

STATISTICAL COMMISSION
and
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Report
of the forty-seventh plenary session

(Neuchâtel, Switzerland, 14-16 June 1999)



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Information Guide for the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)**IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMISSION DECISION I(48)**

To be considered during the sessions of the Principal Subsidiary Bodies (PSBs) and included in their report to the Commission

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REPORT THE MEETING

I. INTRODUCTION

Attendance

1. The Conference of European Statisticians held its forty-seventh plenary session in Neuchâtel at the invitation of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office. It was attended by representatives of Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and United States.

2. The session was attended by representatives of the European Commission (Eurostat).

3. Australia, Japan, Mexico, Mongolia and the Republic of Korea participated under Article 11 of the terms of reference of the ECE.

4. Representatives of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the following specialised agencies and intergovernmental organisations attended: International Labour Organisation (ILO), World Health Organisation (WHO), WHO Regional Office for Europe, International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organisation (WTO), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and development (OECD), Interstate Statistical Institute of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT), and European Free Trade Association (EFTA).

5. The following non-governmental organisation in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) was represented: International Statistical Institute.

6. Paolo Garonna (Italy) chaired the session. Adrian Abrahamse (Netherlands), Svein Longva (Norway), Donal Murphy (Ireland), Edvard Outrata (Czech Republic) and Rein Veetousme (Estonia) served as Vice-Chairs.

Agenda and procedure

7. The provisional agenda (ECE/CES/55) was adopted. The Conference recalled the procedure for improving the efficiency of plenary sessions (CES/821) that the Conference adopted at its 1994 plenary session.

Opening statements

8. Opening addresses were delivered by Paolo Garonna, Chairman of the Conference, Carlo Malaguerra, Director-General of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office, Francis Matthey, Chief of the Department of Public Economy of the Canton of Neuchâtel (Switzerland) and Yves Berthelot, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Europe.

II. IMPLICATIONS OF MEETINGS OF THE CONFERENCE'S PARENT BODIES

A. May 1999 session of the Economic Commission for Europe

Documentation: CES/1999/7

9. The Conference noted that its methods of work and its operating procedures are already largely aligned with the recommended practices called for at the Commission session and in Commission decision A(53);

10. The Conference thanked Eurostat for facilitating the participation of representatives of central and east European countries and of CIS countries in the annual plenary sessions of the Conference of European Statisticians and in selected other high priority meetings in the Conference's work programme, by permitting representatives of the statistical offices of these countries to use the European Commission's PHARE and TACIS funds to finance their participation in these meetings.

11. The Conference requested the Bureau of the Conference to look into the possibility of prioritising the Conference's work programme in the manner which has been recommended by the Commission's Group of Experts on the Programme of Work (see E/ECE/1372), for review by the Conference at its 2000 plenary session.

12. The Conference noted that the ECE Statistical Division is already collaborating closely and in a partnership relationship with Eurostat, OECD, the UN Statistics Division and other international organisations in carrying out the Conference's programme of work and also, to a considerable extent, in the secretariats' collection of statistics from ECE member countries. The Conference also asked these organisations to continue their cooperation in this area.

13. The Conference noted the initiative the Bureau of the Conference plans to take in establishing a Task Force within the framework of the Bureau of the Conference, to look into the possible role statistics could play in a wide-ranging programme of recovery and reconstruction of South-eastern Europe after the Kosovo conflict has ended.

B. March 1999 session of the United Nations Statistical Commission

Documentation: CES/1999/8

14. The attention of the Conference was drawn to: (i) The ongoing reform process of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD); (ii) Development by the UNSD of searchable Web databases available to NSOs as well as general public (The first two databases will contain information on completed and ongoing methodological work); and (iii) Planned revision of the Manual of Statistical Organisations.

15. The Conference was also informed about the informal meeting of the Economic and Social Council held a few weeks after the meeting of the UN Statistical Commission. The ECOSOC meeting discussed a list of basic development indicators. There was no final decision and the work on basic indicators is expected to continue.

16. At this occasion the delegate of Spain informed the Conference that a new "Conference of Statisticians of the Americas" has been created under the auspices of the UN Economic Commission of the Latin America and the Caribbean. Spain is participating in their work representing the European region for the next two years.

III. INTEGRATED PRESENTATION OF INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL WORK IN THE ECE REGION

Documentation: CES/1999/10 and addenda 1-7; CES/1999/11 and addend 1 and 2; CES/1999/12; and CES/1999/13

a) Introduction

17. The Conference agreed to review the Integrated Presentation in the manner suggested by the Bureau, namely to review three topics in greater depth, and to review the remaining 40 or so programme elements more quickly on the basis of the detailed recommendations made by the Bureau.

18. The following three topics were the ones which were reviewed in greater depth: (a) labour statistics (Programme Element 4.10); (b) health statistics (P.E. 4.6), and hidden economy (part of P.E. 3.1).

b) Labour Statistics

Documentation: CES/1999/12

19. ILO contributed the paper (CES/1999/12) which served as the basis for discussion on this topic. An overview of labour statistics with a focus on the ECE region was presented. It was noted that 54% of all countries of the ECE region furnished the ILO with statistics for all or most of the tables published in the ILO Yearbook of Labour Statistics. Although the ECE region

covers the majority of statistically advanced countries in the world, there still remains much to do in order to harmonize statistical sources, methods of data collection and practices of data dissemination. For statistics on employment and unemployment, improvements have been made as concerns country coverage. On the other hand, timeliness has stagnated or even deteriorated.

20. As concerns sources and methods, ILO observed that in a number of countries of the ECE region, data collected for the same variable do not come from the same type of source and that they are not based on ILO international standards. The extent to which data are comparable therefore varies significantly across countries in the region.

21. Another observation was that subjects covered by national surveys as well as the periodicity of data are not harmonised throughout the ECE region, which makes in a number of cases international comparison difficult or impossible.

22. During the presentation it was also stressed that international organizations have not yet been able to put in place an agreement for a coordinated system for the collection of national labour statistics, although the idea has been addressed informally on several occasions over the last 10 years. ILO considered that an ideal model would be that Eurostat collects data from its 15 member countries, OECD from its members who are not members of EU, and ILO from the rest of world. For international data collection ILO suggested a single format based on the most detailed questionnaire. In the discussion both OECD and Eurostat pointed out a number of areas where international cooperation both in the area of data collection and in methods and standards have been very successful in recent years. Both these organisations would be happy to extend their cooperation on data collection to include ILO. On standards, it was mentioned that Eurostat's Task Force on Unemployment Statistics would try to incorporate the new ILO recommendations on underemployment which were adopted at the 16th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (1998) on this subject.

23. During the 16th ICLS three international resolutions were adopted and two sets of guidelines were endorsed. It was noted that it takes 5-8 years to get an international standard adopted, which then has a life span of approximately 20 years. It was recognised that developing world level standards inevitably involves a lengthy and slow process. However, for important policy issues a lag of such a length of time cannot be accepted to achieve some degree of standardisation. In this respect, the important role played by the Paris Group in advancing the timetable was recognised, and it was decided to ask OECD, which is a member of the group, to report to the Conference on the work of the group from time to time.

24. During the discussion it was suggested that ILO should extend its series on Sources and Method with a volume on methodology of integration of data from different sources and updated methods for calculating balances of

labour resources. ILO was also asked to give more attention to statistics on labour migration

25. It was agreed that more attention should be given to policy indicators that are relevant for monitoring the effectiveness of labour programmes, structural changes in the labour market etc. This would require closer contacts with labour market analysts as well as the use of more sophisticated measurement techniques. In this context it was also emphasized that concepts such as underemployment means different to different groups of countries depending on their economic development.

26. The Conference also agreed that ILO should review and propose to the Bureau of the Conference for its autumn 1999 meeting amended text for inclusion in the "Objectives" and "Expected collective outputs" of P.E. 4.10 of the Integrated Presentation.

c) Health statistics

Documentation: CES/1999/11 and addenda 1 and 2

27. Mr. Fellegi presented the invited paper contributed by Statistics Canada on Health Statistics. Two supporting papers by Eurostat/Statistics Netherlands and WHO-Europe also served as a basis for discussion of this topic.

28. A main conclusion of the Canadian paper was that health statistics should become a priority area for the Conference, and that of all the major areas covered by health statistics, development is most urgent in health status measurement which is central to all health decisions. Despite the fact that health expenditure is a major item in all nations' budgets, adequate health information for policy analysis and decision making is not currently available. The presenter also concluded that there is a need for better coordination and information sharing both nationally and internationally and that existing data on health interventions and costs need to be better connected with health outcomes and health determinants. These conclusions were similar to those which were reached by the October 1998 Joint ECE-WHO Meeting on Health Statistics in Rome (CES/AC.38/1998/3).

