

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

ECE/CES/BUR/2012/FEB/17
1 February 2012

Third Meeting of the 2011/2012 Bureau
Luxembourg, 7-8 February 2012

For discussion and recommendations

Item 9(b) of the Provisional
Agenda

**CES 2012 SEMINAR ON IMPLEMENTING THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES
OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS, INCLUDING ISSUES RELATED TO
COORDINATION OF NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEMS**

**Note prepared by the UNECE secretariat, in consultation with Austria, United
Kingdom and United States**

I. BACKGROUND

1. At its June 2011 plenary session, the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) selected the topic “Implementing the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, including issues related to coordination of national statistical systems” for one of the CES seminars in 2012. The organisation of the seminar is coordinated by UNECE. United States will chair the seminar. Austria and United Kingdom will organise the sessions. In addition, New Zealand and Ukraine have provided ideas and suggestions on the organization of the seminar.
2. The CES Bureau discussed the first draft outline of the seminar at its 2-3 November 2011 meeting and provided many useful comments for improving the seminar. These are taken into account in this updated outline presented for discussion at the 7-8 February 2012 meeting of the CES Bureau.
3. The seminar will take place on Thursday, 7 June 2012, 9:30 – 12:30 and 14:30 – 16:50.
4. The seminar will discuss the new challenges in the implementation of the Fundamental Principles (FP) due to the evolving role of statistics and statistical offices. Special attention will be paid to the coordination of national statistical systems which is one of the most challenging principles to implement in practice.
5. Furthermore, the 42nd session of the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) called for regional assessments of the implementation of the FP and for development of a practical guide for their implementation including good practices. The seminar is expected to give input to global discussion on this topic led by the UNSC Friends of the Chair Group formed under the leadership of the United States.
6. **The Bureau is invited to discuss and comment on the organization of the Seminar.**

II. TWENTY YEARS ANNIVERSARY OF THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

7. The seminar will mark 20 years from the adoption of the Fundamental Principles (FP) at a political level by the UNECE. As recommended by the CES Bureau, the celebration part will kept on the margins of the seminar to leave maximum time for the substantive sessions and the discussion.

8. Following the Bureau decision, the secretariat will undertake two actions:

- a) Ask Heads of statistical offices to prepare a short text (maximum 1 page) for the CES 2012 plenary session on the importance of the FP in their country. The secretariat will compile the texts to be presented at the margins of the seminar (e.g. as posters).
- b) Draft an official letter from the UNECE Executive Secretary to the governments of the UNECE Member States to promote the FP on the occasion of their 20th anniversary. The text of the letter will be consulted with the Bureau.

9. Some other ideas have been suggested to mark the 20th anniversary of the FP included a speech by a prominent person who was involved in drafting the Principles (possible candidates: Ivan Fellegi, Hallgrimur Snorrason, Carlo Malaguerra), video of interviews with key persons explaining the challenges in implementing FP and how the FP have helped to improve quality of statistics. These can be considered taking into account the technical feasibility and their possible timing during the seminar.

III. STRUCTURE OF THE SEMINAR

10. Katherine Wallman will be the Chair of the seminar. She will open the seminar with a short introduction (5-7 minutes).

11. After the opening, the keynote speech will be delivered (about 20 minutes for the speech and 10 minutes for questions/answers and comments). The Bureau considered desirable to invite the keynote speaker from outside official statistics.

12. The proposed keynote speaker is Mr. Danilo Türk, President of Slovenia (to be confirmed).

13. The seminar will consist of three sessions: the first one focusing on implementing the FP (organized by United Kingdom), the second one on coordination of national statistical systems (organized by Austria), and a third session to discuss possible follow-up to the seminar (organized as panel discussion).

A. Session 1: Implementing the fundamental principles of official statistics

Session Chair/Organiser: Jil Matheson, ONS, United Kingdom

Invited papers:

- Switzerland – paper on how to reinforce the fundamental principles vis-à-vis the political actors and the general public, both at the national and international levels.
- UNECE – paper on current challenges in the implementation of FP based on the UNECE survey on implementation of FP in countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) and South-East Europe, and experience from Global Assessments of national statistical systems.

