

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Ninety-fifth meeting

Geneva, 11 December 2017

Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda

Informal document No. **2017/62**

Meeting with the Chair of the Conference of European Statisticians

Report by the Chair

Report from the Chair of the Conference of European Statisticians

I. Improving the quality and policy-relevance of official statistics

1. UNECE Statistical Division works with member States to develop official statistics for evidence-based policymaking and assessing progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and to ensure the coordination of statistical activities in the UNECE region under the Conference of European Statisticians.
2. The work is governed by the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) and focuses on the priorities of member States. The Conference is composed of the Heads of the national statistical organizations in the UNECE region, with the participation of OECD member countries as well as Brazil, China, Colombia, Mongolia, and South Africa.
3. The CES work supports the development of strong national statistical systems through the implementation of the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, a standard developed by CES in 1991, and endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2014 (resolution A/RES/68/261).
4. The Statistical Division works in close collaboration with international organizations active in statistics, such as the statistical office of the European Union (Eurostat), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and the United Nations Statistics Division/DESA. The Chief Statisticians of these organizations participate in the work of the CES Bureau. Furthermore, the work responds to the global initiatives of the United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC), which sets the global statistical standards.
5. The present report presents highlights of the work undertaken in support of statistical development and the measurement of SDGs, covering achievements during the past 12 months and the major activities planned for 2018 and beyond. (Further details can be found in the report of the sixty-fifth plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians, ECE/CES/93). The UNECE statistical work is aligned with SDGs to support member States in measuring progress towards the 2030 Agenda in line with the *Declaration on the role of national statistical offices in measuring SDGs*^a, adopted by CES in 2015. The main directions of work and links to SDGs are presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Areas of work and links with SDGs.

^a http://www.unece.org/publications/ces_sust_development.html

II. Achievements over the past twelve months

6. UNECE leads the work on modernizing statistical production through the UNECE High-level Group for the Modernisation of Official Statistics (HLG-MOS). Modernizing statistical production and sharing the related development costs enable taking up new challenges, such as the monitoring of progress towards SDGs. The High-Level Group also promotes the development of skills and capabilities, which was discussed at a CES seminar on the next generation of statisticians and data scientists in June 2017.

7. In June 2017, the CES endorsed the models and frameworks developed under HLG-MOS, namely the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM), the Generic Statistical Information Model (GSIM), the Common Statistical Production Architecture (CSPA), and the Generic Activity Model for Statistical Organisations (GAMSO). These standards support the modernization of statistical production in the UNECE region and beyond. Therefore, the High-Level Group regularly reports to the United Nations Statistical Commission on its work.

8. The 2017 CES also endorsed a record number of statistical guidelines and recommendations, developed by teams of specialists over the last 2-3 years. These and other statistical guidelines and recommendations that were prepared jointly with main partners, are available on the UNECE website:

- *Guide on Poverty Measurement* provides recommendations for improving the international comparability and availability of statistics on poverty and the related metadata. These recommendations are important in light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its principle of leaving no one behind;
- *Road Map on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals* presents a strategy on how to provide statistics for SDGs and guides member States in developing the national capacity in this area;
- *Set of Key Climate Change-related Indicators* defines an internationally comparable set of indicators on climate change that can be derived largely from existing statistical systems and that are aligned with the indicators for the measurement of SDGs, the Sendai Framework for disaster risk reduction and the Paris Agreement on climate change;
- *Value of Official Statistics* publication provides recommendations on promoting, communicating and measuring the value of official statistics to allow for better understanding and communication of this value to society. The Task Force also created a platform for the exchange of good practices with over 200 cases highlighting how to enhance the value of official statistics;
- *Guide on Valuing Unpaid Household Service Work* proposes concepts and definitions, measurement approaches and valuation techniques of unpaid household service work, which is an emerging area for the statistical community and an important area for analysis of gender and inequality issues;
- *Recommendations on Communicating Population Projections* share current good practices on communicating population projections and propose mechanisms for collecting and disseminating metadata on national and international population projections.

III. Major activities planned for 2018 and beyond

9. UNECE Statistical Division's major activities for 2018 and beyond focus on the following priority areas: economy and globalization; population, migration, gender, poverty and inequality; sustainable development, climate change and environment; and statistical management and modernization. The statistical capacity development focuses on reducing capacity gaps in member

States, such as areas highlighted by global assessments of statistical systems and on the development of institutional and legal frameworks of official statistics.

Economy and globalization

10. UNECE work on economy and globalization is part of the Global Implementation Programme for the 2008 System of National Accounts, adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission. In 2018, UNECE will focus on methodological work in the areas of measuring human capital, consumer prices, global production and economic data exchange. The terms of reference of thematic Teams of Specialists are presented to EXCOM for approval.

