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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Conference of European Statisticians

#### Sixty-seventh plenary session

Paris, 26-28 June 2019

Item 11(a) of the provisional agenda

#### **Programme of work of the Statistics subprogramme of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

#### **Reports on the work of the Conference of European Statisticians, its Bureau and Teams of Specialists**

### **Implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Statistical Programme 2020**

#### **Addendum**

#### **Report of the Conference of European Statisticians Bureau meeting, 16-17 October 2019**

#### **Note by the secretariat**

#### *Summary*

The present report is submitted in compliance with the Rules Governing the Work of the Conference and its Bureau (ECE/CES/2007/8), adopted by the Conference of European Statisticians at its fifty-third plenary session. Referring to the Rules, the Bureau acts as a steering body of the Conference. The report includes decisions taken by the Bureau at its February 2020 meeting on the work carried out under the auspices of the Conference.

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



## I. Introduction

1. The meeting of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) was held in Geneva on 16-17 October 2019. The following members of the Bureau attended: Ms. M. Bruun (Chair, Finland), Mr. S. Mnatsakanyan (Armenia), Mr. K. Pesendorfer (Austria), Mr. A. Arora (Canada), Mr. P. Dalton (Ireland), Mr. J. Santaella (Mexico), Mr. D. Rozkrut (Poland). The following permanent observers also attended: Mr. A. Kosarev (representing Mr. V. Sokolin, CIS-STAT), Ms. M. Kotzeva (Eurostat), Ms. M. Durand (OECD) and Ms. L. Bratanova (UNECE).
2. The following persons assisted members of the Bureau: Ms. S. Fortier (Canada) and Ms. M.-J. Santos (Eurostat). Ms. T. Luige (UNECE) served as Secretary of the meeting supported by Ms. M. Cwiek (UNECE). Mr. T. Koskimäki (Finland, remote participation), Mr. B. Loison and M. L. Lugano (Switzerland), Mr. R. Diez de Medina and Mr. K. Walsh (ILO), Mr. S. MacFeely (UNCTAD), Mr. J. Palacin (UNECE), Mr. C. Acosta, Ms. L. Bell and Mr. E. Bonet Porqueras (UNICEF), and Mr. M. Bacchetta and Mr. A. Maurer (WTO) participated in the meeting for selected agenda items at the invitation of the Chair. Mr. Loranger and Mr. E. Saint-Pierre (Canada) attended the discussion on agenda item V (Future of economic statistics) through a teleconference.
3. The following staff of the UNECE Statistical Division also attended: Mr. C. Boldsen, Ms. T. Dimova, Mr. T. Gjaltema, Mr. M. Nagy, Mr. S. Vale, Mr. A. Vikat and Ms. F. Willis-Nunez.
4. Ms. L. MacPherson (New Zealand) and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) sent written comments on the agenda items. The comments were presented to the Bureau and considered in the discussion.

## II. In-depth reviews of selected statistical areas

### A. International migration and cross-border mobility

*Documentation:* ECE/CES/BUR/2019/OCT/2 by Mexico, 2/Add.1 by UNECE

5. The Bureau reviewed in-depth statistics on international migration and cross-border mobility based on a paper by Mexico (with inputs from Austria, New Zealand and the United Kingdom) and a note by UNECE. The Bureau made the following comments:
  - Definitions of migration and cross-border mobility are often discussed in the context of labour mobility where it is important that the various types of non-resident workers are not labelled migrants. Cross-border mobility is not limited to neighbouring countries as many weekly commuters travel longer distances by air.
  - Information from the many existing case studies should be analyzed to understand how the integration of different data sources improves the measurement of migration and cross-border mobility.
  - The pertinent issues will be discussed at the UNECE-Eurostat Work Session on Migration Statistics in Geneva on 29-31 October 2019 and at the International Forum on Migration Statistics that IOM, OECD and UNDESA will organize in Cairo in January 2020.
  - A number of experimental and research examples exist of using new data sources (such as mobile devices, social media networks, satellite images and Internet platforms) for measuring migration and cross-border mobility. However, it will be important to gather examples where NSOs are using the new data sources for producing official statistics in this area. Mexico and New Zealand offered to provide some examples.

## Conclusion

6. Mexico will update the in-depth review paper to take into account issues raised in the discussion and submit it to the 2020 CES plenary session. The Secretariat will consult with the UNECE Steering Group on Migration Statistics and present to the next Bureau meeting a proposal on further work on the use of new data sources for measuring migration and cross-border mobility.

## B. Measuring well-being in the era of digital society

*Documentation:* ECE/CES/BUR/2019/OCT/3 by Canada

7. The Bureau had an initial discussion on measuring well-being in the era of digital society in preparation for an in-depth review that will take place in February 2020. The following points were raised:

