

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Third Meeting of the 2007/2008 Bureau
Geneva (Switzerland), 12-13 February 2008

REPORT OF THE 12-13 FEBRUARY 2008 BUREAU MEETING

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The third meeting of the 2007/2008 Bureau was held in Geneva, Switzerland, on 12-13 February 2008. The following members of the Bureau attended: Heli Jeskanen-Sundström (Chairman), Peter Hackl, Walter Radermacher, Eduardo Pereira Nunes, Vladimir Sokolin, Aija Zigure and Katherine K. Wallman. The following permanent participants also attended: Ivan Fellegi (Committee on Statistics of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)); Enrico Giovannini (OECD); Pieter Everaers (Eurostat), Mikhail Korolev (Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States); and Heinrich Brünger (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)). Jan Fischer (Czech Statistical Office) attended the meeting for agenda item four at the invitation of Heli Jeskanen-Sundström.

2. The following persons assisted members of the Bureau: La-Fayette Côrtes Neto (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, Brazil); Béla Prigly (Statistics Canada); Andrey Kosarev (Bureau of Economic Analysis, Russian Federation); Suzann Evinger (United States Office of Management and Budget), Sabine Köhler (Federal Statistical Office of Germany); and Hartmut Buchow (Eurostat). Lidia Bratanova of UNECE served as Secretary of the meeting.

3. The following staff of the UNECE Statistical Division also attended: Carsten Hansen, Angela Me, Juraj Riecan, Petteri Baer, Tiina Luige, Vitalija Gaucaite-Wittich, Enrico Bisogno and Vania Etropolska.

II. IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF SELECTED STATISTICAL AREAS

4. The Bureau reviewed in-depth two statistical areas, namely environment statistics and culture statistics. The Bureau also considered the follow-up to the in-depth review of income, living conditions and poverty made in October 2007.

a) Environment statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/2 (Eurostat), Add.1 (extract from the Database of International Statistical Activities), Add.2 (Germany) and Add.3 (UNECE).

5. The Bureau reviewed in depth environment statistics based on a paper by Eurostat and comments by Germany and UNECE. The Bureau acknowledged that coordination of international work in environment statistics has improved over the last few years and efforts have been made to streamline the different international initiatives. Therefore, at the current stage, the main problem is not the coordination of work but prioritisation and convergence of the activities towards a coherent system of environment statistics.

6. The following comments were made in the discussion:

- the two main problems with environment statistics are that (i) the architecture of environment statistics as a domain is not clear, and (ii) there is no overview of the many different activities that are undertaken and whether this work will lead to a coherent system of environment statistics;
- it would be useful and necessary to extend mapping of the ongoing initiatives – complementary to the coordination work: there are still some overlaps and gaps in the work although cooperation is good. Some of this mapping is being currently

undertaken by the United Nations Committee of Experts on Integrated Environmental Economic Accounting (UN CEEA) and in the European context by the so-called Group of Four (Eurostat, Joint Research Centre (JRC), European Environment Agency (EEA) and the Directorate General on Environment);

- so far too many priorities in environment statistics have been expressed from the policy side at national and international levels;
- there is great diversity in how environment statistics are organised in countries, which also makes international coordination difficult; more attention should be paid to coordination with other fields of statistics;
- official statistics in this area implies certain quality requirements and adherence to fundamental principles; official statisticians can give advice on methodology, sampling, etc. to the other producers of environment statistics that do not seem to fall within the realm of official statistics (like data on fauna, flora, biodiversity, etc.);
- the use of environmental accounting data in policy monitoring needs to be highlighted; it is difficult to obtain financing for environmental accounting when there is little use and understanding of it. One of the problems is the timeliness of data: data often refer to 2-5 years ago which is not sufficient for policy analysis;
- looking at environment from the environmental capital services viewpoint could bring together the data on biodiversity, flora, fauna, etc. in a way that is understood both by economists and statisticians;
- dealing with global problems (e.g. climate change) requires data across borders; this can only be solved by a top-down approach based on theory, not by a country-driven process;
- a survey carried out by the UN CEEA shows that the current situation and future plans in countries diverge depending on local problem areas;
- the work in environment statistics should focus on outcomes that can be achieved within the next 2-3 years, for example, to see what data countries are expected to produce within the coming years, what are the user expectations and priorities, and how can data comparability be improved.