29. Mr. Franchet, who presented the joint Eurostat/Statistics Netherlands paper, emphasized that the adoption of the Community action programme on health monitoring reinforced the activities needed on health statistics. He agreed that regular exchange of information was needed and that international cooperation should cover methodological and conceptual work, data collection and dissemination. He therefore suggested that the major international actors in the health field should be convened to discuss these matters and that OECD as the Rapporteur for this programme element should act as convener of the meetings. He also suggested that several national experts, drawn from those countries that have an active developmental activity in this field,

should also be invited to participate in the meetings. It was also suggested that consideration could perhaps also be given to the possibility of allocating the functions of the Rapporteur among the major international organizations active in the field of health statistics every two years.

30. The representative from the WHO Regional Office for Europe demonstrated the importance of comparative international health information to improve health and the delivery of health care to patients. However, the health requests from different international collectors imposes a heavy response burden on countries and the challenge was how best to combine the needs of different agencies in a partnership for health information arrangement that would result in the sharing of both the work done and the fruits of labour. In his view the concept of distributed "national health integrated databases" inter-linked via a communication network was the most effective solution and the one countries would benefit most from. Such a network is already being developed by WHO/EURO for Eastern Europe (EUPHIN-EAST covering 23 central and east European and CIS countries). A similar network is being established as part of the Community action programme on health monitoring by the EU/EEA/EFTA countries. The ultimate goal of these networks would be to obtain one large European Public Health Information Network.

31. The representative from WHO-headquarters' Global Programme on Evidence for Health Policy also briefed the Conference on the new emphasis of their work in epidemiology and health statistics. WHO will continue to collect, analyse and disseminate national cause of death statistics with an increasing emphasis on the use of mortality statistics for burden of diseases assessment. It has also initiated a new programme of work on the analysis of health inequalities based on individual and small area data. Composite indicators of population health status, incorporating both mortality and non/fatal outcomes, are being developed and conceptual and normative debate around approaches and methods for describing and valuing health states are being promoted. Several of these issues will be discussed at a Global Conference WHO is convening in December, 1999, on Summary Measures of Population Health as well as at the Joint WHO/ECE expert meeting in Ottawa in the year 2000. The WHO representative also indicated that his office will develop guidelines and databases on the economic cost of diseases, injuries and risk factors, and on the cost/effectiveness of interventions for use by Member States. In connection with the 2000 World Health Report, it is reviewing the set of indicators used to assess and monitor health system performance, and is preparing guidelines on the establishment of a system of national health accounts.

32. The plenary session unanimously supported the proposal for making health statistics a priority for the Conference and for intensifying cooperation in international health collection. Regarding the best way to proceed, some thought that combining questionnaires and sharing data would suffice while others thought the countries would benefit more from developing national integrated health databases. As pointed out by the representative

from UNFPA, the latter would particularly be helpful for strengthening the national health system in less developed countries that in this way could benefit from work done in the ECE region. As part of the UN system the Conference should ensure that all countries would benefit from these developments in the health field.

33. The Chair summarised the discussion on the health statistics work of the Conference and concluded that the area of health should be a priority area and that coordination should be further encouraged in international health work and data collection. Furthermore, intellectual leadership should be promoted to advance conceptual issues of measurements and classifications. Finally, a health monitoring system capable of supporting policy analysis and decision making in the field of health should be the long-term goal of the Conference's work.

d) The hidden economy

Documentation: CES/1999/13

34. Mr. M. Calzaroni presented the ISTAT paper (CES/1999/13), which he and Ms. S. Ronconi had prepared as the basis of discussion on this topic.

35. The paper was concerned with the estimation of non-observed economy in order to guarantee the exhaustiveness of the national accounts estimates according to the production boundaries as defined by the 1993 SNA. The need for adopting a homogeneous language and terminology as a basis for describing the phenomenon was noted. In order to ensure the exhaustiveness of GDP a common conceptual framework has to be defined and the methodology to measure the non-observed economy improved.

36. According to the internationally accepted definitions described in the 1993 SNA, the Non-directly Observed Economy, or "NOE", defines three areas, i.e. illegal activities, underground economy and informal sector. It was also stressed that for the needs of the policy makers it is very important that the components of the NOE are described in greater detail. Moreover, a concern was expressed that while the breakdown of NOE in three components is quite useful to describe the phenomenon it could be difficult to use them in practical terms and in some cases even impossible to apply.

37. An overview of the activities undertaken by international organisations to assist the countries from the ECE region in measuring the non-observed economy was presented. Improving the exhaustiveness, reliability and comparability of the Member States' GNP estimates is a high priority for the EU Commission. All member countries had to provide the Commission with description of the procedures and methods they use to ensure the exhaustiveness of their GNP estimates. The results of the exercise are being analysed and it is expected that by the end of 1999 the definition of the exhaustiveness of national accounts estimates will be clearer.

38. Until recently, particular attention was not paid to the estimation of the illegal productive activities, apart from some theoretical studies. Discussion is now taking place to verify the possibility of estimating these kinds activities and the consequences that their inclusion might have on the current national accounts estimates.

39. It was noted that the work of the international organisations to assist transition economies and the MED countries is of particular importance for developing and improving their statistical systems. It was emphasised that the estimation of NOE is one of the most complex issues for the transition economies and a priority area in their work programmes. For example, in the Russian Federation and Ukraine recent estimates of non-observed economy represent about 23-24 % of the GDP.

40. It was pointed out that the experience of the western economies in measuring the NOE, and especially the technical details of the approaches used, are of great importance for the transition economies. In this respect an appeal was made to the western countries that their expertise is made available to the other countries and the exchange of best practices insured. The expertise of ILO in this area was also recognised.

41. Another aspect related to the work on NOE and its estimation in the national accounts of the CIS countries is the political implications which it may have on government decisions. Therefore it is extremely important that these countries find the appropriate instruments to measure the NOE. A suggestion was made that in its future work the Conference should continue to devote some time on this topic.

42. The difference between economic and statistical underground was pointed out. While the economic underground is typical for developed statistical systems, the statistical is more characteristic for the countries that are in a progress of rebuilding their statistical systems. In this context, a recommendation was made that transition economies should learn from the experience already accumulated by the EU countries on this subject.

43. The adoption of the SNA '93 and ESA '95 stressed the importance of the informal activities, not only in the transition economies because of the difficult economic situation some of them are facing, but also in western economies. As regards transition economies where the informal sector will remain important for some years, its is recommended that this sector is integrated and institutionalised within the national economies. At the same time, the economically developed countries have to develop a new statistical apparatus in order to measure the new aspects of informal activities that are emerging.

44. It was suggested that the issues of exhaustiveness and quality should be carefully considered at every stage of preparing the estimates, starting from the design of the questionnaires, the definition of target population of

new data sources through the preparation of a detailed description of the methods used to estimate national accounts aggregates. It was also emphasised that the analyses of the exhaustiveness should be improved not only within Eurostat but also in the non-European countries to ensure that the same production boundaries are used.

45. In concluding the discussion it was emphasised that the measurement of NOE is a very complex issue. It was also recognised that while a lot has been done to find a general model for measuring the NOE and the conceptual framework has become much clearer, much remains to be done. Full exhaustiveness of the national accounts estimates requires a continuous work to improve the quality of national accounts and the accounting practices. It was noted that different countries use different approaches in the estimation of NOE, which are linked to different data sources. However, 'transparency' is the key word to ensure comparability between countries. The work should continue by engaging in new work, particular illegal activities and the informal sector.

46. Within Europe a lot has been invested to ensure the international comparability of data. It is of great importance that the outcomes of this work are now discussed. However, this discussion should continue not only within the European Union but also outside its member states and include other non-European countries so as to find eventual gaps.

47. The Conference asked the OECD as the Rapporteur for this programme element to recommend proposed new text for the "Objectives" and "Collective expected outputs" to the CES Bureau, for the Bureau to consider at its autumn 1999 meeting.

e) Other programme elements in the Integrated Presentation

48. Following the recommendation made by the Bureau, the discussion by the Conference of the remaining 40 or so programme elements in the Integrated Presentation was introduced for each Programme Activity (P.A.) by a designated member of the Bureau, as follows: P.A. 1 (Organisation and operation of statistical services) by Mikhail Korolev (CIS-STAT); P.A. 2 (Technical infrastructure and other cross-cutting issues) by Donal Murphy (Ireland); P.A. 3 (Economic statistics) by Adrian Abrahamse (Netherlands); P.A. 4 (Social and demographic statistics) by Svein Longva (Norway); P.A. 5 (Environment statistics) by Edvard Outrata (Czech Republic); and P.A. 6 (Dissemination and support for secretariat activities) by Rein Veetousme (Estonia).

