

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

First Meeting of the 2008/2009 Bureau

Washington D.C. (United States), 20-21 October 2008

REPORT OF THE 20-21 OCTOBER 2008 BUREAU MEETING

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The first meeting of the 2008/2009 Bureau was held in Washington, D.C. at the invitation of the World Bank on 20-21 October 2008. The following members of the Bureau attended: Heli Jeskanen-Sundström (Chairman); Peter Hackl; Brian Pink; Eduardo Pereira Nunes; Gerry O'Hanlon; Andrey Kosarev (representing Vladimir Sokolin); Aija Zigure; and Katherine K. Wallman. The following permanent observers also attended: Enrico Giovannini (OECD); Pieter Everaers (Eurostat); Youri Ivanov (representing Mikhail Korolev, Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT)); Lucie Laliberte (IMF); Ivo Havinga (representing Paul Cheung, UN Statistical Division); Misha Belkindas (representing Shaida Badiie, World Bank); and Heinrich Brünger (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)). Munir Sheikh (Statistics Canada), Jennifer Madans (U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, for agenda item 5e), Mary Bohman (U.S. Department of Agriculture, for agenda item 2a) and Hiek Som (FAO, for agenda item 2a) attended the meeting 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); Hilikka Vihavainen (Statistics Finland); Suzann Evinger (United States Office of Management and Budget); Maria-João Santos (Eurostat); and Tiina Luige (UNECE). Lidia Bratanova of UNECE served as Secretary of the meeting.

II. IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF SELECTED STATISTICAL AREAS

3. The Bureau reviewed in-depth two statistical areas, namely agricultural statistics, including forestry and fisheries, and statistics on measuring labour cost. The Bureau also considered the follow-up to the in-depth reviews of environment statistics and culture statistics undertaken in February 2008, and of statistics on income, living conditions and poverty undertaken in October 2007.

(a) Agricultural statistics, including forestry and fisheries statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/2008/OCT/3 (Eurostat, in cooperation with United States and Brazil), Add.1 (extract from DISA) and Add.2 (UNECE)

4. The Bureau reviewed in depth agricultural statistics based on a paper by Eurostat and comments by UNECE. Representatives of FAO and the U.S. Department of Agriculture participated in the discussion.

5. FAO has been the leading organization in global agricultural statistics. In the UNECE region this has been done in strong collaboration with Eurostat. An evaluation of FAO statistical work carried out recently resulted in proposals for reshaping the activities. More priority in the work will be given to capacity building in countries. In order to improve coordination of statistical activities within the FAO, it was proposed to create a post of Chief Statistician. The FAO database is being released with new methodology and the dissemination part has been updated.

6. The following points were made in discussion:

(a) The review of agricultural statistics is timely because of the food crisis, increase in food prices, climate change, etc.; the current crisis may help to gain more visibility and emphasise the importance of agricultural statistics;

(b) Agricultural statistics has been traditionally self-contained, the way forward is to better link it with statistics from other domains and to look at the wider information for rural areas; the link with environment and climate change is especially important;

(c) The capacity of countries to produce agricultural statistics and the quality of agricultural statistics have decreased in recent years, especially in developing countries; a possible response to reduced resources is to work more efficiently and effectively;

(d) Agricultural statistics is mostly concerned with the supply side, more information is needed on the demand side and on non-food use of agricultural products;

(e) Farms are often not included in the business registers, or if farm registers are kept separately, they are not managed in the same way as business registers; this poses problems when building the sample frames for surveys;

(f) In the CIS countries, there are some problems with the integration of agricultural statistics with the national accounts due to the considerable reduction in the number of supply-and-use tables and simplification of their structure;

(g) The governance of agricultural statistics at the international level needs improvement; a new Intersecretariat Working Group should be established including selected countries and focussing on core agricultural issues, especially the quality aspect;

(h) Other international organizations and countries should help FAO as much as possible in regaining its global leadership role in agricultural statistics;

(i) At the global level, the focus of agricultural statistics is on capacity building; in the UNECE region, the priority is mainly on improving the quality and cost-efficiency of agricultural statistics, and furthermore on improving communication, cooperation and coordination at all levels (e.g. with other government agencies dealing with agricultural statistics, such as the Ministry of Agriculture); as well as integration with other fields of statistics.

(j) There is presently no forum to discuss issues of agricultural statistics at the UNECE level (it exists only for forestry statistics);

(k) There are two possible ways to reinvigorate the work: to have a wider mandate including issues of environment, prices, etc., or to focus on core agricultural statistics; concern was expressed that with a wide mandate, the work can become too dispersed; it was suggested to focus on core agricultural statistics and the problems at the basic level, but to identify the links to other statistical areas, like environment, water, energy, land use, natural resources, etc.