7. The Bureau asked the UN CEEA through Walter Radermacher (Chairman of the UN CEEA) to prepare a paper with a proposal on how to address these issues, taking into account the interests of different groups active in the area. The paper will be considered at the CES Bureau 2008 October meeting (*action: Walter Radermacher, UN CEEA, Eurostat*).

b) Culture statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/3 (Finland), Add.1 (extract from the Database of International Statistical Activities), Add.2 (UNESCO) and Add.3 (Brazil, Germany, UNECE).

8. The Bureau reviewed in depth culture statistics based on a paper by Finland and comments by UNESCO, Brazil, Germany and UNECE.

9. The Bureau noted that the Institute of Statistics of the United Nations Economic, Social and Cultural Organization (UIS) is currently revising the framework of cultural statistics. The formal consultation of the draft framework will take place in 2008. A revised framework is planned to be presented to the United Nations Economic, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) General Conference in 2009. UIS proposes that the framework be discussed also by the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC).

10. The following comments were made in the discussion:

- very little international work is carried out in culture statistics and the resources are scarce, therefore rapid progress in the area can not be expected;
- there is no clear definition of what should be covered by culture statistics; however, the decision can be left to the countries. A solution could be to focus first on the core business and then expand the area step by step;
- culture statistics should also include the so-called public culture (regional customs, etc.) and consider the new cultural expressions made possible by the new technologies;
- the starting point for the framework of culture statistics should be their purpose and the user perspective; it is important to clarify the demand for culture statistics and link it with the supply side; the framework should also take into account the potential basic data sources for culture statistics;
- regional conferences might not be the best way to discuss the framework as not all regions have enough activities in culture statistics to provide a basis for substantive discussion. It could be more useful to circulate the framework to countries and ask for comments in advance, and to focus the meetings on discussing the implementation and next steps forward;
- good work on culture statistics in earlier years has been undertaken by the European Union Leadership Group (LEG) who developed a model survey on cultural participation; however, no follow-up is taking place and actually no international organization is promoting the approach;
- there could be more coordination in culture statistics between the UNESCO (UIS) and the European Union institutions;
- 2009 will be the *European Year on Creativity and Innovation by Education and Culture*; this can provide an opportunity to reinforce culture statistics.

11. The UIS was encouraged to consult the framework of culture statistics with countries as widely as possible. The countries' attention will be drawn to the framework and the importance of contributing to its development at the plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) in June 2008. A joint meeting on culture statistics by UIS, Eurostat and possibly UNECE could be organised in early 2009 (*action: UIS, Eurostat, UNECE*). The secretariat will send the extract of the report of the Bureau meeting dealing with culture statistics to the UIS (*action: UNECE*).

c) Follow-up on income, living conditions and poverty

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/4 by Canada

12. The Bureau made an in-depth review of income, living conditions and poverty in October 2007 and asked Richard Barnabé, the Chair of the CES Task Force on emerging issues in social statistics, to develop a proposal for possible practical actions that can be undertaken to improve work in this area.

13. The paper proposed three possible scenarios for further work with different levels of ambition and resources required:

- (a) a minimum program: to ask an international organization (e.g. OECD) to monitor country practices with respect to existing recommendations on income and poverty measurement;

(b) a medium program: to set up an international task force to review the experience with implementation of the international recommendations, and produce an updated and integrated set of recommended practices;

(c) the most ambitious program: a major leading edge development effort to prepare an integrated set of micro- and macro-indicators bringing together the concepts of income, expenditures and wealth that could be linked to the National Accounts; an initial small group would be asked to articulate a work plan with clear targets and deadlines.

14. The following points were made in the discussion:

- statistics on income, living conditions and poverty are quite well developed, therefore statistical offices need to decide whether this would be a priority area where to put additional resources while there are other, less developed statistical areas that require attention;
- on the one hand, there is a great variety of basic primary data; on the other hand, users often ask for highly aggregated composite indicators to measure welfare, wellbeing, etc.. An in-between layer would be needed to link the top indicators with basic data - this could require some efforts along the lines of option (b);
- a multidimensional approach is needed, especially in lower income groups, to see how people can access basic goods and services; a survey module to capture this kind of activity would be needed;
- measuring poverty is a continuing priority and will be increasingly important in the next few years. For example, in France it has been taken up at the highest political level: a Commission has been set up on measurement of economic performance and social progress, the results of which will be available in about 18 months' time and are expected to draw wide media attention. Statisticians should anticipate this interest and be ready to react;
- OECD would be ready to work on option (a) monitoring country practices concerning comparability of income equality measures; OECD is also doing some work, in the context of the project on measuring progress of societies, on multidimensional view of poverty using the capability as a key measure. OECD could investigate the feasibility of a project in line with option (b) (possibly together with Eurostat) and try to find resources;
- a practical step forward could be to update the handbook of the Canberra Group; this work could be done over a relatively short period of time.