- The discussion on measuring well-being in the era of digital society should focus on the core business of statisticians: measurement. Based on the many research studies carried out, a range of domains/dimensions for measuring well-being can be identified. These dimensions can constitute a minimum set, not trying to be universal as national circumstances (cultural norms, etc.) have a big impact on well-being. The OECD ‘How is life’ initiative is a good starting point.
- Creating another set of indicators is not useful as policies in countries are different.
- A challenge is to come up with measurements that would be forward looking and focus on what will matter in future, not what was in the past.
- It is difficult to entangle the effect of digitalisation among the many aspects that impact well-being. Often what can be measured is well-being and not so much the impact of information and communication technologies (ICT) on that. For example, OECD focuses on risks and opportunities related to digitalisation instead. However, national policy makers may be interested specifically in the impact to decide where to invest to have a maximum effect on well-being.
- The existing frameworks and dimensions of well-being can be analysed from the viewpoint of how they are covered with existing data sources: what types of surveys and data are needed to fill the gaps. We have to be open to exploiting all potential data sources, including administrative and big data.
- ICT surveys alone are far from sufficient for measuring impact of digitalisation on well-being. Combining data from different surveys is needed (for example, Poland can share experience with linking regular development indicators with time-use surveys (TUS), Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC), Labour Force Survey (LFS), ICT survey, etc.). At the same time, digitalisation offers new possibilities for the data collection using digital channels (e.g. for time-use surveys). It will be good to coordinate sampling schemes of surveys so that they can be linked together easier. A core set of social variables and well-being questions could be included in every survey.
- Comparability of well-being measures is an issue. On the one hand, well-being strongly depends on national context, and there are significant differences between generations, urban/rural population, and different localities. On the other hand, there is a lot of user interest in (international) comparability. Therefore, harmonisation and coordination is needed.
- We should look at the frameworks and approaches that countries have already used and tested, try them out in other countries and exchange experience.
- Not much work has been done on societal and community wide aspects of well-being and how digitalisation affects that.
- UNSD suggests that the work is recognised as a global priority and coordinated with Inter-secretariat Working Group on National Accounts (ISWGNA), Advisory Expert

Group (AEG) on National Accounts, Committee of Experts of Business and Trade Statistics and other UN agencies working in related areas, focusing on 2-3 priority areas (e.g., digitalisation and well-being and sustainability). The work should take stock of what is already achieved and not duplicate what has been done.

- The proposed survey on NSO involvement in measuring digitalisation was supported. It should cover all countries participating in the CES work.

### **Conclusion**

8. Canada will update the paper for the February 2020 meeting of the Bureau reflecting the points raised in the discussion. The work will complement the work done on digitalisation and well-being elsewhere, including in OECD and Eurostat.

9. Canada will update the questionnaire on NSO involvement in measuring digitalisation taking into account the comments. The Secretariat will send the questionnaire to non-OECD countries by mid-November<sup>1</sup>, so that preliminary results of the survey could be available by the time of the next Bureau meeting in February 2020.

## **C. Follow-up to the in-depth review of use of satellite image data in official statistics**

*Documentation:* ECE/CES/BUR/2019/OCT/4 by UNECE

10. The Bureau carried out an in-depth review of the use of satellite imagery and Earth observation technology in official statistics in October 2018. The topic was further discussed at the CES plenary session in June 2019 to obtain input from all CES members. The Conference noted the growing importance of integrating statistical and geospatial data, particularly in the context of statistics for SDGs, and the need to improve skills and access to data to accelerate the progress.

11. The Bureau discussed possible further work in this area. The following points were raised in the discussion:

- The use of Earth observation and satellite image data should be considered in a wider context of integrating statistical and geospatial information. Many groups and projects are dealing with this topic at European and global levels and it is a challenge to get an overview of all the groups. At the same time, it is important not to duplicate activities.
- Communication on geospatial issues needs to be less technical to better engage chief statisticians.
- Integration of all types of data (statistical, geospatial, administrative, etc.) should be considered in the context of a public sector data strategy. It goes far beyond a purely technical issue involving collaboration between the many different agencies that are custodians of these data and is linked with the new role of the statistical offices.
- Standardising the input from Earth observations and satellite imagery for statistics is a big challenge. This would allow developing classifications and algorithms to produce outputs that can be internationally comparable.
- It is important to consider how to produce indicators at different geographic levels from local to international, in an internationally comparable way. Coherent definitions of urban and rural areas, cities and sub-national areas are needed.
- Integrating statistical and geospatial data architectures is a growing priority. The High-Level Group for the Modernisation of Official Statistics (HLG-MOS) will consider how to include this topic in its future work. Integrating geospatial information in the HLG-MOS models and architectures would be a good starting point.

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<sup>1</sup> UNECE sent out the questionnaire on 7 November with a deadline for replies 22 November 2019.

- The current HLG-MOS project on machine-learning includes the use of Earth observation data for SDG statistics.
- The DGINS meeting for the European Statistical System members, to be held in Poland in autumn 2020, will also consider the use of Earth observation data for official statistics.
- Use of satellite/Earth observation data for official statistics is one of the focus areas of the UN Global Working Group on Big Data.
- It is needed to accelerate acquisition of new know-how and new methods in this area. UNECE capacity development work in integrating statistical and geospatial information is ongoing, in partnership with UNSD, Eurostat, EFTA, UN-GGIM and others.

### Conclusion

12. The Bureau supported the ongoing and proposed activities related to the integration of statistical and geospatial information outlined by the Secretariat. The joint day with UN-GGIM: Europe during the 2020 CES plenary session will provide an opportunity to discuss joint activities with concrete results for the statistical and geospatial communities. The Bureau will reflect on the outcomes of that joint day at its October 2020 meeting.