Conclusions:

7. Eurostat will update the in-depth review paper based on input from the Bureau discussion. The CIS-STAT will provide more information on the situation in the CIS countries (as an Addendum). The updated paper will be made available on Internet.
8. It was recommended that the Chair of the CES Bureau together with some Bureau members and observers talk to Pietro Gennari, the new Director of FAO Statistics Division, to convey the concerns and support of the Bureau.
9. Agricultural statistics, including its integration with other domains of statistics, was identified as a potential topic for a future CES seminar, possibly in 2010.
10. Eurostat will prepare the Terms of Reference for future work on agricultural statistics in the UNECE region.
11. Any future work on agricultural statistics should take into account the outcome of the expert group meeting on agricultural statistics on 22-23 October 2008. Eurostat will report on the outcome of this meeting and on the mandate of a new ISWG at the February 2009 meeting of the Bureau.

(b) Measurement of labour cost

Documentation: ECE/CES/2008/OCT/4 (OECD), Add.1 (extract from DISA) and Add.2 (UNECE)

12. The Bureau reviewed in depth statistics on labour cost based on a paper by OECD and comments by UNECE. The following points were made in the discussion:
 - (a) Considerable work has been carried out to set up the framework for labour cost index in the OECD countries. The demand comes mostly from the central banks who use the data for analysing inflation; outside this framework, there is no strong demand, the labour cost index data would be useful only at a very detailed level which is costly to produce, however, sharing experiences in this area would be useful;
 - (b) Progress has been made in unit labour cost but it will be a long-term process to obtain the desired results;
 - (c) A priority is to improve the measurement of hours worked;
 - (d) There are not many activities concerning statistics on wages and earnings, especially in non-EU countries; at the same time, new forms of payment and contracts appear; national accounts framework provides definitions but there is much variety across countries in their detailed application;
 - (e) The surveys on wages can not be harmonised because of the different institutional setups and different national labour market practices;

(f) Because the ILO meeting of labour statisticians only takes place once every five years, this does not allow to keep the standard up-to-date.

Conclusions:

13. The Bureau agreed that its members will provide detailed written comments on the paper to OECD. The updated version will be made available on Internet. CIS-STAT will provide a short English version of its annual report on measuring labour cost.

(c) Follow-up to the in-depth review of environment statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/2008/OCT/5 (Eurostat)

(The Bureau considered two topics together: the follow-up to the in-depth review on environment statistics, and the follow-up to the measurement of sustainable development. For the report on discussion on sustainable development, see item IV.)

14. The Bureau discussed environment statistics following the in-depth review made in February 2008. The paper by Eurostat lists several actions that have been undertaken or are planned to address the issues raised at the review in February.

15. The following comments were made in the discussion:

(a) Some concern was expressed about the proposal to extend the mandate of the UN Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting and Environment Statistics (UNCEEAA) to include global coordination of environment statistics, and the capacity to manage this. The work on revising the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting should remain the highest priority of the UNCEEAA;

(b) There is some tension between environment statistics and other statistical fields (e.g. energy); it may take time for UNCEEAA to find a way to deal with such tensions.

Conclusion:

16. The Bureau will continue to follow up regularly on the work on environment statistics undertaken in the UNECE region.

(d) Follow-up to the in-depth review of culture statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/2008/OCT/26

17. The Bureau made an in-depth review of culture statistics in February 2008. As follow-up, Eurostat informed the Bureau about the actions in this area.

18. Eurostat has re-launched work on culture statistics, although it is not a high priority area. There is a proposal to create a European Statistical System Network (ESSnet) activity on culture in the beginning of 2009. It was agreed that the international meeting foreseen for March 2009 should

be postponed until later in 2009 taking into account the start of the ESSnet and its respective actions. A conference on culture statistics has also taken place in Latin America.

Conclusion:

19. The Bureau will continue to follow up on developments in culture statistics and suggested the postponement of the international meeting to late 2009 in order to take into account the start of the ESSnet project.

(e) Follow-up to the in-depth review of statistics on living conditions, income and poverty
Documentation: ECE/CES/2008/OCT/6 (Canada) and ECE/CES/2008/OCT/7 (UNECE)

20. The Bureau made an in-depth review of statistics on living conditions, income and poverty in October 2007. The Bureau discussed the proposal for further work in this area prepared by Statistics Canada.

