

**UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS**

Seminar “The way forward in poverty measurement”
(Geneva, 2-4 December 2013)

CALL FOR PAPERS

I. INTRODUCTION

1. UNECE, OECD and CIS-STAT are jointly organizing the Seminar “The way forward in poverty measurement”, under the auspices of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES). The meeting will be held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva (Switzerland), on 2-4 December 2013.
2. The present note provides information to the organizations and experts who wish to contribute to the Seminar with a paper and a presentation.

II. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE SEMINAR

3. The monitoring of Millennium Development Goals and the recent discussions on the post-2015 development agenda have further strengthened the importance of measuring poverty, inequality and vulnerability. With the current economic and financial crisis, the importance of measuring trends and the timeliness of data has again become apparent. Even in high-income countries, there are pockets of poverty and the improvement of welfare is far from being self-evident. Poverty measurement needs to cover vulnerable populations and address regional disparities.
4. Countries and international organizations need comparable data and harmonized data sets. However, there is currently no coherent set of indicators to measure and monitor poverty in the UNECE region. For monitoring Millennium Development Goal 1 “Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger”, over 100 indicators are used by the countries in the region. Indicators used by international organizations are not among those used most frequently by the countries. For the various indicators, a large variety of definitions, methods and primary data sources are available and there are no uniform national or international guidelines for their application.
5. New developments such as multidimensional poverty measurement, new data sources and opportunities arising with the information society lead to new measurement approaches. Issues related to data quality, harmonization and the use of new technologies need to be discussed.
6. The Seminar should be a useful forum for the exchange of experiences and practices in poverty measurement. This can support work towards establishing a recommended coherent set of indicators that is relevant for all countries in the UNECE region and contribute to the global discussion on monitoring the post-2015 development agenda

7. The target audience of the seminar consists of statisticians and analysts from national statistical offices (NSOs), ministries and other government agencies that produce or use poverty statistics.

III. OUTLINE OF THE SEMINAR

8. The seminar is organized in three thematic sessions:

- Methodological issues in poverty measurement;
- Data comparability;
- Interlinkages between poverty, inequality, vulnerability and social inclusion.

9. Ample time is reserved for discussion of the presentations in each session. A discussant will guide the overall discussion of the papers with a view of their implications for the future of poverty measurement. He or she will also provide a summary of the main conclusions of the session.

10. The conclusions of the discussants from each session will be the basis to start the panel discussion on the future of poverty measurement in the UNECE region, including the perspective of developing a coherent set of indicators.

11. **Experts are invited to contribute papers to the three substantive sessions of the seminar.** An outline of the expected content and of possible issues that could be addressed is given below.

Methodological issues in poverty measurement

12. The methods and data sources for poverty measurement vary greatly and reporting on bias and uncertainty of poverty data is limited. The session will discuss methodological and technical issues. Possible topics are the coverage of the informal sector, measurement of in-kind benefits, the coverage of health insurance and pension contributions and the impact of the costs of earning on poverty reduction. Another range of questions is related to the use of poverty estimates based on either consumption or income, and to the possibility of introducing new measures by combining the two approaches. A further related issue is the choice of data collection tool, for example, when to use national account data and when to use household surveys, or how to integrate and merge different sources to improve measurement.

13. Special attention should be given to the timeliness of data. The impact of crises is difficult to measure immediately as there is a lag in the data becoming available. The impact of political, food, energy and economic-financial crises is diverse and different groups are affected, in each case in different ways. The effects in standard poverty indicators may appear only after a significant delay, which may slow down policy responses. New approaches provided by the modern information society and more frequent or continuous measurement tools can be discussed.

14. An associated topic for poverty related policies is how to capture vulnerable groups and regional disparities. Certain sub-groups or regions can be specifically affected by poverty, which would not be detected from national averages. To address the causes of disadvantages, policymakers might need information other than that provided by standard surveys. Disaggregation increases the statistical variance. Alternative methods and data sources might be needed in order to produce reliable data.

15. Examples of other topics that could be discussed include:

- Criteria to measure poverty;
- How to improve the coverage of low and high income groups;
- How to build the weights for the individual members when using household survey data;
- How to capture poverty among children, disabled persons and single parent households;
- Benefits of absolute versus relative measures;
- How to improve the reliability of measurements for sub-groups and small areas;
- Use of household surveys and qualitative information on consumer sentiments;
- The capacity of poverty measures to allow for the analysis between market income, gross income and disposable income;
- Use of already available data from national accounts and the impacts of the methodology on the data needs;
- Trade-offs between all the requirements for measuring poverty and inequality on the one hand and the need of users on the other hand.