## D. Follow-up to the in-depth review of various types of satellite accounts

*Documentation:* ECE/CES/BUR/2019/OCT/5 by Canada and UNECE

13. The Bureau discussed follow-up to the in-depth review of various types of satellite accounts conducted in February 2019. The follow-up proposal included developing a general guide to satellite accounting and establishing an online inventory of published satellite accounts. The following points were raised in the discussion:

- There has been a proliferation of satellite accounts, including those prepared outside statistical offices. Each account has its own specificities. However, the satellite accounts are most useful when comparable among countries and aligned with agreed international standards such as the System of National Accounts (SNA). In this respect an overarching general guide to satellite accounting and an on-line inventory of existing satellite accounts would be very useful.
- Satellite accounts provide a different perspective than national accounts and help to reach different communities.
- The interest toward satellite accounts from different user communities is growing. Any further work on general guidance needs to be coordinated with the work on the SNA research agenda as many issues related to digitalization, wellbeing and sustainability will be addressed through satellite accounts.
- OECD has started work on preparing guidance on thematic satellite accounts. The document is circulated for consultation with various expert groups, including the Advisory Expert Group (AEG) on National Accounts to ensure coordination with the work on the SNA research agenda. This document would be a good base for the general guide on satellite accounting. It will be useful to outline in the guide the necessary capabilities to support satellite accounting.
- UNECE together with Statistics Canada have already started the work on the on-line inventory. It is important to ensure global outreach and inputs from various international organizations who support the development of various specialized satellite accounts.

### Conclusion

14. The Bureau welcomed the activities launched by OECD and UNECE to develop general guidance and an on-line inventory on satellite accounting. UNECE will collaborate with UNSD to ensure global outreach and involvement of international organizations

responsible for specialised satellite accounts in updating the on-line inventory. The preparation of the guide on satellite accounting should be coordinated with the ISWGNA work on SNA research agenda.

## **E. Follow-up to the in-depth review of measurement of gender identity**

*Documentation:* ECE/CES/BUR/2019/OCT/6 by UNECE

15. The Bureau reviewed the proposal for the creation of a networking platform and a task team on measuring gender identity, presented by UNECE. The following points were raised in the discussion:

- The proposed regional networking platform would be useful and could at some point be extended to include the growing experience in this area in the ECLAC region.
- It is important to collect data to understand how gender diversity manifests itself and influences society, which requires that the organizations in charge of administrative data consider it in their data collection. In some countries the law requires that individuals should be able to identify into a “diverse” gender category. Providing statistics on the people in the diverse category is often not possible due to their small number in survey samples and statistical offices should avoid creating expectations for this.
- In the European Union, it could be possible to provide statistics on people of diverse gender by pooling data from member countries, which would require that many countries collect relevant data using harmonised definitions.
- Obtaining meaningful information on gender identity is complex and requires very well-designed questions that depend heavily on the mode of data collection. If a survey includes questions on sexual orientation, it would be suitable to place those questions close to those on gender identity. It should be clearly recognised, however, that the issues of sexual identity and sexual orientation are conceptually separate.
- OECD offered to share a paper on measuring gender identity that they presented at a meeting in ONS, UK.
- Experimental results on measuring gender identity, including those related to the 2020 census round, are becoming available in the coming two years. Therefore, it is proposed that the task team will report back to the Bureau in October 2021 after the experimental results are available. At that point, the Bureau could consider a more ambitious work programme aiming to harmonize concepts and terminology.

### **Conclusion**

16. The Bureau approved the creation of a networking platform and task team on measuring gender identity, and requested the Secretariat to proceed with its implementation, engaging the interested countries (United Kingdom (Chair), Canada, New Zealand, Sweden, and the United States).

## **III. Follow-up to the 2019 CES plenary session**

### **A. Evaluation of the 67<sup>th</sup> plenary session**

*Documentation:* ECE/CES/BUR/2019/OCT/7 by UNECE

17. The Bureau discussed evaluation of the CES plenary session based on the summary of evaluation questionnaires that were filled in by participants after the meeting. The CES 2019 seminars were both well evaluated. The CES participants encouraged to continue to use interactive electronic tools to allow for a dynamic discussion. The Bureau noted that the response rate to the survey was rather low which does not give a good basis for a precise assessment.

## Conclusion

18. The Secretariat will consider ways to provide incentives for filling in the evaluation questionnaires to increase the response rate.

## B. Follow-up to the CES 2019 seminar on “New data sources – accessibility and use”

*Documentation:* ECE/CES/BUR/2019/OCT/8 by United States and Switzerland

19. An outcome of the CES 2019 seminar ‘New data sources – accessibility and use’ was a proposal to develop an action plan on access to data and acquiring the necessary skills. The Bureau discussed the draft action plan prepared by an informal task team led by Switzerland and the United States. The following points were raised in the discussion:

