

ECE/CES/68

STATISTICAL COMMISSION
and
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Report of the fifty-third plenary session

(Geneva, 13-15 June 2005)



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I. INTRODUCTION

Attendance

1. The Conference of European Statisticians held its fifty-third plenary session in Geneva at the Palais des Nations. It was attended by representatives from Albania, Australia, Austria, Belarus, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Republic of San Marino, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom and United States.
2. The Conference was attended by representatives of the European Commission (Eurostat).
3. Representatives of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO); United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD); United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); and the following specialised agencies and intergovernmental organizations attended: the European Environment Agency (EEA); the European Free Trade Association (EFTA); Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of the Independent States (CIS-STAT); the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); the World Trade Organization (WTO); Bank for International Settlements (BIS); International Labour Office (ILO); International Monetary Fund (IMF) and The World Bank.
4. Ms. Katherine Wallman (United States) chaired the Conference.
5. Ms. Milva Ekonomi (Albania), Mr. Dennis Trewin (Australia), Mr. Luigi Biggeri (Italy), Mr. Vladimir Sokolin (Russian Federation), Ms. Irena Krizman (Slovenia) and Mr. Svante Öberg (Sweden) served as Vice-Chairpersons.

Agenda and procedure

6. The provisional agenda (ECE/CES/67) was adopted.

Opening statements

7. Ms. Wallman, Chairman of the Conference, and Ms. Schmögnerová, Executive Secretary of the UNECE, delivered opening statements. In her statement, Ms. Schmögnerová highlighted the impact of the EU enlargement and the new Neighbourhood Policy of the EU on the work of the UNECE and its Principal Subsidiary Bodies. In this context, a team of external evaluators is preparing a comprehensive report on the state of the UNECE in light of the new European institutional architecture, focusing on the comparative advantages that UNECE can bring to its members in future. The Executive Secretary thanked the Conference of European Statisticians and its Bureau for their collaboration in the review. Ms. Schmögnerová drew the attention of the Conference to the activities of the UNECE to integrate sustainable development into its work and to

achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration (MDGs). She emphasised that the quality of data on MDG indicators is important and that it will not be possible to measure the achievement of MDGs without statistical capacity building. She also noted with satisfaction that the CES seminars on sustainable development and improved data reporting are in line with the discussion on these issues within the UNECE.

8. Ms. Katherine Wallman thanked Ms. Schmögnerová for her support of the work of the Conference over the years. She also thanked Ms. Irena Krizman, Director General of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia and Vice-Chair of the Bureau of the Conference, for representing the Conference at the UNECE session.

II. IMPLICATION OF MEETINGS OF THE CONFERENCE'S PARENT BODIES

February 2005 session of the Economic Commission for Europe

Documentation: CES/2005/1

9. The Conference took note of the matters arising from the February 2005 Session of the UN Economic Commission for Europe. The outcome of the session requires some follow-up by the Conference. Therefore, the Conference:

- (i) agreed that the Bureau of the Conference, the Conference itself, and the Statistical Division should continue to contribute actively to strengthening the UNECE as an organization;
- (ii) asked the Bureau of the Conference to continue to evaluate the programme of work of the Conference, review regularly the activities in its programme of work, and report on the outcome to the annual plenary sessions;
- (iii) decided to follow the UNECE external evaluation process and implement the recommendations for adjusting its work;
- (iv) decided to continue its efforts to prioritise activities within the subprogramme on statistics of the UNECE work programme;
- (v) supported the concern about the quality of data on MDG indicators in many countries and the need for statistical capacity building to enable countries to measure the achievement of the MDGs;
- (vi) asked the UNECE Statistical Division to continue to be involved in technical cooperation activities through the Regional Adviser Programme and to seek ways of increasing its technical assistance through the Conference's regular meeting programme and its current regular budget and extra-budgetary resources;
- (vii) asked the UNECE Statistical Division to regularly draw the attention of the members of the Conference to these statistical areas where the less developed statistical offices in the UNECE region need help but the technical assistance activities are currently under-funded;
- (viii) thanked Norway, Eurostat, EFTA, World Bank, and the UNDP for facilitating the participation of representatives of Central and Eastern European countries and of the CIS countries in the annual plenary sessions of the Conference of European Statisticians and in selected other high priority meetings in the Conference's work programme;

March 2005 session of the UN Statistical Commission

10. Mr. Stefan Schweinfest (UN Statistics Division) informed the Conference about the main outcomes of the March 2005 session of the UN Statistical Commission. He drew attention to the following issues:

- the review of the working methods of the Statistical Commission and the panel discussion on the challenges for national statistical systems;
- the substantive discussions on population and housing censuses, national accounts, energy statistics, and environmental accounting;
- the release of the global report by the UN Secretary General on the progress made in achieving the Millennium Development Goals;
- the setting up of a Friends of the Chair Group whose task is to analyse the ability of countries to produce indicators for the monitoring of the Millennium Development Goals.