(i) Programme Activity 1: Organisation and operation of statistical services

49. The Conference approved the comments of the Bureau on work done in 1998/99 and on ongoing activities in this programme activity

50. Subject to the qualifications specified below the Conference accepted the Bureau's recommendations on the planned activities in the programme elements in this programme activity (see CES/1998/34/Add.1)

P.E. (Programme element) 1.2: Managerial and policy issues of direct concern for presidents of national statistical offices

51. The Conference selected the topic "Use of statistics for administrative, managerial and analytical purposes" as the topic for substantive discussion for the 1999 plenary session. At the request of the Bureau, Statistics Netherlands agreed to organise and chair the session.

52. The Conference accepted the invitation of the OECD to hold its 2000 plenary session in Paris.

P.E. 1.3: Countries in transition in the ECE region

53. The Conference asked ECE, OECD and Eurostat as co-sponsors of the April 2000 joint meeting on national accounts to join efforts in trying to find ways which would facilitate the CIS countries being able to attend both the 25 April Seminar on National Accounts for CIS countries and the 26-28 April ECE-OECD-Eurostat joint meeting.

54. Attention of the Conference was drawn to the financial problems that had affected several national statistical services in countries in transition in the region, and the importance of good co-ordination of donor activities was emphasised.

55. Reference was also made to the UNFPA-funded project, for which UN ECE is Executing Agency, that had provided a programme of valuable activities on census taking for countries in transition. The view was expressed that it would be a pity if this project ended at the end of 1999, as it was scheduled to do, but that Conference members should make a positive assessment of this work.

P.E. 1.4: Relations with countries outside the ECE region (including countries in the Mediterranean region)

56. The Conference asked ECE secretariat and Eurostat to look more closely into priority programmes of Eurostat's MEDSTAT programme, in order to determine whether, in addition to the field of migration statistics, there is more scope for the ECE secretariat to provide Eurostat with back-up support in other fields on statistics of relevance to countries in the Mediterranean region that are covered by MEDSTAT programme.

(ii) Programme Activity 2: Technical infrastructure and other cross-cutting issues

57. The Conference approved the comments of the Bureau on work done in 1998/99 and on ongoing activities in this programme activity

58. Subject to the qualifications specified below the Conference accepted the Bureau's recommendations on the planned activities in the programme elements in this programme activity (see CES/1998/34/Add.2 and Add.7)

P.E. 2.1: Management of statistical information technology

59. The Conference agreed to publish the amended version of the paper "Information systems architecture for national and international statistical offices: guidelines and recommendations" that had been an input to the February 1999 Meeting on the Management of Statistical IT in the Conference's Statistical Standard and Studies Series.

60. The Conference agreed to include a further meeting on the Management of Statistical Information Technology in the Conference's work programme for 2000/2001.

61. The Conference also agreed to convene a work session on statistical data confidentiality in its work programme for 2000/2001.

P.E. 2.2: Statistical data collection and processing

62. Attention of the Conference was drawn to the 1999 Seminar on the Exchange of Technology and Knowledge (ETK '99) used for the statistical processing and transfer of know-how that Eurostat will organise in Prague from 13-15 October 1999.

63. The Conference noted that the collection and processing of data from the forthcoming round of censuses will be launched in many member countries in the near future. It agreed that special attention should be drawn to those activities.

64. The Conference authorised the secretariat to reproduce the final version of the document "Strategies for improving statistical quality" that was discussed at the June 1999 work session on statistical data editing, and to distribute it to interested statistical offices as methodological material.

65. The Conference also agreed to include a work session on statistical data editing in its work programme for 2000/2001.

P.E. 2.3: Dissemination and interchange of statistical information

66. The Conference noted that in many national statistical offices the output databases were developed and implemented. Attention was drawn to the software used in this area and it was suggested that possibilities of sharing software tools should be explored.

67. The Conference noted that many national statistical offices now have web sites on the Internet. In this connection it was mentioned that the possibilities of developing a joint web site that would facilitate the integration of information flow and assist further improvement of dissemination of statistical data via Internet should be investigated.

68. In view of the high importance of metadata used for dissemination of statistical data via the Internet, attention of the Conference was drawn to the importance of integrating this kind of metadata into the whole statistical metainformation system that has been developed and implemented in statistical agencies.

69. The Conference noted that OECD and Eurostat shortly will be able to provide each other with desktop access to their databases, and that the ECE will also be included in this arrangement very soon. It encouraged other international organisations to follow this approach wherever applicable.

70. The Conference agreed to include a work session on statistical output for dissemination to information media in the Conference's work program for 2000/2001.

P.E. 2.4: Statistical classifications

71. The Conference was informed about the work undertaken by Canada, USA and Mexico in the area of product and service classifications. Reference was made to an International Expert Group set up by UNSD with country representation.

P.E. 2.6: Geographical and regional data

72. The Conference noted that the growing demand for data on cities calls for urgent development of definitions on urban and rural classifications. It asked the Bureau to look into possible ways in which this problem could be addressed.

(iii) Programme Activity 3: Economic statistics

73. The Conference approved the comments of the Bureau on work done in 1998/99 and on ongoing activities in this programme activity

74. Subject to the qualifications specified below the Conference accepted the Bureau's recommendations on the planned activities in the programme elements in this programme activity (see CES/1998/34/Add.3 and Add.7)

P.E. 3.1: Implementation of the system of national accounts

75. Attention was drawn to the achievements of harmonization in the EU; the implementation of ESA95, HICP, a range of short-term indicators etc. In this context it was stressed that it is important that non-EU countries be able to keep pace with the developments of EU countries. The joint ECE-Eurostat-OECD meeting and seminar on national accounts in year 2000 was mentioned as an important event, in particular for ensuring cooperation with the CIS and the transition countries.

P.E. 3.2: Money and banking, government finance and balance of payments and P.E. 3.5: Distributive Trade

76. It was noted that harmonization needs to be expanded further; new modules should be developed and work on classifications and manuals continued. In the latter aspect, the manuals on monetary and finance statistics (P.E. 3.2) and distributive trade (P.E. 3.5) were mentioned as good examples.

77. As concern the project on electronic commerce mentioned under Eurostat in P.E. 3.5, Eurostat agreed to expand the coverage and extend invitation to countries interested to participate in the project. It was also noted that under this programme element OECD would supply text about its activities.

78. The ISI representative announced a forthcoming conference on electronic commerce in cooperation with the Statistical Office of Singapore.

79. During the discussion an update was given on the work carried out by the Intersecretariat Task Force on Finance Statistics. A second release of the External Debts Statistics will, in a few days time, be released on the Web jointly by OECD, BIS, World Bank and IMF. Work will be undertaken to further enhance external debts statistics, among other things, by broader country coverage. In the methodological area work will be initiated to update the 1988 manual. A series of seminars will be organized combined with technical assistance.

P.E. 3.3: International trade in goods

80. The importance of the OECD 1999 meeting on foreign trade statistics was signalled.

P.E. 3.7: Tourism

81. As for tourism statistics the Conference underlined the need that a manual on accounting be developed by WTO as a coordinated effort with the OECD.

P.E. 3.8: Other marketed services, and non marketed services

82. Attention was also drawn to the lessons drawn from a Seminar in the Hague on the lack of statistical coverage of the Information Society by Official Statistical Offices.

P.E. 3.9: Price statistics

83. The initiative to improve the quality of CPI and PPP was welcomed as well as the effort of co-ordinated data collection by international organizations. It was mentioned that the quality of output and performance indicators would be discussed under a separate agenda item.

P.E. 3.14: Business registers

84. The Conference agreed to include a joint UN/ECE-Eurostat Work session on business registers in its work programme for 2000/2001.

(iv) Programme Activity 4: Social and demographic statistics

85. The Conference approved the comments of the Bureau on work done in 1998/99 and on ongoing activities in this programme activity

86. Subject to the qualifications specified below the Conference accepted the Bureau's recommendations on the planned activities in the programme elements in this programme activity (see CES/1998/34/Add.4 and Add.7)

87. Attention of the Conference was called to the growing importance of longitudinal surveys for obtaining social and demographic statistics. The Bureau was asked to consider how a more effective exchange of international experience in this domain could be facilitated.

P.E. 4.1 Social indicators and frameworks

88. The Conference noted that work in the field of social and demographic statistics being undertaken at the international level is not sufficiently integrated. It considered that greater priority should be devoted to addressing this problem. In this connection Eurostat informed the Conference that it has established a leadership group on social accounting with Statistics Netherlands as the lead agency, and that this group should lead to some progress being made on this.

P.E. 4.4: Registers and administrative records in social and demographic statistics

89. The Conference agreed to include a work session/seminar on registers and administrative records for social and demographic statistics, (jointly with Eurostat, Luxembourg), in the Conference's work programme for 2000/2001.