21. The following comments were made in the discussion:

(a) Poverty is an issue of great interest to the public. The published data on poverty can be interpreted in different ways that do not always reflect reality. Therefore, clarification of concepts and integration of income statistics with the expenditure side and distribution of wealth would be helpful in order to obtain data that give a clear message and are more comparable;

(b) The statistical offices should work on this issue together with central banks and initiatives like the Luxembourg Income Study. The European Central Bank is planning to carry out surveys on wealth in EU countries. In many countries, the work may be outsourced to private companies, and that raises concern of the Bureau about the validity of the approach from the viewpoint of official statistics;

(c) There are significant discrepancies between income measures coming from national accounts and household surveys; there is a need to work on harmonising expenditure surveys and on reconciling micro- and macrodata;

(d) IMF is interested in balance sheets by sector, especially the household sector, and in measurement of wealth; the work should be pragmatic and focus on data, not on conceptualisation;

(e) The CIS-STAT has published a report on poverty in the CIS countries. Many indicators on income, consumption and income distribution come from different sources and are not compatible. CIS-STAT would be interested in participating in international work on distribution of income and wealth.

Conclusions:

22. Work is needed in two directions: a narrower focus on practical implementation of the Canberra Group Handbook (as outlined in the paper in §22a), and a wider initiative to work towards an integrated framework of income, expenditures and wealth.

23. The work on the development of practical implementation guidelines of the Canberra Group Handbook should reflect recent advancements in income measurement in specific areas such as imputed rent, in-kind benefits, and capital gains and losses. Canada, United States and Austria volunteered to draft the Terms of Reference for a CES Task Force to undertake the work. Austria, Canada, United States, Eurostat, OECD and CIS-STAT would like to participate in the Task Force. All other CES members are also welcome to participate.

24. The work on a wider scope at the global level could be considered under the UN framework by setting up a possible city group. Canada will discuss the proposal with the UNSD and report back to the Bureau in February 2009. OECD and United States would be interested to participate in the work.

III. PROCESS OF IN-DEPTH REVIEWS BY THE BUREAU - EVALUATION OF THE NEW APPROACH

Documentation: ECE/CES/2008/OCT/8 (UNECE)

25. The Bureau carried out the last two in-depth reviews according to a new approach agreed upon in February 2007. The Bureau assessed the approach and considered how to report on the in-depth reviews to the CES plenary session.

26. The following points were made in the discussion:

(a) The outcomes of the in-depth reviews should be considered at the CES plenary session in such a way that countries will have more opportunity to be involved and contribute to the in-depth reviews; therefore, more time is needed to allow for discussion (this may be achieved by reducing the time for the seminars);

(b) Asking for written comments before the plenary session will provide countries with an opportunity for a more thorough reflection on the issues.

Conclusions:

27. The Bureau decided that it will be useful to discuss the topics selected for in-depth review by the Bureau at a CES plenary session prior to the discussion at the Bureau meetings. This will allow to get input from the CES members. This approach will be tested at the next CES plenary session with the topic on statistical dissemination. The secretariat will look for a possible author of an issue paper that will be the basis for the discussion at the CES plenary session.

28. The outcomes of the reviews on agriculture statistics and statistics on labour cost will be consulted electronically with the CES members before the 2009 February Bureau meeting. The UNECE secretariat will process the comments by countries and report back to the Bureau in February.

IV. MEASURING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT – TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE NEW TASK FORCE

Documentation: ECE/CES/2008/OCT/9 (Canada)

29. The Bureau discussed future work in the area of sustainable development based on a paper prepared by Statistics Canada. (*The topic was discussed together with the follow-up to the in-depth review on environment statistics.*)

30. The following points were made in the discussion:

(a) The indicators are not useful if they are not accepted by policymakers, therefore careful communication and consultation is required. It would be good to signal that the present indicators often do not measure sustainability (e.g. GDP). The TOR should include a specific point on allowing discussion with users and politicians;

(b) The indicators should be validated both from the statistical viewpoint (whether it is possible to obtain data) and from the viewpoint of relevance for policymakers;

(c) The analysis of commonalities of indicators showed that some of the policy-oriented indicators are compatible with the capital approach;

(d) The work should also follow up on dimensions unresolved in the previous report: human and social capital;

(e) The work should focus on indicators that are useful for individual countries and on inter-temporal comparability, not so much on international comparability.

Conclusions:

31. The secretariat will take into account the comments made by the Bureau and will prepare, together with Statistics Canada, more detailed terms of reference and outline for the work. The document will be first discussed with Eurostat and OECD, and then electronically with all members of the Bureau, aiming to agree upon a text before the 2009 February meeting of the CES Bureau.

V. UNECE STATISTICAL PROGRAMME FOR 2009

Documentation: ECE/CES/2008/OCT/10, Add.1 and Add.2 (UNECE)

32. The Bureau discussed the draft UNECE Statistical Programme (SP) for 2009, focusing on activities that are new or considerably changed compared to the previous year's programme. The various Steering Groups and Task Forces that are related to the new or changed activities were also reviewed under this agenda item.