III. SEMINAR ON IMPROVED DATA REPORTING

11. This seminar was organised by United States in cooperation with Finland, Switzerland, Canada, United Kingdom and Sweden. Ms. Katherine Wallman (United States) chaired the seminar.

Session 1: Using the Internet for business surveys

Documentation: CES/2005/8, CES/2005/9, CES/2005/10 and CES/2005/33

12. The session was organised and chaired by Ms. Heli Jeskanen-Sundström (Finland). Mr. Ivan Fellegi (Canada) served as the Discussant for this session.

13. The session dealt with different aspects of offering the Internet option for business surveys: the associated benefits and costs, the security issues, and respondent attitudes towards electronic reporting.

14. Implementation of the business data collection over Internet requires considerable resources. Finding ways to make it cost-efficient is therefore very important for the statistical offices. However, the benefits of better data quality, a lesser burden on respondents, improved timeliness, and increased efficiencies in data collection and processing are expected to outweigh the costs, particularly in the medium to long term.

15. The respondents' trust in the security and usability of the Internet will influence take-up rates. The challenges are to ensure that the security and privacy standards are met while developing accessible, user-friendly web applications.

16. In addition, the following points were made during the discussion:

- to be efficient, the Electronic Data Reporting (EDR) should be integrated within the questionnaire design and processing workflow;
- a generalised approach to electronic questionnaire development can be considered preferable to ad-hoc solutions for individual surveys;

- suggestions to increase user friendliness and decrease response burden include: offering a possibility to interrupt the completion of the questionnaire and resume at a later time; direct data extraction from businesses' information systems; finding the appropriate level of respondent side editing without overburdening the user; and better understanding of respondent motivation;
- the necessity to continue to provide traditional alternatives to EDR, such as paper questionnaires; this can be important in addressing the security concerns of respondents;
- the importance of developing common taxonomies and coordination of data collection to avoid duplicate reporting; these common taxonomies can involve cooperation between several government agencies engaged in data capture;
- metadata is important for development of electronic questionnaires, as well as for reporting and use of data.

Session 2: Using the Internet for population censuses and surveys

Documentation: CES/2005/11, CES/2005/12 and CES/2005/13

17. The session was organised by Statistics Canada. Mr. Werner Haug (Switzerland) served as the Chair and Discussant for this session.
18. An increasing number of countries use the Internet as an optional data collection method for the population census, to respond to the expectations of a specific part of the population and to meet the goals of national e-Government strategies.
19. Collection of census data over the Internet has the potential to reduce response burden and improve data quality. Census coverage could also be improved, in particular for some population groups that are traditionally under enumerated, such as young students and professionals, persons with disabilities, and those living in remote areas.
20. The Internet option is not expected to produce net cost savings in the short-term, but savings could be obtained in the long-term. Careful planning and testing of the Internet application is fundamental.
21. In addition, the following points were made during the discussion:
 - at present, the paper questionnaire is still the standard census data collection method and the Internet an alternative. This trend could reverse in the future;
 - the impact of the Internet data collection on census quality should be carefully investigated: on the one hand, higher response rates and lower item non-response rates could be expected, but on the other hand, the impact of who would fill in the online form in a multiperson household should be assessed;
 - security is a key factor for the success of the Internet census; since it is not possible to eliminate the risk completely, backup solutions should be prepared;
 - contracting out some of the activities associated with the Internet census is often a good option, but attention should be paid to the need to reassure the public that this would have no effect on census security and data confidentiality;

- communication with the public is another key factor: the Internet census should be adequately promoted among the target groups;
- the adoption of a central online control system to track the submission of forms from the various sources is one of the necessary conditions for offering the Internet option.

