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CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

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Prioritisation of the Conference's Work Programme: Explanatory note

Recommendations prepared by the secretariat and endorsed by the CES Bureau

I. Background

1. At its 54th session in May 1999 the Economic Commission for Europe agreed to revise the system of prioritisation that Principal Subsidiary Bodies of the ECE are required to use as a result of the outcome of the 1997 Reform of the Commission. The Commission agreed that PSBs should henceforth prioritise their activities using a proforma, in preparation for the biennial programme budget submission for the Commission. This proforma was developed by the Commission's Group of Experts on the Programme of Work (GEPW), and it is intended to allow the GEPW to compare the activities of PSBs on a cross-sectoral basis, with information provided in similar formats.

2. The contents of this explanatory note were drawn up jointly by the GEPW and the secretariat. It is intended to explain the revised system and offer guidance to the PSBs for future reference. The note also outlines the roles and responsibilities of the GEPW, the Secretariat and the PSBs in the prioritisation process; describes the individual sections of the proforma; and explains the procedure for preparing and completing the proforma.

II. Roles and Responsibilities of each Group

3. There are three main groups involved in the prioritisation exercise:
- a) the Group of Experts on the Programme of Work (GEPW);
 - b) the ECE secretariat (including the Office of the Executive Secretary and the Divisional Directors); and
 - c) the individual PSBs (and their Bureaux).

Each group plays a specific and significant part in ensuring the effectiveness of the new system, which is designed to ensure that all three groups work together rather than individually.

a) Group of Experts on the Programme of Work

4. The GEPW was established in accordance with the ECE Plan of Action, which was adopted by the Commission at its fifty-second session in 1997. The Group's mandate is:

(i) to examine the programmes of work of the PSBs and to advise on arbitration between the competing additional demands from PSBs when they imply significant shifts among these programmes;

(ii) to advise on how to adjust the programme of work according to possible changes in orientation, to anticipated changes in the level of resources for the next biennium or, in respect of the current biennium, to unexpected changes of such a magnitude that it would have a significant impact on the existing programme of work.

5. The GEPW is responsible for ensuring that the direction of ECE work concurs with the wishes of the individual member States. The overall orientation of ECE's activities can be altered by changing, as necessary, the resource allocation to each PSB. This may follow an increase or decrease in the total budgetary allocation. It may also follow a consensus among the member States to place more or less emphasis on individual areas of activity, with no impact on the total ECE resource base.

6. The GEPW was not established to supervise or to micro-manage the work of individual PSBs. It has no remit to make arbitrary decisions on resource allocations between PSBs. Any recommendation to redistribute resources between PSBs would only be put to the Commission after having consulted the relevant Divisional Directors. The Commission would then need to formally adopt the recommendations of the GEPW. Even then, it would be for the PSBs themselves to determine how a change in the level of their resources should be most effectively applied, since the experts on each Committee are best placed

to decide which activities would benefit from, or be least harmed by, a change in the PSB resource allocation.

7. In consultation with the respective PSBs through Divisional Directors and PSB Secretaries (who would in turn consult the PSB Bureaux), the GEPW will determine the clusters of activities to be prioritised for each PSB.

8. The GEPW will meet in the autumn preceding the submission of the budget narrative by the Executive Secretary. This meeting will determine, in the light of information contained in the proformas and any supplementary information submitted, whether it is necessary to recommend the allocation or redistribution of resources to or between the PSBs. The GEPW may also be convened on an ad hoc basis at the request of the Bureau of the Commission, the Chairman of the GEPW or the Executive Secretary. Individual member States may also formally request the Bureau or the Chairman of the GEPW to convene a meeting of the Group to discuss any other issues relevant to the mandate of the GEPW.

b) The ECE secretariat

9. Divisional Directors and PSB Secretaries will be consulted on the clusters of activity to be prioritised on the proforma, which will be based on the structure of the programme of work established by the PSB. Divisional Directors will also be responsible for overseeing the prioritisation exercise in the PSBs for which they are responsible.

10. The Office of the Executive Secretary will supervise the prioritisation exercise as a whole. It will also collate the completed proformas (with supplementary information if submitted) for consideration by the GEPW. It will advise the GEPW on budgetary and administrative matters in ECE that are relevant to the work of the GEPW, and it will convene and attend meetings between the GEPW and other parties (Bureaux of PSBs, Divisional Directors, PSB Chairpersons) as necessary.

c) PSBs and their Bureaux

11. The PSB Bureaux should aim to present the PSB with a draft completed proforma for discussion and agreement at its annual session. It may request an informal meeting with the Chairman or a representative of the GEPW if any further clarification is required.

12. The PSBs should ensure that the completed proforma meets the requirements of the GEPW. In addition, it may submit any supplementary information that the PSB wishes to draw to the attention of the GEPW.

III. The proforma

13. An example of a blank proforma is shown in Annex I. It consists of two main sections: a prioritisation table listing the clusters (or main subject areas) of activity for each PSB; and two boxes relating to the impact of a change in the level of staff resources.

14. On the prioritisation table, PSBs should allocate a level of priority (Higher, Medium or Lower) to each cluster of activities identified on the proforma. Given their limited size, PSBs that account for less than 5% of total ECE resources (Human Settlements, Timber and Sustainable Energy) may, if necessary, prioritise on a two-tier basis (Higher or Lower). Each priority level must contain at least one cluster of activity. PSBs should also identify the number of regular budget Professional staff (excluding Divisional Directors) for each cluster of activities. This need not be a round number, for a cluster of activities may, for example, cover 1.3 or 2.7 staff.