- The paper provides a very useful structure for grouping actions related to new data sources. It also helps to set priorities. Eurostat has already used this structure to give an overview of the many activities they are undertaking in this area.
- We should check with the groups that are identified in the document whether they can undertake the proposed actions.
- Tangible examples of communication with policy makers are needed to provide evidence how the new data sources can be useful for policy decisions. This work is important at national level for ensuring political support to changing the legal basis that would allow NSOs (and other members of the national statistical system) to access the new sources.
- The legal basis for access to data is just a start. The necessity and proportionality of effort related to the expected outcome have to be taken into account. Some countries (e.g., Canada, Ireland) have already worked on that and can give examples.
- There is a lot of discussion about constraints to using new sources. However, another big challenge is how to find such sources and to identify which ones could be useful. The starting point should be policy needs for data (and not an exciting new source). Concrete person(s) should be tasked with scanning the horizon for new data needs and potentially useful sources. A change of mindset is required for all staff.
- It is not possible to standardise the approach to new data sources because the sources and situations in countries are different.
- The quality criteria for official statistics should be met in any case. Quality means more than meeting technical standards.
- It would be useful to make the results of work on accessing new data sources available in one place, as the topic continues to be discussed in many international fora.
- Canada, Ireland and New Zealand can consider possible work on action 7 (legal basis and hurdles to data access) and inform the Bureau at its next meeting.
- New Zealand offers to contribute examples on actions 1, 2, 5 and 7.
- OECD informed about their work related to the actions 1 (a workshop targeting policy makers in 2020, supported by Switzerland and Germany), 3 (the new OECD quality framework), and 4 (launching a data academy together with IMF to develop courses for statisticians).
- UNSD was involved in preparing the paper and is ready to coordinate at the global level. Subgroups of the UNSD Global Working Group on big data can (or are already) undertaking work related to actions 2, 3, 5 and 6.
- HLG-MOS will discuss at its workshop in November the action items where they are mentioned. Under HGL-MOS a platform is being considered for sharing case studies related to data collection.

### Conclusion

20. The Secretariat will contact the groups mentioned under the seven action items, clarify whether they can take up the proposed tasks, and report to the next CES Bureau meeting. The Bureau will coordinate the implementation of the action plan and discuss concrete follow-up actions and their schedule at its February 2020 meeting.

## IV. UNECE Statistical Programme

### A. Leading, composite and sentiment indicators (further work)

*Documentation:* ECE/CES/BUR/2019/OCT/9 by UNECE

21. The CES plenary Session adopted *Guidelines on producing leading, composite and sentiment indicators* in June 2019. A print publication is expected to become available in November 2019.

22. The following points were raised in the discussion:

- For deciding about possible further work in this area, it is better to wait for the outcome of the Bureau discussion on measuring well-being in the era of digital society that will take place in February 2020.
- Several frameworks for measuring well-being already exist. There was no interest in developing a framework, even less so for a composite index.
- Several countries are interested in sharing experience in this area, e.g. at an expert meeting.
- OECD is undertaking work and organising workshops on this topic where non-OECD countries can be invited to participate.

### Conclusion

23. The Bureau will decide on possible follow-up work in the area of leading, composite and sentiment indicators, in particular related to well-being, after the discussion on measuring well-being in the era of digital society in February 2020.

### B. Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals (renewal of the terms of reference)

*Documentation:* ECE/CES/BUR/2019/OCT/10 by the Steering Group

24. The Bureau reviewed the updated terms of reference of the Steering Group on SDGs. The Steering Group was congratulated for the efficient and productive work. Concerning its further work, it was noted that countries need guidance on the Voluntary National reports to the High-level Political Forum to ensure that these reports are data driven and evidence based.

25. CIS-STAT informed about its activities and the related capacity development in the area of statistics for SDGs in the CIS countries, and expressed interest to become a member of the Steering Group.

### Conclusion

26. The Bureau approved the updated terms of reference of the Steering Group on statistics for SDGs until 2022, and supported CIS-STAT to become a member of the Steering Group.

## C. Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals – developing the UNECE regional platform

*Documentation:* ECE/CES/BUR/2019/OCT/11 by UNECE

27. The Bureau was informed about the progress on a regional platform on statistics for SDGs that the Secretariat is developing together with a Task Team composed of Denmark (lead), Canada, Poland, Russian Federation, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The platform will consist of 3 parts: (i) a knowledge hub; (ii) dashboard of SDG indicators, and (iii) database. The CES 2019 plenary session supported development of the platform.

28. The Bureau made the following comments:

- When ready, the UNECE regional platform can be linked to the global Open SDG Data Hub (<http://unstats-undesa.opendata.arcgis.com/>). The experience of the Hub with providing national SDG data from selected countries should be taken into account in developing the platform.
- The Bureau supported the work towards including both global and national data (in the second phase) in the database with clear explanation for the reason of the differences.
- It is challenging to obtain SDG data from national websites to the UNECE regional platform. This would require setting up an automatic data transfer mechanism (use of questionnaires is not possible because of resource constraints; it would also be a duplication of the data requests from custodian agencies). 21 out of 56 UNECE member countries do not have any SDG data available on national websites. For the 35 countries who have (some) data available, there are significant differences in terms of coverage of SDG indicators, use of proxies or national indicators instead of the global ones, available disaggregations, download formats and tools. Currently a (semi-) automatic data download is feasible for only a handful of countries.
- The Task Team on Data Transmission under the CES Steering Group on statistics for SDGs is looking into using API and SDMX options for automating data transmission. The Task Team aims to give recommendations to countries on how to make available data on SDG indicators in a way that facilitates the use and automatic download, reduces reporting burden and avoids duplication of effort.

### Conclusion

29. The Bureau supported further work on the UNECE Regional Platform on Statistics for SDGs. The Secretariat, together with the task team will continue the work based on the available resources and taking advantage of solutions developed at the global level. The platform is planned to be available in February 2020.

## D. Measuring hazardous events and disasters (further work)

*Documentation:* ECE/CES/BUR/2019/OCT/12 by the Task Force and UNECE

30. The 2019 CES plenary session endorsed the *Recommendations on the role of official statistics in measuring hazardous events and disasters*, and supported continuation of work on issues identified in the Recommendations, especially highlighting the need for statistical operationalisation of the related terms, definitions and classifications.