Session 3: Cognitive and usability testing and marketing in support of Internet reporting

Documentation: CES/2005/14, CES/2004/15 and CES/2005/16

22. The session was organised and chaired by Ms. Cynthia Clark (United Kingdom). Ms. Heli Jeskanen-Sundström (Finland) served as the Discussant for this session.
23. The session demonstrated the importance of cognitive and usability testing for the successful implementation of electronic questionnaires. Usability testing provides invaluable insight into user behaviour and expectations, often revealing problems with design and functionality that are not detected through other forms of software testing.
24. The functionality of an electronic survey (such as online help, personalization, real-time validation, and routing to skip over unnecessary questions) has the potential to improve data quality and decrease the burden on respondents. However, the design needs to be carefully tested to find the right balance between helping and confusing respondents.
25. In addition, the following points were made during the discussion:
- testing is an essential part of the development of electronic data collection modes;
 - questionnaires aimed at business respondents may not be directly comparable to social surveys or censuses, due to different levels of experience using the Internet and familiarity with the terminology used;
 - it would be interesting to measure what impact the change from paper to web-based surveys has had on survey results;
 - it is too early to estimate the cost/benefit ratio of the of web versus other modes of data collection - not enough information is available about the real costs of developing and maintaining the electronic option;
 - the length of validity of testing is an issue; tests have to be continuously repeated as the software used by respondents is changed or updated.

Session 4: Reducing respondent burden through improved data reporting

Documentation: CES/2005/17, CES/2005/18, CES/2005/19, CES/2005/28, CES/2005/29, CES/2005/35 and CES/2005/47

26. The session was organised and chaired by Mr. Svante Öberg (Sweden). Ms. Milva Ekonomi (Albania) served as the Discussant for the session.
27. The session considered how improved data reporting can reduce response burden. This can be achieved mainly by three methods: reducing the volume of data collection; using administrative data sources; and the development of technological solutions for electronic reporting. Using existing

administrative data has additional advantages, such as avoiding the problem of low response rates and saving costs in data collection. However, extracting data from administrative databases can be complicated by different definitions of data and technical, organisational, and legal barriers. Developing good working relationships with the agencies maintaining the registers is important in order to minimise these problems. Also, by working with governments and policy makers, statistical organizations may be able to influence or leverage political mandates to reduce response burden.

28. Developing partnerships with respondents and business communities is important. Providing feedback on statistical results helps to gain cooperation in surveys, especially if the respondents see it as useful for their own purposes.

29. In addition, the following points were made during the discussion:

- the political and legal frameworks differ in countries, and this has an impact on efforts to reduce response burden;
- the perception of the NSO is an important factor affecting perceived burden. Perceptions can be improved through positive promotion of the agency's work and developing relationship with business communities;
- reducing response burden is an important managerial consideration and needs a clear strategy, targets and action plans; it cannot be done efficiently without monitoring the response burden.

Concluding remarks

30. In conclusion, Ms. Katherine Wallman highlighted the key points of the seminar:

- legal and organisational frameworks need to be taken into account in improving response rates and decreasing the respondent burden;
- the shift to EDR has been a result of both national "e-government" initiatives and the efforts made by NSOs to meet the public expectations;
- EDR is not necessarily a method of achieving cost savings, particularly in its initial stages;
- challenges and opportunities include: issue of public trust (internet security, confidentiality, and compatibility with various versions of technology); reducing the volume of data collection; mixed-mode design and mode effects; partnerships with businesses and technology providers; communication with the public; and a need for better cost analysis of EDR.

Action taken by the Conference

31. The Conference agreed that it would be useful to establish a working group to further explore the issues surrounding EDR. The Chair requested the assistance of Heli Jeskanen-Sundström (Finland), Ivan Fellegi (Canada) and Brian Pink (New Zealand) to help in drafting terms of reference for this group and invited others to join this effort.

IV. SEMINAR ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Documentation: CES/2005/36

32. The seminar was organised by Sweden in cooperation with Canada, Estonia, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Eurostat, OECD, UNSD and UNECE. Mr. Svante Öberg (Sweden) chaired the seminar.

33. Mr. Thorvald Moe, the Deputy Secretary General of the Norwegian Ministry of Finance, delivered the keynote speech. He noted that in order to be of practical use for policymaking, the measurement of sustainable development should be focused on a few key long-term indicators. However, these core indicators do not eliminate the need for more detailed economic, environmental, and social data to monitor short-term policies. Mr. Moe called for a more active role of international organizations in developing the sustainable development indicators (SDI) and more international cooperation in this area.

