

# UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

## CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

### HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 52<sup>nd</sup> PLENARY SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS (Paris, 8-10 June 2004)

- \* The Conference of European Statisticians held its fifty-second plenary session in Paris at the invitation of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The Conference was attended by over 150 delegates representing 55 national delegations (of which 7 delegations from non-ECE member countries) and 15 international organizations, UN departments and specialised agencies.
- \* Mrs. Brigita Schmögnerová, Executive Secretary of the ECE, addressed the Conference and highlighted the progress made in its work. She also referred to the new challenges for UNECE and CES in the context of the EU enlargement. Ms. Schmögnerová expressed her appreciation that the priorities of the Conference include also those emanating from United Nations global conferences and world summits.
- \* The plenary session was organised for the second time according to the new structure in three parts, as decided by the 50<sup>th</sup> Conference in 2002: one session to deal with formal business and two seminar sessions to deal with foundational issues of statistical systems and new emerging issues respectively.
- \* The first seminar session – on foundational issues of statistical systems - was organised by Statistics Finland and dealt with national statistical systems. It considered the coordination, independence, integrity and credibility of official statistics, issues generating demand for statistics and official statistics as a brand. The keywords in the discussion were quality and credibility. The Conference agreed that maintaining credibility requires constant daily work and staff is the key to success. The importance of adhering to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and promoting the Principles among all statistics producers was underlined. The Conference emphasised the need for a pro-active approach by statistical agencies to meet the increasing demand for statistics to measure the new economic and social developments.
- \* The second seminar - on new emerging issues – was organised by ONS, United Kingdom and focused on measuring the prices and volume of the service sector. The importance of statistics on services is increasing steadily as the service sector constitutes about 60-70 percent of GDP in developed economies and is rapidly growing in the transition and developing economies. The seminar looked at the current international practice for measuring prices and volume in the services sector, measuring non-market services, output measures of services volume and the use of service statistics by external users. The challenge is to implement the handbooks and manuals prepared in recent years. The need for cooperation and sharing of knowledge at the international level in this area was underlined. It was pointed out that there is some imbalance between data produced on manufacturing and on services. This issue has to be addressed at the policy level.
- \* The Conference approved the Guidelines that set the procedures for creating various groups of specialists to work under the Conference and its Bureau.

- \* The Conference reviewed the purpose, recent and future developments of the Integrated Presentation (IP) of international statistical work programmes. The Conference agreed that IP has been an efficient tool to enable the Conference and its Bureau to coordinate the statistically related work that international organizations undertake in the ECE region. Several changes are expected to the structure of the IP and to the procedure of its review and updating. A Task Force to review the classification of statistical activities of the IP has been created. The full version of the IP is available in a database format (<http://unece.unog.ch/IntPres/>) since June 2003. An overview of the statistical activities of other regional commissions, namely ECLAC, ESCAP and ESCWA, was also provided.
- \* The Conference made an in-depth review of Environment Statistics. The difficulties encountered in the coordination of environment statistics were analysed. Although there has been some progress in recent years, it is essential to continue the efforts of streamlining data reporting to international organizations. The Conference recommended that the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics (ISWGES) review the issues related to overlaps in data collection and improving coordination, and report to the next Conference in 2005.
- \* As a follow-up to the seminar on confidentiality and access to microdata held in 2003, a Task Force was set up to develop internationally agreed principles on the provision of access to microdata. The Task Force presented a progress report and the draft principles. The discussion paper is available on the ECE Statistical Division's web page at <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/tfcm.htm>. Countries and international organizations were invited to send their comments on the paper to [confidentiality@unece.org](mailto:confidentiality@unece.org) by 30 June 2004. It is planned to submit the revised draft to the Bureau meeting on 18-19 October and to finalise the principles by the beginning of 2005.
- \* As a follow-up to the seminar on globalisation held in 2003, an experiment on measuring the activities of multinational enterprises is being carried out: the MNE project. The list of variables to be covered and a framework for the data sharing and confidentiality has been agreed. The five participating countries (Canada, France, Italy, the Netherlands and United Kingdom) have started to establish lists of MNEs with headquarters in their countries. In the first round, data from one MNE in each country will be collected. The preliminary results of the project are expected to be presented to the Roundtable on Business Survey Frames at the end of October 2004 and to the CES Bureau on 18-19 October 2004.
- \* The Conference agreed to hold its 53<sup>rd</sup> plenary session on 13-15 June 2005 in Geneva. The following topics were selected for the two seminar sessions:
  - a) the session on foundational issues of statistical systems:  
Improved data reporting: (i) electronic reporting; (ii) decreasing burden on respondents;
  - b) the session on new, emerging issues:  
Measurement of sustainable development: what is the role of official statistics, what are the analytical tools that are needed to measure it and what kind of information needs to be collected.
- \* All documents for the 52<sup>nd</sup> Conference of European Statisticians are available on the ECE website at the following address: <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2004.06.ces.htm>  
For further information, please contact: Lidia Bratanova, Secretary of the CES, Statistical Division, UN Economic Commission for Europe, Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Tel: (4122) 917 17 72, E-mail: [lidia.bratanova@unece.org](mailto:lidia.bratanova@unece.org)