15. The secretariat will explore the demand from countries for setting up a city group to update the Canberra Group Handbook (*action: UNECE*, deadline May 2008). Based on the result, the Bureau will decide whether there is a need to set up such a group. If the group is set up, United States and Eurostat would be interested to participate.

16. The Bureau will review the area again in about 18 months to take stock of the situation and decide whether any other follow-up is needed (*action: CES Bureau*).

III. SELECTION OF TOPICS FOR IN-DEPTH REVIEWS IN OCTOBER 2008 AND FEBRUARY 2009

17. The Bureau selected the following topics to be reviewed in depth during its next two meetings:

Agricultural statistics (including forestry and fisheries statistics) – to be reviewed in October 2008, United States and Brazil offered to cooperate with Eurostat in preparing the in-depth review paper (*action: Eurostat, United States, Brazil*).

18. This area lacks coordination and a forward looking view since the Intersecretariat Working Group on Agricultural Statistics no longer exists. There is an enormous need for good agricultural statistics from the developing countries, e.g. on food production and food delivery, and within the environmental context. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has started an extensive review of its statistical work. Eurostat is going to redesign its fishery statistics section.

Government finance, fiscal and public sector statistics – to be reviewed in October 2008. The Bureau decided to ask the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to prepare the paper (to be confirmed, *action: IMF*)

19. Some Bureau members considered that this topic does not meet the criteria for an in-depth review: there are no significant developments in the area, currently there is good coordination and a lot of ongoing activities. However, other members considered it worth discussing as there are very few international fora where statistical offices can discuss these issues other than as part of National Accounts or in the EU framework. Therefore, this area may risk escaping the attention of statistical offices.

Measurement of labour cost – to be reviewed in October 2008 or February 2009, paper by OECD (to be confirmed, *action: OECD*)

20. The Bureau considered the topic a good topic for review because of the lack of available data on total labour cost. At the same time, labour cost is an important policy-relevant indicator because of its link with productivity measurement and inflation. It was noted that the country practices are varied. The United States has a highly developed system but many countries do not do much beyond wages.

Housing statistics – to be reviewed in February 2009.

21. Very little is done in this area at international level while it has a high economic importance and the available data are of rather poor quality. It is a multi-faceted area touching upon economic, financial, social and environmental issues. The area is topical both in Europe and in the United States.

Publication, communication and dissemination issues – to be reviewed in February 2009. Germany will define the scope of the topic; Germany and OECD will consider preparing a joint paper (to be confirmed, *action: Germany, OECD*)

22. The new requirements of societies raise the question of how to present and communicate data and how to coordinate these activities. This topic can be a combination of statistical areas 4.5. Dissemination and 3.4 Yearbooks and similar compendia, possibly linked also to 3.3.5 Indicators related to Millennium Development Goals. Germany will define the scope of the review on this topic, and how it is related to the role of international organizations and international cooperation. Germany should also seek input from the CES Steering Group on Dissemination and Communication, and take into account the results of

the meeting on new visualisation tools organised jointly by OECD and Sweden in May 2008 in Stockholm.

23. Some other topics were mentioned as possible candidates but were not selected for this round of reviews, as follows:

- *banking, insurance and financial statistics* - it was not considered timely yet to discuss the area;
- *time-use surveys* - there are very few activities at international level, while the time-use data are potentially useful for many areas of statistics. However, it will be difficult to find a country/organization who can prepare a paper.
- *the role of the 3rd sector (voluntary sector or non-profit sector – voluntary and community groups, social enterprises, charities, etc.)* - could be a potential topic but there is currently no statistical area in the classification dealing with that.
- *mixed models of data collection (change from survey dominated collection to mixed modes)* - a potential topic for review in future. This is a combination of statistical areas 4.3.5. Other administrative sources and 4.4 Data editing and data linkage. However, the topic will be discussed in the near future at international fora, such as International Association of Official Statistics (IAOS), and therefore it can be considered for review later.