34. In addition, the following points were made during the discussion:

- it is important to pay sufficient attention to the human and social capital in the proposed capital approach and to look both at stock and flow data;
- sustainable development is a global phenomenon and therefore global indicators are needed on top of national indicators: UN Millennium Development Goals can be a good point of departure;
- sustainable development is a long-term issue. However, politicians are focused on short-term actions; it is a challenge for statisticians to provide data to analyse the effect of the short-term decisions on the long-term issues.

Session 1: The role of official statistics

Documentation: CES/2005/20, CES/2005/21, CES/2005/31 and CES/2005/37

35. The session was organised and chaired by Dennis Trewin (Australia). Mr. Heinrich Brünger (UNECE Statistical Division) served as the Discussant for this session.

36. The Conference discussed the role of National Statistical Offices (NSOs) and international organizations in the work on SDIs. Because of the high policy importance of SDIs, the NSOs should consider sustainable development statistics as a part of their core business.

37. The NSOs are in a good position for this work because of their expertise with developing indicators, the availability of the required data, and high attention to quality. A major challenge is the integration between the different dimensions of sustainable development: ecological, economic and social.

38. During the discussion, the following points were made:

- the role of official statistics in the measurement of SD should be strengthened but without compromising the fundamental principles;

- conceptual frameworks and information systems are very important to ensure coherence and consistency. SD is a complex issue that cannot be covered by a small number of indicators;
- the development of SDIs is even more difficult because the sustainable development issues differ from country to country. There is no commonly agreed framework and the NSOs are not always the producers of the data;
- the measures used should be meaningful in the context of sustainability;
- the focus of the work is currently on measuring SD but it has to go beyond that and engage in forecasting and modelling;
- the issue of recycling indicators by different labelling of the existing ones: indicators should be re-used in different sets only if there is a sound scientific basis;
- scientists should be involved in the SDI development work in addition to statisticians and policy makers;
- lack of environmental data is a particular problem, especially in the developing countries;
- a top-level framework built on a sound scientific basis that could be adapted to the specific circumstances of the countries is needed;
- the issue of division of labour between policy makers and official statisticians was addressed;
- the importance of energy policies and energy statistics in relation to SD was highlighted;
- concern was expressed about trying to measure something that is not measurable as part of official statistics.

Session 2: Frameworks and analytical tools

Documentation: CES/2005/22, CES/2005/23 and CES/2005/32

39. The session was organised and chaired by Anil Arora (Canada). Mr. Jarig van Sinderen (Netherlands) served as the Discussant for this session.

40. The session looked at different frameworks and indicator sets being developed by countries and international organizations. At present, there is great variety in the conceptual foundations of the frameworks, the completeness of indicator sets, the choice of indicators, and their influence on policy debates. Without agreement on frameworks, countries may head in divergent directions with their measurement efforts. The two main directions are to use the approach of different dimensions ("pillars") of sustainable development or to use the existing methodological frameworks (e.g. the System of Economic and Environmental Accounts – SEEA).

41. During the discussion, the following points were made:

- the need to agree on a common conceptual framework was highlighted;
- statisticians have an important role in developing the underlying theory and frameworks, bearing in mind the practical problems to be solved in their implementation;
- different viewpoints were expressed concerning the object of sustainability (e.g. 'national wealth', 'human development', 'economic development'). There is a need for continuing debate on what is exogenous and endogenous with respect to SD;
- integration of SDIs into the System of National Accounts (SNA) can be considered a good approach, but there are problems with monetary valuation of environmental assets: a solution could be to extend the NA with environmental accounts in physical terms;

- there is agreement that it is desirable to include social aspects in the capital approach but social capital is a very difficult concept to measure;
- the practical problems with measurement can be overcome, more investment is needed in solving the conceptual problems;
- tools for visualising the data can be very useful for communicating the statistical results to users: they can help in informing and engaging the whole society in the discussion about the SD;
- it is recognised that the various components of national wealth cannot necessarily replace each other. Each individual component should be maintained at a certain minimum level in order to secure sustainable development.

Session 3: Case studies

Documentation: CES/2005/24, CES/2005/25 and CES/2005/30

42. The session was organised and chaired by Vladimir Sokolin (Russia). Mr. Walter Radermacher (Germany) served as the Discussant for this session.