31. The Bureau discussed a proposal for next steps which could be taken by the existing Task Force under a new mandate. The Bureau emphasized the importance to prioritise the planned activities and narrow the focus. The work could be undertaken in stages.

### Conclusion

32. The Bureau supported the proposal to continue the work. The Secretariat will present new Terms of Reference for the Task Force on Measuring Hazardous Events and Disasters to the February 2020 Bureau meeting.

## **E. Measuring institutional population (further work)**

*Documentation:* ECE/CES/BUR/2019/OCT/13 by UNECE, presentation by UNICEF

### **1. Follow-up to the Recommendations on measuring older populations in institutions**

33. The 2019 CES plenary session endorsed the *Recommendations on measuring older populations in institutions*. The Bureau discussed continuation of the work based on a note by UNECE.

34. The following points were raised in the discussion:

- The Recommendations are appreciated as important and useful.
- The presented suggestions for next steps could be pursued in contexts other than CES, considering that the required expertise would extend beyond statisticians and include agencies governing the institutions, charitable organizations and academia. Guidance on how to reconcile and integrate the data on institutions coming from different sources could be useful.
- In the conditions of population ageing, policy demand for better statistics on older population in institutions is likely to continue. The current work of the UNECE Task Force on disaggregated poverty measures could address the ways how surveys can cover institutional population.

#### **Conclusion**

35. The Secretariat will consult with the UNECE Task Force on disaggregated poverty measures about the possibility to cover aspects relevant to the measurement of institutional population.

### **2. Overview of statistical activities of UNICEF and a proposal for work on children and youth**

36. UNICEF Regional Office in Geneva provided an overview of its statistical activities and presented a proposal to review availability and quality of data on children, adolescents and youth with a view to undertake activities under CES.

37. The following points were raised in the discussion:

- Understanding the UNECE countries' priorities in statistics on children and youth would be useful for planning data collection in this area. Countries have many ongoing surveys to which the possible data collection in this area could link.
- It will be useful to see where the demand for these data are coming from. The level of policy interest differs in countries.
- Statistics on health of children under 18 is often insufficient (even in developed countries) and guidance would be needed on how to fill this gap.
- The proposal for future work should consider the perspective of the entire UNECE region and not only the programme countries in the region where UNICEF works. The proposal could lead to an establishment of a team of specialists. It was proposed to focus on areas that link to already ongoing work under CES.
- Eurostat recently started publishing EU statistics on children in cooperation with UNICEF and is ready to contribute to developing a concept note on future work in this area.

#### **Conclusion**

38. UNICEF Regional Office in Geneva, Eurostat and the Secretariat will prepare a concept note/work plan on children and youth statistics and present it to the February 2020 meeting of the Bureau.

## F. Statistical programme for 2020

*Documentation:* ECE/CES/BUR/2019/OCT/14 by UNECE

39. The Bureau reviewed the draft Statistical Programme 2020 which is prepared in a narrative format to complement the official UN work programme that provides information at an aggregate level. The UNECE 2020 work programme on statistics will be presented to the UNECE Executive Committee (EXCOM) on 16 December 2019 for approval.

### Conclusion

40. The Bureau approved the UNECE Statistical Programme for 2020, subject to corrections in paras 45 and 46 to include reference to OECD work in the related areas.

41. The Secretariat will inform all CES members about submitting the UNECE Statistical Programme 2020 for approval to EXCOM on 16 December 2019 and encourage them to contact their country Missions to UN in Geneva to raise awareness and support of EXCOM members to the statistical work undertaken by CES.

## V. Future of economic statistics

*Documentation:* ECE/CES/BUR/2019/OCT/15 by UNECE and 15/Add. 1 by UNCTAD Presentation by Canada - Chair of the Friends of the Chair Group on Economic Statistics;

42. The Bureau discussed the six questions raised by the UN Statistical Commission Friends of the Chair Group on Economic Statistics. Chief Statisticians and experts from the International Labour Organisation (ILO), UNCTAD and World Trade Organisation (WTO) attended the session and also provided their views.

**Question 1.:** Are there gaps/issues that need to be addressed, in addition to those identified by the Friends of the Chair Group (digitalization, globalization, economic well-being, economic inequalities, sustainability, climate change, intangible assets, household production, human capital and the informal sector)?

43. In general, the list of global priority areas in economic statistics was found to be comprehensive. The following comments were made:

- The scope of “economic statistics” as presented by the Friends of the Chair Group needs clarification, especially concerning areas such as well-being, climate change and sustainability. A clearer delineation would also have implications for the governance.
- Economic statistics should be looked at in an integrated way.
- In addition to the listed priority areas in question 1, it will be a major challenge to update the existing frameworks and classifications. Many of the indicators have a completely different meaning today given the globalised economy (GDP, BoP, trade).
- Instead of adding topics, we should add dimensions: granularity and location. There is high demand for subnational accounts. A big issue is how to locate where value is added across the global value chains.
- International comparability around the world is a challenge for big part of economic statistics, with national accounts being the only exception.
- The issue of inequality plays a growing role and suitable measures for policy purposes are needed.
- New work arrangements including the platform economy (‘gig economy’), will have significant effect on the future labour markets and beyond. There are currently initiatives to fill some of those gaps by e.g. ILO and OECD.
- The informal sector plays a significant role in many countries and may be growing as a result of new types of employment. New or adapted classifications are needed to

allow suitable recording of informal activities, including unpaid work and household production.

