



**Economic and Social
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**STATISTICAL COMMISSION and ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS**

EVALUATION OF ECE STATISTICAL PUBLICATIONS

Note prepared by the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians^{1 2}

1. In decision 0(45), the Commission requested "the Conference of European Statisticians to evaluate periodically the utility and impact of ECE's various statistical publications for policy makers and enterprises in the region, and to formulate recommendations concerning:
 - (i) the discontinuation of publications of low interest;
 - (ii) improvements to the format, substance and arrangements for distribution of publications actually or potentially of high interest.³
2. The Conference of European Statisticians set up a Working Group to undertake the evaluation. The report of the Working Group was discussed at the 1992 plenary session of the Conference.
3. The Working Group made no specific recommendations on any of the 40 publications which were reviewed, but concluded that the use of international statistics was very limited and, based on interviews undertaken in several western countries, that there was very little

¹ Prepared at the request of the Conference of European Statisticians at its fortieth session (ECE/CES/40, para.49).

² This note is issued for submission to the forty-eighth session of the Economic Commission for Europe in April 1993. It will also be submitted to the forty-first plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians in June 1993.

³ Document E/1990/41/Add.1; E/ECE/1224/Add.1, Chapter IV, para.2, Section III, item h.

demand for the statistical publications of the ECE. The only eastern European country represented in the Group, Poland, found a much greater demand.

4. The Working Group made the following general observations:

- (i) the extent of the use of international statistics is fairly small in most instances;
- (ii) the ECE is not widely known as a body separate from the UN as a whole;
- (iii) lack of timeliness of ECE statistics was mentioned quite frequently;
- (iv) in many areas there is scope for greater international cooperation and coordination;
- (v) statistical publications which feature textual analysis were more popular than others and there is a demand for more analysis.

5. Although discussion of the report at the Conference was hampered by the lack of any specific recommendations, the majority of interventions expressed disquiet at the negative tenor of the report and were supportive of fundamental reforms. On the other hand, some interventions stressed the importance of maintaining a relevant and efficient programme of statistical dissemination. Three main issues emerged from the discussion. Firstly, the data collection and dissemination policy of the ECE needs to be reviewed. Secondly, the extent of the overall international statistical publication programme must be reassessed keeping in mind the need for internationally comparable data. Thirdly, the character of future ECE statistical publications, as opposed to other forms of literature dealing with statistical information, needs to be defined.

6. As the Conference of European Statisticians is responsible for only about a quarter of the ECE's statistical publications, it was concluded that the Working Group's report must be presented to the other Principal Subsidiary Bodies of the ECE which are responsible for the majority of the publications. Subsequently those bodies have been asked for their comments on the report, for their own assessments of statistical dissemination in their domains and for suggestions how the publications can be modified and improved.

7. Given the lack of specific recommendations in the report of the Working Group, the Bureau of the Conference asked the secretariat to make a detailed study of the existing publications as quickly as possible, taking into account the report of the Working Group, discussion at the plenary session of the Conference and the results of consultations with other PSBs. The secretariat was also asked to bring forward specific proposals which would enable the Conference to meet the Commission's request to formulate recommendations concerning the discontinuation of publications of low interest and improvements to the format, substance and arrangements for distribution of publications actually or potentially of high interest.

8. The Bureau asked the secretariat to take the following considerations into account:

- (a) relevance to the needs of the member countries;

- (b) balance of costs and benefits;
 - (c) the availability of other sources;
 - (d) the efficiency of their production;
 - (e) timeliness;
 - (f) distribution, costs and procedures;
 - (g) possibility of joint collection and/or dissemination with other international organizations;
 - (h) possibility of publication in other formats including Yearbooks, monitors, diskettes, etc.
9. In order to accelerate the decision-making process, recommendations will be made in respect of each publication or set of publications as their reviews are complete.
10. The reviews of all publications are due to be completed by September 1993.
11. By March 1993, the secretariat had made the following specific recommendations:

Energy Statistics Publications

- (a) The specialized energy bulletins: Coal, Gas and Electric Energy would all be continued on an annual basis but substantial changes would be introduced into each publication. Apart from presentational changes, sections with analytical text would be included in the bulletins and the use of graphs and figures expanded. The Statistical Division would be responsible for producing the tables and graphs, as well as for writing the methodological sections, and the analysts in the Energy Division would write the textual analysis.
- (b) The Annual Bulletin of General Energy Statistics would be discontinued. The collection of energy-balanced data would be substituted by an oil data collection with the aim of producing overall energy balances in-house. When analyzed, the balances would be published in an existing ad hoc publication together with the projected balances published periodically by the Energy Division in the current ECE Energy Series-Energy Balances for Europe and North America 1970-2000. The publication would remain under the authority of the Committee on Energy which is the main user of the data.
- (c) Improved cooperation on the publication of energy statistics with EUROSTAT and with the International Energy Authority is to be sought through the intersecretariat working group on energy statistics.

Engineering Products

The Annual Bulletin of Statistics on World Trade in Engineering Products has been discontinued.

Housing, Transport, Forestry and Timber

As of March 1993 the thirteen publications in these areas were under current review.

Chemicals, Steel and Environment

The detailed review of the statistical publications in these areas will follow the review of the publications in the area of housing, transport, forestry and timber. It is the secretariat's aim to complete the review of all the publications by September 1993.

12. The detailed reviews of the statistical publications within the secretariat are being undertaken by the Statistical Division together with the other relevant ECE divisions. The proposals will be presented to the relevant Principal Subsidiary Bodies. The secretariat's review process is thorough and has been undertaken in full consultation with all the relevant parties. The recommendations are therefore expected to be approved by the relevant responsible bodies.

13. The request to the Conference of European Statisticians from the Economic Commission for Europe in decision 0(45) asked for an evaluation of statistical publications to be carried out "periodically". As most of the publications in question are annual, the Conference may wish to return to this topic in about three years time to assess the effects of the current review and to consider whether a further detailed review would be necessary at that time. Meanwhile, the Conference may wish to ask the secretariat of the ECE, and other international organizations which publish statistics, to consider, in the context of the various working groups and intersecretariat task forces, how they can develop greater collaboration in the collection and dissemination of statistical information.