P.E. 4.5 Population and housing censuses

90. The Conference discussed problems that many countries have in conducting their population and housing censuses, and stressed that these are mainly connected to financial shortage, legal issues and individual data protection. A use of administrative records and registers to replace partly or fully censuses in some countries was mentioned, but it was stressed, that this is not possible for all countries. The Conference, therefore, recommended that the Bureau follow developments related to population and housing censuses in the future.

P.E. 4.9 Culture statistics

91. The Conference postponed the ECE-Eurostat-UNESCO joint work session on cultural statistics to 2000/01, with the understanding that ECE, Eurostat and UNESCO will develop proposed new terms of reference for the meeting for the Conference to consider at its 2000 plenary session.

P.E. 4.11 Demographic statistics (including projections, migration, fertility and families and households)

92. The Conference welcomed the proposal for interested NSOs to establish a Task Force to look into the possibility of a case study approach being used to determine whether and how more rapid progress towards greater international comparability in the field of international migration statistics could be achieved by countries with the help of the new set of international recommendations on international migration statistics.

93. The Conference included an ECE-Eurostat joint work session on demographic projections in its work programme for 2003/2004.

94. The Conference approved the Population Activities Unit's (PAU) planned work programme on a provisional basis, pending further examination and review by the Bureau of the amended version of the work plan that the PAU is to prepare for the Bureau's autumn 1999 meeting.

95. With respect to the PAU's planned work programme, the Conference encouraged interested NSOs and National Population Institutes (NPIs) to participate in: (1) discussions and decisions on research and related data-collection priorities; (2) evaluation of experiences with the PAU's research

and related data collection in the 1990s; (3) development of an agenda for the research into the behaviour and conditions of different generations; and, (4) elaboration of methodologies for the collection and analysis of survey and census sample data.

96. With respect to the PAU's planned work programme, the Conference encouraged NSOs and National Population Institutes from countries in transition to continue to cooperate with the ECE/PAU with the view to developing and maintaining the regional information system (database) for the monitoring of the implementation of the final documents of the International Conference on Population and Development, European Population Conference and the Regional Population Meeting in these countries.

P.E. 4.14: Statistics on population groups of special interest

97. The Conference approved the Population Activities Unit's (PAU) planned work programme on a provisional basis, pending further examination and review by the Bureau of the amended version of the work plan that the PAU is to prepare for the Bureau's autumn 1999 meeting.

(v) Programme Activity 5: Environment statistics

98. The Conference approved the comments of the Bureau on work done in 1998/99 and on ongoing activities in this programme activity

99. Subject to the qualifications specified below the Conference accepted the Bureau's recommendations on the planned activities in the programme elements in this programme activity (see CES/1998/34/Add.5)

P.E. 5.2: Environmental Accounting

100. As secretariat for the "London Group", Statistics Canada called the Conference's attention to the fact that the members of this group had volunteered to update the UN Statistics Division's Handbook on Environmental Accounting. The draft chapters were to be discussed at the November meeting of the group in Australia. For this to be possible, offices participating had to allow the concerned staff to work on the project. Participating offices were also encouraged to make financial contributions to paying for the work of the final editing of the manual.

(vi) Programme Activity 6: Dissemination and support for secretariat activities

101. The Conference approved the comments of the Bureau on work done in 1998/99 and on ongoing activities in this programme activity

102. The Conference accepted the Bureau's recommendations on the planned activities in the programme elements in this programme activity (see CES/1998/34/Add.6)

f) Approved programme of work of the Conference, 1999/2000 and 2000/01

103. The approved programme of work of the Conference for 1999/2000 and 2000/01 will be reproduced after the plenary session and published as CES/1999/30 and Addenda 1-6. That set of documents will constitute Annex I of this report. The Conference also approved the calendar of meetings planned for the next two years.

IV. JOINT INTERNATIONAL DATA COLLECTION

Documentation: CES/1999/13

104. The Conference welcomed the increased cooperation between international organizations in joint data collection which not only results in a reduced response burden on countries but also in more coherent international statistics. The international organizations were therefore encouraged to continue their efforts in this area. In particular, they should regularly follow up those areas that now might be working well to ensure that new cases of duplication do not arise.

105. The Conference noted the achievements of the European Environment Agency in the collection of data. It requested the EEA to fully integrate itself in the coordination effort of Eurostat, OECD and other organizations that collect environmental data. Eurostat undertook to bring together the EEA and one or more countries to discuss problems both at the national and international level.

106. During the discussion it was proposed that the future reports to the Conference should also cover:

- standards for data transmission;
- an update on the agreement between IMF and the ECB, which acts as a gateway for the transmission of country data to the IMF, as well as on accelerated discussions on similar agreement between IMF and Eurostat;
- the role of Eurostat in the areas of information society and electronic commerce. The successful cooperation with the OECD in these areas should be mentioned in section IV of the paper on joint international data collection ; and
- cooperation in the area of structural business statistics between Eurostat and OECD should be included in section IV of the report.

V. ASSISTANCE TO COUNTRIES IN TRANSITION

Documentation: CES/1999/25

107. The Conference noted that the ECE Statistical Division has a very limited amount of funds to provide technical assistance for countries in transition. This funding comes from two sources. First, from UNFPA and UNDP. This is always temporary and there is no guarantee of its continuance. Moreover it is earmarked by those funding agencies for activities that correspond with their priorities.

108. Secondly, funding may be provided by ECE for a Regional Adviser (RA) post. However the Conference noted that the ECE Executive Secretary had informed the Bureau that he had decided to keep the RA post in the Statistical Division vacant throughout 1999.

109. Ambassador Somol, as Chairman of the Economic Commission for Europe, commented that assistance to countries in transition is very important and that extra-budgetary funding by agencies such as UNFPA and UNDP is very much appreciated. He noted that some countries were in greater need than others.

110. The Conference concluded that it is important to stress the need for regional, as well as national, programmes of assistance in statistics. It is in the nature of international statistical work that country experts learn from each other by working together.

111. Eurostat observed that in this field of assistance, co-ordination is good. Phare and Tacis programmes will continue for some time and it was emphasised that there was a great need for assistance in economic statistics and that it was to be hoped that ECE would restore the RA post to the Statistical Division.

112. Eurostat also referred to the programme of assistance that they would be spearheading to provide assistance to countries in SE Europe. They will be producing a document by mid-August defining the problems, the nature of assistance that may be provided, the time frame and possible sources of funding. The aim is to produce a document that builds on existing programmes and proposes a region-based approach. It would be useful if an ECE project using UNDP funds could fit within the Eurostat led Group.

113. CIS-Stat commented on the following three concrete issues.

a) The importance of assistance in carrying out population censuses. A lot of work has already been done by ECE as Executing Agency for the UNFPA funded project. This included a very important and valuable seminar held in Moscow in April 1999 on census enumeration experiences. CIS-Stat urged that in view of the importance of this work the Conference should call for the UNFPA project with ECE as Executing Agency to be extended beyond its current closing date.

b) The loss of the RA post was much to be regretted and the Conference should appeal for it to be reinstated. When looking at complex issues such as Systems of National Accounts and the Non-Directly Observed Economy required the services of a highly qualified observer.

c) It was unfortunate that some major restrictions had been introduced to the Tacis programme and Eurostat should be requested to get the restrictions lifted.

114. UNFPA pointed out that it actually gives more assistance to ECE countries in transition than that being provided in the Statistical Division project. Moreover their funds had been reduced in recent years. Nevertheless they would see what could be done within their limited funding.

115. The Conference concluded that

- there was strong support for the current programme of activities in the UNFPA and UNDP funded projects and the planned work to be undertaken in them;
- that the importance of the Regional Adviser post was recognised and that an appeal should be made to ECE to reinstate the post in the Statistical Division as soon as possible;
- Eurostat's readiness to engage in an important programme of assistance to SE Europe was noted.
- In the field of statistics countries benefit from coming together and exchanging experiences (e.g. the recent Moscow seminar on Census Enumeration Experiences was cited as an excellent example of this). It was generally agreed that for statistics these are the most effective and efficient ways of providing technical assistance to the countries in transition.

116. The Conference approved the forms of technical assistance that the Statistical Division is providing to CITs through its UNFPPA- and UNDP-funded extra-budgetary projects and through the Conference's own work programme. However, it expressed strong concern about the fact that the Division has had to suspend and curtail the types of technical assistance the Division was giving to CITs because of the Executive Secretary's decision to leave the post of Regional Adviser in Statistics vacant throughout 1999. It asked the Executive Secretary and the Commission to consider ways which would permit this important post in the Statistical Division to be filled as soon as possible.

