

**CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS**

Meeting of the 2014/2015 Bureau  
Geneva (Switzerland), 17-18 February 2015

Approved

Item 2 (d) of the Provisional  
Agenda

**TERMS OF REFERENCE OF A TASK FORCE ON MEASURING EXTREME  
EVENTS AND DISASTERS**

**Prepared by the Secretariat**

**I. BACKGROUND**

1. There is increased policy interest in measuring extreme events and disasters. Several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include issues of disaster preparedness and risk reduction (in particular Goals 11 on cities and human settlements, and Goal 13 on climate change). A number of indicators on related targets are proposed (such as losses from extreme events and disasters, people and businesses affected, etc.). Furthermore, the 3rd World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction will be held on 14-18 March 2015 in Sendai, Japan. A proposal on targets and indicators on disaster risk reduction is being developed for this Conference. The area is also related to climate change and its impacts.

2. The Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) conducted an in-depth review of measuring extreme events and disasters in October 2014, based on a paper by Mexico and notes by UNECE and Turkey. A representative of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), Ms. Margaret Wahlström (Head of UNISDR) participated in the discussion.

3. The main conclusions of the in-depth review are:

- (a) It is important to clarify the role of NSOs in providing information on disasters and extreme events, including issues such as institutional cooperation, integration of statistical and geographical information, statistical confidentiality, etc.
- (b) One of the first tasks would be to agree on common classifications and definitions on disasters and extreme events for statistical purposes. There are currently several classifications used by countries and international organisations. The Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (FDES) was mentioned as an important reference document.
- (c) There are strong similarities between the work on this topic and the work on climate change related statistics: defining the role of official statistics in the area, analyzing what official statistics can contribute, what users need, which statistics are readily available and which should be developed in future. It is crucial to establish collaboration with partner organizations involved in this area.

4. The in-depth review paper by Mexico (ECE/CES/BUR/2014/OCT/3) included a comprehensive overview of the related international activities. While there are many activities going on, these do not focus on statistics. Several international organizations deal

with disaster risk reduction and disaster relief. They are users of data which often come from research institutions, insurance companies, news agencies, etc., and are not consistent with the definitions and methods used in official statistics. Official statistics are involved in providing data on extreme events and disasters in a very few countries. At the same time, the statistical systems have at their disposal data on population, businesses and environment that could be much better utilised for disaster preparedness and relief.

5. The only international activity that has a strong focus on data and statistics is the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific (under UN-ESCAP, launched in October 2014). The members of the Expert Group are government-nominated technical advisors and regional and international experts from statistics and disaster management. The main output of this Expert Group is planned to be a basic list of disaster-related development indicators. The Expert Group plans to develop also a framework comprising classification, definitions and standards for the basic range of disaster-related statistics, and guidelines for production and dissemination of these statistics. The work should be completed within two years.

6. As a follow-up to the in-depth review, the Bureau asked the Secretariat, in consultation with Mexico, Eurostat, OECD and UNISDR, to develop terms of reference for a group to deal with statistics on extreme events and disasters, and explore countries' interest in participating in the work. The group should consider the role of official statistics in this area and develop a work plan. The work should take into account the existing international initiatives to avoid duplication, including the UNESCAP initiative. The Task Force may benefit from the successful experience of the CES Task Force which prepared the *Recommendations on climate change related statistics*, endorsed in 2014 by about 60 countries and a number of international organizations.

## **II. MANDATE**

7. The work of the Task Force is conducted within the framework of CES and its Bureau. The Task Force will be created for a period of two years, after which it will submit a final report with concrete recommendations. The work of the Task Force will be coordinated with the Steering Group on climate change-related statistics.

## **III. OBJECTIVES**

8. The main objective of the Task Force is to clarify the role of official statistics in providing data related to extreme events and disasters, and identify practical steps how national statistical offices in coordination with national agencies responsible for disaster management can support disaster management and risk reduction.

9. The work should take into account the relevant issues raised in the context of SDGs and the post-2015 Development Agenda.

10. In pursuing these objectives, the Task Force should cooperate with the UN agencies and other international organisations working in this area.

#### **IV. PLANNED ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS**

11. The Task Force will undertake the following activities:
- a) Clarify the role of National Statistical Offices in measuring extreme events and disasters and providing information for disaster risk reduction;
  - b) Analyse the main data needs related to extreme events and disasters of the various stakeholders, including the outcomes of the 3rd World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Japan (14-18 March 2015);
  - c) Review the currently available official statistics and practices adopted by countries and international organisations in statistics on extreme events and disasters (possibly by a survey). The review will include an analysis of
    - (i) the role of NSOs,
    - (ii) institutional cooperation,
    - (iii) main challenges,
    - (iv) main data sources (including administrative sources),
    - (v) data sharing (including issues related to statistical confidentiality),
    - (vi) integration of statistical and geographical data,
    - (vii) existing “key” statistics about extreme events and disasters;
  - d) Map existing official statistics (national, regional and global level) with data needs and identify gaps;
  - e) Identify needs for harmonisation of classifications, terms and definitions;
  - f) Identify and consider recent and upcoming developments that have implications for the statistics on extreme events and disasters, such as Global Geospatial Information Management (GGIM), SEEA and Ecosystem Accounting;
  - g) Draft recommendations on the measurement of extreme events and disasters within the realm of official statistics.
12. The main output of the work of the Task Force will be *Recommendations on the measurement of extreme events and disasters*, including:
- (a) Clarification of the role of NSOs and statistical systems;
  - (b) Statistical and geographical data needs of stakeholders related to prevention, care and measuring impact;
  - (c) A glossary of most relevant terms and definitions;
  - (d) A draft typology of extreme events and disasters which at a later stage can be further developed towards a flexible and adaptable international classification on disasters;
  - (e) List of disaster related statistics and indicators to be produced by NSOs as part of official statistics;
  - (f) Case examples from NSOs and international organisations.

#### **V. TIMETABLE**

13. The task force is foreseen to work for two years. A detailed work plan (including milestones and interim deliverables) will be drafted in the first two months after setting up of the Task Force. The work is planned to finish with the approval of the *Recommendations on the measurement of extreme events and disasters* by the CES in June 2017.

## **VI. METHODS OF WORK**

14. The Task Force will work primarily by e-mail, wiki workspace and telephone conferences. Physical meetings of the Task Force could be organised back-to-back to other meetings that would be attended by a significant number of task force members, such as the expert meeting on climate change related statistics.

## **VII. MEMBERSHIP**

15. So far Mexico, Turkey, Eurostat, OECD and UNISDR have expressed their interest in the activities related to statistics on extreme events and disasters. Other countries and international organizations are welcome to participate in the work.

16. UNECE will act as the secretariat of the task force.

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