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CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

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**SUMMARY REPORT OF THE 35TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
STATISTICAL COMMISSION**

Note prepared by the ECE secretariat

1. The United Nations Statistical Commission is one of the two parent bodies of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES). Consequently, the CES has always paid attention to the deliberations and concerns of this important forum in the global statistical system. It is customary, therefore, that at the plenary session of the CES a summary report of the annual session of the Statistical Commission is provided to the Conference in order to inform it of the main outcome of the most recent session of the Commission.
2. The 35th session of the Statistical Commission was held in New York from 2-5 March 2004. The report of this session is publicly available on the UN Statistics Division website. This report contains all details about participating Member States and organisations, and the conclusions of the discussions on each item of the agenda.
3. In many instances, the conclusions of the 35th session of the Statistical Commission give additional or revised mandates for further work to either UN Statistics Division (UNSD), UN organisations other than ECE, or the various expert, intersecretariat and city groups. This note does not list decisions of this type. The Bureau of the Conference and the Secretariat, in their ongoing work of updating and reviewing the various elements of the Integrated Presentation of the International Statistical Work, take due account of the work of the various expert groups, and that any activities and outcome relevant for the ECE region be reflected in the Integrated Presentation. The regular participation of the Director of UNSD in the meetings of the Bureau ensures that a maximum degree of coordination takes place regarding all activities under the responsibility of UNSD.

4. The present note is limited to those items on the agenda of the Statistical Commission where decisions reached at the 35th session may directly affect the future work of the Conference and its Bureau, or where new groups were created, the work of which will have to be taken into account by the Conference and its Bureau. Five items on the agenda of the Statistical Commission fall into these two categories: Population and Housing Censuses, Health Statistics, Poverty Statistics, National Accounts, and Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

5. Item 3(a) of the Agenda: Social Statistics: The most important issue discussed under this item, based on a room document, was the forthcoming 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme. The Statistical Commission recommended that an international Expert Group be created to focus on critical issues in planning the next round of censuses, and established an extensive list of priority considerations for this group.

6. The work at the world and ECE level needs to be closely coordinated. The Expert Group set up by the Statistical Commission will have to take into consideration the possibilities of developing countries to carry out censuses, whereas the work on developing recommendations for the ECE region, carried out jointly with Eurostat, will have to reflect the needs of developed countries, as well as of developed and less developed transition economies in the ECE region. The joint ECE/Eurostat work was launched following the recommendations of the 51st Conference of European Statisticians in 2003, and a Steering Group has been set up. The range of possibilities concerning the methodology of carrying out censuses in the ECE countries has increased considerably in recent years. It would be advisable that both expert groups consider, on the basis of the experience of the last round of censuses, the importance of dissemination and use of census results, and come up with arguments to facilitate the advocacy for obtaining sufficient resources for carrying out censuses at national level.

7. The first meeting of the ECE/Eurostat Steering Group on population and housing censuses identified the priority areas of work and developed a time schedule for the work to be carried until the adoption of the recommendations by the Conference in 2006. The Expert Group at the world level could take into account the priorities and timeframe of the ECE/Eurostat work, so as to avoid any duplication. The UNSD will participate in the ECE work and vice versa. The ECE/Eurostat Steering Group will report regularly to the Bureau of the Conference.

8. Item 3 (c) of the Agenda, Health Statistics: The Commission discussed the report of the “Friends of the Chair” (FoC) group established to improve the coordination of work between the international organizations, and to ensure a better integration of international activities aimed at data collection at national level with the national statistical systems. The ECE secretariat and several countries of the region contributed to the report and welcomed the findings of the group, especially with respect to better coordination. Furthermore, the Commission inter alia “underscored that health statistics are an integral part of social statistics....and that the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics should be applied in the development of official statistics”, and “requested closer cooperation at the regional level between WHO, its regional offices, and other agencies involved in health statistics.”

9. The CES Bureau has already expressed concern about the lack of coordination of the work in the area of health statistics in the ECE region several times in the past. In its future

periodical review of this statistical area, the Bureau will have to take into consideration the findings of the FoC group and the conclusions of the Statistical Commission. The ECE secretariat will contribute to the improvement of the cooperation in health statistics in the ECE region by organising joint ECE/WHO/Eurostat meetings on health statistics, such as the forthcoming meeting to be held in Geneva in May 2004.

10. Item 3(g) Poverty Statistics: The Statistical Commission recommended that the draft handbook on poverty statistics developed by UNSD be discussed in all regions, including the ECE. The Conference and its Bureau should consider the organization of a meeting on poverty statistics for early 2005. The possibilities for organising this meeting together with Eurostat and OECD could be also explored.

11. Item 4(a) National Accounts: With respect to the process of updating the SNA 1993, the Statistical Commission “emphasized the need for transparency and the broadest possible involvement of the global statistical community in the updating process; suggested to consider using electronically circulated questionnaires as a tool to record opinions on each issue by all member states; also suggested strengthening the consultation process through additional regional workshops with the participation of developing and transition countries for which appropriate funding should be reserved”. Furthermore, it “suggested further research into the underlying factors that impede SNA implementation as input for the updating process; requested UNSD in collaboration with regional offices to draft an action plan and seek funding support for its implementation”. The ECE secretariat will contribute to the current update of the 1993 SNA through its active participation in the work of the ISWGNA and by organising joint ECE/Eurostat/OECD expert meetings on national accounts, such as the forthcoming meeting to be held in Geneva on 28-30 April 2004.

12. Item 6(a) Implementation of the Fundamental Principles: The UNSD presented the findings of a survey of the UN member states about the implementation of the Fundamental Principles, following the Statistical Commission’s decision in 2003. The Commission “expressed disappointment” about the overall response rate (58%). The ECE region compared favourably with other regions in this respect. The Commission “considered that it was important to find out information on the implementation in countries that had not responded, and to study the implementation more in depth for a sample of countries, in cooperation with other organizations...”

13. Several interventions in the discussion on this topic underlined the importance of the fundamental principles as an umbrella for all official statistics at the national level, and not only for the statistical offices. Some transition economies pointed out the relevance of the fundamental principles as an international standard when they began to adapt their statistical systems, in particular their legislation, during the transition process. It was also stressed that some principles are not easy to implement or to understand by policy-makers and other stakeholders, and that there is a need for assistance and advice from abroad.

14. The ECE Statistical Division continues to be committed to promoting the implementation of fundamental principles at national level through multilateral workshops and, on request, assist countries that are in the process of revising their statistical legislation. The planned revision of

the (electronic) ECE Handbook of Official Statistics will include selected descriptive elements of national statistical systems that relate to the fundamental principles.

15. The Statistical Commission “considered that it would be useful to survey the extent to which statistical services in the international organizations implemented the Fundamental Principles and welcomed the work of the Committee for Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA) drafting principles for international statistical services”. The ECE Statistical Division participates actively in this CCSA activity. It has made an attempt to answer the questionnaire on the implementation of the principles for its own activities. Official statistics at national and international level are related and applying the same principles to the various types of international activities (production and dissemination of international statistics; development, adoption and monitoring the implementation of statistical standards for official statistics; technical cooperation) will undoubtedly improve the global statistical system. It is therefore in the interest not only of the international organizations, but also of the national statistical authorities, that the relevance of the fundamental principles for the activities of international organizations be officially recognised. The Bureau and the Conference will be regularly informed about progress of work in this area.

16. Recommended action by the CES: The Conference is asked to note the above conclusions and to consider whether any other item not specifically mentioned above should have any implications for the programme of work of the Conference of European Statisticians on which it would like the Bureau to follow-up.

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