117. The Conference also noted that the Bureau of the Conference during the coming year would be looking into possible ways in which the Conference's work programme might be able to be used, within its current limited resource base, to contribute to post-conflict recovery in South East Europe.

VI. INVOLVEMENT OF NATIONAL STATISTICAL OFFICES IN ANALYSIS AND FORECASTING

Documentation: CES/1999/9

118. The conference agreed that this was an important and growing area of interest. The wide range of benefits outlined in the paper was endorsed, but particular emphasis was placed on the role analysis can play in developing and/or re-enforcing the political independence of an NSI. In particular it was felt it was an excellent way for countries in transition to begin to establish a tradition of independence. Nonetheless the risks of carrying out analytical activities were recognized, and it was agreed that if it was done at all it needed to be done well. In this regard the Conference agreed it would be useful to schedule this topic as an item for substantive discussion at a future plenary session. Such a meeting could consider topics such as a code of ethics and guidelines to guide analytical activities, and could articulate a vision that would guide statistical organizations in exploiting the benefits to be obtained from this important and emerging activity of statistical organizations. One participant indicated that contrary to Canada's experience, analysis of micro-data on businesses in his country is an area of substantial interest, and from this it was concluded that this aspect of the topic should be dealt with when this topic is discussed at a future plenary session.

VII. RELATIONS BETWEEN STATISTICAL OFFICES AND ACADEMIC STATISTICIANS

Documentation: CES/1999/26

119. The ground breaking work of the Bureau in this area was presented. It was noted that there was a positive reaction of the ISI. However, it was concluded that the present format of the Integrated Presentation would not be able to serve as a useful tool for cooperation between academic and official statisticians. It was concluded that the Bureau would look into ways of finding the means for such cooperation based on the report prepared by the ISI. It was noted that the International Association for Official Statistics, a section of the ISI, would be the best means of organizing this type of cooperation

VIII. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR STATISTICAL OFFICES

Documentation: CES/1999/14-17, 17/Add.1-9, 18 and 18/Add.1

I. Introduction

120. The seminar was organised by Mr. Tim Holt, Head of the UK's Office for National Statistics, who had chosen three themes to cover the topic of discussion:

- Performance indicators for official statistics: an overview;
- How do we measure the performance of an NSI? - an NSI perspective;

-Performance indicators for supra-/international organisations.

121. Discussion was based on five invited papers prepared by Mr. Robert Chote (Economics Editor, Financial Times), Mr. Willem de Vries (Statistics Netherlands), Mr. Rein Veetousme (Statistical Office of Estonia), Mr. Ivan Fellegi (Statistics Canada) and Mr. Yves Franchet (Eurostat). In addition, eleven supporting papers by Austria, Denmark, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, the IMF and OECD also contributed to the discussion.

122. A summary of the main papers and the conclusions drawn from the discussion is presented below.

II. Summary of presentations and supporting papers

Theme 1: Performance indicators for official statistics: an overview

123. The guest speaker, Robert Chote, introduced his paper on performance indicators which discusses why statistical offices need to measure their performance and some possible criteria which could be used for evaluating national statistical offices.

124. Mr. Chote thought that the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (FP) as well as some elements of the Declaration of Professional Ethics drawn up by the ISI, were the right type of criteria to be used for evaluating performance. However, the difficulties in quantifying the FP made this difficult. Alternatively, you might use instead a selection of IMF's Special Data Dissemination Standards, which have the merit of being easily available and easy to quantify. He selected five of them and scored 46 statistical offices according to them by way of illustration, whilst recognising the failings in doing this type of exercise. By adding up the scores he derived a composite performance indicator for each office which he used to establish a ranking of statistical offices according to performance.

125. Mr. Chote emphasized that the framework he used in his evaluation was incomplete and not appropriate to judge the performance of a statistical system. That was not his purpose in compiling it. However, he stressed that although the approach he used to obtain his ratings was a "back-of-an-envelope" one with major limitations, he considered it useful for stimulating discussion on how one might proceed to develop better performance measures and better performance. He considered that the preclusion of an "accuracy" criteria from his set of indicators constituted the most serious omission, and that attributing equal weight to the five standards which make up the composite indicator was arbitrary.

126. Nonetheless, compared to the league table of statistical offices, produced by The Economist, he thought that his framework, despite its deficiencies, introduced some more objectivity into the exercise. He

concluded, by saying that statistical offices are already feeling the pressure for international surveillance and voluntary adherence to codes of good conduct, the push for evaluation systems is therefore likely to grow. How would statistical offices respond to this? He recommended that statistical offices complemented objective indicators by a process of focused external peer review.

127. The second paper, prepared by Willem de Vries, raises the issue whether performance can be measured objectively? In his view measuring the performance of a statistical system is very difficult and benchmarking exercises have usually failed. He therefore proposed that an alternative would be to use qualitative indicators, derived from UN's Fundamental Principles. Although the indicators, discussed in his paper, are mostly about "inputs and efforts" and not so much about "outputs and results", he thought that this was not a serious problem, since there is a high positive correlation between, for instance, high ethical and professional standards and good, relevant and timely statistics.

128. In concluding, he said that it was ironical that statisticians find it so difficult to measure their own work. He also recommended that national evaluations be considered against the background of the legal, economic and cultural conditions of a given country and that until a more complete evaluation system has been produced we continue to do "snapshots" of our statistical systems.

Theme 2: How do we measure the performance of an NSI? - an NSI perspective

129. Ivan Fellegi introduced his own paper which argues for an integrated system of performance indicators that fully reflects the multi-dimensional working of the NSO. In his opinion a statistical system cannot be measured by a composite indicator and ranked on a one-dimensional scale. Only an integrated set of indicators will allow the context to be shown and avoids misinterpretation of individual indicators. He also stressed that the system should primarily serve the information needs of management, as understanding its own performance is crucial to almost all the decisions and trade-offs the management has to take. The external audiences are likely to be satisfied at the same time.

130. Mr. Fellegi underlined that the design of the assessment process itself is as important as the derivation of any particular set of indicators. Different audiences have different needs, therefore several subsets of indicators should be prepared, for instance for users, funders, respondents, employees and other. Quantitative measures cannot be produced for all aspects of performance, descriptive information about practices and processes must therefore be incorporated.

131. He concluded that the effectiveness of a NSO depends largely on its credibility. Openness about the operations of the office is a prerequisite

for building confidence and a balanced and open approach to the measurement of its performance will serve to strengthen the office's reputation. Moreover, it was not enough to be seen as a good statistical office, funders want to see visibly good management.

132. The second invited paper described how performance is currently measured and which indicators are used in the Estonian statistical office. The comparison has mainly been between the Estonian and other national statistical offices and the Fundamental Principles and the Special Dissemination Standards of the IMF served as the standards. They did not find it an easy exercise and therefore support the idea of an agreed list of indicators which can be used for measuring and comparing the performance of statistical agencies.

133. Nine offices submitted supporting papers on this theme. They were introduced by Tim Holt, who drew out some of the common threads and issues raised in the papers. His summary mainly focused on the performance indicators themselves while he noted that several of the papers stress that the indicators are just one component of an integrated planning and performance measurement process and of more widely drawn management information systems. He considered in turn:

- The purpose of performance indicators,
- Context and comparability issues,
- What we might measure,
- Where quality fits in, and
- Benchmarking against other NSIs and public sector bodies.

What is the purpose of Performance Indicators?

134. On this there was some consensus in the papers. The Austrian paper, for example, stresses the desire to answer the questions "Are we successful?" or "are we improving or deteriorating?" on the basis of more than just personal impressions and opinions. We would like to be able to point out the facts to support our case. The invited Estonian paper identified two key areas to focus on in doing this - answering the questions "have we satisfied our clients' needs in the best possible way?" And how effective have we been in using scarce resources?" Such measures of performance can then be used to hold us to account - to judge to what extent we have achieved our principal objectives, met the needs of our users and offered value for money for those who fund us. We could add to this whether we have kept response burdens to a minimum. In these respects, we are measuring our performance and getting objective evidence in what could be seen as essentially a passive process. But as argued in the Danish, Spanish and Kazakh papers, performance indicators are also an indispensable and active management tool for the NSI to generate significant improvements to its performance and efficiency, and for financial and human resources management. The active use is perhaps implicit in the passive use, but comes through in some papers stronger than others.

135. A first question can therefore be posed whether this is a fair reflection of why we need performance indicators: to measure how well we are doing in an objective way; to be accountable to our users, funders and data suppliers; and as an active management tool to encourage improvements in an NSIs performance?

