CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

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For discussion and
recommendations

Item II (a) of the Provisional
Agenda

COMMENTS ON THE IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF MEASURING SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Prepared by the Secretariat

> *The note provides the comments from the UNECE Secretariat as input to the in-depth review of social exclusion prepared by Canada and Mexico (ECE/CES/BUR/2018/FEB/2).*

I. INTRODUCTION

1.   The note is based on an internal discussion in the UNECE Statistical Division on 29 January 2018, taking into account the experience from other recent CES work, such as measuring poverty, ageing-related statistics and leading, composite and sentiment indicators.

2.   The paper prepared by Statistics Canada and INEGI, Mexico provides an excellent summary of the challenges in measuring social exclusion, showing the lack of standard definitions, methodology and understanding of what would be useful and feasible to measure. The analysis of the multitude of concepts and approaches related to social exclusion and the overview of international statistical activities in the area are very useful.

II. COMMENTS

3.   UNECE agrees with the authors of the review that "Distinctions between these concepts, like social exclusion, social cohesion, social inclusion, material deprivation or multidimensional poverty are relatively nuanced which […] make it difficult to measure each one individually."

4.   It is interesting to note **how this topic is considered in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**. The concept of social exclusion is not explicitly mentioned in Agenda 2030. However, it is implicitly **included through the concepts of social inclusion and multidimensional poverty**. Under Goal 10 "Reduce inequalities within and among countries", target 10.2 is to "empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status". The indicator to measure the achievement of this target is "Proportion of people living below 50 per cent of median income, by sex, age and persons with disabilities".

5.   The concept of social exclusion is reflected **under the multidimensional poverty** indicator 1.2.2 "Proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in **all its dimensions** according to national definitions" of Goal 1 "End poverty in all its forms

everywhere". Terminological precision is therefore needed as social exclusion and multidimensional poverty could be seen as overlapping in some dimensions, such as health, education, housing and social participation. The ***CES Guide on Poverty Measurement***[1] devotes an entire chapter to multidimensional poverty, which could be used as an input to defining the social exclusion concept.

6.   **Conceptual clarity of social exclusion could assist with the measurement of many indicators for monitoring Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs), and several SDG custodian agencies could be interested in such conceptual work.

7.   It is important to adopt a life-course perspective to defining and measuring social exclusion as it affects children and youth in different ways than older people. For example, education, socialization, opportunities and future life chances matter greatly for children and youth whereas questions of social capital, living arrangements, financial security and access to services are more pertinent to the elderly. Chapter 4 of the ***CES Recommendations on Ageing-related Statistics***[2] looks into the measurement of social inclusion/exclusion from the perspective of older people.

8.   **The CES Task Force on Leading, Composite and Sentiment Indicators has discussed the compilation of composite and sentiment indicators of well-being and quality of life.** Social exclusion, or social inclusion, is usually one of the dimensions included in composite measures of well-being, together with other dimensions such as income, housing, health and safety. However, a range of different statistical variables are used to measure well-being and there is no common agreement on which variables to include or how these might be aggregated into one composite measure of well-being. The Task Force aims to develop guidelines for national statistical offices that produce or consider producing leading, composite or sentiment indicators, which may be useful to take into account in the discussion of measuring social exclusion.

9.   **In discussing the measurement of social exclusion, it is necessary to distinguish between the ability to participate and actual participation, and to decide which of those to measure.** Do we want to measure the availability of easily accessible school places, or educational participation? Do we want to know whether people have a right to vote and a polling place nearby, or whether they actually vote? Do we want to know how many neighbours a person has, or how often they interact with them? It seems that attempts so far mix these up. Estimates of perceived social exclusion could help in examining the gap between the ability to participate and actual participation.

10.   Obtaining reliable data to measure social exclusion is a challenge. Usually socially excluded persons are those who are hard-to-reach with surveys and data on them is often not available in administrative records.

III.   CONCLUDING REMARKS

11.   There is a need for some basic guidelines for statisticians as to what constitutes social exclusion and what could be feasibly measured by official statistics. There is a clear need to measure the prevalence, persistence and depth of social exclusion. For the production of

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[1] Available at http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=47512

[2] Available at http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/publications/2016/ECECESSTAT20164_ENG_web.pdf

policy-relevant statistics that could be turned into actions, policymakers would need to know all of these.

12.   The topic of social exclusion aligns well with the ongoing work on measuring poverty and inequality. The CES Steering Group on Measuring Poverty and Inequality could supervise the possible methodological work. Such work would greatly benefit from a wider collection of countries' practices and contributions from academia. Countries that have experience in measuring social exclusion could be invited to participate. In addition, the full experience of other international organisations should be integrated in the effort, including those of the UNDP Regional Hub with their work in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

13.   Support of Eurostat is essential and their experience with measuring social exclusion over the years should be constructively examined. The components used for compiling the AROPE rate (at risk of poverty or social exclusion) for EU countries give a good basis for developing a comparable measure for a wider group of countries.

14.   Given the strong links with ongoing UNECE work, **the Secretariat supports the in-depth review's recommendation to undertake work to define social exclusion and examine methodologies for its measurement**.

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