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For discussion and recommendations

Item II (a) of the Provisional Agenda

COMMENTS ON THE IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF STATISTICS AND DATA ON CITIES

Prepared by the Secretariat

The note provides the comments from the UNECE Secretariat as input to the in-depth review of statistics and data on cities (ECE/CES/BUR/2018/OCT/2).

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The note is based on an internal discussion in the UNECE Statistical Division on 9 October 2018 and other recent work, such as monitoring provision of statistics for the SDG indicators, particularly for Goal 11 'Sustainable Cities and Communities'.

2. The paper prepared by Statistics Netherlands, Eurostat and others provides an excellent summary of the growing policy demands and continued challenges in the statistical measurement of cities, municipalities, and related concepts such as urbanicity and local communities.

3. Key challenges identified are the multiple and not yet harmonized definitions and methodology. Additionally, it was noted that opportunities to use city-generated data for statistical purposes have been under-utilized. It was noted that the role of NSOs in supporting cities in their use of data for decision making is not well defined, and that more relevant data could be generated with the involvement of cities and communities (inside and outside of government). The paper's description of the complexity and policy-making utility in improving the measurement of cities is a timely overview as international reporting requirements increasingly call for statistics describing local situations.

II. COMMENTS

4. The demand for data describing cities is growing, spurred by local and international policy interests. Through its ongoing work on statistics for SDGs in the region, UNECE is aware of NSOs interest in data disaggregation by geographic location, and that city-level commitments to achieving the SDGs are increasingly expressed.

5. The 2030 Agenda (A/RES/70/1) calls for reporting related to Goal 11 (para 34) but also for data disaggregation for all indicators by geographic location (para 74 (g)). It is interesting to note that six SDG indicators regarding local communities are also included in the reporting requirements for the Sendai Framework for disaster risk reduction. Concerning the Paris Agreement on climate change, the indicators for the global stocktaking required by

Article 14 are not yet specified (planned in 2019). It is expected that these will call for disaggregation by geographic location to demonstrate the achievement of nationally determined contributions, such as reduction of greenhouse gases.

6. A key challenge to improving measurement in this area is the **lack of harmonized definitions** and **consistent use of terminology**. Sometimes the term "city" is used when what is intended (or actually measured) is municipality. A number of additional terms are used that may have different meanings in different contexts (urban/rural, human settlement, locality, village, town, city, city proper, urban agglomeration, metropolitan area, etc.). The core issue here is **clearly defining concepts and measures (including spatial breakdowns) for subnational data** which can have multiple layers of disaggregation for different purposes.

7. Harmonized international definitions for urbanicity, locality, and human settlement are not yet available. This challenges not only the production of SDG indicators but also a wide range of more traditionally produced national statistics. An **internationally agreed definition of urban/rural** would be most urgently needed as this breakdown is required in many areas of statistics, including for monitoring progress towards SDGs.

8. The reasons for the absence of harmonized measurement are manifold. Many international agencies' use somewhat different definitions and measurements. In addition, determining a conceptually clear and policy relevant measurement of cities, urbanicity and locality is challenging when the size and purpose of these units vary greatly from country to country and context to context. An additional complication is that the borders, names and composition of the units change over time which makes it challenging to ensure data comparability over time.

9. How to measure depends on the purpose of measurement. For evidence based policy making, the governments at different local levels are interested in data about the administrative area that they are responsible for (municipality or region). For many areas of demographic and social statistics, the difference between urban/rural is important. For the analysis of commuting patterns, time-use, economic activity, etc. the cities together with areas from where people commute to work are of interest. These are just a few examples of different kinds of purposes for which these data are needed.

10. Because of the different uses and different national contexts, it may not be possible to come up with a single, common definition of these terms applicable in all countries. However, it would be very useful to **develop an internationally agreed taxonomy of the related terms**, how they are linked with each other, and **agree on criteria for their delineation** (such as number of population, population density, number of buildings, etc.). Different countries could use different thresholds. Following common principles could allow recalculating data to facilitate international comparability. This would be somewhat similar to the approach used to measure poverty, which recognizes both national and international methods.

