

First meeting of the 2008/2009 Bureau

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

Item 3 of the Provisional
Agenda

**IN-DEPTH REVIEWS OF SELECTED STATISTICAL AREAS
BY THE CES BUREAU**

Note prepared by the UNECE secretariat

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In February 2007, the Bureau revised the procedure of carrying out the in-depth reviews. According to the new approach, the reviews focus on 4-5 topics selected by the Bureau instead of reviewing all areas as in the past. These can be either single topics or ad hoc groupings from among the 55 areas of the classification of international statistical activities. The criterion for selecting a topic, or a group of topics, could be that (1) there are significant developments in that area, (2) there are significant coordination issues or (3) there is a lack of activities at international level. The review focuses on strategic issues in the next five years or so and deals with issues of concern to statistical offices of conceptual and coordinating nature.

2. The discussion at the Bureau meeting is based on a short review paper written by a Bureau member, an international organization or a NSO. The paper is circulated ahead of time and Bureau members contribute additional papers on the topic. Other international organizations involved in the area may be also invited to contribute papers.

3. The Conference is informed about the outcomes of the in-depth reviews on the basis of a paper prepared by the UNECE secretariat. The paper explains why the particular topic(s) was chosen for in-depth review and informs about the discussion and the Bureau decisions. The appropriate excerpts from the Database of International Statistical Activities (DISA) are attached to the paper to provide an overview of the current statistical activities in the area.

4. With the CES 2008 plenary session, the first round of the in-depth reviews according to the new procedure was completed. Therefore, the purpose of this note is to stimulate a discussion for evaluating the approach.

5. The Bureau members are invited to share their views on the procedure of the in-depth reviews, and in particular the presentation of the outcome of the in-depth reviews at the plenary session of the Conference. Below are some observations by the secretariat.

II. STOCKTAKING OF THE IN-DEPTH REVIEWS SINCE FEBRUARY 2007

A. Discussion at the CES Bureau meetings

6. The following five in-depth reviews have been carried out following the new procedure:

(a) Business statistics (February 2007) – based on a paper by IMF, contributions by Canada, Finland, United States, Eurostat, UNECE, UNSD;

(b) Gender statistics (October 2007) – based on a paper by Italy, contributions by Australia, Brazil, Germany, Latvia, United States, UNECE; World Bank;

(c) Statistics on income, living conditions and poverty (October 2007) – based on a paper by OECD, contributions by Austria, Brazil, United States, UNECE, World Bank;

(d) Culture statistics (February 2008) based on a paper by Finland, contributions by Brazil, Germany, UNECE, UNESCO;

(e) Environment statistics (February 2008) – based on a paper by Eurostat, contributions by Germany, UNECE.

7. The Bureau members have contributed actively to the in-depth reviews (on average, five contributions have been received to complement the discussion paper).

8. The reviews have often led to follow-up actions:

(a) The review on business statistics led to setting up a Task Force on business statistics and the decision to organise a CES seminar on strategic issues in business statistics in June 2009;

(b) The follow-up actions to in-depth review on income, living conditions and poverty are still being discussed;

(c) The follow-up on environment statistics is planned to be discussed at the October 2008 Bureau meeting based on a paper prepared by the UN CEEA;

(d) The review on gender statistics did not lead to new work because there are already many international activities going on in this area. However, the review raised several issues that are important to take into account in the work and identified strategic areas to focus on;

(e) The review of culture statistics drew attention of statistical offices to this topic and encouraged countries to contribute to the UNESCO framework for Culture Statistics that is currently under consultation with countries. A possible follow-up action is organising a meeting on culture statistics.

B. Presentation of the outcomes of the reviews at the Conference

9. As decided by the Bureau, the 2008 plenary session of the Conference was informed about the outcomes of the in-depth review discussion by the Bureau. For this purpose, the

UNECE secretariat prepared a paper for each of the reviewed five topics (see para. 6 above) , covering:

- (a) The reasons for selecting the topic for a review;
- (b) Overview of the discussion at the Bureau meeting (points made in the discussion);
- (c) Conclusions from the review;
- (d) Follow-up actions.

10. The in-depth reviews were on the agenda of the Conference on 10 June. Twenty minutes were allocated to business statistics and 30 minutes for the remaining 4 topics (7.5 minutes per topic).

11. This short time allocated for the in-depth reviews was used to inform the Conference about the outcomes of the reviews and did not allow for practically any discussion from the floor. The Conference simply reaffirmed the Bureau decisions and did not provide any additional proposals to those made by the Bureau in February 2008.

III. CONCERNS

12. The Bureau is invited to consider the following observations by the secretariat. Some concerns were also communicated to the secretariat by members of the Conference during the 2008 plenary session.

13. The purpose of having the reviews at the CES plenary session need to be clarified. Is it just to inform countries/international organizations about the Bureau decisions? Or does the Bureau want to involve the CES members in the process of in-depth reviews by seeking their views? More discussion at the Conference will give an opportunity for the members of the Conference to influence the processes and give a sense of ownership over the work. This will also allow finding out whether countries would be interested to participate in the follow-up work proposed by the Bureau.

14. At the time of the last plenary session, several CES members communicated to the UNECE secretariat that the discussion under the in-depth reviews was not very satisfactory. It has been proposed that the papers be presented in greater detail by those countries/organizations that prepared the Rapporteur Reports and that more time be allocated for discussion.

IV. PROPOSAL

15. Below is a proposal how to improve the discussion of the in-depth reviews at the Conference and to give more opportunity to CES members to be actively involved in the process.

A. Select 1-2 topics from the areas reviewed in-depth to focus at the Conference

16. The outcomes of the reviews on other topics will be presented for information only. The advantage is that more time can be used for one topic and it is easier for participants to

focus on the issue. However, a disadvantage is that the other topics will get very little attention (more than 1-2 topics may merit consideration at the CES).

B. Ask the author of the issue paper (Rapporteur Report) to present it to the Conference. The Chair of the Conference will present the Bureau decisions. A general discussion from the floor will follow

17. The advantage is that CES members get an explanation about the issue which will provide good basis for the discussion. The proposals made at the time of the Conference could be used by the Bureau for follow-up work.

* * * * *