43. The session considered the experience of a few countries in developing frameworks and sets of indicators. It was stressed that to be successful, the procedure of developing frameworks and selecting the indicators has to involve the official statisticians, experts from policy areas, and representatives of civil society in order to minimise the risk of arbitrariness or one-sided influence of any one interest group.

44. The following points were made during the discussion:

- at present, countries use a mixture of monetary and physical indicators;
- the micro/macro issue in measuring SD. However, at this stage, the focus should be on macro-indicators;
- both stocks and flows could be used to measure the basic trends;
- the developed set of indicators should allow society to assess the effect of policy level actions;
- to meet the needs of media and different interest groups, smaller 'core' sets of indicators are required that can be presented in a user-friendly format. Good communication and marketing is essential to create awareness in the general public;
- there is enough knowledge and know-how accumulated that can be used to develop common approaches instead of each country going through a long conceptual process of developing its own approach. It is important that countries learn from each other.

Session 4: Future needs and recommendations

Documentation: CES/2005/26 and CES/2005/27

45. The session was organised and chaired by Ivan Fellegi (Canada). Mr. Laurs Norlund (Eurostat) served as the Discussant for this session.

46. So far, the work on developing measures for SD has been underway mainly in developed countries. Some recommendations for countries that are willing to develop SD indicators were given. These involve: identifying the mandate for developing the SDI; discussing and clarifying the role of the statistical office in this process (vis-à-vis policy makers, scientists, and society in general); identifying headline indicators as an intermediate step while developing a more comprehensive framework; avoiding stand-alone indicators; and developing a communication strategy.

47. The session also considered the following issues:

- how to ensure the better involvement of official statisticians in the monitoring of sustainable development strategies;
- the use of highly-aggregated indicators versus multi-variate statistical analysis of SD;
- the involvement of official statisticians in the assessment of SD trends, and how statisticians can best address the needs to provide indicators for measuring the vaguely defined policy targets like “global partnership” or “good governance”;
- the need for practical solutions for producing measures to be used by the policy makers;
- composite indices are not the way forward as they could fluctuate strongly when weights of individual components are changed, and could therefore be misleading;
- the need for defining a clear mandate and strategy in starting the work: identify a long-term project with clear deliverables and clear intermediate outputs in the short run;
- both indicators and accounting framework are needed and relevant. The accounting framework should be kept simple to balance and underpin the core indicators;
- the discussion on measuring SD should not be limited to environmental issues only;
- the needs of the various groups of users of SD information should be kept in mind;
- there are many cross border effects related to SD. A single statistical office cannot assess the cross border movements. In this context, the need for global statistical cooperation and the role of international organizations were emphasised.

Concluding remarks

48. In conclusion, Mr. Ivan Fellegi highlighted that the discussion showed that:

- measuring sustainable development is important and NSOs are key players in that domain, therefore it is worth spending time and resources to make improvements in this area;
- there is no agreed definition of sustainable development;
- the differing priorities of countries are reflected in their selection of indicators;
- there is no contradiction between ‘conceptual framework school’ and ‘indicator school’. Some countries are putting the emphasis on capital or national wealth based frameworks while others are focusing more on developing sets of indicators. Both directions of development are valid;
- many countries found that their selection of indicators has not been stable, and the lack of continuity reduced their long-term usefulness.

49. There was general agreement that there is a need for further work in this area. The possible steps could be:

- to agree on what broad domains should be covered by a conceptual framework of SD;
- to develop a possible list of indicators for each domain (a menu) but stop short of making recommendations for country indicators;
- to agree on a small subset of the recommended national indicators that could form the set of world-wide indicators;
- to identify what information systems are needed for each domain and which scientific measurements are needed to supplement the statistics.

Action taken by the Conference

50. The Conference agreed that:

- further work is needed in the area of measuring sustainable development;
- the Bureau is asked to decide on how the work should be organised in the future;
- a group of countries should develop terms of reference to be discussed by the CES Bureau at a future meeting.

V. INTEGRATED PRESENTATION AND COORDINATION OF INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL WORK IN THE ECE REGION

51. In the last few years there have been several changes in the compilation and the review of the Integrated Presentation (IP) of the international statistical work programmes. The IP presents the planned future work of some 30 international organizations in 48 statistical areas and is available on the Internet in a database format since 2002. The discussion of the IP at the plenary session has been substituted by a written consultation procedure focusing on selected areas where there are problems and gaps in international statistical work. Countries' comments on the IP provide the basis for the Bureau to make recommendations to the Conference on how to improve the coordination of international work in these domains.

