

UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS
Expert meeting on measuring poverty and inequality
Budva, Montenegro, 26-27 September 2017

INFORMATION NOTE FOR PARTICIPANTS

The meeting will be held at Hotel Mediteran, Budva, Montenegro
on 26-27 September 2017

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) is organising the *Expert meeting on measuring poverty and inequality* under the auspices of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) in Budva, Montenegro, in partnership with the Statistical Office of Montenegro.
2. The meeting is preceded by the *Workshop on harmonising poverty statistics in countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia*, which UNECE will organize in Budva on 25 September 2017, with financial support from the Russian Federation and the United Nations Development Account. More information about the Workshop will be provided in due course.

II. PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

3. The Expert meeting will allow countries to exchange experience on the challenges in poverty measurement and ways to address them. The objective is to take forward the methodological work on measuring poverty and inequality, achieve greater comparability and reliability of poverty statistics, and strengthen multilateral cooperation. The meeting will also address the implementation of the forthcoming *UNECE Guide on Poverty Measurement*.

III. PROGRAMME OF THE MEETING

4. The UNECE Steering Group on Measuring Poverty and Inequality is preparing the substantive programme of the meeting, which will consist of the following topics:
 - Topic 1: Stakeholder involvement in indicator development
 - Topic 2: Harmonization of household surveys

- Topic 3: Methodological issues in measuring economic inequalities
- Topic 4: Measurement of vulnerability to poverty
- Topic 5: Spatial patterns of poverty

5. A concluding session will discuss directions for further work on poverty and inequality statistics in the UNECE countries and implementation of the forthcoming *UNECE Guide on Poverty Measurement*.

6. A detailed timetable will be prepared before the meeting. The substantive topics are briefly described below.

A. Stakeholder involvement in indicator development (Session organizer Austria)

7. Different processes of coordinating poverty indicators and social policy exist. These are likely to increase relevance of statistical indicators but are also challenging the typical mode of work of statisticians. Such processes may slow down production processes, reduce comparability and challenge the independent role of statistical offices.

8. Examples of such processes are available in some EU Member States where stakeholders are organised in platforms against poverty with different roles in the development of national indicators. Another example is the work of the EU Indicators Sub Group (ISG) of national experts for monitoring social inclusion, which coordinates the development of indicators to guide policies. This is especially relevant for comparative data collections such as EU-SILC.

9. An integrated measure of multidimensional poverty has been included in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to complement income poverty measures and show interconnectedness of deprivations. Engaging policymakers in indicator development is critical in generating demand for data and ensuring national ownership. The selection of non-monetary dimensions and deprivation cut-offs normally draw upon commonly agreed approach involving various stakeholders. In the case of national Multidimensional Poverty Indices (MPIs), the consultation process may draw upon documents such as a constitution, national development plan, or on participatory processes engaging poor people and communities. Stakeholder involvement at all levels is thus crucial, including at a regional level as it could facilitate countries with close circumstances to move forward in developing multidimensional poverty measures together – to economise the development efforts and to achieve comparability.

10. This session will discuss different formats and levels of national stakeholder involvement in indicator development as well as the principles of independent production of policy relevant indicators, which have relevance for both users, and producers of statistics, in the UNECE region. Participants are welcome to contribute with their country experience discussing the role of statistical office in developing indicator frameworks on monetary or multidimensional poverty in consultation with other government and non-government bodies and organizations.

B. Harmonization of household surveys (Session organizer UNECE)

11. The ongoing global processes related to the implementation of SDGs call for action on developing comparable and reliable measures of poverty. Currently, the approaches,

definitions and data collection methods for poverty measurement vary across countries. Action towards data harmonization and comparability is thus vitally important.

12. In this session, participants will review the current practices of poverty measurement and will identify the main directions for further steps towards harmonizing poverty statistics. The session will include a discussion on the limits of household survey data to provide information for SDG reporting. Participants are invited to submit country examples of statistical office's response to efforts for harmonisation of poverty statistics, or steps taken towards producing comparable statistics in the context of SDG monitoring.