IV. PLANS FOR THE FORUM ON HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AND TRAINING

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/5 (Czech Republic, Canada)

24. The forum on Human Resources Management and Training will take place on 3-5 September 2008 in The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The preparation of the forum is progressing well. The next step is to contact individual session organisers and start recruitment of speakers and discussants as well as to shape the programme of the individual sessions.

25. The forum will follow the pattern of the CES plenary sessions: a Discussant will be selected for each session and he/she will provide an overview of the papers. The invited papers will not be presented, their authors will have an opportunity to comment or add to the Discussant's summary. Most of the time will be devoted to discussion.

26. The Bureau noted that the panel session still needs further development to make it more focused. A possibility would be to present an issue paper providing a basis for the panel discussion. The representatives of international organizations could also present their views during this session.

27. The seminar organizers will prepare a guiding paper to provoke debate for the panel discussion (**action: Czech Republic, Canada**). OECD offered to prepare a paper for session 1. Also Germany offered participation and contribution.

28. The Bureau noted that it is important to find resources to finance participation from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Western Balkan countries, and translation into Russian. Eurostat offered to look into the Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation (CARDS), Technical Assistance to

Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS), Medstats and the new European Neighbourhood Program (ENP) for possible financing (*action: Eurostat*).

V. CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY ISSUES IN INTEGRATED DATASETS

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/6 (UNECE)

29. The Task Force on Confidentiality and Privacy Issues in Integrated Datasets was set up in 2007 to produce a draft set of principles and guidelines for addressing confidentiality and privacy aspects of statistical data integration projects. The draft set of principles was planned to be submitted to the CES 2008 plenary session for approval.

30. The Bureau discussed the draft principles and made the following recommendations:

- the principles should remain general, they can not be regulative because countries have a different legal and cultural approach to data integration; further detail and explanation should be given in the guidelines accompanying the principles;
- data integration is more relevant to producers of official statistics at the national level, however, it might be useful to consider how the principles can be applied in international organizations;
- a lot of data integration work is done outside the statistical offices, the principles could set an example of “good conduct” in this area even though the rules of official statistics are not applicable to the research institutes.

31. The Bureau agreed that there is room for further work on the principles and extended the deadline for finalising the principles and guidelines until the first half of 2009. The Bureau members were invited to provide their comments on the draft principles, and particularly on the issues raised in paragraph 5 of the document ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/6/Rev.1 by **31 March 2008**, to the UNECE secretariat (juraj.riecan@unece.org) (*action: CES Bureau*). The Principles should be consulted with the CES members before they are submitted to the CES plenary session for approval in 2009 (*action: UNECE*).

VI. ELECTRONIC DATA REPORTING

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/7 (UNECE)

32. The Bureau took note of the report on good practices and recommendations on electronic data reporting (EDR) prepared by the Task Force on EDR. A website on good practices in EDR has been created (<http://www.unece.org/stats/erdr/>). The Bureau agreed to release the website for public use, and **to terminate the work of the Task Force**. Eurostat offered to open the participation in the Eurostat Working Group on Collection of Raw Data to third countries (*action: Eurostat*).

VII. STATISTICAL METADATA

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/8 (UNECE)

33. The Bureau discussed the draft outline for the report on statistical metadata to be presented at the CES 2008 plenary session. The Bureau recommended to focus the presentation on the following main messages to the Heads of statistical organizations:
- (1) importance of metadata both for efficient internal management and for users of statistics outside the national statistical office;
 - (2) the key management 'dos' and 'don'ts' and the crucial role of efficient maintenance of the metadata systems.

34. A suggestion was made to explain the importance of metadata by simple analogies, e.g. metadata can be considered as an infrastructure needed for statistical data related activities. It was also recommended to draw the attention of participants at the CES plenary session to the SDMX metadata standards (*action: Steering Group on Statistical Metadata*).

VIII. PREPARATIONS FOR THE 2008 PLENARY SESSION AND THE TWO SEMINARS

a) Organization of the seminar on strategic issues linked to measurement of international transactions

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/10 (IMF/United States)

35. An updated outline of the seminar was presented to the Bureau for comments. The Bureau noted that the preparation of the seminar is progressing well. Currently the organizers are confirming the papers and authors. The seminar will take a whole day as the Bureau recommended to move the discussion on the sustainable development report to the first day of the plenary session.

b) Organization of the seminar on measuring population movement and integration in a globalised world

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/9 (Germany/Eurostat)

36. An updated outline of the seminar was presented by Germany and Eurostat to the Bureau for comments. The Bureau noted that presently the seminar is focused mainly on Europe and recommended to broaden the coverage by asking countries from other regions to contribute papers and/or act as Discussants. A possible paper giving a global perspective of migration could come from the OECD and/or the World Bank. A possible contributor could also be the SOPEMI group ("Systeme d'Observation Permanente sur les Migrations", OECD).