Context and Comparability

136. The next issue, that of context and comparability -is a theme that runs through several of the papers. A letter, received from the Romanian National Commission for Statistics concerning this session, emphasised that no study is complete if it does not explicitly consider the context within which the experience takes place: the institutional and political culture, legal provisions and regulations, as well as the development stage of the concerned national statistical institute. Certainly there are some major changes and advances going on in NSIs as the papers from Poland, Moldova and Hungary, amongst others, demonstrate. Other countries, such as Norway, add to this list - by including the size of the NSI, the relative size of the country and of course the available resources to the NSI. The basic point being that surely it is unfair to compare the performance of a developing national statistical institute or one with limited resources with well established and resources statistical systems, such as those in many of the Western European countries? And yet, many users and commentators will inevitably do precisely that.

137. Meanwhile, the NSI will often be looking inwardly at how we measure up against our own objectives, within the constraints imposed on us in terms of resources, structure, legislation and so on. It is only within these constraints that we will usually have any degree of control, even if we may have some influence. There is a flavour of this in the papers submitted for the seminar. In the first session when we heard from Robert Chote and Willem de Vries, we looked at papers on how we as NSIs measured up in a wider context; while many of the individual NSI papers measure ourselves against our own objectives. The two approaches can give a quite different picture of how successful we are.

138. A second question is to what extent we should measure our performance against our own objectives, however limited they may be; and/or against user requirements, and international standards, principles and good practice; and where the balance should lie? Our performance indicators will often not be intended for benchmarking purposes or for international comparisons; we might see it as rather unhelpful when they are presented in league tables but that may also be a fact of life.

What might we measure?

139. Coming to the performance indicators themselves many are suggested in the papers and can be grouped into the following three types:

1. Dissemination:

- Number of publications issued and accessed;
- Output in printed pages multiplied by circulation;
- Media coverage, in column centimetres or inches/television coverage;
- Income from activities - including sales of electronic data;
- Accesses to the Website or Databank and volume of information supplied;
- Number of consultations answered by the information service, parliamentary inquiries or numbers of library visitors;
- Customer satisfaction on outputs from customers surveys - subjective views.
- User orientated and user friendly dissemination;
- Improvements in dissemination.

2. Quality and integrity:

- The timeliness/speed of publications - time between the data's reference date and their publication;
- Announcing release times in advance and keeping to these;
- Response levels from respondents to voluntary/statutory surveys
- Acceptance of statistical information as official and trustworthy;
- Customer satisfaction on quality from customer surveys - subjective views;
- Coverage of outputs/the sectoral and satellite accounts that are calculated;
- Improvements in quality and methodology;
- Adherence to codes of good practices.

3. Management, including staff:

- Achievement against NSI plans and objectives;
- Resources used per product;
- Estimates of response burden (in hours);
- Incidence of positive change in the programs of organisation;
- Work volume of the whole NSI in hours;
- Staff satisfaction, via staff satisfaction surveys;
- Workdays lost per employed person.

140. A third question is "Are these the types of indicators that are appropriate for measuring our performance? How should we aggregate them together, if at all, to provide a measure of whether we are successful as an NSI - as the Economist and Robert Chote have tried to do? Are there significant gaps on this list of performance indicators?"

Do we need measures of outcome?

141. The list of indicators drawn from the submitted papers is focussed on inputs and outputs but there is virtually no mention of outcomes: the real verdict of our statistical outputs.

142. For example, the sums of money allocated for public expenditure directly or the basis of statistical estimates. Similarly, the dependence of economic management on statistical information and the impact on every business and every person of the statistical information is poor. These are difficult issues, but do the suggested indicators go far enough?

Where does quality fit in?

143. Robert Chote identified the frustrating omission from his comparison table of measures of accuracy and auditing. Do we feel that there are a shortage of quality measures, in particular with respect to accuracy, in the papers we have presented and is there a clear reason for this?

144. Statistics Sweden talks in its paper about its assessment of quality development - including by the judgement of production experts, as well as actual conditions, including timeliness and response rates. It also uses customer surveys to identify customer satisfaction, including their views on quality, and the relevance of its products. But there are other dimensions to quality - including accuracy, interpretability and the availability of metadata, and coherence.

145. We can turn to the invited Canadian paper, and one or two others such as the Spanish paper, to get some help with these - they suggest a mixture of quantitative and qualitative measures of accuracy; to what extent we have a clear policy and guidelines on metadata and the compliance with these; the coverage of the metadata; the use of compatible conceptual frameworks, definitions, classifications and methodologies. Another possible indicator is the extent to which we issue revisions and the scale of these. The question therefore is: "What are the appropriate quality measures we should use in measuring our performance and, in particular, in assessing accuracy?".

146. This leads to a further question - should there be international standards of quality assessment, measurement and reporting as, for example, there are international standards for labour force activity?

Benchmarking

147. It is clear from the papers that while key stakeholders may try to draw comparisons between us as NSIs, we remain cautious. Even in those countries where such comparisons have been discussed and partly advanced, such as in the Scandinavian countries, they have identified many practical problems to overcome. The Norwegian paper identifies these as:

- measuring outputs of the statistical production systems in a comparable way
- giving a comparable structural description of the statistical production system
- the consistency of cost elements, taking account of differences in accounting practices and organisational models
- distinguishing comparable statistical routines and processes
- balancing between overall and general indicators versus comparable routines.

148. So where does this leave us? The Scandinavian countries working group was scheduled to conclude its work by the middle of May and the countries involved may wish to comment further on progress. It is clear from the papers that we are equally cautious about comparing ourselves with other public sector bodies in our own countries and that there are similar problems with such comparisons. So my question is are these comparisons too difficult to do or too misleading to be useful and, if we cannot draw effective comparisons between countries, then can anyone?

149. In particular, is it inevitable that as time goes on more comparisons will be drawn between countries' statistical systems by users and experts to get a feel for how we measure up? Does this imply that we should be developing a set of indicators that at least benchmark where we are on particular important issues that could act as guide to our statistical systems, and how should we do this? As statisticians, we strive for international comparable statistics. This is our business - so can we really argue that internationally comparable performance measures for NSIs are simply too difficult?

150. Finally, he listed the main questions he had drawn from the papers:

- What is the purpose and role of performance indicators?
- To what extent should we measure our performance against our own objectives, however limited they may be; and/or against user requirements and international standards and principles; and where should the balance lie?
- Have we got the right balance of performance indicators to measure the performance of an NSI?
- How do we handle measuring quality and, in particular, accuracy, and is there a case for international standards?
- Should we be drawing comparisons between countries and with other public sector institutions, and if so how best can this be done?

Theme 3: Performance indicators for supra-/international organisations

151. Yves Franchet presented his paper and underlined the importance of choosing indicators that allowed progress to be measured on agreed corporate

objectives. The speaker also outlined what should be the characteristics of the indicators and told the meeting that Eurostat had drawn up a list of 18 indicators for monitoring its performance on its main objectives. Among the features mentioned of an ideal indicator were that it should be specific, measurable, readily comprehensible, transparent, allow corrective action and associated with targets.

152. He concluded by some reflections on their experience. Among the things mentioned was that it is easy to underestimate the work needed to develop indicators but that the effort was worthwhile and the potential benefits substantial. He also recommended that countries and organisations work together to share experiences and said that those who monitor their performance will also manage to improve it. The paper was welcomed by OECD, in its role as extended discussant, as an important development in developing indicators for international organisations.

III. Conclusions drawn from the discussion

153. After a thorough and sometimes animated discussion which reflected the concern head of offices attribute to the topic, the organiser of the Seminar, Tim Holt, drew the following conclusions which the meeting applauded:

i. The Conference considered a valuable set of invited and contributed papers on the subject of Performance Indicators for Statistical Offices. The Conference recognised that the contents of each paper were the responsibility of the author and did not represent, in any way, the collective view of the Conference and were in no way endorsed by the Conference. But all the papers were nevertheless stimulating, thought provoking and valuable.

ii. The Conference recognised the timeliness of the discussion on the topic since the pressures for accountability and for measures of performance were increasing in individual member States, and in the wider international context. It recognised the need to respond constructively to the need for performance measures that would assist effective management and democratic accountability.

iii. There are different needs for performance measures: for internal purposes as diagnostic tools for the senior management of an office to assess the effectiveness and performance of the office; and for external purposes to provide assurance to stakeholders and accountability for the responsibilities placed on each NSI.

iv. The Conference recognised two broad issues - the computation of performance indicators to assist management and the public dissemination of these. Compiling performance measures for comparative purposes in particular, is fraught with difficulties. They can easily lead to simplistic or even false interpretation by misinformed commentary. Nevertheless, there was much to be gained from assessing performance both within the national

context and in comparison with other institutions. Although benchmark comparisons are difficult to achieve, there was general acceptance that, used positively, they did have value.

v. Turning to performance measures for management purposes: those regularly collected and used actively as a management tool to improve performance is an important way of demonstrating accountability. It helps to build confidence with funding bodies and, putting the value at the most defensive, such process can help avert budget cuts. Just as we use transparency to build confidence in our statistics so we should use transparency to build confidence in management practices.

vi. Performance was recognised as having many dimensions and could not be reduced to a single index without losing its value. Measures used for comparative purposes should not be over-simplified or reduced to ranking lists. Within these broad dimensions there were many aspects of performance which could provide specific measures. These would appeal, to different degrees, to the stakeholders of users, funders, data suppliers and staff. Different stakeholders have different needs.

vii. There were several broad dimensions of performance management.