11. In view of member States' recent challenges in economic statistics, UNECE will develop practical guidance to advance national and international exchange of economic data, especially on the largest multinational enterprises. Data exchange is a promising and perhaps the only avenue for achieving a comprehensive insight into the activities of multinational enterprises, global production and international trade. This work will be closely coordinated with the G20 Data Gaps Initiative on promoting data sharing.

12. UNECE promotes the implementation of the *Guide on Measuring Human Capital*^b that CES approved in 2016. In 2018 UNECE is focusing on implementation of the Guide by supporting member States in pilot testing of the satellite accounts for education and training. The results will feed into the preparation of a compilation guide for such satellite accounts.

13. UNECE, in cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other partners, promotes the implementation of international recommendations on the Consumer Price Index. The Steering Group will review emerging issues and pursue methodological development of consumer price indices to ensure that the indices are of high quality as they are used for indexation of wages, pensions and social security allowances.

Population and migration, gender, poverty and inequality

14. The UNECE work in 2018 will focus on poverty and inequalities, migration and labour mobility, gender, population censuses and ageing. Many challenges relate to the need to increase the use of administrative data, especially on hard-to-reach population groups.

15. Censuses represent the very foundation of statistical systems, providing baseline information on population and housing stock, which is used to produce other statistics, to plan public infrastructure and services, and to monitor SDGs. UNECE work in this area is in line with the ECOSOC resolution (E/RES/2015/10) "2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme". The current work focuses on the modernization of census methodology and technology. UNECE is preparing guidelines on the use of registers and administrative data for population and housing censuses. Terms of reference for a Steering Group on population censuses and a related Task Force on measuring old-age population in institutions are presented to EXCOM for approval.

16. The need for better gender statistics is evident for the monitoring of SDGs, particularly to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls (Goal 5). The crosscutting nature of gender statistics and diversity of topics make these statistics challenging to produce. The CES Bureau carried out an in-depth review of gaps in gender statistics in October 2017, and asked UNECE to make a proposal for follow-up work jointly with national experts.

17. The *Guide on Poverty Measurement* was endorsed by the CES plenary session in 2017. As a follow-up, terms of reference for a Steering Group on poverty and inequality that will focus its work on poverty measurement are presented to EXCOM for approval.

^b www.unece.org/index.php?id=44704

Sustainable development, climate change and environment

18. The main priorities in 2018 will include new work on statistics for SDGs, waste statistics and the continuation of work on climate change indicators, the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, environment indicators and the measurement of extreme events and disasters. The challenges in this area are high, as a large share of SDG indicators relate to environment and data for those need to be developed in collaboration with various national and international producers.

19. The work on climate change and disaster risk reduction is carried out in close partnership with the regional commissions, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR).

20. UNECE provides guidance to member States in line with the UNECE *Road Map on Statistics for SDGs*. The guidance helps countries to (i) assess the readiness to report on SDG indicators; (ii) select regional, national and subnational indicators; (iii) set up the reporting system on global indicators and data flows at national and regional levels; (iv) identify the needs and priorities for capacity building, and (v) establish a communication strategy on statistics for SDGs.

21. In 2018, UNECE and a group of experts from member States, expert institutions and international organizations plan to develop a conceptual framework on waste statistics. The framework will be an important step for the harmonization of waste statistics internationally, especially to provide better quality information for policies related to waste management, such as circular economy strategies, SDGs and others. The terms of reference for a Task Force on waste statistics are presented to EXCOM for approval.

Statistical management and modernization

22. In 2018, the main challenges to be tackled include how to better communicate statistics and how to integrate data from different sources. The work aims at modernizing statistics, developing new standards and tools, building capabilities and sharing tools for statistical production. The strategy of the High-level Group for the Modernisation of Official Statistics (HLG-MOS) will be reviewed during 2018.

23. The CES strongly supported the continuation of work on modernization of official statistics (ECE/CES/93, para 41). The terms of reference for extending the mandate of the High-level Group are presented to EXCOM for approval. The HLG-MOS will focus on four main work strands:

- *Blue-skies Thinking Network*: an innovation hub for modernization to support innovation and assess new opportunities for official statistics;
- *Supporting Standards Modernization*: will support the implementation and use of the various standards and models, developed to facilitate modernization of statistical production;
- *Capabilities and Communication Modernization*: will consider the human resource elements of modernization;
- *Sharing Tools Modernization*: will support and encourage the practical implementation of the Common Statistical Production Architecture.