Issues and problems and Rapporteur Reports

Documentation: CES/2005/3, CES/2005/WP.5

52. The Conference considered the proposed change in the procedure for preparing the Rapporteurs' reports and the way the "issues and problems" in international statistical work are reviewed. The Conference also noted the comments made by member countries during the written consultation prior to the plenary session and indicated in document CES/2005/WP.5 as follows:

53. Integrated Presentation: the IP is considered to be a useful reference material. The improved usability and clarity of the IP were pointed out. It is proposed that the information on expert meetings be updated on a regular basis. Member countries also expressed support to the new procedure of identifying and considering the issues and problems related to the statistical areas in the IP.

54. Technical cooperation and capacity building: the coordination of technical cooperation and capacity building is considered to be an important issue that requires improvement in order to be more efficient. It is essential to involve in the coordination the other international organizations and

bodies dealing with technical cooperation and capacity building, such as the UN Statistical Commission, World Bank, and Paris²¹. Coordination of technical cooperation is especially important for small donor countries. The support of international organizations is needed for strengthening the technical cooperation in the field of statistical infrastructure as a base for official statistics.

55. There is support for Eurostat to be the main coordinating agency for assistance activities in South-Eastern Europe and the CIS countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy Programme. However, before deciding about the coordination responsibility for the other CIS countries, it is recommended to consult the other international donors. Member countries should also be involved in the discussion.

56. Statistics of household income and expenditures, of the welfare of the population, and of poverty, and income inequality: member countries support the proposal to aim for a multidimensional set of indicators to measure poverty (including indicators on social exclusion) rather than for a single definition of poverty. It is proposed that the international organizations develop differentiated approaches in order to meet the country-specific requirements, since it would be difficult to construct a common poverty definition for comparing countries with different levels of income.

57. It is proposed that a workshop be organised to develop an agenda for future action. However, it is important to clarify which organization or country will take a lead in this work. Furthermore, the coordination among international organizations is considered very important.

58. It is also proposed that the mandate and objective of a possible City Group on household expenditure statistics should be clearly defined, if such a group is set up.

59. Labour statistics: among the many issues in labour statistics, there is general support for priority to be given to measurement of working hours. Australia and Canada expressed interest in contributing to the work on developing supplementary questions that could be added to the Labour Force Survey to measure the actual hours worked. It is considered important to take into account the work done by ILO and the Paris Group on revising the international standards on statistics of working time, and that some countries use business surveys to obtain data on working hours. The importance of promoting the work and developing guidelines on the measurement of working hours was emphasised, and it was noted that this work has significant implications from the social and economic point of view.

60. The measurement of labour migration (legal and illegal, as well as international and domestic) is also considered to be a priority.

61. Transport statistics: the countries support the proposed actions to improve the timeliness and actuality of the Annual Bulletin of Transport Statistics (ABTS), to review its contents and consider new ways for its dissemination (Internet and CD). There is also support for identifying best practices in compiling statistics on the volume of road traffic performance and in mobility surveys on traffic habits of persons, and to include statistics on air and maritime transport in the work programme of the UNECE Working Party 6.

Action taken by the Conference

62. The Conference agreed with the comments and proposals made by countries concerning the improvement of the IP and the four above-mentioned statistical areas.

Follow-up to decisions taken by the CES and its Bureau

Documentation: CES/2005/WP.2

63. Attention of the Conference was drawn to the document on follow-up to the decisions taken by the Conference and its Bureau, which summarises the main decisions taken by the Bureau since its February 2002 meeting and by the Conference since the 2002 Plenary Session, as reflected in the respective reports. The note permits the identification of possible delays and facilitates taking decisions for further action. It also provides transparency on the work of the Conference and its Bureau.

Revision of classification systems used in transport statistics

Documentation: TRANS/WP.6/2004/1/Rev.1, CES/2005/WP.6

64. The Conference considered the proposed revision of classification systems used in transport statistics based on a paper prepared by the UNECE Transport Division. The revised classification is part of a new Pan European classification, NST2000, that replaces the UNECE classification of goods in transport (the CTSE) and the similar EU classification, the NST/R. It links the classes of goods in transport directly to the international classifications of production of goods by activity, the CPC and corresponding CPA. The revised classification was already adopted by the UNECE Working Party on Transport Statistics (in June 2004) and by the Inland Transport Committee (in February 2005).