37. The organization and expected outcome of session 4 is not yet clear. Several comments were made concerning session 4 as follows:

- the discussion on common definitions on migration has been going on for the last two decades without reaching any outcome because statisticians do not control the definitions; it will not be possible to reach any conclusions on that issue during the seminar;

- the new work on certain aspects of migration (e.g. remittances) can be considered as some of the emerging needs. Attention has been focused on developing crosswalks between the different concepts, e.g. different definitions of foreign-born etc.;
- countries need to make a transition from a purely administrative source to a multiple source type statistics (LFS, census data, and mirror statistics); the seminar could encourage NSOs to undertake such work;
- the user point of view is needed; this could be provided by the Discussant;
- it was proposed to ask the policy users about their emerging needs in the area and to try to engage them;
- one of the papers for this session could come from the UNECE (or the CES Steering Group on Migration Statistics) based on the latest work carried out in migration statistics;
- it is a good idea to finish the seminar with a session focusing attention on emerging needs; the seminar of Nordic countries held a few years ago could be considered as an example for discussion on issues related to policy questions.

38. The Bureau agreed to allow the seminar organisers two more weeks to decide on how to organise session 4 (*action: Germany, Eurostat*). If the content and expected outcome of this session can not be clarified, it may be omitted. In this case, the planned Eurostat paper can be integrated into one of the other three sessions.

c) Preparation of the formal session, draft agenda and timetable for the 2008 plenary session

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/11 (UNECE)

39. The following comments were made on the draft agenda of the 2008 CES plenary session:

- the report of the Task Force on Confidentiality and Privacy Aspects of Statistical Data Integration is postponed for 2009;
- the report from the Task Force on Electronic Data Reporting will not be presented;
- the Bureau decided that the 1 hour discussion on the sustainable development report will take place on the first day of the plenary session;
- the Bureau proposed to allocate 30 minutes for the four in-depth review topics altogether; the secretariat will prepare an accompanying note for each topic to explain why the topics were selected for review, what decisions were taken and what follow-up actions are planned.

40. The Secretariat will revise the timetable (*action: UNECE*). The Bureau agreed that the secretariat will prepare a relatively short report of the Conference including only the decisions that will be adopted at the end of the Conference. A longer report providing a summary of the discussions will be prepared after the plenary session.

IX. DRAFT REPORT ON MEASURING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/12 (Chairman of the Joint UNECE/OECD/Eurostat Working Group on Statistics for Sustainable Development) and Add.1 (Joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Working Group on Statistics for Sustainable Development)

41. The Bureau discussed the draft report prepared by the Joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Working Group on Statistics for Sustainable Development (WGSSD). The purpose of the Working Group was to develop a broad conceptual framework for measuring sustainable development.
42. The Bureau congratulated the Working Group for producing such an impressive report despite the initial difficulties. The paper represents a consensus between the two initially diverging viewpoints. The report was found to be useful as a research report, adding to the knowledge in this field. However, it was recognised that with this report the work on this issue is not closed: many issues are unresolved and can be further developed. For example, some physical indicators remain too general and can be specified, the comparison between available indicator sets and the conceptual framework can be strengthened, etc.
43. The discussion focused on possible future directions of the work and the way forward: whether the work should continue and in which modality.
44. The following comments were made during the discussion:
- the draft report and its focus on sustainability is appreciated; this is an inspiring and intellectually rich document that will be a good source for further work in many areas of statistics;
 - a great achievement of the work is changing the mindset of statistical offices: about 5 years ago sustainable development was not considered as part of official statistics, now it is understood that official statistics has to try to do its best in this area. This is an important outcome that needs to be communicated to the Conference;
 - the importance of the role that statistics can play in guiding societies towards sustainable development should be highlighted more in the report;
 - the work done so far is only the beginning of a process: it will provide a framework for future work of countries in this field;
 - the draft report does not give guidance on developing sustainable development indicators: more practical focus is needed on elaboration of indicator sets, since at present there is not a good balance between the theory and what can be used in practice;
 - areas to be further developed are, for example, measuring human capital, total wealth, measuring capital stock, use of physical indicators of capital, etc.;
 - the report could recommend topics to be developed by other Working Groups that touch on the issue of measuring capital;
 - a suggestion was made to set up a high-level steering group to guide the work, especially if some work has to be done in relation to National Accounts, the System of Environmental Economic Accounting, etc.;
 - it was recommended that any possible further work should make maximum use of knowledge from currently existing groups; duplication of work with other groups should be avoided. In this context the work of the groups such as ISWGNA, UNCEEA and others should be taken into account;
 - it will be useful to circulate the draft report to external experts before submitting it to the Conference in June;
 - at this stage the draft report should be communicated to the Conference as a result of research work and basis for further work rather than a statistical recommendation;