13. The session will discuss in detail country approaches from the perspectives of survey methodology, sample size and population coverage, periodicity and data quality. In this context, the participants will be informed about the first results of the UNECE project "Harmonized poverty indicators for monitoring sustainable development". Under the project, a set of model survey questions is currently being developed to address the essential needs for poverty measurement, including those necessary for the poverty indicators for monitoring SDGs. The session will discuss the implementation of the model survey questions, and the indicators that can be computed from the collected data.

C. Methodological issues in measuring economic inequalities (Session organizer United Kingdom)

14. Over the last 30 years, income inequality has been rising in most UNECE economies. In many countries, this widening gap between rich and poor has been accompanied by an increasing focus in public debate on inequalities, particularly since the beginning of the global economic downturn. This in turn has led to increased interest in the various measures of economic inequality that are available. This session will focus on some of the methodological challenges and opportunities that are associated with measuring inequality and vulnerability. Proposals for papers are welcomed on a range of topics associated with income inequality, such as addressing the challenges associated with capturing the top 1% (and 0.1%), the suitability and communication of different inequality indicators, and the role of taxes and transfers.

15. However, income provides only a partial view of the economic resources available to support consumption and the importance of also considering household wealth is increasingly recognised. Households can use wealth to consume more than income, or they may consume less than their income, and thus save. Wealth also allows individuals to smooth consumption over time and to protect them from unexpected changes to income. Households that are "asset rich and income poor" can be expected to have a higher material standard of living than would be indicated by their income alone. Proposals for papers considering the methodological issues associated with measuring wealth inequalities are therefore also particularly welcomed, as are papers focussed on capturing jointly economic inequalities in two or more dimensions of income, consumption and wealth.

D. Measurement of vulnerability to poverty (Session organizer UNDP)

16. Many countries focus policies on vulnerability to poverty. There is no common definition of vulnerability, making measurement particularly challenging. There is also a growing recognition that reducing the level of poverty may not be a fully satisfactory approach, because an individual can be vulnerable to falling below a threshold across several

dimensions, such as health, food consumption and income, and across different periods. In this session, participants will take stock of different approaches and measures of vulnerability to poverty and at-risk-of-poverty, from both unidimensional and multidimensional points of view.

17. People who are vulnerable to poverty can drop below the poverty line for a variety of reasons, often due to shocks. Alarmingly, recurring shocks of various kinds are becoming a “new normal” in the contemporary world, as was discussed at the Istanbul Development Dialogue on risk and resilience in March 2017. In the 2030 Agenda, this is addressed under SDG 1 target 1.5 *“By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters”*. Papers are welcome on the application of attempts to define and measure vulnerability within national or international policy contexts.

E. Spatial patterns of poverty (Session organizer Switzerland)

18. Traditional poverty or inequality measures are usually estimated and used at the national level. These measures are based on the assumptions that income level does not vary systematically by region and that differences among population groups are the same throughout the country. In fact, most countries do have different levels of income or standard of living across regions that are not easily measurable with independent variables such as the degree of urbanization or ethnic group. Moreover, sub-national political entities (federal states, regions, cities) sometimes have programs to alleviate poverty and demand statistics that would help policymaking or at least monitor the situation in their own entity. These questions are particularly relevant in countries where federal states have strong political competencies.

19. Many statistics are based on survey data characterized by samples too small to produce reliable estimates. Moreover, the sample design is sometimes not adapted to produce statistics for the desired regional level. Papers should address the following questions: What kind of strategies can be implemented in order to decrease the variance (such as pooling datasets or small area estimation)? Is it appropriate to use the weights, even the equivalence scale or more important the poverty thresholds that are designed at the national level or would it be appropriate to use regional ones? What kind of regional indicator or index can be developed in that field? How to correct for the difference in expenditure caused by the regional price differences that affect material well-being or welfare? Papers are therefore welcome on the application of attempts to measure poverty or inequality for or within sub-national policy contexts.