65. The UNECE secretariat conducted a consultation with member countries prior to the Conference. The comments received were summarised in Working Paper no. 6. Most of the countries support the adoption of the classification in its present form. However, some minor changes/corrections were identified in the text. All comments and proposals were communicated to the secretariat of the Working Party 6.

Action taken by the Conference

66. The Conference:

- adopted the revised classification (document TRANS/WP.6/2004/1/Rev.1) in its present form on the grounds that the UNECE secretariat will take into account the comments made by the members of the Conference;
- requested the UNECE Working Party on Transport Statistics (WP 6) to take responsibility for keeping the document up-to-date and making any necessary amendments or revisions.

Topics for in-depth review by the CES Bureau in February 2006

Documentation: CES/2005/6

67. The CES Bureau reviews each year about 5 statistical areas to identify issues and problems in the coordination of international statistical work in these areas. The results of these reviews are brought to the attention of the Conference at its annual plenary session. For the first time this year, the UNECE secretariat conducted a small survey among member countries on the areas to be reviewed in depth by the Bureau in February 2006.

68. The survey showed that the following topics received the most interest from countries:

- quality frameworks and measurement of performance of statistical systems and offices;
- population and migration statistics;
- management and development of human resources;
- technical cooperation and capacity building;
- globalization.

69. The topics of justice and crime, regional and small area statistics, living conditions and poverty, indicators related to the Millennium Development Goals, and institutional frameworks and principles and the role of official statistics were also frequently marked by countries as candidates for in-depth review.

70. The Bureau will decide on the topics for in-depth review based on the results of the survey and will select the countries and/or international organizations that will be asked to prepare the reports.

UNECE Statistical Programme: report on 2004 and plans for 2005

Documentation: CES/2005/7

71. The Conference noted the Report on the implementation of the UNECE Statistical Programme. Attention was drawn to the major achievements in the work of the UNECE Statistical Division in 2004 and the beginning of 2005, and the plans and major challenges for 2005. It was pointed out that all activities included in the 2004 Statistical Programme had been regularly carried out (with some minor carrying over to the beginning of 2005), and that the activities included in the 2005 Statistical Programme are also being conducted as planned.

Migration statistics: issues and problems

Documentation: CES/2005/4, CES/2005/34

72. The Conference considered migration statistics on the basis of a Rapporteur Report prepared by the United States in collaboration with the IMF and the World Bank, and a supporting paper from Bulgaria. The Conference acknowledged the progress made by national and international organizations in improving the quality and availability of migration statistics. However, it emphasized the significant remaining problems and the need to better harmonize terminology and

definitions regarding migrants, migration, and residency. The challenge is to involve in a coordinated way all agencies that are active in this area at national and international level.

73. The Conference was informed about the new developments affecting migration statistics: changing legislative and organizational frameworks, technological developments (e.g., Internet-based reporting), new interests (e.g. national security) and new limitations (e.g. public sensitivities to government inquiries). Recent progress in the area includes beginning research on new methods of collecting migration data by censuses and surveys, numerous formal and informal collaborative efforts addressing the issues of migration data quality and combining various sources (administrative and statistical) to achieve better data coverage.

74. Other issues pointed out in the discussion included:

- the need to link the work on migration statistics with economic statistics;
- issues of labour security; and migrant workers.

Action taken by the Conference:

75. The Conference:

- asked the Bureau to consider the appointment of a Steering Group to develop a work plan for the next few years with concrete deadlines and deliverables and report back to the Conference. The possibility to eventually expand this Steering Group into a global body will be explored within the Statistical Commission;
- requested to ensure coordination between the Task Force created after the ECE/Eurostat Seminar on Migration Statistics (March 2005) and the Steering Group. It is important to have the results from this Task Force ready in due time for the 2010 Recommendations on Population

VI. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE MULTINATIONAL ENTERPRISES PROJECT

Documentation: CES/2005/WP.3

76. The Conference took note of the Report prepared by Statistics Canada on the first phase of the Multinational Enterprise (MNE) project that was launched in 2003 under the auspices of the Conference. The aim of the Project was to identify areas where the measurement of the activities of the MNEs could be improved by having MNEs report in an integrated fashion to several national statistical offices. The project was led by Statistics Canada. Representatives from five countries participated in the project: Canada, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

77. The experiment shows that data collected in this fashion provided different results than the measurement in the regular statistical programmes of the NSOs, even though information was sought on a few relatively simple variables (employment, sales, capitalised expenditures, operating earnings). It is not clear at this point which method is more accurate. All participating countries found the exercise interesting and valuable, clarifying some of the problems related to data provision by MNEs.