Supporting papers: Czech Republic, Georgia, Italy, Netherlands, Romania, Spain, Ukraine and United Kingdom and Eurostat.

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14. Following the “Recommendations on organising the CES seminars”, the session will start with a short introduction of the topic by the Session Organiser (5 minutes). Then the Session Organiser will present the key points from the invited papers and the main findings in the supporting papers, and will ask a few questions from the authors of invited papers (15 minutes). The invited authors each will have about 5 minutes to answer the questions.

15. The following general discussion is one of the most important parts of the seminar, allowing countries and organizations to present their experiences and to brainstorm on possible ways to address common problems (1 hour). The sessions will finish with a short summary of the discussion and recommendations coming out of the session by the Session Organizer (5 minutes). This timing is reflected in the tentative timetable provided in section IV.

16. The session is planned to discuss real-life problems in the implementation of FP and propose messages to be communicated to policy makers. The session could further discuss the following aspects:

- (a) Increased demand for professional independence and accountability in the field of official statistics; bearing in mind the budget cuts at both national and international levels, what could the national and international offices do jointly to pave face this challenge?
- (b) How to increase awareness and recognition of the FP, especially among political authorities. Resistance to pressure from political authorities, which are often tempted to intervene in statistical activities and even manipulate technical choices of statisticians, or to limit the role and missions of official statistical bodies;
- (c) How to promote the implementation of the FP among other producers of statistics both within and outside the national statistical system.
- (d) Institutional arrangements and practices that provide for successful implementation of the fundamental principles;

(e) Reacting appropriately and rapidly in case of attacks on the independence of statistics or use of “bad practices”;

(f) Protection against misuse of statistical data by outsiders or organized media campaign to discredit the statistical service, its outputs, methods, or staff;

(g) Are the fundamental principles sufficient to ensure compliance? The need for detailed guidelines for the implementation of FP;

(h) The role of international organizations in supporting the implementation of FP.

17. The Bureau suggested to structure the session according to the different Fundamental Principles focusing on the most problematic ones to implement. The discussion should focus on substantial and critical issues, analyze why the FPs were effective in some and not in other cases, and highlight good practices.

18. The session organizers will be in contact with the authors of papers to guide them on the focus and length of papers. Country reports should be avoided. This is particularly valid for the invited papers that should focus on the issue from a wider perspective than experience of one country.

B. Session 2: Coordination of national statistical systems

Session Chair/Organiser: Konrad Pesendorfer, Statistics Austria

Invited papers

- Finland – on the current and future challenges of co-ordination and means and tools to keep co-ordination effective and efficient.
- Sweden – on soft coordination and broad cooperation: implementing principles and guidelines across the system of official statistics

| *Supporting papers*: Lithuania, Mexico, Portugal ~~and Eurostat~~.

19. In the same way as for the first session, the second session will start with a short introduction of the topic by the Session Organiser (5 minutes). Then the Session Organiser will present the key points from the invited papers and the main findings in the supporting papers, and will ask a few questions from the authors of invited papers (15 minutes). The invited authors each will have about 5 minutes to answer the questions.

20. The following general discussion is one of the most important parts of the seminar, allowing countries and organizations to present their experiences and to brainstorm on possible ways to address common problems (1 hour). The sessions will finish with a short summary of the discussion and recommendations coming out of the session by the Session Organizer (5 minutes). This timing is reflected in the tentative timetable provided in section IV.

21. The second session focuses on the coordination of national statistical systems which is one of the most challenging principles to implement in practice. The surveys on the implementation of FP that have been carried out by the United Nations Statistics Division

(UNSD) in 2004, and UNECE in 2009 found that national coordination was among the least implemented principles. The global assessments of national statistical systems in several countries of East Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia have confirmed that many countries experience difficulties in this area.

12. Usually the national coordination is understood as the coordination of statistical activities and principles applied by other national producers of official statistics. This session will cover national coordination from a wider viewpoint broadening the concept to the entire statistical process, taking into account also other important stakeholder groups. E.g. including data providers (be them institutional entities like enterprises or providers of administrative data) or main users of official statistics (like ministries). The emphasis and the tools of co-ordination vary among different target groups. The content of coordination work has changed during the years.