(a) Environment statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/2008/OCT/11 (UNECE)

33. A new activity is planned to help the CIS and South-East European (SEE) countries to strengthen environmental data collection, produce environmental indicators and promote comparability of environmental statistics. It is a joint activity with the UNECE Environment, Housing and Land Management Division. The CES Bureau approved the proposal to set up a Joint Intersectoral Task Force on Environmental Indicators. As a joint undertaking, the proposal has yet to be approved by the other Sectoral Committee, the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy.

34. Eurostat invited the UNECE to follow the work of the so-called EU Group of Four (Eurostat, European Environmental Agency, DG on Environment and DG Joint Research Centre) to see how to establish a link between the work on environmental indicators in the EU and CIS countries.

(b) Statistics related to Climate Change

35. The UNECE secretariat proposed a new activity to deal with statistics related to climate change, in particular concerning the emission inventories maintained by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

36. The following points were made in the discussion:

(a) It is necessary to look at the Guidelines for compiling the emission inventories from the viewpoint of official statistics. There are several problems, e.g. maritime and air transport emissions are excluded, the calculations are based on the amount of fuel sold which produces exceptionally high figures for countries where there is a large number of cross-border purchases;

(b) The complete review of the Guidelines on the compilation of emission inventories is a very ambitious goal that will require very technical level expert knowledge;

(c) The classifications used in emission inventories are different from statistical classifications. It would be very useful if UNFCCC adopts the statistical classifications so that the data could be exchanged with statistical agencies;

(d) The scope of any future work should be defined taking into account the outcome of the Conference on Climate Change, Development and Official Statistics (Seoul, 11-12 December 2008) and the action plans at the global level.

Conclusions:

37. The Bureau supported, in principle, undertaking some work related to statistics on climate change but recommended strongly to narrow the scope of this activity. The work should have a well-defined scope and produce a useful output that can be achieved within a limited time. The secretariat will reformulate the activity description in the Statistical Programme to take into account the comments made by the Bureau. The Bureau will decide on the exact contents of the work on statistics on climate change after the topic is discussed at the meeting to be held in Korea

in December 2008, and in view of the paper submitted to the UN Statistical Commission in February 2009.

(c) Migration statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/2008/OCT/12, Add.1 and Add.2

38. The Bureau reviewed the plans for future work of the Steering Group on Migration Statistics and a Task Force on Measuring Emigration.

39. The following comments were made in the discussion:

(a) Statisticians can not impose a common definition of length of stay as the administrative sources for such data are not under their control; however, the impact of different definitions used in countries is an important issue to signal to policy makers; integration with statistical sources may help in increasing comparability;

(b) The 12-month duration is a key definition not only for migration statistics but for many other statistics as well; it should be kept for defining long-term migration;

(c) Different definitions of residency adopted by different countries pose a challenge for the measurement of migration; in this case, one person can be resident of several countries at the same time;

(d) A practical solution for improving migration statistics would be to pay more attention to measuring stocks, and use Labour Force Surveys and Censuses to measure the flows;

(e) It would be useful to have a definition of different types of short-term migration related to the reasons for migration.

Conclusions:

40. The Bureau approved the Terms of Reference for the Task Force on the analysis of international migration estimates using different length of stay definitions, subject to taking into account the comments made in the discussion. Eurostat is interested to participate in the Task Force.

41. The *Guidelines on the use and dissemination of data on international immigration to facilitate their use to improve emigration data of sending countries* will be consulted electronically with the Bureau after the meeting. The outcome will be presented to the Bureau in February 2009. The final draft of the Guidelines will be presented for endorsement to the Conference in June 2009.

(d) Population projections

42. The draft TOR for a Task Force to develop a collection of documented practices in the production of population projections was discussed in February 2008. As by then only one country had volunteered, the deadline for countries to join the Task Force was extended.

43. The Bureau decided not to set up a task force in view of the limited number of offers to participate in the work. The UNECE will continue to be involved in the area of population projections as a co-organiser of the 2010 meeting on population projections (together with Eurostat). This will allow countries who are not members of EU or EFTA to participate in the meeting. No work on population projections is foreseen in the Statistical Programme for 2009.

(e) Health statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/2008/OCT/21 (CES Steering Group on Measuring Health Status)

44. The Bureau discussed the coordination of health statistics based on a report covering the work of the Washington Group on Disability Statistics, the Joint UNECE/WHO/Eurostat Task Force on Health Status (the so-called Budapest Initiative) and the Intersecretariat Working Group on Health Statistics. The importance of coordinating and linking the activities of the Washington Group and the Budapest initiative was stressed. The Bureau noted the progress in that direction. UNESCAP has expressed an interest in joining the Budapest initiative.

