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Matters arising from the sixty-eighth session of Economic Commission for Europe and the fiftieth session of the United Nations Statistical Commission

Matters arising from the sessions of the Economic Commission for Europe and the United Nations Statistical Commission

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The document presents the key outcomes of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (21-22 March 2019), the 68th session of the Economic Commission for Europe (9-10 April 2019) and the 50th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission (5-8 March 2019). The note focuses on the discussions and decisions of these bodies that have a bearing on the work of the Conference of European Statisticians.



I. Introduction

1. The document presents the key outcomes of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (21-22 March 2019), the 68th session of the Economic Commission for Europe (9-10 April 2019) and the 50th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission (5-8 March 2019). Only those discussions and decisions of these bodies are presented that have a bearing on the work of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES).
2. The Regional Forum on Sustainable Development included on 22 March a focus event “How to measure progress? Data and statistics for SDGs”. Section II.A of this document reflects the conclusions of the focus event. Section II.B reflects the relevant decisions of the UNECE Commission session.
3. Section III presents the decisions of UNSC with particular relevance to CES.
4. The following sections include extracts of summaries of discussions and key decisions of the above mentioned meetings. For the full texts, please consult the reports of the UNECE Commission session and UNSC, respectively at: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=50174>, and at: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/50th-session/documents/Report-on-the-50th-session-of-the-statistical-commission-E.pdf>

II. Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and the 68th session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

A. Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

5. The Regional Forum on Sustainable Development took place on 21-22 March 2019. It included a focus event “How to measure progress? Data and statistics for SDGs”. The event was moderated by Afshan Khan, UNICEF Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia. It included four panellists: Anahit Safyan, State Council on Statistics of the Republic of Armenia; Joanne Evans, Office for National Statistics, United Kingdom; Mr. Jos Verbeek, World Bank, Geneva; and Ms. Marianne Haslegrave, Commonwealth Medical Trust, Civil Society Representative.
6. The following key conclusions were drawn from the focus event:
 - (a) The statistical community is making steady progress in improving the availability of data for measuring progress towards SDGs. But the global SDG indicators alone will not be enough. Many countries are establishing additional national indicators to better inform policy action at national and local levels. Using new technologies to reduce cost and respondent burden, using qualitative data and process indicators are all important to improve data for decision-making. The regional dimension is essential to compare with and learn from countries in similar situations. The *Conference of European Statisticians’ Road Map on statistics for SDGs* should be updated as a tool to give guidance.
 - (b) Additional financial resources are needed to develop national statistical capacity and modernize current systems as part of a critical national information infrastructure. Without these additional resources national statistics systems will focus on data production over analysis and dissemination, and economic sectors over social and environmental aspects.
 - (c) There are many examples of using data for policy-making on SDGs but also a lot of potential for improvement. To make data the lifeblood of decision making, capacities for use and analysis should be increased by improving accessibility, promoting open data culture, and engaging National Statistical Offices and decision-makers together

in analytical processes. Intermediaries between data producers and policy makers are needed to make full use of the potential of data, in particular looking at dimensions of equity.

(d) There is a clear need to improve the disaggregation of data to give a fuller picture on the groups left behind. Complementary efforts for data collection on sensitive issues, like human rights and SDGs, should also be undertaken. Academia, private sector and civil society all have a role to play as both producers and users of data. Official statistics should seek strategic partners that can offer added value. There is a need for better clarity on the entry points for representatives from academia, private sector and civil society to engage with the official statistics community and to play a formal role in SDG monitoring processes.

B. 68th session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

7. The UNECE Commission session, on 9-10 April 2019, extended the mandate of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development. Among other issues, the Commission decided to¹:

(a) continue to convene annual sessions of the Regional Forum in 2020 and 2021, in close cooperation with the entities of the regional United Nations system and with the active engagement of other relevant stakeholders;

(b) Requests the secretariat to develop the agenda of each session of the Regional Forum [...] to align it with the respective themes and programme of work of the high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, with a focus on those aspects that are particularly relevant to the ECE region, and taking into account lessons learned from previous meetings;

(c) Also requests the secretariat to publish a yearly report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the ECE region to support the discussions at the sessions of the Regional Forum, with a focus on the Sustainable Development Goals under review by the high-level political forum for sustainable development that year, using existing data sets and statistics.

8. Following the decision in point (c), the UNECE Statistical Division proposes to set up a regional platform on statistics for SDGs consisting of (1) a knowledge hub, (2) a dashboard of indicators, and (3) a database. The proposal will be considered under CES agenda item 5 (document ECE/CES /2019/8/Add.1).

