

**Economic and Social Council**Distr.: General
1 May 2012

English only

Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of European Statisticians

Sixtieth plenary session

Paris, 6-8 June 2012

Item 6 (b) of the provisional agenda

Review of the UNECE**Review of the work of the United Nations Economic
Commission for Europe: Statistics Subprogramme****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

The paper informs the Conference of European Statisticians about a United Nations Economic Commission for Europe review process aiming to provide concrete recommendations and proposals for future work priorities for each Subprogramme in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

The Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians discussed the documents prepared by the secretariat for the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe review process at its meeting in November 2011. After consultations with the Bureau, the documents were submitted to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Executive Committee for the review.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Executive Committee discussed the Statistics Subprogramme at its meeting on 12 December 2011. The Chair of the Conference gave a presentation. An excerpt of the conclusions of the Chairman of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Executive Committee from this meeting is provided in Annex I.

I. Background

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), at its 2011 spring session, initiated a review of the UNECE work and the implementation of the 2005 reform. The review is carried out by the UNECE Executive Committee (EXCOM), a body that was established following the 2005 UNECE reform to implement the overall recommendations set by the Commission and to act on its behalf in between the biennial sessions. The review aims to provide concrete recommendations and make proposals for future work priorities for each Subprogramme in the UNECE.
2. The secretariats of the UNECE Sectoral Committees were asked to provide a detailed analysis of the work, which included the following aspects:
 - (a) Possibilities for streamlining and synergizing activities, ways of improving efficiency and methods of work;
 - (b) Expected results and related activities that may need to be reoriented/refocused to better reflect priority demands of Member States;
 - (c) Prioritisation of activities and possible optimization of the programme of work;
 - (d) Proposals for improving communication and public outreach.
3. In addition, the secretariat was asked to prepare, in consultation with the Sectoral Committees, information on the key results achieved, expected future results, proposed new, emerging activities and their priorities.
4. The Conference of European Statisticians (CES) Bureau discussed the draft documents to be submitted to the EXCOM at the Bureau meeting in November 2011. The discussion provided many valuable comments and ideas for strengthening the paper. Following the Bureau discussion, the secretariat revised the document. It was sent out to all members of EXCOM (representatives of Missions of the UNECE member countries in Geneva).

II. The review of the Statistics Subprogramme at the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Executive Committee meeting

5. The EXCOM reviewed the Statistics Subprogramme at its meeting on 12 December 2011. The Chair of the CES, Enrico Giovannini, presented the work. The presentation was inspiring and included concrete examples showing the relevance of the work in practice. The Chair was successful in catching the attention of the audience and engaging them in a discussion.

III. Conclusions of the review meeting

6. For further information, an excerpt of the report of the EXCOM meeting on 12 December (the conclusions by the Chairman of EXCOM) is provided in Annex I.
7. The members of the EXCOM expressed strong support for the work undertaken by the Conference and the Statistical Division. The EU delegation encouraged the work and gave the Statistics Subprogramme as a good example, in particular with respect to its work

with other international organizations, the flexibility of the Teams of Specialists provided by the concrete Terms of reference, deliverables and sun-set clauses, and the work through electronic means. The Russian Federation considered the CES to be an important intergovernmental mechanism in developing and implementing regional and world-wide standards in statistical work. The Russian delegation also expressed its support for the future programme of work proposed by the CES Bureau, and noted that serious work was being done in supporting the development of statistics in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries. The United Kingdom, France and others noted that there is a need to further promote and communicate the notable results of the work of the Statistics Subprogramme in a clear and efficient manner.

8. Some noteworthy exchanges during the meeting include: “The Conference of European Statisticians has a unique and complementary role...” (the United Kingdom), “The Conference of European Statisticians is the most important mechanism in statistics regionally and with a global impact”, “The (above listed) methods of work of Statistics Subprogramme should serve as good examples to other UNECE Subprogrammes” (European Union (EU)), “Review documents are well-prepared, value added of the work is clear and results were well presented” (EXCOM Chairman), “The CES is now not only attended by very high-quality and experienced people but one of the most active and proactive international statistical forums in the world”.

9. In his final statement, the CES Chair encouraged Member States to make voluntary contributions to enable UNECE to provide more assistance to countries in need of capacity building.

