



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
RESTRICTED

CES/1996/R.28
12 April 1996

ENGLISH ONLY¹

**STATISTICAL COMMISSION and ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS**

Forty-fourth plenary session
(Paris, 11-13 June 1996)

**HABITAT II
Declaration of the Conference of European Statisticians
on Statistics for Human Settlement and Shelter Policies**

Prepared by the Bureau of the UN/ECE Conference of European Statisticians
on behalf of the Conference

I. The Importance of Statistics for Human Settlements and Shelter Policies

1. Increasingly, the world's problems are urban problems, and the world's opportunities are urban opportunities. Urban growth is the major issue and the most formidable challenge in the transformation of human settlements. Urban areas will shelter 50 per cent of the world's population by the year 2000. During the period 1990 to 2030, the bulk of the world's population and economic growth will be located in urban areas.

2. This prospect places considerable stress on the existing tools for monitoring and managing the city, making them largely inadequate in providing an overall picture of the "urban universe" and its health. Most existing monitoring tools have, in fact, been sectoral in nature, restricted to one part of the city economy and society. Rarely do they provide means for understanding the relationship between policy and urban outcomes, the interaction between different sets of policy measures, the linkages among demographic, economic and environmental phenomena. Nor do they necessarily offer an indication of the relationships between the performance of individual sectors and broader social and economic development processes.

3. The lack of appropriate statistical information at the city level is creating a serious problem in conducting human settlement policy in both developed and developing countries. Major economic aggregates which might

¹ Due to limited capacity in the UNOG translation services, this document cannot be translated.

measure the health of the urban economy, such as city product, investment or trade, are not available. Other data which might measure the condition of the population, infrastructure and the environment, are available in some places but not others, and are seldom collected in a consistent national or international framework. Data which measure the internal spatial structure of the city, its economy and the distribution of opportunities, are not collected in many parts of the world.

4. Habitat II, the "City Summit", places great importance on the role of statistics for improving human settlements and shelter policies. The Conference aims at elaborating on the need for enhancing the quality of existing sources of data, strengthening collection and reporting methodologies, developing relevant and sound indicators, harmonizing statistical concepts, definitions and classifications, and promoting best practices in methods and techniques.

5. One of the two national objectives associated with the Habitat II Conference is "to strengthen the capacity of institutions at all levels to monitor shelter conditions and urbanization processes using a minimum set of substantially uniform and consistent indicators". The Indicators Programme being adopted for Habitat II seeks to obtain concordance in definitions and classifications, and provide advice and assistance on a country-by-country basis. Country reports on habitat conditions have to be based on facts and figures.

6. The Conference of European Statisticians: a) welcomes the growing awareness among experts and policy makers of the importance of statistics for human settlements policies; b) fully supports the initiatives taken on the collection and dissemination of human settlements statistics both at the regional and international level; c) recognizes the importance of human settlements indicators as developed by Habitat and urges Governments and international organizations to collect statistics, compile these indicators and use them for monitoring and reporting purposes; d) stresses the need for standardizing statistical concepts, definitions and classifications, and harmonizing methods and practices; e) calls on a more intensive and coherent use of data drawn from different sources, including censuses, sample surveys, administrative archives and registers, and on a more integrated approach to the analysis of basic data; f) will closely review the recommendations for implementing, at the national and international level, the results of Habitat II by developing consistent procedures for monitoring human settlements and evaluating policy requirements and outcomes.

7. The present Declaration of the Conference of European Statisticians wishes to point out the main directions and priorities for future action in the field of human settlements statistics.

II. Measuring the Quality of Shelter And Urban Life

8. Are urban systems "sustainable"? How does increased "mobility" of the population in numbers, direction, span and frequency affect the established equilibrium between population and territory? What kind of monitoring and information is required for "governance" of the emerging large metropolitan

complexes? What "inequalities", new and old, arise in the evolving organization of the city?

9. The inherent complexity of the issues calls for a systematic, comprehensive, fact-based and quantitative approach, relying on high-quality data. However, developing the statistical infrastructure for such an approach is in itself conditioned by the complexity of the underlying conceptual framework.