III. 50th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission

A. 50/101 Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

9. *“The Statistical Commission:*

(e) Further expressed its appreciation for the ongoing work to improve data flows and global reporting, especially the collaborative work that took place between the Inter-Agency and Expert Group and the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, and endorsed the criteria for the implementation of the guidelines on data flows and global data reporting for the Sustainable Development Goals, contained in annex I to the report;

¹ Decision B (68), http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/commission/2019/E_2019_37-1906911E.pdf

(f) Welcomed the background document entitled “Best practices in data flows and global data reporting for the Sustainable Development Goals” as a useful compilation of case studies on data flows from countries to international agencies, and requested the Inter-Agency and Expert Group to continue to regularly update the document as additional best practices are identified;

(m) Stressed that many countries still face challenges in addressing the data needs for the Sustainable Development Goals, and reiterated the urgent need for increased resources and coordinated statistical and analytical capacity-building [...].

10. CES is carrying out work to support the global processes reflected in the above decisions, including:

(a) The CES Steering Group is preparing the second edition of the *Road Map for Statistics on SDGs* to support CES members in their work related to statistics for SDGs. The second edition will reflect experiences acquired in implementing the first edition, and guidance how to deal with the new, emerging challenges. A special focus will be on leaving no-one behind. More detail is provided in document ECE/CES/2019/8.

(b) A CES Task Team carried out two pilot studies of data flows from countries to custodian agencies responsible for SDG indicators. The outcomes of the studies contributed to the principles and best practices of data flows prepared by IAEG-SDGs and CCSA that were considered by the 50th UN Statistical Commission.

(c) UNECE is involved in the United Nations Development Account Programme for Data and Statistics, and provides a number of capacity building activities, advisory missions and training workshops in the economic, social, environmental and infrastructure pillars of the programme. Furthermore, UNECE will implement an extrabudgetary project financed by the Russian Federation “Strengthening statistical capacity of the CIS countries for providing high quality statistics and indicators to monitor progress towards SDGs” focusing on environmental indicators.

B. Decision 50/104: Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics

11. “The Statistical Commission:

(a) Reiterated the growing importance of the *Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics* and noted existing national commitments;

(d) Cautioned against changing the *Fundamental Principles* at this point and encouraged the Group to focus its reflection on implementation and to examine a potentially widened scope of the *Fundamental Principles* with respect to non-official and non-traditional data;

(f) Also asked the Group to propose ways to give the *Fundamental Principles* higher visibility in particular beyond the community of official statistics;”

12. The following CES work streams are particularly relevant for the Friends of the Chair Group on the *Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics*:

(a) UNECE published *Recommendations for promoting, measuring and communicating the value of official statistics* in December 2018. The Recommendations build on the *Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics* as a foundation for generating value to society, and as the source of the unique value-added of official statistics that should be in the centre of statistical offices’ communication. The publication is available in English, French and Russian².

(b) CES endorsed in 2018 the *Guidance on modernising statistical legislation*, providing good practice guidance on how to reinforce legal frameworks to guarantee independence, integrity and accountability of national statistical systems and the high quality of official statistics. The Guidance will be published in July 2019 in English, French

² <http://www.unece.org/statistics/publications.html>

and Russian. Following the CES Bureau decision UNECE also plans to organize a meeting on modernising statistical legislation, tentatively in November 2020.

D. Decision 50/108: National accounts

13. *“The Statistical Commission:*

(a) Welcomed the report of the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts, expressed its appreciation for the activities undertaken by the members of the Working Group, the regional commissions, other regional organizations and countries to facilitate the implementation of the 2008 System of National Accounts (2008 SNA) and supporting statistics, and endorsed the programmes of work for 2019 of the Working Group and the Advisory Expert Group on National Accounts;”

14. The CES work programme on national accounts is closely aligned with the global work process, including the following current work areas:

(a) UNECE organizes, jointly with Eurostat and OECD, regular meetings of the Group of Experts on National Accounts, focusing every second year on measuring global production. These meetings also provide an important platform for discussing common challenges of national accounts, balance of payments and business statistics, and to monitor the implementation of global standards and related UNECE guides.

(b) UNECE contributes to the global process of advancing the 2008 SNA research agenda in two of the priority areas: globalization and wellbeing and sustainability. As follow up to the work on measuring global production the UNECE Task Force on Exchange and Sharing of Economic Data is developing guidelines aiming at increasing statisticians' ability to analyse the activities of multinational enterprises. The UNECE Task Force on Satellite Accounts for Education and Training has produced a compilation guide that will assist countries construct internationally comparable satellite accounts for the education sector, which will lead to improved cost-based measurement of human capital.