Data comparability

16. There is a strong need for data that is comparable internationally and over time. The issues for this session include retrospective estimation of any new poverty measures for understanding their trend, and international micro-data access for calculating comparable poverty indicators since nationally defined cut-off points may depend on specific national policy targets. Different poverty levels require different measures, which leads to the question of whether comparable indicators exist that are relevant for all countries or only to specific income groups.

17. International organizations can show how they safeguard comparability of poverty measures and especially present recent or upcoming changes. National agencies can indicate to what extent international recommended indicators and methodology are applicable in their situation. In this regard, the tension between the need for comparable primary data sources and the need to adapt standardized surveys to local circumstances could be discussed.

18. Other examples of topics that could be discussed include:

- Comparability of the existing indicators;
- Relevance of the various indicators for all countries of the UNECE region or depending on the stage of development;
- Maintaining a consistent measure versus developing and improving methodology;
- Methods and programs to harmonize methodology and primary data sets;
- Adaptation of methodology and indicators to local needs.

Interlinkages between poverty, inequality, vulnerability and social inclusion

19. The interlinkages between poverty, inequality, vulnerability and social inclusion is a topic for conceptual discussion on questions such as the following: What do the indicators measure and what do we want to measure? What does poverty mean in practical terms? Do absolute poverty lines measure aspects of poverty differently than the relative ones? Are material deprivation indices a promising direction of an integrated approach to the assessment of the poverty situation? What are the relationships of poverty indicators with material and non-material deprivation indicators and how does this relate to social exclusion?

20. Developing a minimum set of different indicators sufficient for measuring poverty is a further topic in this context. In this respect, a conceptual framework that integrates already available indicators can be discussed.

21. The relevance of indicators and their link to policy needs is important. These topics are also related to sustainable development. How poverty indicators and the measurement of poverty should fit in the sustainable development framework is relevant in this respect. National experiences in applying conceptual frameworks of poverty measurement can be presented here as well as simulation models and other tools for presenting information on poverty to help policymakers understand the impact of their decisions.

22. Examples of further topics that could be discussed include:

- Conceptual issues of selecting the approaches to measure these phenomena;
- The pros and cons of multidimensional poverty assessment;
- The relation between poverty, inequality and social exclusion;
- Should food security be included and if so, how;
- Implications in view of Rio+20 and the measuring of the sustainability of poverty alleviation.

IV. INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS

23. The working languages of the work session are English, French and Russian. Papers can be submitted in English or Russian. Papers and slides provided in Russian will be translated to English to the extent possible and provided that they were delivered by the deadlines listed below. A limited number of papers will be translated from English to Russian. Authors of papers submitted in Russian are strongly encouraged to provide a short abstract in English (maximum one page).

24. Abstracts should be submitted by **30 September 2013**. The abstract should include:

- the title of the presentation;
- a clear description of the issues addressed in the paper;
- the main conclusions of the paper;
- each author's name and e-mail address;
- institutional affiliation.

25. The full final versions of papers should be sent to the UNECE secretariat in Word format by **21 October 2013**. It is recommended not to exceed 10 pages including charts, annexes and references. Presentations should be submitted by **15 November 2013**.

26. Papers, abstracts and presentations should be submitted electronically to Mr. Taeke Gjaltema, e-mail taeke.gjaltema@unece.org.

27. Papers will be made available on the UNECE website at the following location:
<http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2013.12.poverty.htm>.

V. IMPORTANT DEADLINES

28. Please take note of the following deadlines:

- 30 September 2013: submission of abstracts
- 21 October 2013: submission of full final versions of papers and presentations
- 15 November 2013: Submission of PowerPoint presentations and registration

VI. INFORMATION AND CORRESPONDENCE

29. All submissions should be sent to the UNECE secretariat who would also respond to other inquiries and provide additional information.

UNECE secretariat:

Mr. Taeke Gjaltema
Social and Demographic Statistics Section
Statistical Division, UNECE
Tel: +41 22 917 1272
Fax: +41 22 917 0040
E-mail: taeke.gjaltema@unece.org

Ms. Oyuna Oyunjargal
Social and Demographic Statistics Section
Statistical Division, UNECE
Tel: +41 22 917 4147
Fax: +41 22 917 0040
E-mail: mdg.stats@unece.org