Action taken by the Conference

78. The Conference:

- agreed with the proposal made by Statistics Canada in WP.3 that the study in its current configuration be terminated;
- asked the Bureau to decide on the best approach how work can be continued in other fora where non-EU members of the UNECE are included, and to find the means to keep the non-EU members fully informed about the work under the auspices of the Eurostat project on the European register of enterprise groups.

VII. CONFIDENTIALITY AND MICRODATA: DRAFT GUIDELINES

Documentation: CES/2005/5

79. The Conference reviewed the progress report of the Task Force on Confidentiality and Microdata (chaired by Dennis Trewin).

80. The Conference noted that the Guidelines are planned to be submitted to the CES 2006 plenary session for endorsement.

81. It was pointed out that the section dealing with international access requires further work. It was proposed to include in the Task Force some representatives from international organisations to deal with this issue.

Action taken by the Conference

82. The Conference encouraged countries to provide additional case studies; additional comments on the paper can be provided to Dennis Trewin and to the UNECE secretariat. The Conference asked the Task Force on Confidentiality and Microdata to prepare an updated document for the October 2005 Bureau meeting.

VIII. SELECTION OF TOPICS FOR SEMINARS TO TAKE PLACE DURING THE NEXT PLENARY SESSION

Documentation: CES/2004/WP.4

83. Following the decision of the 50th Conference, two seminar sessions are organised each year at the annual CES plenary session.

84. Based on the results of the survey conducted electronically by the UNECE secretariat in March-April 2005 and the recommendations of the Bureau, the Conference selected the following topics for the seminars in 2006:

The first seminar session: Population Censuses

The Conference delegated the preparation of the Seminar to the Steering Group. Interested countries may offer their contributions directly to the Steering Group.

The second seminar session: Human resources and training (human resources development; organization of training in statistical offices; international training courses; e-learning).

Session organizer: Czech Republic; Contributors: Canada, Finland, Eurostat, IMF. Interested countries may offer their contributions directly to the Session organizer.

**IX. RULES GOVERNING THE WORK OF THE CONFERENCE AND ITS BUREAU;
ELECTION OF THE BUREAU**

Documentation: CES/2005/2

85. The Conference considered the updated version of the Rules governing the work of the Conference and its Bureau. It represents a consolidated text of previous decisions.

86. At the 2005 plenary session, elections for a Chair and for Vice-Chairs were held for the two-year period June 2005 to June 2007.

87. According to the Rules, elections to the Bureau are made on the basis of a proposal by the most senior previous Chairman of the Conference. If no previous Chairman of the Conference is present at the plenary session or in exceptional cases, the Bureau proposes the designation of a member of the Conference at the beginning of the plenary session, who will assume the task of preparing the proposal for the composition of the Bureau. Mr. Ivan Fellegi, the most senior previous Chairman of the Conference is also a permanent observer in the Bureau as the Chairman of the OECD Committee on Statistics. The Conference asked Mr. Hallgrimur Snorrason, Director General of Statistics Iceland, to organise the elections of the Bureau.

Action taken by the Conference

88. The Conference endorsed the updated Rules governing the work of the Conference and its Bureau presented in the Annex to document CES/2005/2. It was agreed that the text in para 2 (iv) will read: “to discuss and adopt statistical standards in the UNECE region”.

89. For the 2005/06 and 2006/07 term of the office, based on the proposal put forward by Mr. Snorrason, the Conference elected:

Ms. Katherine Wallman (United States) as a Chairperson,

and the following Vice-Chairpersons of the Bureau:

Ms. Milva Ekonomi (Albania)

Ms. Heli Jeskanen-Sundström (Finland)

Mr. Luigi Biggeri (Italy)

Mr. Vladimir Sokolin (Russian Federation)

Ms. Irena Krizman (Slovenia)

Mr. Svante Öberg (Sweden)
Mr. Dennis Trewin (Australia)

X. OTHER BUSINESS

90. It is proposed that the next plenary session of the Conference will take place in the week of 12-16 June 2006 in Paris.

XI. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

91. The report of the plenary session was adopted by the Conference at its closing session on 15 June 2005.

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