(c) UNECE, in collaboration with partner organizations such as EFTA, Eurostat and UNSD, facilitates the implementation of the 2008 SNA and Balance of Payments Manual, sixth edition in the EECCA and SEE countries through the organization of workshops, special sessions, development and translation of training materials.

E. Decision 50/113: Price statistics

15. *“The Statistical Commission:*

(c) Noted the imminent global consultation on the updated Consumer Price Index Manual and encouraged a timely response from Member States;

(d) Requested the Intersecretariat Working Group on Price Statistics to submit the updated Consumer Price Index Manual to the Commission for its endorsement at its fifty-first session, to be held in 2020, and to publish the Manual subsequently in all the United Nations official languages.”

16. As part of the CES work programme on consumer price indices (CPI), UNECE in cooperation with ILO organises biennial meetings of the Expert Group on CPI. The recommendation to update the 2004 CPI manual was made at the meeting of the Expert Group in May 2014. Draft outlines of the updated manual were presented at the Expert Group meetings in 2016 and 2018. The 2020 CPI Expert Group meeting will, among other things, discuss implementation of the recommendations of the updated CPI manual.

F. Decision 50/115: Environmental-economic accounting

17. *“The Statistical Commission:*

(a) Welcomed the report of the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting, expressed its appreciation for the work of the Committee, agreed

with its work programme, as detailed in its report, noted with interest the increased uptake and growing demand for the implementation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) in countries, and urged the Committee to continue to scale up its work on the implementation and mainstreaming of SEEA;

(c) Requested the Committee of Experts to continue its work on mainstreaming the use of SEEA for policy processes, in particular with regard to biodiversity, in view of the adoption of the post-2020 biodiversity agenda, and climate change, circular economy, beyond gross domestic product (GDP) and green growth initiatives;

(i) Requested the Committee of Experts to continue its work in strengthening capacity in countries through increased coordination, workshops and e-learning, technical notes, South-South cooperation and in-country technical assistance;

18. The CES work programme in support of SEEA implementation is closely aligned with the global work programme, and includes the following key activities:

(a) OECD and UNECE jointly organize regular seminars on the implementation of SEEA. These seminars provide a platform for exchange of knowledge and experience, and support the coordination of capacity development. The topics discussed at the seminar are aligned to a large extent with the work programme of the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting, with a focus on priority issues for the UNECE and OECD regions. The last seminar, held on 20-21 February 2019 in Geneva, discussed the implementation of water accounts and its policy applications in the region, which is one of the priority accounts for the global SEEA databases. Furthermore, the seminar discussed environmentally related taxes and subsidies and SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting with some practical examples of the region.

(b) UNECE also contributes to the SEEA capacity development as part of the UNCEEA work plan. An e-learning course on SEEA was organized in cooperation with UNSD and Statistics Netherlands for Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia in autumn 2017, followed by a regional SEEA training workshop held in Minsk (Belarus) in January 2018. A regional training on energy balances and energy accounts for policy tracking was organised in collaboration with the International Energy Agency, ESCAP and UNSD in May 2019 in Dushanbe (Tajikistan);

(d) In 2018 and 2019, at its national training workshops on environment statistics for SDG indicators, financed by the United Nations Development Account Programme for Data and Statistics, UNECE provided basic training on the SEEA Central Framework in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, the Russian Federation and Uzbekistan. From the same funding, study visits on SEEA of Ukrainian experts to Finland and Moldovan experts to Poland were organised by UNECE;

(e) UNECE, with the help of experts from NSOs of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, translated the UNSD training course on energy accounting into Russian;

(f) The UNECE Task Force on a set of key climate change-related statistics using SEEA refers as far as possible to the SEEA Central Framework. Some issues for the SEEA research agenda have been identified by the Task Force.

G. Decision 50/116: Disaster-related statistics

19. *“The Statistical Commission:*

(a) Welcomed the joint report of the Secretary-General, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the Economic Commission for Europe, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction on disaster-related statistics, and commended them on the significant work that they have undertaken in this emerging field;

(b) Recognized the urgency of integrating both disaster risk reduction and the building of resilience into national development policies, plans and programmes at all levels and the need to incorporate social, economic and environment statistics into disaster

information, as well as the need for better, disaggregated and comparable data and for statistical measurement to capture the impacts of disasters on people in order to improve the understanding of disaster risk reduction, including strengthening resilience and preparedness;

(c) Noted the growing relevance of and greater focus on statistics related to both hazardous events and disasters, acknowledged the already considerable coordination and cooperation in that regard, and emphasized the need for further capacity-building and training on this important topic;