- Trade in intellectual property products has a growing importance. We need to disentangle such trade from other trade flows. It would also be useful to identify the impact of taxation on trade and international investments. Users are asking for more granular trade statistics and data on e.g. crypto currencies.
- In relation to the liberalisation of the financial markets more statistics on (private) debt is needed since this may include systemic risks in some countries. Debt is also an important aspect of global inequalities.
- Full sectoral account balance sheets as recommended by the G20 would be useful.
- There is high user demand on productivity and the impact of globalisation on productivity.

**Question 2.** Is there a need for additional global initiatives (beside the currently existing ones) that could support NSOs in their transformation to a new role?

44. The following comments were made:

- It is crucial to build national data infrastructures that utilise and integrate potential data sources including administrative data and big data, rather than relying on isolated sources of information.
- Establishing and maintaining access to administrative and private data sources (including big data) is a major challenge. It will require suitable legal frameworks, investments in IT infrastructure, a quality framework, and guidance on data quality, cleaning and validation. International collaboration could facilitate getting access for the statistical community to big data holders such as Google, big IT and media companies. The quality control of these data could be also done in international collaboration to be more efficient.
- In some countries exchange of micro data among institutions is in place based on different types of cooperation agreements, and respecting data confidentiality. Also, in some countries NSOs have influence on administrative registers. However, in many countries, data exchange and the use of administrative registers are still in an early stage of development.
- For the production of macroeconomic statistics, it is crucial that NSOs have access to all relevant data sources, including balance of payments statistics.
- It will be useful to bring together statistical business registers (and business statistics more generally) and macroeconomic statistics since the register provides the basic building blocks of information for most macroeconomic statistics. This should also be taken into consideration in possible future revisions of SNA.
- The UNECE Task Force on exchange and sharing of economic data has developed a draft *Guide to sharing economic data* that will be presented to the CES plenary session in 2020. In addition to providing practical advice, the Guide proposes possible follow-up actions, such as i) establishing an international network of experts on multinational enterprise groups; ii) creating and maintaining a register of the largest MNEs for statistical purposes; iii) creating a multi-country database with mirror statistics; and iv) developing a Guide to data reconciliation.

**Question 3.** Does the governance structure supporting the key macroeconomic accounting frameworks need to be re-examined, and if yes, how?

45. The following comments were made:

- Many groups are dealing with economic statistics. The current governance structure of the groups should be reviewed and evaluated according to certain agreed principles. The starting point for the review should be the priorities and objectives of the work.
- A good first step would be a stocktaking of the existing groups: their mandates, reporting lines, membership, outcome produced, and an analysis whether this

structure meets the objectives. The UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) where the Chief Statisticians are members has the right to decide which groups should be maintained and which not.

- It is important to make a difference between groups at expert and managerial level (both may be needed), and intergovernmental (where members are countries) and intersecretariat groups (where members are international organizations).
- Based on the review, adjustment to the current structure may be discussed according to agreed principles. The general view was that there may be a need for some modifications of the current governance structure, but not for major changes or the establishment of new mechanisms.
- The challenges with governance start at the national level. Inputs for economic statistics come from many sources. Coordination within the national statistical system is weak in many developing countries, due to lack of resources and national governance.
- For the main macroeconomic areas including national accounts, balance of payments and price indices the governance structure appears clear, is well-established and coordinated (e.g. BOPCOM; ISWGNA/AEG; IWGPS; Interagency Task Force on International Trade Statistics). UNECE's work on statistical business registers is closely coordinated with Eurostat and OECD guided by the Steering Group of the Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers. However, it is not always clear how the links and coordination between these existing groups and the newly established bodies will be ensured, for example with the *Intersecretariat Working Group on International Trade and Economic Globalization Statistics* or with the *Committee of Experts on Business and Trade Statistics*. The research and methodological work recently launched under these bodies considerably overlaps with the work of the existing groups.
- An issue is improving communication within the UN system. It was mentioned that the newly established groups do not report to UNSC, and therefore we may not be aware of their work and any gaps or duplication of work.
- It is important to inform UNSC about the regional work to share experiences and developments and avoid duplication of efforts.

**Question 4.** Given the increasing availability of disaggregated data and microdata, how can the current mechanisms be reinforced or adapted to give access to these data? Or are new mechanisms needed?

46. The following comments were made:

- Users are increasingly asking for more granularity and location information (geography) across areas of economic statistics, for example to identify where value added and employment are created. Rather than establishing new mechanisms the issue should be integrated in the work of existing groups.
- Within existing groups, efforts to strengthen the role of NSOs and other producers of official statistics and their access to microdata, develop techniques to ensure confidentiality, and share experiences and good practices in this area would be useful. The UNSD platform on Big Data for Official Statistics is an example of a forum that could be used in this regard (available on <https://unstats.un.org/bigdata/>).

**Question 5.** Are new institutional arrangements needed to make the system of economic statistics more responsive to changes in user and policy needs?

47. The following comments were made:

- The question of responsiveness of official statistics can be considered at two levels: national level and international level.
- At the national level it concerns NSOs ability to react on and meet user needs within reasonable time. This has to do with availability of resources and data sources, streamlining of production and dissemination processes, and implementation of

flexible production systems that allow new statistics to be produced with minimum delay. If not already in place, close cooperation with owners of data sources and with user groups and other stakeholders (i.e. in advisory statistical committees) should be established. Sharing of experiences and good practices in this regard may also be helpful to many NSOs.