Management and input indicators: of vital use to the senior management of each NSI and used to demonstrate accountability for public expenditure.

Output measures: used to assess the outputs of an office in both quantity and quality and to demonstrate responsiveness to users

Outcome measures: ideally used to measure the impact of statistical outputs on society, often through promoting and monitoring effective government policies and resource allocation. It was recognised that outcome measures are difficult to achieve and little progress has been made.

viii. Concerning possible actions the Conference:

- recognised the need for each NSI to develop management information systems that would assist the evaluation of performance.
- recognised that benchmarking could be helpful in comparing ourselves with other NSIs, where such comparisons make sense, but concerned that these should not be ranked arbitrarily with league tables. We are worried about misuse of this information but we need to have some information as a benchmark.
- recognised that consideration of this issue needs to be taken forward by the statistical community so that we can tailor such benchmarking to: (1) ensure that benchmarks are rigorous and can stand up to scrutiny; (2) that they are easy to measure and accurate; (3) that they measure useful concepts where comparisons can be useful as a management tool and (4) that they ensure the maximum usefulness to NSIs.

- recommended that the Bureau at its next meeting discusses how to take this issue forward and whether to constitute a small working group of interested countries.

IX. ELECTION OF THE BUREAU

Documentation: CES/1999/6

154. In accordance with the rules of procedure adopted by the conference at its 1993 plenary session, the election was organised by Carlo Malaguerra of Switzerland, who was the most senior previous Chairman of the Conference present at the plenary session.

155. For the 1999/2000 and 2000/01 term of office, based on proposals put forward by Carlo Malaguerra, the Conference elected the following as Bureau members:

Chairman:	Svein Longva (Norway)
Vice chairmen:	Adrian Abrahamse (Netherlands)
	Pilar Martín-Guzman (Spain)
	Edvard Outrata (Czech Republic)
	Hallgrímur Snorrason (Iceland)
	Rein Veetousme (Estonia)

156. The Conference paid special tribute to two departing Bureau members, namely Paolo Garonna, who had served as a Vice-Chair in the Bureau for four years (1993-1997) and as Chair for two years (1997-99), and Donal Murphy, who had served as a Vice-Chair on the Bureau for four years (1995-1999), for the important contributions they had made to the Conference during their terms of office.

157. The Conference also thanked Carlo Malaguerra for the task he performed in this process.

158. The Conference also thanked the members of the Bureau who had served on the Bureau during 1997/98 and 1998/99 for the work they have performed for the Conference during this period.

X. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

159. This report was adopted by the Conference at its closing session on 16 June 1999.

ANNEX I

**INTEGRATED PRESENTATION OF PROGRAMMES OF INTERNATIONAL
STATISTICAL WORK IN THE ECE REGION, 1998/99 AND 1999/2000**

Note

The Integrated Presentation of the statistical work programmes of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the European Communities (EC), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and other international organizations working in the ECE region is presented in documents CES/1999/30 and Addenda 1-6, as indicated below. The Integrated Presentation shown in these documents, which collectively constitute Annex I of the report of the plenary session, is too large to issue as part of this report or as a single document.

CES/1999/30: Programmes of international statistical work in the UN/ECE region, 1998/99 and 1999/2000: An Integrated Presentation - Introduction and overview

CES/1999/30/Add.1: Programme Activity 1: Organization and operation of statistical services

CES/1999/30/Add.2: Programme Activity 2: Technical infrastructure and other cross-cutting issues

CES/1999/30/Add.3: Programme Activity 3: Economic statistics

CES/1999/30/Add.4: Programme Activity 4: Social and demographic statistics

CES/1999/30/Add.5: Programme Activity 5: Environment statistics

CES/1999/30/Add.6: Programme Activity 6: Dissemination and support for Secretariat activities.

ANNEX II

Priority Menu of the CES for 1999/2000 and 2000/2001

a) July 1999 - June 2000

WORK PROGRAMME OF THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS PRIORITY MENU FOR 1999/2000			
Programme element	Substantive action required of the ECE secretariat	Major coordination required	Output for the plenary session 2000
1.1 Promotion and coordination of multilateral statistical work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparation of integrated presentation of international statistical work programmes - Various intersecretariat working groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eurostat, OECD, UNSD, IMF, World Bank, Specialized Agencies, etc. - various organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Draft Integrated presentation
1.2 Managerial and policy issues of direct concern to presidents of national statistical offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparation of CES plenary session - Organization of substantive discussion - Organization of Bureau meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All international agencies active in the region - - Eurostat, OECD, UNSD, IMF, World Bank 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CES Annual Report - Discussion papers - Bureau's reports; minutes of meetings
1.3 Transition countries in the ECE region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taking full account of the needs of countries in transition in the CES work programme, provision of guidance and advice to transition countries by the Regional Adviser - Participate in inter-agency coordination activities - To manage, as the executing agency, the UNDP and UNFPA regional projects for the development of social and demographic statistics in transition countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eurostat, OECD, UNSD, IMF, World Bank, ILO, etc. - Eurostat, OECD, UNSD, IMF, IWG.COORD, CIS - UNDP, Eurostat, UNSD, CIS-STAT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Progress report, when required - Progress reports, when required - Progress report, when required
1.4 Relations with countries outside the ECE region (including in the Mediterranean region)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparation and provision of relevant CES documents to the Statistical Commission, UNSD and the Regional Commissions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UNSD, Regional Commissions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Progress reports, when required

Programme element	Substantive action required of the ECE secretariat	Major coordination required	Output for the plenary session 2000
2.1 Management of information technology infrastructure	- Seminar ISIS 2000		- Report
2.2 Statistical data collection and processing	- Preparation of methodological materials on statistical data editing		- Methodological materials
2.3 Dissemination and interchange of statistical information	- Work session on dissemination to inf. Media - Work session on statistical metadata - Preparation of methodological materials on statistical metadata - Participation in the development of EDISTAT (European Board for EDI Standardisation – group EEG6)	- EUROSTAT	- Report - Report - Methodological materials - Progress report
2.6 Geographical and regional data	- Work session on methodological Issues involving the integration of Statistics and Geography - Preparation of methodological materials on implementation of GIS	- EUROSTAT	- Report - Methodological materials
3.1 National accounts	- Preparations of an ECE special session for transition countries back-to-back with the OECD national accounts meeting (autumn 1999) - Preparations of an ECE-Eurostat-OECD Seminar on national accounts for CIS countries (April 2000) - Preparations of a joint ECE-Eurostat-OECD meeting on national accounts (April 2000)	- OECD - Eurostat, OECD - Eurostat, OECD	- Report - Report - Report
3.9 Price statistics, including PPP	-Preparations of an ECE special session on consumer price indices for transition countries (November 1999) - Preparation of the ECE/ILO Meeting on consumer price indices (November 1999)	- Eurostat - ILO	- Report - Report

Programme element	Substantive action required of the ECE secretariat	Major coordination required	Output for the plenary session 2000
3.10 Agricultural statistics	-Preparations of the ECE-Eurostat-FAO-OECD Seminar on monetary agricultural statistics (Luxembourg, July 2000)	- IWG.AGRI	- Report
3.12 Energy statistics	-Preparation of the ECE-Eurostat-OECD/IEA meeting of the energy statistics Working Group (November 1999)	- IWG.EN	- Report
4.2 Gender statistics	- Preparation of the ECE-INSTRAW joint work session	INSTRAW	- Report
4.6 Health statistics	- Preparatory meeting for the 2001/2002 joint meeting	- WHO and WHO/Europe	- Report
4.10 Labour statistics	- Preparation of the joint ECE-ILO(-Eurostat) Seminar on Quality of Employment (May 2000)	- ILO (Eurostat)	- Report
4.11 Demographic statistics (including projections, migration and fertility)	- Preparation of the annual migration matrices - Preparation of the ECE-Eurostat work session on migration statistics	- Eurostat, UNSD - Eurostat, ESCWA	- Matrices - Report
5.1 Sectorial concepts, definitions and classifications	- Organization of the joint ECE/Eurostat work session on methodological issues of environment statistics	- Eurostat	- Report
6.1 Coordination of international data collection	- Annual collection in the field of energy. Preparation of Trends in Europe and North America (the UN/ECE Statistical Yearbook) - Preparation of the UN/ECE Statistical Journal	Eurostat, OECD/IEA, UNSD as required - UNSD -	- - Annual publication 4 issues of Statistical Journal per year
6.2 Other statistically-related activities of the ECE secretariat	- Preparation of statistical tables and analysis as required - Collection of macroeconomic data from transition countries - Maintenance of the database on macroeconomic statistics for transition countries	- Eurostat, OECD, UNSD, CIS STAT, other ECE PSBs - OECD, ILO, IMF, UNIDO, UNSD, CIS STAT -	- Progress report (to the CES Bureau) - Progress report (to the CES Bureau) -

