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COORDINATION OF INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL WORK IN THE UNECE REGION

**SURVEY ON HOUSING STATISTICS: AREAS WHERE FUTURE WORK MIGHT BE
UNDERTAKEN AT INTERNATIONAL LEVEL**

Note by the secretariat

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Following a request of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES), the secretariat of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) carried out a survey among the CES members to find out priority areas of housing statistics where future work might be undertaken at international level. The secretariat prepared a questionnaire with the help of Australia, Brazil, Finland, Latvia and Poland. The questionnaire was sent to CES members in April 2009. A Russian version of the questionnaire was also sent to the CIS countries. The secretariat would like to thank the National Statistical Committee of Kyrgyzstan for providing unofficial translation of the questionnaire into Russian.

2. The questionnaire consisted of 4 parts:

(a) The production of housing related statistics at national level by the following categories: Statistics related to dwelling stocks; Economic and financial statistics related to housing; Energy/environment related housing statistics; and Social and demographic statistics related to housing and space-related statistics;

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(b) Topics with regular or occasional production of official statistics for which international comparability would add significant value;

(c) Topics for which at present there is no regular production of official statistics but which are considered for inclusion in the regular statistical production in future;

(d) Priority areas in housing statistics where international standards, guidelines, recommendations, etc. would be needed.

3. Countries were asked to indicate data availability and their priorities according to the list of housing topics prepared by the secretariat of the UNECE. Multiple answers were possible.

4. By the end of May, **replies and comments to the questionnaire were received from 42 countries¹**: Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States sent a number of questionnaires that were filled in by different agencies. These were consolidated by secretariat. **Three international organizations also replied** and provided comments to the questionnaire: European Central Bank, Eurostat and the IMF.

5. The high number of replies received to the questionnaire is an indication of interest from CES members on the topic of housing statistics. In the sections that follow the number of countries that replied to a particular question is indicated in brackets.

II. DATA AVAILABILITY AND PRODUCTION OF HOUSING STATISTICS AT NATIONAL LEVEL

6. The first part of the questionnaire investigated the production at national level of statistical data related to specific elements of housing statistics with different periodicity within and outside official statistics.

7. The highest number of responses to the question about the availability of **at least annual, regular production of official statistics** was received on topics from economic and financial statistics related to housing, from statistics related to dwelling stocks, and from social and demographic statistics related to housing.

8. The topics where most of the countries have available data are:

(a) Construction and increase in dwelling stock (34 countries);

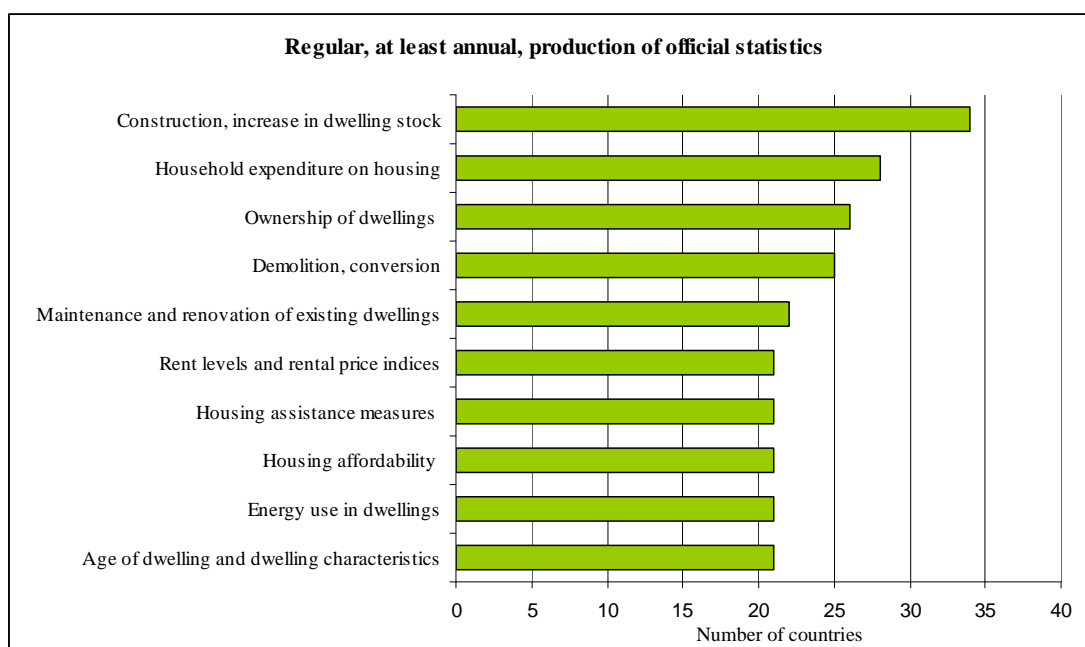
¹ Two countries (Japan and Spain) replied after the paper was submitted to the CES plenary session (8-10 June 2009)

- (b) Household expenditure on housing (28 countries);
- (c) Ownership of dwellings (26 countries);
- (d) Demolition and conversion (25 countries);
- (e) Maintenance and renovation of existing dwellings (22 countries).