IV. Next steps

10. The review of all UNECE Subprogrammes is planned to be completed by the end of June 2012. By November 2012 the EXCOM will carry out a cross-sectoral review and prepare concrete recommendations for the future UNECE work priorities. The recommendations will be submitted for adoption at the 2013 spring session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

Annex I

Meeting of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Executive Committee, 12 December 2011

Excerpt from Chairman's conclusions

Item 3 (b) – Review of the 2005 Economic Commission for Europe Reform: Subprogramme on Statistics (Informal document 2011/26)

1. Mr. Enrico Giovannini (Italy), Chair of the CES presented the work of CES and the subprogramme on Statistics.
2. The EXCOM thanked Mr. Giovannini, the CES Bureau and the secretariat for the requested information as presented in Informal document 2011/26.
3. The Chairman recognized that statistics is a necessary basis for important political and economic decisions world-wide, particularly within Europe.
4. The representative of the Russian Federation considered the CES to be an important intergovernmental mechanism in developing and implementing regional and world-wide standards in statistical work. This is a good example of ECE playing a role at the global level. Moreover, in the field of statistics ECE provides the link between various parts of the region. He took note of the high appraisal of the work of ECE from the Chair of CES who previously also served as the Chief Statistician in OECD. The Russian statistical office, Rosstat, values the work of CES and is active within its framework.
5. The Russian delegation also expressed its support for the future programme of work proposed by the secretariat and noted that serious work was being done in the area of statistics in the CIS countries. Bearing in mind the trend towards increased integration in the Eurasian direction, Russia was interested to know how the CES will develop its activities and cooperation with this particular group of countries.
6. The representative of France stated that the CES has worked well. He wondered if the title "Conference of European Statisticians" was appropriate given that the body includes many members outside the region and the work has a global impact. He raised this communication issue as being also relevant for other areas of ECE activities with participation from other regions.
7. The United Kingdom representative reiterated that the Conference has a unique and complementary role. Each Committee should develop in a way that adds value and communicate its success so that the capitals can see why ECE is a worthwhile body. He believed that the Statistics subprogramme and the CES have done well in improving their work efficiency. However, further improvements in this respect are still possible in working with other international organizations. He further posed the same three questions that he asked of other subprogrammes.
8. The EU delegation representative underlined three approaches that are particularly positive with the Statistics subprogramme that could be replicated across ECE. The subprogramme has managed to guarantee non-duplication of work with other organizations by having all the concerned organizations around the table. It is a very interesting model that other Sectoral Committees could learn from. To a large extent it works electronically which is cost-efficient. It works with flexible teams of specialists, with concrete terms of

reference, deliverables and sunset clauses, which allows it to take on new subjects as they present themselves.

9. The EXCOM Chairman found the presentation and the paper very well prepared. He also felt that the very good achievements of the subprogramme and the CES were not sufficiently communicated. He pointed out that the document indicated the work on social statistics related to measuring well-being, poverty and social inclusion as a medium priority for the future. Considering the policy attention given to these issues in countries, he asked that the area be considered of higher priority in the final document.

10. The CES Chair underlined that in 2002 the CES underwent a substantive reform and reconsidered its role and method of work. He informed that over the last 10 years, they were able to re-think, re-design and provide value-added; and the CES is now not only attended by very high-level and experienced people but one of the most active and proactive international statistical forums in the world. According to him, the CES is used to working under continuous pressure and would not wait for 10 more years to discuss how to evolve in the best way.

11. The CES Chair expressed concern that the current crisis would lead to the public sector cutting resources for activities that provide knowledge, including statistics. He encouraged Member States to make voluntary contributions to enable ECE to provide more assistance to countries in need of capacity building. He would bring the issue of the name of the CES to the CES Bureau. Concerning communication, the international statistical community was very well aware of the work of CES. However, more awareness-raising is needed to be done for the general public and for policy-makers and those who decide on the budget.

12. With regard to the United Kingdom's questions, the CES Chair responded that it is up to the national representatives in the CES and its Bureau to indicate their priorities. He added that further improvements were always possible and the CES is continuously adjusting its work according to current priorities and available resources. At the same time, the CES appreciates the EXCOM's support and its substantive guidance. He added that in the review paper and in the Annex II the subprogramme has indicated its priorities for consideration.

13. The representative of France underlined that each Committee, including the CES, should identify what is higher or lesser priority, and clarify what should be done now, what should be done in future, what should be done with the core budget and what can be done with extrabudgetary resources, as well as where the demands are coming from.

14. The EXCOM thanked the CES Chair for his participation.