15. The two additional boxes on the proforma will ask the PSBs to consider the impact on their activities in the event of an addition or a reduction of one staff member. This will help the PSB to consider potential new areas of activity and the impact of a budget reduction. PSBs are encouraged to consider carrying out new activities from within their existing resource allocation, in which case prior reference to the GEPW is not necessary. The GEPW need only be consulted if additional resources were required.

IV. Procedures to be used in preparing and completing the Proforma

16. For each PSB, the Chairman of the GEPW would discuss the clusters of activity to be prioritised (and therefore placed in the proforma), with the PSB Secretary and the Divisional Director who would in turn consult their respective PSB Bureau.

17. Once the clusters of activities have been determined, the PSB will be asked to complete the proforma. Ideally, the Bureau of the PSB should complete the proforma in draft before submitting it to the Committee at its annual session in the budget submission year.

18. The prioritisation table must be discussed and agreed by the PSB as a whole. For the boxes, in the absence of consensus, the PSB can submit (on

supplementary pages if necessary) the different options expressed by member States.

19. The completed proforma, once agreed by the Committee, should be passed to the Office of the Executive Secretary for collation on behalf of the GEPW in advance of the submission by the Executive Secretary of the budget narrative.

V. Conclusion

20. The revised prioritisation process is intended to be both co-operative and consultative. Any problems that are identified during the process should be discussed and resolved as soon as possible, to ensure that the end result is not affected. For that purpose, the GEPW will be available for consultation, and would welcome the opportunity to discuss or clarify the concerns of PSBs as necessary.

VI. Draft Proforma for the Conference's work programme

21. A proposed draft proforma for the Conference's work programme is presented in Annex II. The Bureau is invited to review the draft from the standpoint of both the expectations of the GEPW and the Conference. The Bureau may wish to introduce amendments to the draft when deemed appropriate.

The Bureau is expected to agree on a draft which both the Bureau and the Conference will be content with, so that the Conference will be able to endorse it at its 2000 plenary session. Once that has been done, the secretariat would then pass it on to the Office of the Executive Secretary for collation on behalf of the GEPW.

22. If the suggested prioritization shown in Annex II meets with the approval of the Bureau, it would then be submitted to the plenary session of the Conference in June together with a recommendation from the Bureau that it should be endorsed by the Conference.

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SECTION 1: PRIORITISATION

Please complete the following prioritisation table. Each priority level (Higher, Medium or Lower) must contain at least one cluster of activities. The number of regular budget Professional staff (excluding the Divisional Director) must be shown against each cluster of activity e.g. 0.7, 1.4 etc.

No	Clusters (or Main Subject Areas) of Activities	Priority Level (H, M, L)	Regular Budget Professional Staff
1			
2			
3			
4			
5 etc.			

SECTION 2: ACTIVITY OPTIONS

With the addition of one extra staff member, what additional activities would the Committee consider?

With the reduction of one staff member, what activities would the Committee consider reducing?

Annex II: Draft Proforma for the CES Work Programme

SECTION 1: PRIORITISATION

No	Clusters (or Main Subject Areas) of Activities	Priority Level (H, M, L)	Regular Budget Professional Staff
1	Programme Activity 1: Organisation and operation of statistical services	H	2.38
2	Programme Activity 2: Technical infrastructure and other cross-cutting issues	H	2.33
3	Programme Activity 3: Economic statistics	H	4.18
4	Programme Activity 4: Social and demographic statistics	H	1.48
5	Programme Activity 5: Environment statistics	M	0.17
6	Programme Activity 6: Dissemination and support for secretariat activities	H,M,L	7.46 <u>a/</u>
	Total, all Programme Activity Areas	--	Total = 18 posts

a/ Programme Activity 6 includes the regular budget professional posts in the Statistical Division which are used to support work carried out by the Economic Analysis Division on the three annual issues of the Economic Survey for Europe.

SECTION 2: ACTIVITY OPTIONS

With the addition of one extra staff member, what additional activities would the Conference consider?

If the Statistical Division were to receive one additional post, it would be used primarily to strengthen the work that the Division would undertake in collaboration with other international organisations in contributing to reconstruction and international statistical cooperation in the Western Balkans or Southeast Europe. In addition, policy surveillance monitoring and evaluation is generating an increasing demand for indicators, particularly in the social, environmental and institutional fields. Therefore, a share of the additional staff member would be devoted to supporting the Conference in playing a promotion and co-ordinating role in the area of indicators in Cupertino with other international organisations active in the field. This would also benefit other ECE Divisions where there is work on indicators by providing databases and links with statistical offices; and would facilitate linking the Conference and NSIs with policy decision making, analysis and debate.

With the reduction of one staff member, what activities would the Conference consider reducing?

Staff allocated to Programme Activities 1-4 cannot be reduced because of the "high" priority of these activities for Statistical Offices and of the already low level of resources available for their implementation. Programme Activity 6 was designated as a "high" priority area in the 1997 ECE reform process and has recently been augmented following that directive. This activity includes regular budget professional posts in the Statistical Division which are used for statistical support for economic and other sectoral analyses (notably, the "Economic Survey of Europe"), ECE common database development and data dissemination. Notwithstanding this, in the event of a one-post reduction to the Statistical Division, this would inevitably result in a curtailment or scaling down of activities in the following two main areas of work of the Division (i) support work for the CES in subject-matter fields of statistics covered in Programme Activities 1-5; and (ii) support work that the Division gives to the Economic Analysis Division and other Divisions of the ECE in Programme Activity 6.