9. Half of the countries that replied to the questionnaire reported the availability of at least annual and regular data production in areas of energy use in dwellings, housing assistance measures, housing affordability, rent levels and rental price indices as well as age of dwellings and dwelling characteristics (see Graph 1).

Graph 1

Regular, at least annual, production of official statistics



10. **Regular production of official statistics, less than annual** was indicated mainly for topics from economic and financial statistics related to housing and social and demographic statistics related to housing:

- (a) Overcrowding (13 countries);
- (b) Energy use in dwellings (12 countries);
- (c) Age of dwellings and dwelling characteristics (12 countries).

11. The reported **frequency** for regularly available data varies from 2 to 6 years and in some cases 10 years (if data are received from the Population and Housing census). However, for some indicators, information is available on a more frequent basis than annually. On a monthly, quarterly or semi-annual basis, the following data are available:

- Transaction prices for dwellings;
- Rental price indices and rent levels;
- Price of building plots;
- Construction and increase in dwelling stock;
- Demolition and conversion.

12. The main sources used for these frequently produced indicators are the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and issued administrative permits or sample surveys.

13. Only a few countries regularly produce official statistics (both at least annual and less than annual) on

- Exposure of dwellings to natural disasters;
- Secure tenure arrangements; and
- Conversion of land used for other purposes into land used for housing.

14. **Occasional outputs of statistics** are mainly indicated for social and demographic statistics related to housing and statistics related to dwelling stocks.

15. Eleven countries indicated occasional output of official statistics in the areas of energy use in dwellings, age of dwelling, dwelling characteristics and accessibility from home to major facilities; nine countries reported data on homelessness; and eight countries reported data on dwellings not used as main residence and time spent at home (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Occasional outputs of official statistics

Item	Number of responses
Accessibility from home to major facilities	11
Age of dwelling and dwelling characteristics	11
Energy use in dwellings	11
Homelessness	9
Time spent at home	8
Dwellings not used as main residence	8
Overcrowding	7

16. The main sources used for regular or occasional official statistics are as follows:

- Population and Housing census;
- Microcensus;
- EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC);
- Time use survey;

- Household budget survey; and
- Other regular or occasional surveys as well as administrative data (permits).

17. **Regular production of statistics outside official statistics** is seen relatively less frequently in CES member countries. These kind of data are available for:

- Transaction prices for dwellings (5 countries);
- Conversion of land used for other purposes into land used for housing (4 countries);
- Age of dwelling and dwelling characteristics, homelessness, mortgage defaults and arrears, housing affordability, construction, maintenance and renovation of existing dwellings, price of building plots, safety and accidents at home, use of land for dwellings and greenhouse gas emission from dwellings (3 countries).

18. **Occasional production of statistics outside official statistics** was reported mainly in the area of social and demographic statistics related to housing and economic and financial statistics related to housing:

- Four countries indicated having produced data outside official statistics about homelessness and exposure to nuisances;
- Three countries indicated having information about transaction prices for dwellings and housing assistance measures.

19. It should be noted that only seven countries reported on the production of housing statistics outside official statistics.

20. **The production at national level is planned in future or is under development** of statistics related to:

- (a) Age of dwellings and dwelling characteristics (7 countries);
- (b) Energy use in dwellings (7 countries);
- (c) Demolition and conversion (7 countries);
- (d) Exposure of dwellings to natural disasters (7 countries);
- (e) Transaction prices for dwellings (8 countries).

III. INTERNATIONAL COMPARABILITY OF EXISTING DATA

21. Housing is mainly a local or regional issue. Therefore, striving for international comparability of housing data is not an immediately obvious priority area for statistical offices. Nevertheless, international comparability might add significant value for national users. Thus countries were asked to select up to 3 topics among those listed in the questionnaire for which there are regular or occasional data produced and for which, in their opinion, international comparability would be a major gain.

22. Responses to this question were received from 25 countries. No specific topics emerged that could be identified as priority areas to aim for international comparability. Areas selected by countries are:

- (a) **transaction prices of dwellings** (8 countries);
- (b) **rent levels and rental price indices, and construction, increase in dwelling stock** (7 countries);
- (c) **household expenditure on housing and ownership of dwellings** (5 countries).

Table 2

Items, for which international comparability would add significant value

Item	Number of responses
Statistics related to dwelling stocks	8
Transaction prices for dwellings	8
Rent levels and rental price indices	7
Construction, increase in dwelling stock	7
Economic and financial statistics related to housing:	6
Household expenditure on housing	5
Ownership of dwellings	5
Social and demographic statistics related to housing	4
Overcrowding	4

23. Several countries indicated only broad groups of housing indicators, such as statistics related to dwelling stocks and economic and financial statistics related to housing. It is not clear which indicators are meant.