10. The first priority therefore is to adjust and strengthen the conceptual framework on which the formation of statistical data is based. Statisticians, in close contact with analysts and policy users, have to derive sound statistical concepts, definitions and classifications. The pressures and sensations shaping the quality of the urban environment and city life have to be transformed into measurable facts and figures. Sustainability, governance, social exclusion, the quality of life and the environment, inequalities, deprivation and rehabilitation each have to be made into precise concepts and definitions, capable of entering into the terms of reference for policy action and public scrutiny. Moreover, these measures have to be standardized to permit comparison across space and time and relate to statistical standards in other areas of economic or social statistics thereby enabling: 1) an analysis of cross-cutting themes; 2) the monitoring of linkages and sequences; and 3) the promotion of an integrated approach to urban issues.

11. Statistical data and concepts derive from sound theories, but the latter are validated by reliable data. Theory therefore needs empirical data, but meaningful data can only be produced by applying convincing theoretical frameworks. A process of continuous interaction and feedback between data production and analysis is essential in order to establish and maintain effective information systems. A close relationship needs to be promoted between statisticians and analysts, national statistical institutes and research communities; the former will have to be involved in the analysis of human settlement issues, the latter should become concerned with the availability and quality of the data. Statisticians have a lot to contribute by: 1) pointing out the sensitivity of measurement outcomes to the adjustment of concepts and classifications; 2) illustrating the trade-offs between timeliness and accuracy, and the enormous added value arising from geocodability and the adoption of statistical standards in administrative directories; 3) illustrating the importance of time patterns in the construction of data (night-time vs. day-time surveys) and the usefulness of linking sample survey information with administrative sources or other surveys; 4) evaluating the comparability of data over time and across space, the consistency of definitions and the trade-off between adjustment and continuity in the standards; and 5) assessing the costs and lead-time involved in setting up and monitoring an appropriate statistical infrastructure capable of providing early warnings and timely responses to urgent needs.

12. But the decisive levers are in the hands of Governments. They can, and should, make use of statistics and statistical expertise. An appropriate statistical infrastructure enables policy makers to take informed decisions by exploiting the available data. Effectiveness and accountability require a

policy process guided and evaluated by statistical information. Governments should commit themselves to closely linking their actions to statistics for policy analysis and evaluation. Governments need it. Citizens demand it.

III. Tapping the existing sources of data and filling the gaps

13. Sources of data on human settlements are numerous, diverse and disperse. Most countries have an official system of data collection on the stock of dwellings in place. A large number of government agencies hold relevant data; for instance the different authorities responsible for public utilities (water, transport, etc.). The sharing of responsibilities in relation to planning, education, housing, police, etc., and accordingly the resulting data, differ from country to country involving local, regional and sometimes state and federal levels, school districts, environmental and other specialized agencies. Administrative city records under certain conditions are a powerful source of statistical information. Important information can be drawn from censuses, income and expenditure surveys, household and enterprise surveys, multipurpose social surveys, industrial and price statistics, special ad-hoc investigations. However, often standard sources do not collect or tabulate data by urban/city categories. Classifications and definitions moreover are often inconsistent and unstable. The variability of administrative patterns and institutional arrangements affects the comparability of the figures. Programmes are sometimes not defined in such a way as to allow monitoring and assessment of inputs and results. There is little scope for cross-country comparisons and comparative policy analysis.

14. The national statistical institutes (NSIs) are an important provider of relevant statistics, but there are many other players and potential sources. Indeed, often NSIs may not be the primary producers of human settlements data. The main responsibility of NSIs, therefore, is that of promoting coherence, particularly by setting and implementing statistical standards, and encouraging the dialogue and cooperation among the many partners that need to be involved in the collection and dissemination of data, and in the design and management of databases.

15. It is however the responsibility of Governments to create the conditions for official statistics to play their role. Investing in official statistics represents an essential infrastructure for effective and democratic city management. Data should be used in the policy process for planning and decision-making, monitoring, evaluation and control. Statistics should feed political decisions on strategic options and taking responsibilities in urban communities by national and local governments, and all other parties concerned.

IV. Developing consistent and comprehensive indicators

16. The importance of indicators for measuring the performance of the city as a whole and for the development of urban policy has been clearly recognized. Habitat has identified three sets of indicators describing the characteristics of population and households, the urban context (infrastructure, transport, local government, environmental management and the socio-economic situation) and shelter conditions. The Commission on Human Settlements has endorsed the list of key indicators; it has urged Governments

to collect indicators at the national level, at least for one or more cities, and to use these indicators as the basis for country reporting related to the Habitat II Conference.

17. The Conference of European Statisticians (CES) welcomes the efforts being undertaken for promoting the use of indicators as a policy tool and expresses its support for the work done in the collection and processing of data and in the area of policy analysis necessary for the construction of reliable indicators.

