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Item 5 of the provisional agenda

Integrating geospatial data and official statistics

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Note by the secretariat

Summary

This document presents an overview of developments since the previous Conference of European Statisticians plenary session relating to integration of geospatial information with official statistics.

The Conference is invited to express its views on further collaboration between the United Nations initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) Europe and the secretariat, how best to support work to develop a European Statistical Geospatial Framework, and suggest further practical steps to facilitate the integration of geospatial and statistical information.

This document is presented following the decision taken at the 64th plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians, (ref. ECE/CES/89, para. 76 and further elaborated in paragraph 89).

I. Background

1. The United Nations initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) was formally established in 2011 by a resolution of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Regional sub-groups, including UN-GGIM: Europe were subsequently created. UN-GGIM aims to play a leading role in setting the agenda for the development of global geospatial information, and to promote its use to address key global challenges. It provides a forum to liaise and coordinate among Member States, and between Member States and international organizations.
2. In July 2016, ECOSOC adopted another resolution on strengthening institutional arrangements on geospatial information management. Amongst other things, this resolution “requests that the regional commissions provide relevant support, upon request and as appropriate, to the work of the regional bodies of the United Nations Initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management, and that the outcomes and benefits of the activities of those bodies be equally disseminated to all Member States in each region”. This resolution further called for the integration of geospatial and statistical information systems.
3. The secretariat for UN-GGIM at the global level is provided by the Statistical Division of the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). The Statistical Divisions of the five UN regional commissions are actively encouraged to engage with the corresponding UN-GGIM regional sub-groups. This link has already been established in Africa and Latin America, and is under development in the other regions.
4. The UNECE Secretariat has followed the work of UN-GGIM: Europe since it was created in 2014, attending all of the plenary sessions, as well as the initial meeting of the Executive Committee in Moldova in 2014. During 2015, the chairs of UN-GGIM (at the global level) and UN-GGIM: Europe both visited Geneva to discuss possible collaboration with UNECE managers.
5. The 2016 ECOSOC resolution quoted above resulted in discussions in three successive meetings of the UNECE Executive Committee on how to respond to the ECOSOC requirements. This committee is composed of ambassadors of UNECE Member States, and approves UNECE work plans and priorities. It has recognised the importance of geospatial information in many areas of UNECE’s work programme, and has supported greater collaboration with UN-GGIM: Europe on this topic.
6. UNECE representatives attended the UN-GGIM: Europe Executive Committee meeting in Malta in January 2017 to explore the possibilities for closer collaboration, resulting in agreements for joint work in several areas.
7. In February 2017, the chair of UN-GGIM: Europe wrote to the head of UNECE expressing the willingness of UN-GGIM: Europe to explore ways to collaborate, and to develop a joint proposal to this effect, covering potential benefits, value added, funding and support, areas for collaboration, a transitional period and the future.
8. The outcome of the activities described above was a decision by the Economic Commission for Europe (the ministerial-level governing body of UNECE) in April 2017, the text of which reads: The Economic Commission for Europe “Decides to request UNECE to engage with the United Nations Initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM: Europe), within existing resources, to gain a better understanding of how geospatial information can complement and support existing UNECE activities, particularly in the area of reviewing progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, and to present a detailed proposal for collaboration between the two bodies, taking into account the decision of the Conference of European Statisticians of

April 2016 to support professional forums for statistical and geospatial experts to share good practices and learn from one another (ECE/CES/91) and a forthcoming decision on the nature and scope of this collaboration by the UN-GGIM: Europe Plenary Session, to be held in June 2017, for the consideration of the UNECE Executive Committee before December 2017.”

9. UN-GGIM: Europe held its Plenary Session in Brussels on 7-8 June 2017. It agreed to prepare a detailed proposal on collaboration with the UNECE Secretariat, for consideration by the UNECE Executive Committee before the end of 2017. A European Statistical Geospatial Framework is being developed. It was proposed that CES could consider how best to support this work. It was also agreed that future activities of UN-GGIM: Europe will be open to participation from all UNECE Member Countries, as requested by ECOSOC.

II. Enhancing collaboration

10. A first practical step to increase collaboration is the organisation of a joint UNECE / UN-GGIM: Europe workshop on statistical and geospatial standards. This workshop will be held in Sweden on 6-8 November 2017. It will bring together experts from both the statistical and geospatial standards communities to highlight how geospatial data sources, methods and standards can be integrated into the production of official statistics, and to identify a plan for future collaboration to support integration and interoperability of statistical and geospatial standards.

11. Other collaborative activities have been agreed with the UN-GGIM: Europe Executive Committee including:

(a) Sharing information of common interest. For example, both UNECE and UN-GGIM: Europe have projects on data integration but from two different perspectives. It was agreed to collaborate on this topic;

(b) UNECE will support the work of the UN-GGIM: Europe with relevant information on UN Rules and procedures, for example on UN treatment of disputed boundaries.

12. The UN-GGIM: Europe Plenary Session also noted the important opportunities for collaboration related to the 2020 round of population and housing censuses. Moreover, geospatial information is of particular importance in the context of reporting on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals where the indicators often have a strong geographic dimension. This is a key priority for UNECE and the whole UN system.

III. Proposal to the Conference

13. The Conference is invited to:

(a) Express its views on the nature of further collaboration between UN-GGIM: Europe and the UNECE secretariat;

(b) Express its views on how best to support work to develop a European Statistical Geospatial Framework;

(c) Suggest further practical steps to facilitate the integration of geospatial and statistical information.