24. Other topics, not mentioned in the list, however for which the need for international comparability was stressed are: house price indices, collective households and household waste.

25. Some international activities have already been undertaken in the area of House Price Indices (HPI). Eurostat is undertaking pilot work with European Union (EU) countries to develop House Price Indices. Eurostat will also prepare a new international handbook on Residential Property Price Indices in agreement with the Inter-Secretariat Working Group of Price Indices (IWGPS). Several countries and international organizations reported that the HPIs are a major challenge because of the nature of data sources used and the need for consistency in terms of methods.

IV. REGULAR STATISTICAL PRODUCTION IN FUTURE

26. Thirty-two countries responded to this question. There are several areas in housing statistics for which at present there is no regular production of official statistics but which are considered for inclusion in the regular statistical production in future as follows:

- (a) Housing affordability (4 countries);
- (b) Safety and accidents at home (4 countries);
- (c) Transaction prices for dwellings (3 countries);
- (d) Financing of ownership (3 countries);
- (e) Energy use in dwellings (3 countries);
- (f) Dwellings not used as main residence (3 countries);
- (g) Age of dwelling and dwelling characteristics (3 countries);
- (h) Accessibility from home to major facilities (3 countries);
- (i) Time spent at home (3 countries).

27. In addition, three countries informed about plans to produce statistics about owner occupied housing, and two countries plan to produce data on price indices of new detached (residential) houses. Material deprivation, measuring the relative impact of various factors on energy use, house building cost, information technology and communication, recreational life and financing of multi-unit structures were mentioned among other topics where regular production of official statistics is planned in future.

V. PRIORITY AREAS FOR INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

28. Given the importance of such indices in the current global crisis, both countries and international organizations expressed interest in **house price indices**.

29. The European Central Bank and Eurostat attach a high priority to the 3 statistics that have been included in the so-called list of Principal European Economic Indicators (PEEIs):

- The residential property price indices;
- House sales; and
- Building permits.

30. More aligned methodological national practices would certainly improve the reliability of the experimental European Central Bank (ECB) residential property price indicator and the frequency of the indicator could also be improved. Considering the strong influence of house prices on the economy and financial position of households, it is recommended to continue further harmonisation in this field in collaboration with Eurostat, ECB and EU member states.

31. The countries who responded to the questionnaire have noted the necessity of having international standards, guidelines or recommendations on the following:

- (a) Housing affordability (5 countries);
- (b) House price indices (4 countries + 4 countries on closely related topics);
- (c) Homelessness (4 countries);
- (d) Overcrowding / square meters per person (3 countries);
- (e) Energy use in dwellings (2 countries);
- (f) Secure tenure arrangements (2 countries).

32. Several countries supported work on social and demographic statistics and on economic and financial statistics related to housing in general without identifying specific indicators.

33. Countries also emphasised the need for internationally agreed definitions, and for methodological help. A statistical compendium on key housing data across EU member countries or regional level would be valuable for comparative analysis by governmental institutions and researchers. Analyzing the best practices in connection with the Population and Housing census would be of benefit to the improvement of the quality of data on housing. Classifications and accounting procedures, standardized guidelines to improve data quality and the ability to perform international comparisons would be necessary to improve data quality, coverage and comparability.

VI. CONCLUSION

34. The aim of the survey was to identify priority areas where international work on housing statistics could be undertaken.

35. In most countries who replied to the survey there is currently regular production of official statistics on economic and financial data related to housing, and social and demographic statistics related to housing. The majority of respondents reported occasional outputs of official statistics in the area of social and demographic statistics related to housing. Regular or occasional output outside official statistics is not common in member states; nevertheless, it has been reported in areas of social and economic statistics related to housing. Many countries plan to make available or improve social and demographic statistics related to housing.

36. Most countries noted economic and financial statistics as an area for which there is no or limited production of official statistics, but which is considered for regular production in future. Work in this area should be undertaken in collaboration with the international organizations on the development of guidelines.

37. No common topic emerged where international comparability would add value to housing statistics. Broad areas of economic and financial statistics and statistics related to dwelling stocks were mentioned, but opinions differ in the details. Some concrete areas were mentioned, such as HPI, where international work is already being undertaken.

38. The survey showed that it is essential that a standard international set of definitions, accounting procedures and guidelines be established to ensure international comparability.

39. The surveyed countries noted three main outputs of international work that could be helpful for the national statistical offices:

- (a) Better comparability of housing data;
- (b) General guidelines, recommendations;
- (c) Best practices on collecting housing data.

40. The survey did not identify a clear priority area in housing statistics where international work should be undertaken.

41. The Conference is invited to comment on the outcome of the survey. The Conference is also invited to request the CES Bureau to analyse the results of the survey and the discussion at the CES plenary session at its October 2009 meeting, and to decide on follow-up actions as appropriate and report back to the Conference in June 2010.

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