- the mandate of the Working Group was to see how far the work on measuring sustainable development can be pushed forward on a conceptually sound basis: the Group has fulfilled its mandate.

45. It was recognised that a lack of concrete follow-up steps would lead to loss of the momentum that has been built up during the last years. Converging views and accumulation of expertise achieved by the Group should be used for continuation of the work in some form, e.g. to develop practical guidelines. If the work should be taken forward only within groups focusing on different kinds of capital, the common thinking on how it is related to sustainable development will be lost.

46. The Bureau thanked the Chairman of the Working Group, Rob Smith, and the Editor, Knut Alfsen, for their outstanding work on the report. The Bureau approved the draft report for presentation at the Conference in June subject to any changes made by the Working Group at the meeting in Lisbon (5-6- March 2008). The draft report will be updated based on the recommendations of the Lisbon meeting and consulted with all members of the Conference. A summary of countries' comments will be presented for information to the Conference (*action: UNECE*).

47. The Bureau decided to ask Rob Smith, Chairman of the WGSSD, to formulate a proposal for the way forward (*action: Rob Smith*). The proposal should be circulated to the Bureau by the end of March and, if consensus emerges, will be presented to the Conference in June. Direction for further development of the work will be discussed at the Bureau meeting in October 2008, after receiving the input of the Conference (*action: UNECE*).

X. WORK OF THE CES TEAMS OF SPECIALISTS

a) Business statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/13 (Canada/Eurostat),
ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/14 (UNECE)

48. The Bureau discussed the Terms of Reference (TOR) for a Task Force to address pending issues in the field of business statistics, prepared by Eurostat and Canada.

49. The TOR includes a proposal for a one-day CES seminar on business statistics in June 2009. The Bureau asked the co-chairs to prepare a more detailed agenda for a possible seminar, and circulate it to the Bureau members by the beginning of April (*action: Eurostat and Canada*). The proposal, taking the comments from the Bureau into account, will be presented to the Conference in June 2008.

50. The Conference will decide whether to select business statistics as a topic for the 2009 CES seminar. If the topic is selected, the group will prepare a more detailed outline for the Bureau 2008 October meeting. The terms of reference were approved under the condition that the proposal for a possible seminar be elaborated further.

51. A paper on short-term statistics by the UNECE secretariat was presented for information. The Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT) would like to translate the report into Russian and plans to discuss it with the CIS Statistical Council to analyse the recommendations. The CIS-STAT will provide comments on the paper when the Russian translation is available. The consultation with

countries proposed by the UNECE secretariat was very much appreciated. In this context, the Russian Federation noted that it produces seasonally adjusted time series and is ready to discuss the techniques used with UNECE.

b) Business registers

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/15 (UNECE)

52. The Bureau discussed the new revised proposal for the Organising Committee on Business Registers that takes into account the recommendations of the October 2006 and February 2007 meetings of the Bureau.

53. Canada, Germany and Eurostat raised once more a concern about the effectiveness of the cooperation between the Organizing Committee and the Wiesbaden Group. Potential overlap and conflict may occur if the work is not well managed. There is currently about 40% overlap in the membership of the Organizing Committee and the Steering Group of the Wiesbaden Group (its Chair is also a member of the Organizing Committee). The Bureau insisted on a unified leadership and proposed to have the same chair to lead both the Organizing Committee and the Wiesbaden Group.

54. The TOR for the Organizing Committee were approved with a sunset clause in 2009. In 2009, the Bureau will consider again whether there is a need for an Organising Committee on business registers.

c) Gender statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/16, 17 and 18 (UNECE)

55. The Bureau approved the TOR of the Steering Group on Gender Statistics and of the Task Force on Gender Statistics Training for Statisticians.