b) July 2000 - June 2001

**WORK PROGRAMME OF THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS
PRIORITY MENU FOR 2000/2001**

Programme element	Substantive action required of the ECE secretariat	Major coordination required	Output for the plenary session 2001
1.1 Promotion and coordination of multilateral statistical work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparation of integrated presentation of international statistical work programmes - Participation in various intersecretariat working group meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eurostat, OECD, UNSD, IMF, World Bank, Specialized Agencies, etc. - Various organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Draft Integrated presentation
1.2 Managerial and policy issues of direct concern to presidents of national statistical offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparation of CES plenary session - Organization of substantive discussion - Organization of Bureau meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All international agencies active in the region - Eurostat, OECD, UNSD, IMF, World Bank 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CES Annual Report - Discussion papers - Bureau's reports; minutes of meetings
1.3 Transition countries in the ECE region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taking full account of the needs of countries in transition in the CES work programme, provision of guidance and advice to transition countries by the Regional Adviser - Participate in inter-agency coordination activities - To manage, as the executing agency, the UNDP and UNFPA regional projects for the development of social and demographic statistics in transition countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eurostat, OECD, UNSD, IMF, World Bank, ILO, etc. - Eurostat, OECD, UNSD, IMF, IWG.COORD, CIS - UNDP, Eurostat, UNSD, CIS-STAT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Progress report, when required - Progress reports, when required - Progress report, when required
1.4 Relations with countries outside the ECE region (including in the Mediterranean region)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparation and provision of relevant CES documents to the Statistical Commission, UNSD and the Regional Commissions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UNSD, Regional Commissions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Progress reports, when required

Programme element	Substantive action required of the ECE secretariat	Major coordination required	Output for the plenary session 2001
2.1 Management of statistical information technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meeting on management of statistical Information technology - ECE/Eurostat work session on statistical confidentiality 	- Eurostat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report - Report
2.2 Statistical data collection and processing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work session on statistical data editing - Preparation of methodological materials and publication on statistical data editing 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report - Methodological materials
2.3 Dissemination and interchange of statistical information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work session on statistical metadata - Work session on statistical output for dissemination to information media - Participation in the development of EDISTAT (European Board for EDI Standardisation – group EEG6) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report - Report - Progress report
2.6 Geographical and regional data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparation of methodological materials on implementation of GIS 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Methodological materials
3.9 Price statistics, including PPP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparations of the ECE-Eurostat-OECD-ACSO Consultation on the European Comparison Programme (autumn 2000) 	- ACSO, Eurostat, OECD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report
3.10 Agricultural statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparations of the 2nd World Conference on Agriculture Statistics (June 2001) 	- IWG.AGRI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report
3.14 Business registers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Preparations of the ECE-Eurostat work session on business registers (June 2001) 	- Eurostat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report
4.2 Gender statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparation of the work session (jointly with INSTRAW and UNSD) 	- Eurostat and UNSD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report
4.10 Culture Statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparation of the work session (jointly with Eurostat and UNESCO) 	- UNESCO and Eurostat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report
4.11 Demographic statistics (projections, migration and fertility)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparation of the annual migration matrices 	- Eurostat, UNSD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Matrices

Programme element	Substantive action required of the ECE secretariat	Major coordination required	Output for the plenary session 2001
5.1 Sectorial concepts, definitions and classifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organization of the joint ECE/Eurostat work session on methodological issues of environment statistics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eurostat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report
6.1 Coordination of international data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annual collections in the field of energy. - Preparation of Trends in Europe and North America (the UN/ECE Statistical Yearbook) - Preparation of the UN/ECE Statistical Journal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eurostat, OECD/IEA, UNSD as required - UNSD - 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - - Annual publication 4 issues of Statistical Journal per year
6.2 Other statistically-related activities of the ECE secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparation of statistical tables and analysis as required - Collection of macroeconomic data from transition countries - Maintenance of the database on macroeconomic statistics for transition countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eurostat, OECD, UNSD, CIS STAT, other ECE PSBs - OECD, ILO, IMF, UNIDO, UNSD, CIS STAT - 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Progress report (to the CES Bureau) - Progress report (to the CES Bureau)

c) Projects inactive in 1998/99 and 1999/2000

**Work programme of the Conference of European Statisticians
Projects that will be inactive in 1999/2000 and 2000/2001**

- 2.4 Statistical classifications**
- 2.5 Statistical research and development**
- 2.7 Human resource development**

- 3.2 Money and banking, government finance, and balance of payments**
- 3.3 International trade in goods**
- 3.4 Transport statistics**
- 3.5 Distributive trade**
- 3.6 International trade in services**
- 3.7 Tourism**
- 3.8 Other marketed services and non-marketed services**
- 3.11 Industrial statistics**
- 3.13 Science and technology statistics**

- 4.1 Social indicators and frameworks**
- 4.3 Multi-purpose social surveys**
- 4.7 Crime and criminal justice statistics**
- 4.8 Education and training statistics**
- 4.10 Labour statistics**
- 4.12 Human settlements and housing statistics**
- 4.13 Statistics of household income and expenditures, of the welfare of the population, and the poverty income statistics**
- 4.14 Statistics on population groups of special interest**

- 5.2 Environmental accounting**
- 5.3 Environmental database and reporting**

ANNEX III

PLANNED DATES OF MEETINGS IN THE CES WORK PROGRAMME, 1999/2000 and 2000/2001

1999

2.3	Work Session on Statistical Metadata	22-24 September 1999
3.1	ECE Special Session for Transition Countries (back-to-back with OECD's National Accounts Meeting, Paris)	24 September 1999
5.1	ECE-EUROSTAT Work Session on Methodological Issues in Environment Statistics (Jerusalem, Israel)	11-14 October 1999
3.9	Preparatory ECE-ILO Meeting on Consumer Price Indices (Special Session for Transition Countries)	2 November 1999 (p.m.)
3.9	ECE-ILO Meeting on Consumer Price Indices	3-5 November 1999
1.2	CES Bureau Meeting (Oslo, Norway)	10-11 November 1999
3.12	ECE-EUROSTAT-OECD (IEA) Meeting on Energy Statistics (Paris)	22-23 November 1999

2000

1.2	CES Bureau Meeting	Spring 2000
2.6	Work Session on Methodological Issues Involving the Integration of Statistics and Geography (Neuchâtel)	10-12 April 2000
3.1	Seminar on National Accounts for CIS Countries	25 April 2000 (E/R only)
3.1	ECE-EUROSTAT-OECD Meeting on National Accounts	26-28 April 2000
4.10	Joint ECE/ILO Seminar on Measurement of the Quality of Employment	3-5 May 2000
4.11	Joint ECE-EUROSTAT Work Session on Migration Statistics	8-10 May 2000 (E/F/A)
2.1	Seminar on Integrated Statistical Information Systems (ISIS 2000) (Riga, Latvia)	29-31 May 2000
4.6	Preparatory Joint ECE/WHO Meeting on Health Statistics (Ottawa, Canada)	7-9 June 2000
1.2	48th Plenary Session of the Conference of European Statisticians (Paris, France)	13-15 June 2000

2000 (continued)

3.10	ECE-EUROSTAT-FAO-OECD 7th Seminar on Agricultural and Food Statistics (Luxembourg)	5-7 July 2000
2.3	Work Session on Statistical Output for Dissemination to the Information Media (Voorburg, Netherlands)	25-27 September 2000
2.2	Work Session on Statistical Data Editing (Cardiff, United Kingdom)	18-20 October 2000
3.9	ECE-Eurostat-OECD and Austrian CSO Joint Consultation on the ECP within Group II	23-25 October 2000
4.2	ECE-INSTRAW Work Session on Gender Statistics (Italy)	October 2000
2.3	Work Session on Statistical Metadata	22-24 November 2000
4.9	ECE-EUROSTAT-UNESCO Work Session on Cultural Statistics	week of 4-8 December 2000

2001

3.14	ECE-Eurostat Work Session on Business Registers	June 2001
3.10	2nd World Conference on Agricultural Statistics	5-7 June 2001
1.2	49th plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians	11-13 June 2001