- At the international level problems with responsiveness are associated with the considerable time needed to develop or update guidelines, standards and classifications. An efficient governance structure will help to improve responsiveness/timeliness at international level, combined with clearer priorities on areas where timing is crucial.
- Brazil and Mexico were mentioned as examples of institutional arrangements that support the integration of official statistics and geospatial information.

**Question 6.** Do NSOs and international organizations need to accelerate their pace of innovation and degree of experimentation in economic statistics?

48. The following comments were made:

- New data sources and technologies should be explored and applied where possible. Users are looking more and more at non-official statistics as this is often available faster. It is, nevertheless, difficult to keep pace with the economic development, and the trust in official statistics should not be put at stake.
- NSOs and international organisations must be innovative. To this end, increased cooperation with other producers of statistics, owners of data sources and the research community will be needed.
- The new data sources and better production processes may allow to improve quality, timeliness and granularity but there will still be trade-off between these aspects. Improving all of that while being innovative requires more resources. It is not possible to succeed in all areas at the same time, therefore it is necessary to establish priorities.

#### **Conclusion**

49. The discussion provided valuable input and raised important points. The Friends of the Chair Group on Economic Statistics will take these into account in the proposal to the 2020 session of the UN Statistical Commission on a practical way forward to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness of the governance of the current system of economic statistics.

## **VI. Preparation of the Conference of European Statisticians 2020 plenary session**

### **A. Organization of the 2020 CES seminar on “Impacts of globalization and digitalization on the future of economic statistics”**

*Documentation:* ECE/CES/BUR/2019/OCT/16 by Canada, Finland and Norway

50. The Bureau discussed the organization of the seminar based on an outline prepared by the seminar organizers, Canada, Finland and Norway. The following comments were made:

- It was proposed to invite people from outside official statistics to the seminar, such as chief economists or experts from the banking sector. For example, the head of WTO could be invited to give a keynote speech. OECD also offered to give suggestions.
- As the seminar is taking place after UNSC, it will take into account the outcome of the UNSC discussion on the future of economic statistics and work of the Friends of the Chair Group.

- It was suggested to consider also the communication of the impacts of globalisation and digitalisation on economic statistics.
- The seminar schedule will be adapted to a shorter duration (shortened by half an hour).
- UNSD offered to contribute to the organization of the seminar. New Zealand (session to be determined) and OECD (1<sup>st</sup> session) offered to contribute papers.

### Conclusion

51. Canada will continue the preparation of the seminar in cooperation with Finland and Norway along the lines suggested by the Bureau.

## B. Organization of the 2020 CES seminar on “Implementing the role of NSOs in an era of expanded possibilities”

*Documentation:* ECE/CES/BUR/2019/OCT/17 by Estonia and ECE/CES/BUR/2019/OCT/18 by Denmark and HLG-MOS

52. The Bureau discussed the organization of the seminar based on an outline prepared by the seminar organizers, Denmark and HLG-MOS. The following points were raised in the discussion:

- The seminar topic is very wide, and the points from the action plan in the paper by Estonia address different parts of the government. The seminar should focus on drawing strategic conclusions and delegate implementation details to relevant working groups.
- The seminar is planned to take place during a joint day of CES and UN-GGIM: Europe plenary sessions. Therefore, its contents should be carefully balanced so that the geospatial community feels included. The seminar should still address the needs of national statistical offices to get practical guidance about their changing role. The title and content may need rethinking. It was suggested to include a subtitle “Partnership and collaboration” focusing on building bridges and engaging in partnerships.
- The seminar duration will be shorter to finish by 15:00 in the afternoon.
- UNSD volunteered to be involved in organizing the seminar.

### Conclusion

53. The Secretariat will consult with the seminar organizers and UN GGIM: Europe how to proceed with the preparation of the 2020 CES Seminar on “Implementing the role of NSOs in an era of expanded possibilities” taking into account the comments by the Bureau. An updated outline for the seminar will be submitted to the 2020 February meeting.

## C. Better measurement of the digital transformation

*Documentation:* ECE/CES/BUR/2019/OCT/19 by OECD, Add.1 by IMF, and Add.2 by Eurostat)

54. The Bureau discussed better measurement of digital transformation based on papers summarizing the recent activities of Eurostat, OECD and IMF in this area. The topic will be also discussed at the 2020 CES plenary session. The following points were raised in the discussion:

- OECD, Eurostat, IMF and other international organizations are doing extensive work in this area. The focus of the discussion at the CES plenary session should be well defined, it cannot cover everything.
- It will be good to have a general overview/concept paper with a clear structure presenting the areas affected by digital transformation, and the respective activities of international organizations. The purpose of the paper would be to take stock of the issues and related statistical activities and help identify priority areas.

- The starting point for the paper should be the statistical measurement issues and not the political agenda. The measurement issues concern, e.g. how to get access to digital data sources or how statistical classifications and standards should be adapted to capture digital transformation.

### Conclusion

55. A task team consisting of Eurostat (lead), OECD, IMF and UNECE will prepare a concept paper for the CES Bureau meeting in February 2020. The paper will be updated based on the feedback from the February Bureau meeting, and submitted to CES as a basis for the agenda item on better measurement of the digital transformation.