56. Concerning the Task Force on Gender-Based Violence, the Bureau approved the TOR and agreed that the Task Force prioritize its work by continuing to focus on violence against women before the work is broadened to cover other aspects of gender-based violence.

d) Population projections

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/19 (UNECE)

57. As a conclusion of the in-depth review of population statistics in February 2007, the Bureau emphasised the need to document best practices in the production of demographic projections. The Bureau discussed the draft TOR for a task force on population projections prepared by the UNECE at the request of the Bureau.

58. The Bureau noted that only one country had volunteered to participate in the task force. It also emphasized that the work is very technical and it is difficult to develop regional or international recommendations since each country has different circumstances which require different methodology. Eurostat commented that the experience of European countries is well documented in this field and that the value added of a task force would be limited.

59. The Bureau decided to extend the deadline for countries to volunteer to join the task force to see if any other countries are interested to participate. If a lot of interest is expressed,

the proposal for creating the task force should be re-submitted to the Bureau for consideration in October 2008 (*action: UNECE*). Otherwise, no CES task force will be set up.

e) Social statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/20 (UNECE)

60. The Bureau welcomed the progress made by the Task Forces on Measurement of New Forms of Families and Households, and Measurement of Volunteer Work.

f) Quality of employment

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/21 (UNECE)

61. The Bureau was informed about the progress of work of the Task Force on Quality of Employment. The draft conceptual framework for quality of employment is planned to be ready by the end of October 2008 to be submitted to the International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS). As requested, the Bureau will be consulted on the framework before it is submitted to the ICLS (*action: UNECE*).

g) Database on Millennium Development Goals (MDG)

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/22 (UNECE)

62. The 2005 Work Plan of the UNECE Reform requested the creation of an MDG database. This is the only action item on statistics from the UNECE reform plan that has not been implemented so far.

63. The Bureau was informed that there is a strong commitment from the UNECE high level management to secure an additional regular post for the Statistical Division to work on MDGs. The post could assure the regular updating and maintenance of an MDG database. Furthermore, the Bureau was informed about another proposal that has been submitted for external funding for the involvement of countries in the development of the MDG database framework and for supporting countries in improving the production and dissemination of MDG-relevant data.

64. The Bureau agreed to the proposal of establishing a regional MDG database for the CIS and South-East European (SEE) countries subject to the minimum condition of obtaining a regular post for the long-term maintenance of the database.

h) Impact of globalisation on national accounts

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/23 (Working Group on Impact of Globalization on National Accounts)

65. The Bureau considered the progress of work of the Working Group on Impact of Globalization on National Accounts. The Leadership Group has agreed on the agenda and identified areas of interest for research. In order to avoid duplication of work, an inventory was made of all existing Working Groups that touch on the work on globalisation.

66. The Bureau congratulated the Group on its well planned work and progress made. The website on Impact of Globalization on National Accounts was considered very useful. It was suggested to include substantial papers in the area on the website.

67. Measuring globalization is also an issue for developing countries. Therefore, the Group should search for funding to involve the CIS countries in the work.

XI. REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2007 UNECE STATISTICAL PROGRAMME

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/24 (UNECE)

68. The Bureau approved the report on the implementation of the 2007 UNECE Statistical Programme.

XII. PRACTICES OF REPORTING THE OUTPUT OF STATISTICAL OFFICES

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/25 (Latvia)

69. As a follow-up to the CES seminar on efficiency and effectiveness of statistical offices held in 2007, Latvia made a survey on practices of reporting the output of statistical offices used in different countries. Twenty-eight countries responded to the survey.

70. The following comments were made in the discussion:

- in order to evaluate the effectiveness of their work, statistical offices should look at the final outcome of their services, e.g. how the information is used to build knowledge. The results of the survey show that statisticians are still far from analysing the impact of their work;
- there is still confusion with the terminology, for example some basic concepts like output, efficiency, etc. are defined differently by different countries;
- there are many activities focusing on quality but the statistical offices do not measure the volume of output of statistical services;
- some Bureau members expressed scepticism about the usefulness of volume measures: it is not clear whether an increase in the number of data points, press releases, etc. is a positive sign. These indicators can be used in relations with the external stakeholders but they are not suitable for managing the office; for example, quality reviews and user surveys are much more useful for this purpose;
- other Bureau members found the volume indicators useful, for example when speaking about productivity targets for different Government sectors; volume indicators can also be useful for internal purposes, for example to answer requests for more resources;
- it was suggested to look for some quantitative indicators that can represent the qualitative side.