45. The Bureau welcomed progress made in international work on health statistics.

(f) Management of statistical information systems (MSIS)

46. Activity 8.1: 'Management of statistical information systems' in the SP2009 includes a proposal for new work to facilitate the sharing of statistical software between national and international statistical agencies. The short-term target of the work is to provide information and a repository of software tools (implemented via the European Commission's existing Open Source Observatory and Repository portal). To govern a longer-term process of moving towards the convergence of IT systems architectures, platforms and solutions, it is proposed to establish a Sharing Advisory Board. The Bureau discussed the proposal.

47. The following points were made in the discussion:

(a) To make the portal successful, its governance needs to be carefully handled: there should be an incentive for contributors to make their software available through the portal; some successful examples of bottom-up approaches can be shown where the portal also includes guidelines and quality control rules; furthermore, a critical mass of users/contributors is important for the success of the project;

(b) Making software available in itself will not ensure that it can be used; the questions of development, support and training have to be solved, e.g. in many cases, the authors of software may not have resources for later IT support;

(c) The development of new IT architectures with standard tools and standardised metadata environments may be required for efficient software sharing, so that components of systems can be found in an open market;

(d) Some countries are creating common information architectures across government institutions; in this case, the use of software tools produced by agencies from other countries may become difficult.

Conclusions:

48. The Bureau agreed that the issues of managing and sharing statistical software should be dealt with from a strategic perspective and solved at a managerial level. The Bureau asked the Steering Group on Management of Statistical Information Technology to prepare a paper on challenges in managing IT in statistical offices for the February 2009 meeting of the Bureau. The Chair of the Steering Group will be invited to participate at the meeting. The TOR of the Group might be revised following the discussion in February.

49. The Bureau considered it important to involve Chief Statisticians in the discussions on managing IT in statistical offices. This is a potential topic for a CES seminar.

50. With regard to the concern expressed about Statistics Sweden's plans to outsource PC-Axis, the Bureau considered it important to find a solution to address the concerns of statistical offices in developed and less developed countries, and to guarantee the long-term sustainability of the software.

(g) UNECE contribution to UNData

51. The CES Bureau discussed the activity proposed by UNECE related to the UNECE contribution to the portal of UN System databases, known as UNData. The following points were made in the discussion:

(a) This initiative should be seen from the perspective of modern technology; it is not possible to put copies of all international data and metadata together in one single database;

(b) The application has to be SDMX-compliant;

(c) The project has to be discussed on a wider scale because of its implications for other international organizations maintaining online databases, and for the statistical offices from which the source data originate.

Conclusions:

52. The Bureau agreed that the UNECE secretariat contribute to the UNData work.

53. Following the Bureau meeting, the Director of the UN Statistical Division offered to provide more detail on UNData at the October 2009 meeting of the Bureau.

(h) Technical cooperation

Documentation: ECE/CES/2008/OCT/20

54. In February 2006, the Bureau asked the UNECE secretariat to carry out regular surveys on technical cooperation in statistics in Central Asia. The secretariat presented the results of the second survey carried out in 2008. The input from the CIS Statistical Committee was received after the paper was finalised and was not included in the version of the paper discussed by the Bureau.

55. The following comments were made:

(a) There is a mistake in the paper concerning the technical assistance by EU institutions: Eurostat is not a donor of technical assistance activities but a provider of technical advice to other European Commission services;

(b) It was questioned whether Azerbaijan should be covered by the UNECE survey: Azerbaijan is an EU neighbourhood country and the technical activities are coordinated by the EU;

(c) The projects mentioned in para. 42 are independent projects financed by separate countries jointly with the World Bank; in cases where there is a partner agreement between the World Bank and countries, the role of the World Bank has to be clarified;

(d) The need for a regular survey on technical assistance in statistics in Central Asia will cease when Paris 21 covers the whole world in its reporting. Currently, this is not yet the case.

Conclusions:

56. The secretariat will make corrections in the paper as indicated above.

57. There is no need for such a detailed and extensive document to be considered by the Bureau in future. A summary of the analysis of survey results would be sufficient. The secretariat should submit a more concise report after the next round of the survey.

(i) Other issues related to SP 2009**Conclusions:**

58. The Bureau endorsed the SP 2009 subject to the comments given above under the various items. The secretariat will finalise the text and send it to all members of the Conference for information. The Statistical Programme will be presented to the meeting of the UNECE Executive Committee on 21 November for approval.

VI. EVALUATION OF THE 56TH CES PLENARY SESSION; RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANISING THE CES SEMINARS

Documentation: ECE/CES/2008/OCT/14 and 15 (UNECE)

59. The results of the evaluation questionnaires of the 2008 CES plenary session were presented for information. The Bureau discussed the updated *Recommendations for organising the CES seminars*.