IV. DOCUMENTATION, METHODS OF WORK AND LANGUAGES

20. The working languages of the meeting are English and Russian. Simultaneous interpretation will be provided in these languages.

21. Participants are welcome to submit a paper for any topic on the agenda. Authors of papers are encouraged to provide a short abstract. Authors of papers submitted in Russian are encouraged to provide a short abstract in English (maximum one page).

22. The following deadlines and requirements apply:
- Intention to participate and contribute a paper should be submitted by **22 May 2017**. Please indicate the topic of your paper and attach the short abstract, which will be reviewed by the session organizers and the Steering Group. Include author's name, e-mail address and institutional affiliation.
 - Full papers should be sent as Word files by **15 August 2017**.
 - Presenters are encouraged to send their PowerPoint presentations by **15 September 2017**.
 - All submissions should be addressed to the UNECE Secretariat, e-mail social.stats@unece.org
23. Papers will be made available on the meeting web page at the following location: <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2017.9.poverty.seminar.html>. The timetable and other documents will be posted on the same meeting web page.
24. The posted documents will not be distributed in the meeting room. Participants are encouraged to download them and bring their own copies to the meeting.

V. PARTICIPATION, ACCREDITATION AND REGISTRATION

25. The meeting is open to representatives of all UNECE Member States. Representatives of other Member States of the United Nations, specialized agencies of the United Nations, other intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) may also participate in a consultative capacity, according to the terms of reference of UNECE (E/ECE/778/Rev.3, paras. 11, 12 and 13). All delegates must be accredited by the competent authority of their country or international organization.
26. The meeting targets statisticians and analysts from national statistical offices and other government agencies that produce poverty statistics. Participants are expected to take an active part in the discussion and share their experiences.
27. All participants should register by **15 August 2017** (participants funded by UNECE by 30 June) by completing the online registration for the following links:
- Expert meeting on measuring poverty and inequality (26-27 September 2017): <https://www2.unece.org/uncdb/app/ext/meeting-registration?id=36i1VK>
 - Workshop on harmonising poverty statistics (25 September 2017): <https://www2.unece.org/uncdb/app/ext/meeting-registration?id=yzLTFJ>
28. The online meeting registration guideline is available at: <https://www2.unece.org/wiki/display/OMR>.

VI. VISA

29. All participants attending the meeting are requested to have a valid passport and, if required, a visa. Applications for visas should be made as soon as possible at the Embassy of Montenegro in the country in which the participants reside or the nearest embassy, with

reference to the UNECE Expert meeting on measuring poverty and inequality. If necessary, the Statistical Office of Montenegro can provide a letter to facilitate obtaining a visa. Please contact Ms. Majda Savicevic from the Statistical Office of Montenegro (majda.savicevic@monstat.org) for further questions regarding the visa.

VII. ACCOMMODATION, TRAVEL AND AIRPORT TRANSFER

30. The meetings will be held in the Hotel "Mediteran" at the address Bečići bb, 85310 Budva, Montenegro, tel +382 33 424 384, email prodaja@mediteran.me.

31. A block of rooms will be available at the Hotel "Mediteran" for a special rate of 75 EUR per night for a single room (100 EUR for a double room). Participants funded by UNECE will be booked into this hotel. Non-funded participants should contact the hotel directly by **15 August 2017** to make their reservation, referring to "UNECE meetings on poverty".

32. Participants are requested to make their own travel arrangements. The UNECE Secretariat will contact separately the participants funded by UNECE regarding travel.

33. Airport transfer for the participants of the meetings will be organized by the UNDP office in Montenegro. Please provide the information about your **arrival /departure times** directly to Ms. Ljiljana Radovic (ljiljana.radovic@undp.org) and Ms. Dubravka Obradovic (dubravka.obradovic@undp.org).

VIII. INFORMATION AND CORRESPONDENCE

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