be appropriate for people with mental health disorders or functional limitations. Conducting surveys in institutions also entails use of mediators, and necessitates alteration of survey instruments to ensure the questions are relevant to the institutional setting (a point echoed by Lithuania with respect to the EHIS). They argued therefore in favour of separate data gathering for institutional populations.

59. New Zealand supported the point that surveys based on private households are likely to produce biased estimates of ageing-related and especially health-related phenomena.

Exclusion of interviews conducted via proxies could also introduce bias. The discussion of the use of proxies could benefit from mentioning that some kinds of information should not be collected by proxy (e.g. overall life satisfaction). Different privacy laws will introduce differences in what approach can be taken in different countries. They suggest a possible need for more guidance in this recommendation.

60. Also in relation to privacy laws, the Czech Republic pointed out that use of administrative data could only provide a partial solution for obtaining data on people in institutions for some indicators.

61. Spain noted that the use of proxies in surveys should be limited. They observed also that the use or otherwise of proxies should be taken into account when comparing indicators across countries and/or across different surveys and sources.

62. Several countries stressed the challenges associated with this issue — properly defining the institutional population, accounting for new kinds of institutions, defining long-term care, collecting accurate data on hard-to-reach groups in the face of declining resources (Canada, Finland, Hungary). Finland noted that more work is needed to resolve the definitional issues. Hungary added that if people change their place of residence frequently (e.g. in and out of institutions or between them), the use of the concept of ‘usual place of residence’ from the UNECE Census Recommendations becomes problematic.

H. Dissemination and communication

63. Several countries expressed support for the chapter. Finland and New Zealand agreed that ageing-related statistics could be disseminated in a way that makes better use of visualization techniques. Hungary agreed with the recommendation that new dissemination techniques should be explored.

64. Mexico, Serbia and Ireland particularly supported the idea of collating diverse sources and their metadata in a single web page or portal, and Norway stated that they will consider producing such a page. Mexico mentioned that it produces an annual online bulletin of ageing-related statistics to mark the International Day of Older Persons. New Zealand suggested that agencies should be encouraged to share the resources and code used to create such pages, and also suggested the creation of a centralized portal of such pages, e.g. under the auspices of the United Nations. They noted also that it would be useful if the pages were designed to be easily useable by older persons. Hungary and Ireland suggested that the presentation of the Eurostat Census Hub should discuss the effort and cost involved in creating and maintaining such a tool.

65. Spain mentioned public use files of anonymized microdata, which it has found to be useful for a wide audience beyond only the use of microdata for scientific purposes referred to in the report.

66. New Zealand noted that online data querying tools still pose challenges to statistical organizations in terms of confidentiality. Either confidentialized summary data must be provided, or a tool must be used that confidentializes microdata ‘on the fly’.

V. Proposals for further work

67. There was general support for the list of areas for future work presented in section 9.6 and some respondents proposed further. Six suggested including other items in the list. Hungary proposed that a roadmap for this future work could be developed, including the tasks expected of NSOs.

68. Israel suggested preparing a table of all the suggested indicators for all member States, in which countries could indicate data sources, availability, and other relevant aspects
69. Mexico proposed further collaborative projects between countries to share existing experiences.
70. Spain proposed additional methodological work on the issues surrounding the measurement of institutional populations and the use of proxies. They proposed an exercise to compare current practices across countries.
71. Canada suggested that further exploration of issues surrounding institutional populations might merit a task force in its own right.
72. Lithuania called for further investigations of the possibility of using various administrative data sources and big data for the production of ageing-related statistics.
73. Serbia suggested that the topic of intergenerational solidarity requires further development.
74. Canada proposed work on enabling environments for older persons and especially 'ageing in place'.
75. Tajikistan suggested that case studies would be helpful.

VI. Points for discussion

76. The Conference is invited to:
- express its views on the Recommendations;
 - ask the Task Force to review in detail the comments and suggestions made, and reflect them in a revised version of the Recommendations;
 - ask the Task Force to review the proposals made for further work and report on these to the Bureau;
 - agree that the revised Recommendations will be submitted to the 2016 October CES Bureau meeting for final approval.
-