11. The authors note the ongoing work to harmonize measurement of cities and human settlements for the purposes of SDG reporting. The degree of urbanization and the use of the EU-OECD functional urban area definition are being field tested, with the intention of requesting approval of the delineation of urban and rural areas by the UN Statistical Commission in 2020. In addition, UN Population Division and ILO continue their own work to address complexities in measurement at the subnational level. This work is important and

the entities involved are best-suited to pursue this task. UNECE will follow the pilot results closely.

12. Data about cities can also be generated for and by cities. The mechanisms for such collaboration—at the level of indicator selection and/or data collection or dissemination—are often not well defined in the national context. This may limit the extent to which data about cities is useful and relevant to local policy makers.

13. The data generated by cities is **not usually part of official statistics** (unless the city has a regional statistical office that belongs to the national statistical system). In the context of the discussions on the changing role of NSOs in the data ecosystem, it may be worth considering how to establish a closer link with city or other local governments that are interested in generating data at the local level.

14. The paper is based on examples from EU countries and Canada. It would be interesting to know about the situation in some countries from other parts of the UNECE region. For example, measurement of "remote areas" as a distinct concept from "urban/rural" may be particularly of interest to Australia and perhaps the US.

III. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE ACTIVITIES OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THIS AREA

15. **UN Population Division** (UNPD) publishes annually estimates and projections of the urban and rural populations of all countries in the world and of their major urban agglomerations (see https://population.un.org/wup/). **ILO** is working on identifying the need and challenges in measuring urbanization in the context of employment and job creation. It will be useful to add information about these activities to the in-depth review paper.

16. Some additional information on the activities of international organizations for the paper is provided in the Annex concerning the **UNECE Unit on Housing and Land Management**. The Unit works on policy issues related to cities, housing and land management but the work also includes some activities that deal with statistics and data.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

17. To improve statistical measurement of cities, conceptual work is needed to clarify the terms related to cities, municipalities, urbanicity, locality and human settlements, and develop harmonised definitions. Improved measurement is needed to meet local, national, and international policy reporting requirements. The current collaboration among the European Commission, FAO, OECD, UN-Habitat, UNSD and the World Bank is piloting some proposals. In addition, UN Population Division and ILO continue their own methodological work in this area. UNECE believes the entities involved are best suited to lead work in this area.

ANNEX

18. The UNECE Housing and Land Management Unit is undertaking several projects supporting national and city governments in promoting evidence-based policies for urban development.

19. The **United Smart Cities project** (launched in 2014) aims to address major urban issues in medium-sized cities. The activities also include among many others training on data collection.

20. In 2016, UNECE and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) established the **UN global initiative United for Smart Sustainable Cities** (U4SSC), which currently involves 16 UN bodies. In 2017, the U4SSC stakeholders elaborated a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for smart sustainable cities which includes 92 indicators (core and advanced) divided in the 3 dimensions of sustainable development: economy, environment, and society and culture. The KPIs encompass the following topics: ICTs, transport, productivity, infrastructure, spatial planning, innovation, air quality, water and sanitation, waste, public spaces, energy, education, health, culture, safety, housing, food and social inclusion. The indicators are fully aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and serve as a tool for evidence-based decision making, progress monitoring and achieving the SDGs at the local level. 50 cities of different sizes and development are implementing the KPIs worldwide, including Dubai, Singapore, Montevideo, Valencia, Rome, Astana, Manizales, Goris, Voznesensk, Bizerte, Pully etc.

21. A capacity building project in cooperation with UN-Habitat is developing a policy paper and **guidelines for the collection and analysis of the national data on housing and urban development**. The policy paper includes analysis of the data collection situation in four countries: Albania, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine. A training programme will be developed, and trainings organised in the four countries to support building capacities of national and city governments for evidence-based policies for sustainable housing and urban development.

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