(e) Supported the continuing work under the leadership of the international and regional organizations, towards progressing a common statistical framework and a network of experts for disaster-related statistics among the multiple disciplines and areas of expertise involved, in particular statisticians, disaster risk reduction experts and geospatial information experts, in order to meet the emerging needs of the statistical community;

(f) Requested the Statistics Division, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the Economic Commission for Europe, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, in consultation with members of the existing regional expert groups and task forces, to consider options and modalities for the establishment and coordination of a formal mechanism under the purview of the Statistical Commission to advance a common statistical framework on disaster-related statistics and a network across the expert communities to sustain cooperation, coordination and fundraising for enhancing statistics related to hazardous events and disasters, and requested that they report back to the Commission at a suitable time;

(g) Urged the international statistical community to expand its capacity-building efforts in statistics relating to hazardous events and disasters to assist countries in strengthening capacities for disaster management agencies, national statistical offices and other related contributors of official data to meet reporting requirements for evidence-based approaches to achieving national development policies, plans and programmes, and the goals and targets in the Sendai Framework and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

20. UNECE provided the secretariat for the CES Task Force on Measuring Extreme Events and Disasters, which was established by the CES Bureau in February 2015. The main aims of the Task Force were to (i) to clarify the role of national statistical offices and other members of national statistical systems in providing information related to hazardous events and disasters, and (ii) to identify practical steps needed for these organisations, in coordination with national agencies responsible for disaster risk management, to better support disaster risk management efforts. The *Recommendations on Measuring Hazardous Events and Disasters* prepared by the Task Force, will be considered under CES agenda item 4 (a) (document ECE/CES/2019/3/Add.1)

21. The Task Force identified several follow-up activities, which are also supporting the recommendations mentioned in the joint report to UNSC, including:

(a) Further work on statistical operationalisation of key terms and concepts used in disaster risk management and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction;

(b) Develop guidance on core activities of NSOs in this area;

(c) Define a set of core indicators and statistics, in alignment with climate change-related indicators and statistics.

(d) Provide a platform for regular exchange of experience among NSOs and improve dialogue with other national and international organizations working on hazardous events and disasters (for example by organising regular expert meetings), in close collaboration with UNDRR, UNSD and other Regional Commissions.

H. Decision 50/117: International migration statistics

22. *“The Statistical Commission:*

(e) *Recognized the urgent need for statistical capacity-building and resources to support countries in their efforts to strengthen their migration data, in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration ...;*

23. The following work streams of the CES work programme are of particular relevance:

(a) UNECE has developed and is testing a harmonised survey module to support countries in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia in using their existing surveys for producing comparable data on migration and remittances; the results of the testing will be reviewed at the UNECE workshop on measuring migration and remittances (Geneva, 28-29 October 2019);

(b) UNECE has updated its Clearing House (database) for Migration Statistics, which enables exchange of migration data among countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia;

(c) The UNECE Task Force on the Use of Longitudinal Data for Migration Statistics is preparing guidelines on how to incorporate longitudinal data into annual migration statistics and complement the available cross-sectional measurements;

(d) The forthcoming UNECE-Eurostat Work Session on Migration Statistics (Geneva, 29-31 October 2019) will exchange experience among countries to strengthen their migration data; the topics include Data integration, Data exchange and mirror statistics, New methodologies and tools, and Measuring emigrants and hard-to-reach groups of migrants.

I. Decision 50/118: Human settlements statistics

24. *“The Statistical Commission:*

(d) *Welcomed the work on developing the methodology for the delineation of urban and rural areas and the definition of the city based on the degree of urbanization, and requested the submission of the final assessment, to be prepared in consultation with Member States, on the applicability of this methodology for international and regional comparison purposes to the Commission at its fifty-first session.”*

25. The CES Bureau carried out an in-depth review of statistics and data on cities in October 2018. Among other issues, the Bureau highlighted the lack of harmonized definitions and consistent use of terminology. For example, there is no single, internationally agreed definition of urban/rural although this breakdown is used frequently in official statistics. The Bureau noted that it may not be possible to agree on common definitions applicable to all countries. Rather, agreeing on a taxonomy of related terms and their use may be a more fruitful approach. Different countries could use different thresholds for defining towns, cities, human settlements, etc.

26. The CES Bureau requested the UNECE Secretariat to carry out a survey on the involvement of NSOs in the production of statistics on cities (and other subnational units), and their engagement with cities in this area. The Bureau will consider further follow up regarding the harmonization of definitions and terms after the UNSC discussions. The in-depth review paper discussed by the Bureau, including the CES Bureau decision is provided in document ECE/CES/2019/17.