24. Further, UNECE will organize a High-Level Seminar on Strategic Partnerships in April 2018, as partnerships are becoming increasingly important for national statistical organizations, in areas such as data acquisition, geospatial information management and in the context of SDGs.

IV. A number of important statistical guidelines coming up

25. UNECE is currently working with national and international experts to finalize the following six statistical guidelines for submission to the 2018 CES plenary session for endorsement:

- *Guidelines on Data Integration for Measuring Migration* will describe good practices and provide practical guidance for integrating different data sources to improve the measurement of immigration, emigration and net migration;
- *Guidelines on Labour Mobility* will focus on the compilation of labour mobility statistics and provide practical guidance on the definitions, methods and data sources that can be used to measure labour mobility. They will also include country case studies on the measurement of labour mobility;
- *Guidelines on the Use of Registers and Administrative Data for Population and Housing Censuses* will cover operational, practical, technical and legal aspects of using multiple data sources for censuses, in particular register and administrative data. They will also provide methods for measuring coverage and quality of the various sources and present good practices in the area;
- *Guidelines on Entrepreneurship Statistics* will provide definitions and guidance on the compilation of key business demography indicators and linking statistical business registers with information from other sources to produce entrepreneurship indicators;
- *Good Practice Guidance on Common Elements of Statistical Legislation* will define common elements and requirements for modern legal frameworks to guarantee flexibility, independence, integrity and accountability of national statistical systems and high quality of official statistics;
- *Recommendations for Producing Leading, Composite and Sentiment Indicators* will be submitted to the CES plenary session for discussion. The Recommendations will include a taxonomy of these indicators with definitions, compilation methods and uses. The document will also suggest strategies, especially on communication, that could be useful in dealing with the different types of indicators.

V. Opportunities and challenges of UNECE statistical work

Changing need for statistical capability development

26. UNECE aims to enhance the capacity of national statistical systems in all member countries, and particularly those in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, to implement international standards and guidelines and meet the challenges of the 2030 Agenda.

27. In the past, almost all capacity-building activities focused on the countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. However, recent developments – such as the adoption of the SDGs and the need to modernise statistical production – affect all UNECE member countries. UNECE member States are currently able to produce roughly about one third of the SDG indicators, and even developed countries with strong statistical systems cannot produce more than half. Therefore, all countries need to improve their statistical capacity. This places increasing pressures on UNECE resources for capacity development that benefits all member States.

28. Capacity development also needs to put more emphasis on the growing importance of integrating statistical and geospatial information. The demands for many new types of statistics, and the appearance of potential new data sources, such as Big Data. Statistical capacity development is, therefore, urgently needed in all UNECE countries, though the nature, type and form will vary from country to country.

29. Furthermore, a new approach to capacity building is needed. Traditional capacity building, focusing mainly on training workshops for individuals, has in some cases had a “negative” impact,

rendering specially trained staff more attractive to other potential other employers and leaving statistical offices struggling to pay competitive salaries. Therefore, future capacity development should encompass the entire organization, including its processes, persons, technology and the entire system. As the main barriers to development are not technological, capacity development also needs to focus more on organizational and management culture.

30. Based on recent trends, UNECE statistical capacity development will focus on:

- Statistics for SDGs including institutional frameworks to support their development;
- Geospatial information management, including integrating statistical and geospatial information;
- Population and housing censuses;
- Environment statistics and environmental-economic accounting;
- Modernising statistical production;
- Modernising management and organisational capabilities – change and risk management, capability and resource planning.

The way forward in measuring progress towards SDGs

31. Data and statistics on SDGs will be crucial for member States in the future to support the implementation of SDGs. Measuring progress towards SDGs will challenge all UNECE member States, even the most statistically advanced countries. UNECE can help member States in meeting this challenge by providing methodological support and guidance. As situations differ in each country, more tailored activities are needed to advance member States' work on SDGs.

32. The UNECE Statistical Database provides key statistics on areas of high political importance to member States and to the United Nations system, such as on migration, globalization and gender. UNECE plans to extend the database with statistics on SDGs to the extent possible and depending on available resources.

33. The Conference of European Statisticians supports member States in advancing the work related to statistics for SDGs, together with Eurostat and OECD. To this end, CES is following up on the implementation of the *Road Map on Statistics for SDGs* in the region. The Conference decided to set up a Steering Group on Statistics for SDGs to coordinate and guide the CES work in this area (ECE/CES/93, para 51). The terms of reference of the Steering Group are presented to EXCOM for approval.

34. The UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, held on 25 April 2017, emphasized that “addressing the challenges faced by statistical systems requires political support and additional financial resources.” Furthermore, the *UNECE Road Map on Statistics for SDGs* was considered a useful tool that provides practical guidance for building a robust SDG measurement system.