18. Much however remains to be done, particularly in the following areas:

- a) Indicators have to be theory-driven, based on a better understanding of the underlying forces at work in city economies, of their interrelationships, of their capacity to determine outcomes, of the leads and lags involved, etc.
- b) Indicators have to measure not only inputs, but outcomes, the performance of policies and the reaction functions of the urban players. They must permit spatial and temporal comparison and impact and sensitivity analysis, while controlling for the many and different factors involved.
- c) Countries should develop a capacity to establish and systematically use sustainability indicators at the appropriate level. An enabling process must be set in motion, particularly in transition and developing countries, building up a knowledge of and interest in urban conditions by all stakeholders: national governments, local administrations, businesses and citizens. This process must be supported by effective institutions, more education and training, high participation and commitment as well as appropriate technologies and expertise.
- d) While countries will be guided by their own priorities in the selection of indicators, the exchange of experience and international comparability of results are proving to be increasingly valuable. For example, the Housing Indicators Program showed that the house price to income ratio was very different in otherwise comparable countries, and much of the price difference could be traced to differences in land development policies. Setting a core of international standards and norms will produce a set of internationally relevant indicators for policy dialogue and the identification of best practices.
- e) Indicators should not only represent average or median situations, but also monitor the distribution and variability of phenomena. They should identify who are the winners and who are the losers, and whether social progress is occurring, along with changes in the redistribution of income and wealth, in social exclusion and labor market participation.

19. Statistical institutes at the national level and the international community of statisticians at large can provide invaluable support for the development of an indicators programme. They have the experience and expertise in data collection, analysis and processing, and possess a wide range of professional interests in applied statistics covering the economic, social and environmental field, thus enabling a comprehensive and integrated understanding of urban processes. They usually are in close contact with the world of research, bridging the gaps that exist between policy applications and academic analysis. They possess the independence and technical authority required for credibility in policy analysis. This independence of judgment is often guaranteed by institutional mechanisms, and always enshrined in the ethical code defined by the "Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics", established and regularly reviewed by the CES.

20. Statisticians also possess a wealth of data which can be drawn upon for the construction of indicators, and can appreciate data sources and gaps in planning the further development of an effective human settlements information system. Finally, NSI experience with national accounts and satellite accounts puts them in a strong position to contribute to the development of accounting frameworks capable of describing linkages and sequences affecting human settlements, and relating them to standard indicators of economic well-being or the quality of life.

21. In many countries statistical techniques relating to Geographic Information Systems (GIS), cartography and remote sensing have been considered an important tool for sustainable development policies. The preparation of maps through remote sensing imagery permits an illustration of the land-cover and land-use on a territory, with its links to human activity on the one hand, and to the natural environment on the other. An effective and integrated GIS is a powerful instrument for: a) identification of the physical boundaries of towns; b) the classification of land-use in an urban environment; and, c) the delineation of urban agglomerations; but it must be constructed upon harmonized classifications and statistical standards and norms.

V. Enhancing the role of National Statistical Institutes for Human Settlements Statistics Development

22. The challenges ahead require the full involvement and commitment of statisticians at the national and international level. The growing demand for high-quality human settlements statistics can only be met if the institutions responsible for official statistics exploit to the fullest their competence, skills, reputation, authority and other resources, including technologies and data, thereby promoting capability building through: 1) the application of techniques; 2) support for monitoring and indicators; 3) the development of standards, methods and norms; and, 4) coordinating the efforts of the many players active in the field.

23. In determining the causes of the current urban crisis and monitoring the progress toward achieving sustainable urban development, it is increasingly necessary to rely on effective information tools to analyze the performance of cities, within countries and on a world-wide basis. It is also necessary to have accurate and timely data on key policy variables at the

city level, and performance indicators which measure conditions and changes at the city level. It is this gap at the interface between policy and data that the NSIs activities intend to address.

24. Governments have a major responsibility in ensuring that NSIs develop their expertise in human settlement statistics and perform their functions. Policy makers are the main users and stakeholders in this process. They will also be the first beneficiaries of improved statistical capacity in this area. Therefore Governments need to make a strong and visible commitment to enhancing the role of NSIs for the development of high quality shelter and human settlements statistics.

25. Statistics are the antennae of the city, and the navigators of its citizens. Greater attention should be given to the role and contribution of statisticians, and more resources should be made available to enable them to carry out their fundamental task in cooperation with the policy and research world in the service of the citizen.