60. The following points were mentioned:

- (a) One of the main purposes of the seminars is to create discussion and dialogue. Therefore, it is important to leave ample time for general discussion; the Session Organisers are responsible for guiding the discussion;
- (b) The Session Organiser will also act as a Discussant;
- (c) The Session Organiser/Discussant should base the presentation on the invited papers and not make his/her own paper out of the Discussant's summary;
- (d) The limit of 2-3 invited papers per session should be strictly observed;
- (e) The recommendations should mention the possibility for countries to contribute papers;
- (f) There is some inconsistency between points V(a) and VII(c).

Conclusion:

61. The Bureau approved the Recommendations subject to taking into account the comments above.

VII. PREPARATIONS FOR THE CES 2009 PLENARY SESSION

(a) Outline for the seminar on strategic issues in business statistics

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/OCT/16 (Canada and Eurostat)

62. The Bureau discussed the outline prepared by Canada and Eurostat. The following comments were made in the discussion:

- (a) Session 1 should focus on strategic issues concerning topics listed in §4a-f; the discussion should be between Heads of offices, not experts;
- (b) The session should deal with statistics collected from businesses (not limited to statistics on businesses). For example, data related to environment and sustainable development, workers (decent work, working conditions), innovation, etc.;

- (c) Session 1 covers disparate areas that are not linked, it will be difficult to organise a discussion with any common thread;
- (d) The session could touch upon the implications of the current financial/economic crisis with regard to the information collected (financial sector, services, etc);
- (e) It was recommended to look for a keynote speaker from an agency other than a central bank because the central banks are interested in only a part of business statistics;
- (f) Session 2 should not include papers that have been already discussed at the IAOS meeting in Shanghai and at the DGINS Conference in Vilnius. A paper summarising the outcome of the Vilnius meeting could replace the papers currently proposed. Session 2 should go further and cover more operational and practical issues to deal with the challenges that were identified at these meetings;
- (g) An issue to be considered could be how to deal proactively with the change in response burden over time;
- (h) It is important to avoid overlap between the sessions;
- (i) The order of the sessions could be switched, starting the seminar with a summary of the response burden issues;
- (j) The seminar could be shortened and some of the time used for considering the in-depth reviews by the CES Bureau.

Conclusions:

63. The following contributions were offered to the seminar:

- (a) OECD: on new ways to obtain entrepreneurship data (e.g. using the balance sheets of private enterprises) and the related issue of competition between official and unofficial data sources;
- (b) OECD: on information needed from businesses for innovation analysis;
- (c) Finland: on control of respondent burden by using business registers and administrative data (same topics as in paras 18 and 20).

64. There was general agreement that the seminar should not repeat recent international discussions on reducing respondent burden (in Shanghai and Vilnius), but go further on that topic. The organisers of the seminar will revise the outline based on the comments by the Bureau and present the updated outline in February 2009.

(b) Outline for the seminar: “Balancing principles of professional autonomy and accountability with the mandate to produce policy relevant data”

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/OCT/17 (Ireland)

65. The Bureau discussed the outline prepared by Ireland. The outline was considered very good. The following points were made in the discussion:

- (a) It would be important to bring into the discussion some experiences outside Europe;
- (b) The seminar could discuss how to draw the boundaries of official statistics, there is no common interpretation of this;
- (c) It would be useful to involve some experts from outside official statistics, e.g. from an opinion polls agency, economic analysis agency, etc.
- (d) Session 2 part B: careful difference should be made between collecting data on opinions and on subjective measures (e.g. health);
- (e) Session 2 part C: the question is about interaction between statistics and administrative registers, however, part of this work is a statistical activity; there is a danger that this issue may lead to discussion on the use of administrative registers which is not the topic of this seminar;
- (f) Session 2 part C could be extended to managing cooperation between owners and keepers of administrative sources and the relevant legal arrangements;
- (g) A related issue that could be discussed is why some countries maintain the registers and others do not;
- (h) Session 3: according to the UNSD survey, the fundamental principle 4 (“The statistical agencies are entitled to comment on erroneous interpretation and misuse of statistics”) is not easily implemented; the question is to what extent statistical offices should enter into discussion when data are misused.

Conclusions:

- 66. OECD offered to contribute a paper related to the use of ICT tools to engage citizens and experts in discussing statistics. Eurostat offered to contribute to session 1 with a paper on its experience with the impartiality protocol. Brazil offered to contribute to session 3.
- 67. The Bureau agreed that it is important to keep a geographical balance of papers, therefore it would be good to obtain contributions also from the CIS countries.
- 68. Ireland will take into account the suggestions by the Bureau and present an updated outline at the February 2009 meeting of the Bureau.