71. Latvia was advised to contact Håkan Linden from Eurostat to receive information about some tools currently developed by Eurostat that could be added to the paper (***action: Latvia***).

72. The Bureau considered the paper very interesting and a good basis for further work. A suggestion was made to create a small task force to put together good practices and guidelines on measuring output of statistical offices that could be useful for countries.

73. The Bureau recommended to Latvia to present the paper at the Quality Conference in July 2008 in Rome and, if possible, to organise a session to deal with measurement of output

of statistical offices (*action: Latvia*). The Bureau will come back to the issue in October 2008 to see if further steps are needed (*action: UNECE*).

XIII. EU PEER REVIEWS AND GLOBAL ASSESSMENTS

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/26 (Eurostat)

74. Eurostat presented a short paper providing an overview of the situation with peer reviews and global assessments. A total number of 28 global assessments have been made. The global assessment reports for 2008 are ready, including the global assessments for the Western Balkan and Central Asian countries. The peer reviews are to a large extent completed. It was noted that the peer reviews contain a long list of improvement actions and it is important to follow up on that.

75. The Bureau noted that some of the global assessments for the Western Balkan countries were conducted jointly by Eurostat and UNECE but not in the case of the CIS countries. It would be good in future to have joint reviews also for the CIS countries. It is important to harmonise the prospective list of global assessments so as not to overburden countries.

76. The Bureau was informed about the global assessment carried out by the UNECE and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) in Kazakhstan.

77. The OECD informed the Bureau about the plans in the context of OECD enlargement to make assessments of the statistical systems of Russia, Slovenia, Estonia, Israel and Chile. Work with the Russian Federation has already begun. OECD hopes to benefit from the experience of Eurostat and is making a cooperative effort with Eurostat to minimise the cost for assessing countries that have already been reviewed.

XIV. INVENTORY OF WORKING GROUPS

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/27 and Add.1 (Eurostat)

78. Eurostat presented an updated inventory of the working groups, providing an almost complete overview on the current working groups at international level, organised by subject matter.

79. Eurostat volunteered to update the inventory once a year. Other international organizations were asked to provide Eurostat with information about changes in the groups. Eurostat will discuss with the UN Statistical Division the possibility of making the list available on the UN website (*action: Eurostat*)

XV. INFORMATION ITEMS

a) Meeting of the Chair of the CES with the UNECE Executive Committee (EXCOM)

80. The Bureau was informed about the regular meeting of the Chair of the CES with the UNECE Executive Committee, which took place on 30 November 2007.

b) Information on the database of international statistical activities (DISA)

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/28 (UNECE)

81. The 2008 version of the Database of International Statistical Activities is available at the UNECE Statistical Division website at <http://unece.unog.ch/disa/>. Eurostat informed the Bureau that the European Environment Agency (EEA), the Joint Research Centre and Eurostat have integrated the statistical programmes in the area of environment statistics.

c) Selection of an international organization to present its activities in October 2008.

82. The Bureau asked the CIS Statistical Committee to present its activities in October 2008 (*action: CIS-Stat*).

d) Follow-up to decisions

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/FEB/29 (UNECE)

83. A note on follow-up to the decisions taken by the Bureau and the Conference was presented for information.

XVI. DATES AND VENUE OF THE NEXT BUREAU MEETINGS

84. The Bureau decided to have a lunch meeting on 11 June 2008 (during the 2008 CES plenary session).

85. The October 2008 meeting of the Bureau is planned to take place on 20-21 October 2008 in Washington, D.C., hosted by the World Bank. The February 2009 meeting was tentatively planned for 2-3 February 2009 in Geneva.

86. The Bureau discussed the frequency of the face-to-face Bureau meetings and whether one of the meetings could be replaced by electronic consultation or other virtual means. The point was made that any possible change in the frequency of the Bureau meetings should be considered as of 2010. The Bureau asked the secretariat to prepare a note outlining the advantages and disadvantages of reducing the frequency of the Bureau meetings (*action: UNECE*). The Bureau will consider this issue at its next meeting.

XVII. OTHER BUSINESS

87. The Bureau decided to make available on Internet all papers from the meeting, except those that will be revised and the Terms of Reference that were not approved.

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