13. The biggest challenges are relating to the reorganization of government activities and decreasing budgets. Topical questions are e.g. the (high) quality of all statistics produced; coherence of official statistics produced by separate authorities; uniform and smooth handling of ESS matters; prioritization of needs of various ministries; uniform systems of data collection and data dissemination.

14. The session could discuss the following issues:

(a) How to ensure that all national statistical authorities apply the same ethics, statistical standards and quality frameworks?

(b) How to strengthen the role of national statistical offices (NSOs) in national coordination?

(c) Relations with government and the role of NSO as a national coordinator, e.g. in the context of government reorganization, decreasing budgets, e-government systems, etc.

(d) What would be the value added of the work of NSOs to the rest of the national statistical system?

(e) What is the role of NSO in national coordination vis-à-vis international organizations, how to diminish the burden of NSOs facing diverse needs of international organizations?

(f) How to apply in practice the 8th fundamental principle of official statistics?

(g) What are the good practices in effective coordination?

(h) Planning and follow-up mechanisms?

22. The session organizer has contacted the authors of invited papers and provided guidance on the papers. The invited papers are expected to deal with the topic from a wider viewpoint than one country's experience, highlight good practices and compare different approaches. The authors were encouraged to contact a few other countries to provide an overview of how the coordination is carried out in different statistical systems. The authors

were also asked to include in the papers some proposals how the international statistical community could do something jointly to solve the problems.

C. Session 3: Conclusions and recommendations for follow up work

23. The third session will be organized as a panel discussion. It is proposed that the panel will consist of the Chair of the Seminar (Katherine Wallman) and Session Organizers (Jil Matheson, Konrad Pesendorfer) and the Chair of the CES, Enrico Giovannini.

24. The session will wrap up the discussion and consider possible follow-up actions to address the problems and issues that came out of the two first sessions. The aim is to come up with concrete proposals for actions that can be taken jointly by countries and international organizations to promote the implementation of the Fundamental Principles and to overcome common problems in this area.

IV. TENTATIVE TIMETABLE

Thursday, 7 June 2012 (9:30-12:30 and 14:30-17:30)			
Time	Item	Topic	Document
9:30-16:50	SECOND SEMINAR		
	4	Seminar on “IMPLEMENTING THE UN FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS, INCLUDING ISSUES RELATED TO COORDINATION OF NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEMS”	
9:30 – 9:35		Introduction by the seminar organiser: United States	
9:35 – 10:05		Keynote speech by Mr. Danilo Türk, President of Slovenia (<i>to be confirmed</i>)	
10:05 – 12:00		Session I: Implementing the Fundamental Principles of official statistics – Session organiser: the United Kingdom <i>Invited papers: Switzerland and UNECE</i> <i>Supporting papers: Czech Republic, Georgia, Italy, Romania, Spain, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Eurostat</i>	
10:05 – 10:10		Introduction by the session organiser	
10:10 – 10:25		Presentation by the Session Organiser of the key points from the invited papers and the main findings in the supporting papers; questions to the authors of invited papers	
10:25 – 10:35		Replies by the invited authors to the questions raised by the Session Organiser	
10:35 – 10:55	Coffee/tea break		
		Session I -- continued	
10:55 – 11:55		General discussion	
11:55 – 12:00		Short summary of the session by the Session Organiser	

Time	Item	Topic	Document
12:00 – 15:35		Session II: Coordination of national statistical systems – Session organiser: Austria <i>Invited papers: Finland and Sweden</i> <i>Supporting papers: Lithuania, Mexico, Portugal, Eurostat</i>	
12:00 – 12:05		Introduction by the session organiser	
12:05 – 12:20		Presentation by the Session Organiser of the key points from the invited papers and the main findings in the supporting papers; questions to the authors of invited papers	
12:20 – 12:30		Replies by the invited authors to the questions raised by the Session Organiser	
12:30 – 14:30		Lunch break	
		Session II -- continued	
14:30 – 15:30		General discussion	
15:30 – 15:35		Short summary of the session by the session organiser	
15:35 – 15:55		Coffee/tea break	
15:55 – 16:50		Session III: Conclusions and recommendations for follow up work	
15:55 – 16:40		Panel discussion	
16:40 – 16:50		Concluding remarks by the Seminar Chair	

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