(c) Preparation of the formal session of the 2009 CES, draft agenda

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/OCT/18 (UNECE)

69. The following comments and suggestions were made on the proposed draft agenda:

(a) More time should be given to consider the Manual on Victimization Surveys and the framework for measuring quality of employment;

(b) About one hour should be devoted to pre-discussion of an in-depth review topic before the review is made by the Bureau; the discussion should be based on an issue paper, be properly structured and focus on issues of concern to chief statisticians;

(c) One of the seminars could be reduced to allow more time for the discussion on in-depth review topics;

(d) IMF would be ready to present an in-depth review paper on government finance, fiscal and public sector statistics in June; if the paper is considered at the plenary session, the topic should be addressed from the viewpoint of Heads of statistical offices avoiding too specialised discussion which is not the aim of the CES plenary session;

(e) The progress report on globalisation will not be presented to the CES in 2009.

Conclusions:

70. The secretariat will look for an author to prepare an issue paper on dissemination that will provide the basis for a discussion at the CES plenary session.

71. The outcomes of the in-depth reviews on agriculture statistics and on statistics on labour cost will be consulted electronically with all members of the Conference before February. The Bureau will decide in February 2009 how they will be presented at the June 2009 CES plenary session.

72. The election of new Bureau members will be added to the agenda. The Bureau will decide about the final agenda for the CES 2009 plenary session in February 2009.

VIII. CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY ASPECTS OF STATISTICAL DATA INTEGRATION – DRAFT PRINCIPLES

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/OCT/19 (Australia)

73. The Bureau considered the draft Principles and Guidelines for addressing confidentiality and privacy aspects of statistical data integration. The Principles are planned to be submitted to the CES 2009 plenary session for approval.

74. The following points were made in the discussion:

(a) The paper has an overly negative perspective on data integration;

(b) The Guidelines should more precisely define what is meant under a data integration project, e.g. in some countries, linking data from different sources is a daily practice and it is not possible to apply all the principles to that work;

(c) There are perhaps too many principles. For example, Canada argued that just four points need to be considered: benefits of the project; challenges/costs/problems; sharing information publicly; and how to consider changing the policy and legislation if these do not allow the integration of data;

(d) Another possibility is to focus on two main principles: (1) if data are collected for official statistics in one area, then they can be used for another statistical area; (2) if data collected by government for administrative purposes are also used for statistics, this is not an infringement on privacy;

(c) For the EU countries, the EU legislation contains general provisions that are also applicable to confidentiality issues related to data integration. Therefore, the Guidelines may be more useful for countries outside the EU and countries who have only recently started to deal with data integration issues;

(d) As the Guidelines complement the *CES Guidelines on confidentiality and access to microdata*, they should also deal with the questions of access to data: whether the access principles can be the same or is there a need for a more restrictive approach;

(e) Principle 2c requires more explanation;

(f) Principle 4f: confidentiality of individuals and businesses is equally important;

(g) Principle 5 should be elaborated upon and should take into account the differences between microdata from households and businesses;

(h) Principles 5 and 6: there were doubts about the usefulness of including these principles;

(i) Principle 7a: all users should have access on the same basis regardless of funding;

(j) Principle 7f: who should review the data integration work? It may be difficult to find a person who has the authority to do this;

(k) Principle 7g: the principle is too restrictive, the collected data can not always be destroyed (e.g. in some countries, census data is an integrated dataset), it may be necessary to destroy the key that was used for data linking, not the dataset itself;

(l) Principle 9: this is not suitable for countries where data are integrated on a daily basis, it would be more important to make publicly available the basic legal acts and general information about using and linking the basic data sources.

Conclusions:

75. The Task Force will take the comments into account and prepare a new version of the Principles and Guidelines for the 2009 February Bureau meeting. Finland offered help in formulating the text. The Guidelines will be consulted with all the CES members before they are submitted to the Conference for approval.

IX. PRACTICES IN REPORTING THE OUTPUT OF STATISTICAL OFFICES

76. Latvia informed the Bureau about the follow-up to the survey on practices in reporting the output of statistical offices, carried out in the beginning of 2008. Latvia has received more detailed information from Eurostat and from some countries. There is interest in continuing work on this topic and possibly organising a workshop. There are two possible directions for the work: to focus on quantitative measures, or on how countries are measuring the efficiency of using the resources.

77. Eurostat has several activities in this area under the quality framework. However, the UNECE countries outside the EU might need help in measuring the performance of statistical offices, especially on the output side. The CIS countries have indicated an interest in this work.

Conclusion:

78. The Bureau decided that at the moment no further follow-up is required. The topic of measuring the output of statistical offices will be kept on the list of follow-up topics. The Bureau may come back to this issue in future if there is a demand from countries.