35. The 2017 Regional Forum also noted that the 2030 Agenda underscores the importance of quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data to measure progress. National statistical offices will have a key coordinating role in this regard. There may also be a need to strengthen the statistical institutional frameworks to ensure the necessary coordination with other actors in the context of SDGs, including academia and the private sector, and to improve statistical quality.

Greater engagement on geospatial data between UNECE and UN-GGIM: Europe

36. In July 2016, ECOSOC adopted a resolution on strengthening institutional arrangements on geospatial information management (E/2016/L.28). The 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”.

37. In April 2017, the UNECE Commission Session requested 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 SDGs”. The Commission Session asked the Secretariat to present to EXCOM a detailed proposal for collaboration between the two bodies. This proposal should take 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 decision on the nature and scope of this collaboration by the UNGGIM: Europe Plenary Session of June 2017.

38. As a result, UN-GGIM: Europe and UNECE have been gradually deepening collaboration, mainly through participation in each-others events, and the organization of a joint event. The closer integration of environmental and socioeconomic data with geography will make the data more useful for many policy initiatives, such as SDGs, climate change, disaster risk reduction, and many others. To achieve this, statisticians will need to significantly improve the use of spatial information and develop ways of sharing relevant data more effectively to serve policy needs.

39. In June 2017, the Conference of European Statisticians “supported greater collaboration between UNECE and UN-GGIM: Europe, and the development of a concrete proposal for joint work, for a decision by the UNECE Executive Committee” (ECE/CES/93, paragraph 36).

40. In August 2017, at its seventh session in New York, the UN-GGIM Committee encouraged the GGIM regional bodies to work more closely with the UN Regional Commissions:

- Decision 7/101(e) the UN-GGIM Committee “encouraged the regional committees of UN-GGIM to continue their outreach to the UN Regional Commissions, and determine possible mechanisms for collaboration, and report progress back to the Committee at its next session”;
- Decision 7/107 (c) also “urged the regional committees to continue to reach out and engage with their respective regional statistical counterparts to further strengthen partnerships”.

41. A proposal for joint collaboration between CES and UN-GGIM: Europe is presented to EXCOM for approval.

VI. Proposed changes to the subsidiary structure

42. There have been no standing bodies (Working Parties) under the responsibility of the CES since 1997. The work of the Conference is implemented by steering groups or task forces created for the fulfilment of a particular initiative of the member States. All teams of specialists work according to detailed terms of reference with a concrete timetable and deliverables, in line with the UNECE Guidelines for the Establishment and Functioning of Teams of Specialists (E/ECE/1407/Add.1 and ECE/EX/2006/L.3). The CES Bureau regularly reviews the progress of work of the groups, and they will cease to exist upon completion of their task.

43. The following groups fulfilled their mandate and therefore ceased to exist:

- Task Force on Measuring Human Capital
- Task Force on Poverty Measurement
- Task Force on Ageing-related Statistics

^c E/2017/46-E/C.20/2017/18, available at: [http://ggim.un.org/docs/meetings/GGIM7/GGIM-7%20Report%20\(Advanced%20&%20Unedited%20Version\).pdf](http://ggim.un.org/docs/meetings/GGIM7/GGIM-7%20Report%20(Advanced%20&%20Unedited%20Version).pdf)

- Task Force on Circular Migration
- Task Force on Valuing Unpaid Household Work
- Task Force on Adjusting the CES Recommendations for monitoring SDGs

44. The CES Bureau is currently working on a proposal to establish a standing body on national accounts under the Conference of European Statisticians to be submitted to the CES plenary session in June 2018. The increased complexity of compiling national accounts, the growing importance of issues related to globalization and the substantive work over the last ten years in developing guidance on global production arrangements call for continuity. Furthermore, a number of indicators for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda rely on national accounts and require long-term development. In view of this, the CES Bureau will discuss draft terms of reference for a standing body on national accounts for submission to EXCOM for approval in 2018.

45. In its sixty-fourth and sixty-fifth sessions, the CES decided to establish the following Steering Groups and Task Forces and recommended them to EXCOM for approval:

- Steering Group on statistics for Sustainable Development Goals;
- Steering Group on poverty and inequality;
- Steering Group on population and housing censuses;
- Steering Group on consumer price indices;
- Task Force on exchange and sharing of economic data;
- Task Force on education satellite accounts;
- Task Force on measuring old-age population in institutions;
- Task Force on waste statistics.

46. Furthermore, the CES decided to extend the mandate of the High-level Group for the Modernisation of Official Statistics (HLG-MOS).