## D. CES guidelines and recommendations for endorsement in 2020: Exchange and sharing of economic data

*Documentation:* ECE/CES/BUR/2019/OCT/20 by the Task Force)

56. The Bureau reviewed the draft *Guide to sharing economic data*, prepared by a dedicated Task Force. The aim of the Guide is to facilitate sharing of economic data to ensure correct measurement of global production, and provide meaningful data on the activities of multinational enterprises (MNEs).

57. The Bureau raised the following points in the discussion:

- The Task Force has successfully promoted data sharing in various international meetings and conferences. Together with several initiatives by Eurostat, OECD and IMF this has already started a cultural change which will help enhance data sharing.
- For further promoting the sharing of economic data, it is proposed to establish an international network of MNE experts from statistical offices. Eurostat is setting up a network of experts from Large Cases Units of EU statistical offices and supports Member States in setting up such units. The Joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD meeting on national accounts will offer a link between the EU and other countries. The international network may need a small Steering Group to organise and guide its work.
- The draft Guide already includes a number of case studies but could benefit from additional examples, such as on how to get access to tax authorities' country-by-country reporting data and how to use these data in official statistics (e.g. Canada, Ireland and Slovenia have examples of this).
- The Guide touches upon many strategic issues – legal, institutional, managerial and even political. Eurostat offered to provide comments from the managerial level before a wide consultation with CES members.
- Recommendations in the Guide should be clearly highlighted.
- As a concrete follow-up action, Canada suggested a pilot project on data exchange in the area of foreign direct investments (FDI).

### Conclusion

58. The Bureau congratulated the Task Force on the extensive work carried out and recognised the Guide as an impressive result of international cooperation. Eurostat and OECD will review the institutional and legal aspects in the draft Guide and provide comments within a few weeks. Other Bureau members are also welcome to provide written comments.

59. The draft Guide will be sent for a wide consultation to all CES members in early December 2019, subject to reflecting any additional comments received after the Bureau meeting.

60. Canada will prepare a proposal for a pilot project on exchanging FDI data for the October 2020 meeting of the Bureau. The project may also be presented as a contribution to the 2020 CES seminar on 'Impacts of globalization and digitalization on the future of economic statistics', and the work of Friends of the Chair on Economic Statistics.

## **E. CES guidelines and recommendations for endorsement in 2020: Intra-household decision-making**

*Documentation:* ECE/CES/BUR/2019/OCT/21 by the Task Force

61. The Bureau reviewed the draft *Recommendations for measuring intra-household power and decision-making* and strongly supported the document. Canada indicated willingness to continue leading work on this topic if there will be any follow-up activities.

- The following points were raised in the discussion:
- The work of the Task Force has been presented at several regional and global gender statistics events, including the 2017 and 2018 meetings of the UNSD-led Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics and the 2017 and 2019 UNECE Work Sessions on this topic. The work has benefitted from the input of many experts from national and international organizations.
- There is a need for further qualitative testing of questions. The document should include a recommendation for countries to conduct their own testing, since there is significant cultural variation in understanding of these issues. The Recommendations should also emphasize the need for strong interviewer training and for clear explanations of the intent of questions to foster accurate translation into other languages.
- There is significant cultural variation also in the interpretation of findings. Questions on such subjective matters will be interpreted differently by different people, with variations by country, age, region and socioeconomic characteristics. Therefore, analysts need to be clear that they are comparing perceptions, not ‘facts’. This is discussed at length in the draft Recommendations.
- The introductory text should place greater emphasis on the links with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. While there is no global SDG indicator on this topic, there are two highly relevant targets. These should be made more prominent in the draft Recommendations. The argument in the introduction of the Recommendations that intra-household power is crucial to development should be made more explicit.

### **Conclusion**

62. The Secretariat will circulate the draft *Recommendations for Measuring Intra-household Power and Decision-making* for consultation to all CES members, after reflecting the comments made during the meeting and received via email from OECD. Subject to a positive outcome of the consultation, the Recommendations will be submitted to the 2020 CES plenary session for endorsement.

## **F. Draft agenda and timetable for the 2020 CES plenary session**

*Documentation:* ECE/CES/BUR/2019/OCT/22 by UNECE

63. The Bureau discussed the draft agenda for the CES 2020 plenary session. The organization of the joint day with UN-GGIM: Europe has to be carefully considered to make it a successful event.

### **Conclusion**

64. The provisional agenda for the CES 2020 June plenary session will be updated for the 2020 February meeting of the Bureau.

## **VII. Dates and venue of next meetings**

### **Conclusion**

65. The Bureau decided on the dates and venues of the next meetings as follows:

- 25-26 February 2020 (Aguascalientes, Mexico)
- 15-16 October 2020 (Geneva, Switzerland)
- 17-18 February 2021 (Dublin, Ireland)
- 13-14 October 2021 (Helsinki, Finland).

66. The 68<sup>th</sup> CES plenary session will take place on 22-24 (a.m.) June 2020 in Geneva, back-to-back with the OECD Committee on Statistics and Statistical Policy (24 p.m. June – 25 June 2020) and the plenary session of UN-GGIM: Europe (22 June 2020), as decided by the 66<sup>th</sup> CES plenary session (ECE/CES/95). *[Note: due to the Covid-19 restrictions, the CES Bureau decided to hold the meetings virtually, taking place on the same dates.]*

67. The 69<sup>th</sup> CES plenary session is planned to take place during the week of 21-25 June 2021 in Paris (tbc.), back-to-back with OECD Committee on Statistics and Statistical Policy.

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