X. OUTCOME OF THE FORUM ON HUMAN RESOURCES AND TRAINING

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/OCT/25 (UNECE) and Add.1 (Canada)

79. The Bureau was informed about the outcome of the Forum on Human Resources and Training, organised on 3-5 September 2008 in Skopje, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

80. The feedback from the participants of the Forum has been very positive. The Bureau thanked Canada, Czech Republic and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia for the excellent organization of the meeting. The meeting recommended to continue work in this area and proposed topics for further work.

Conclusions:

81. The Bureau considered that further work should focus on the following topics: (i) competencies in official statistics; (ii) training; and (iii) how to attract and retain staff in statistical offices. Eurostat has a Task Force on competency profiles for official statistics and would like to be involved in the work on this topic. The work should have a specific timetable and lead to a concrete outcome. It may or may not involve organising a meeting on human resources in 2010.

82. The secretariat, in consultation with the Organising Committee, will prepare a more concrete proposal for follow-up work to be considered by the Bureau in February 2009.

XI. PRESENTATION OF THE STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES OF THE CIS STATISTICAL COMMITTEE

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/OCT/27 and Add.1 (CIS-STAT)

83. The Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT) made a presentation on the organization of the Committee and on the various statistical activities that are undertaken.

84. The role of the CIS within the framework of the CIS charter bodies was explained. The main tasks of the CIS-STAT are the coordination of statistical activities in the CIS countries, promoting the reform of statistics, development of standards and recommendations, dissemination and exchange of statistical information, and analysis of socio-economic processes in the CIS.

85. The reform of statistics in CIS countries required bringing the statistics and accounting in accordance with international standards. Considerable attention was given to helping the CIS countries in the implementation of the System of National Accounts (SNA 1993), standards on financial statistics, government finance statistics, business statistics, labour statistics, population censuses, and implementation of international statistical classifications. Priority areas for future work will be the implementation of SNA 2008, improvement of the methodology for compilation of the CPI, and preparation for the 2010 round of population censuses. CIS-STAT will continue the work in the field of the International Comparison Programme within the framework of the next round of global comparisons, which is likely to take place in 2011.

86. In 2006, CIS-STAT was given the task of forecasting the most important macro-economic indicators on a short- and mid-term basis. The CIS-STAT also maintains a common statistical database and a website in Russian and English. The CIS-STAT cooperates actively with other international organizations such as OECD, Eurostat, IMF, World Bank, Paris21, etc.

Conclusions:

87. With the presentation by the CIS-STAT, all international organizations who are members of the CES Bureau have now presented their statistical activities. As five years have passed since the first presentation (by IMF in 2003), it may be necessary to have updated information from the international organizations who already made presentations, or the Bureau can invite other organizations to present their activities. The Bureau will select through electronic consultation the organization to make a presentation at the October 2009 meeting.

XII. AGENDA FOR THE STATISTICAL COMMISSION SESSION IN FEBRUARY 2009

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/OCT/22 (UNSD)

88. The UNSD presented the provisional agenda of the United Nations Statistical Commission in February 2009. The fortieth session of the Statistical Commission will be held in New York on

24-27 February 2009. Any comments on the provisional agenda should be communicated to the UNSD.

XIII. FOLLOW-UP TO DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE BUREAU

Documentation: ECE/CES/BUR/2008/OCT/23 (UNECE)

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

90. Eurostat is currently updating the inventory of the working groups and has contacted UNSD to make it available on the UN website. Eurostat will regularly update the inventory.

91. The in-depth reviews of government finance, fiscal and public sector statistics, and publication, communication and dissemination issues will be postponed to October 2009. There will be only one in-depth review in February 2009, on housing statistics (paper to be prepared by Poland).

92. Culture statistics will be kept on the list of follow-up items.

XIV. FREQUENCY OF THE CES BUREAU MEETINGS; DATES AND VENUE OF THE NEXT BUREAU MEETINGS

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

93. The UNECE presented a paper on the organization of the Bureau meetings, outlining the work cycle of the Conference and the Bureau throughout the year. The discussion on the frequency of the Bureau meetings was postponed until February 2009. The secretariat was asked to prepare an example of an agenda for a Bureau meeting if it were to take place once a year.

94. The next Bureau meeting will take place on 2-3 February 2009 in Geneva. The October 2009 meeting was preliminarily scheduled for 15-16 October 2009.

95. The Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística of Brazil offered to host the October 2009 CES Bureau meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The Bureau members will consider the feasibility of having a meeting in Brazil and will inform the Bureau in February 2009.

96. The World Bank also offered to host a future Bureau meeting.

XV. OTHER BUSINESS

97. The Bureau decided on the papers that will be made available on Internet.

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