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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Conference of European Statisticians

#### Sixty-ninth plenary session

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Item 8 (b) of the provisional agenda

**Programme of work of the Statistics subprogramme of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe:  
Matters arising from the sixty-ninth session of the European Commission for Europe**

### **Matters arising from the sessions of the Economic Commission for Europe and the United Nations Statistical Commission**

**Prepared by the Secretariat**

#### *Summary*

The document presents the key outcomes of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (17-18 March 2021), the 69th session of the Economic Commission for Europe (20-21 April 2021) and the 52nd session of the United Nations Statistical Commission (1-3 and 5 March 2021). The note focuses on the discussions and decisions of these bodies that have a bearing on the work of the Conference of European Statisticians.



## I. Introduction

1. The document presents the key outcomes of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (17-18 March 2021), the 69th session of the Economic Commission for Europe (20-21 April 2021) and the 52nd session of the United Nations Statistical Commission (1-3 and 5 March 2021). Only those discussions and decisions of these bodies are presented that have a bearing on the work of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES).
2. Section II.A of this document reflects the conclusions of a roundtable session “SDGs and COVID-19 – how can data and statistics help building back better?” held during the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development. Section II.B reflects the relevant decisions of the UNECE Commission session.
3. Section III presents the decisions of UNSC with particular relevance to CES.
4. The following sections include extracts of summaries of discussions and key decisions of the above mentioned meetings. For the full texts, please consult the reports of the UNECE Commission session and UNSC, respectively at: <https://unece.org/info/Sessions-of-the-Commission/events/349487>, and at: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/52nd-session/>

## II. Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and the 69th session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

### A. Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

5. The Regional Forum on Sustainable Development took place on 17-18 March 2021. The Forum was informed by the second annual SDG Progress Report *Is the UNECE region on track for 2030?* prepared by the Secretariat at the request of the UNECE 68th session. The report provides a progress assessment on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the UNECE region based on the data available in the United Nations Global SDG Indicators Database and on the statistical methodology commonly used by all five United Nations regional commissions.
6. The Regional Forum on Sustainable Development also included a roundtable session “SDGs and COVID-19 – how can data and statistics help building back better?” held on 12 March. The event was moderated by Cara Williams of Statistics Canada and Joanne Evans of the Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom, and included eight panellists: Anders Tegnell (Public Health Agency of Sweden), Sir Ian Diamond (Office for National Statistics, United Kingdom), Dajna Sorensen (Ministry of Economy and Finance, Albania), Jörg Decker (Destatis, Germany), Alison Hosie (Scottish Human Rights Commission), Alexandru Manda (GEYC Community, Romania), Malgorzata Greszta (CSR Consulting NGO, Poland) and Sven Schade (EU Joint Research Institute).
7. The following key conclusions were drawn from the focus event:
  - (a) The COVID-19 pandemic demanded an effective and targeted response for which data and statistics became even more vital than before. The crisis strained countries’ response mechanisms. It was treated as a challenge by most national statistical systems and became an accelerator of innovation throughout the region. It boosted projects that had already been started in the areas of digitalization, data collection and sharing, communication, and facilitated access to new and non-traditional data sources.
  - (b) In these difficult conditions, national statistical offices and systems faced double pressure: to deliver new data, in a quicker, more frequent and more granular manner, with their staff telecommuting, and no possibilities to collect data through traditional means, such as face-to-face surveys.
  - (c) The “leave no one behind” principle became an important focus to identify the especially vulnerable population groups and target policy interventions. It provided an opportunity to establish new partnerships and look for new data sources, tools and innovative

solutions. This aspect was highlighted by all speakers: government representatives, academia, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), NGOs, and the business sector.

(d) Several examples of adjusting, adapting and combining the existing and new data sources, and implementing new techniques and tools were discussed, including by combining data from different registers; accessing mobile phone operators' data for mobility statistics; web scraping for price statistics and modelling and flash estimations for education, health and GDP data. The scope of surveys was expanded to areas previously considered outside the coverage of official statistics (e.g., the prevalence of the virus based on medical tests). The gender analysis of the impact of the pandemic on women and men shows that understanding a socio-economic impact is the first step in addressing this impact.

(e) The representatives of civil society, academia, NHRIs and business sector emphasised the importance of embedding the "leave no one behind" principle in existing policies and acknowledging the value added of complementary sources to official statistics, such as citizen generated data, sentiment indicators based on social media or results of a human rights monitoring. Additionally, it was underlined that a human rights-based approach to data can provide a real understanding of lived experience of those left behind and promote human rights and equality as the central focus of all recovery policies. In this regard, NHRIs and other actors can provide disaggregated data to statistical offices and governments.

(f) The round table concluded that the national statistical offices, members of national statistical systems, and all other data producers have to join efforts and seek modern and agile solutions. Cooperation and partnership are key if we are to "leave no one behind" - this should be a pathway for a transformative future, not just for crisis situations.

## **B. 69<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

8. The UNECE Commission session, on 20-21 April 2021, extended the mandate of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development. Among other issues, the Commission<sup>1</sup>:

(a) Decided to continue to convene annual sessions of the Regional Forum in the years 2022 and 2023, in close cooperation with the entities of the regional United Nations system and with the active engagement of other relevant stakeholders;

(b) Requested the secretariat to develop the agenda of each session of the Regional Forum [...] to align it with the respective themes and programme of work of the high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of Economic and Social Council, with a focus on those aspects that are particularly relevant to the ECE region and taking into account the findings of the evaluation of the of previous Fora;

(c) Also requested the secretariat to continue to publish a yearly report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the ECE region to support the discussions at the sessions of the Regional Forum, with a focus on the Sustainable Development Goals under review by the high-level political forum for sustainable development that year, using existing data sets and statistics.

(d) Committed to step up the efforts to promote circular economy approaches and the sustainable use of natural resources, namely by mainstreaming circularity and the sustainable use of natural resources in the existing relevant ECE sectoral work programmes;

(e) Invited the secretariat to collaborate with other international organizations and regional economic integration organizations, including the European Union towards the development of a harmonised approach to measuring progress towards circularity including greater resource efficiency;

<sup>1</sup> Decision B (68), [http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/commission/2019/E\\_2019\\_37-1906911E.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/commission/2019/E_2019_37-1906911E.pdf)

(f) Requested the secretariat to present a progress report on the work of the Commission on the promotion of a circular economy and the sustainable use of natural resources for consideration at its seventieth session.

9. In October 2020, the CES Bureau carried out an in-depth review of measuring circular economy based on a paper prepared by a group of experts led by Finland. The paper gave an overview of the current developments and challenges related to measuring circular economy and concluded with recommendations for further work. The Bureau agreed with the recommendations and decided to create a Task Force on measuring circular economy. The following countries and organisations are members of the Task Force: Austria, Belarus, Canada, Colombia, Finland (Chair), India, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, the European Environment Agency, Eurostat, IMF, OECD, Platform for Accelerating the Circular Economy (PACE), the joint UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section, UNEP, United Nations University, UNSD and UNECE. The Task Force is open to other countries and organisations that would like to contribute to its work.

10. Conference will be informed about the outcomes of the in-depth review and the Commission session under agenda item 4(b).

### III. 52nd session of the United Nations Statistical Commission

#### A. Decision 52/101: Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

11. *The Statistical Commission:*

(f) *Welcomed the dedicated work of the Group on challenges relating to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals and the background document entitled “COVID-19 and the global SDG indicators”, as a useful and timely resource for countries to help to identify areas of the Goals on which the pandemic has had a high impact;*

(i) *Encouraged the Group to further incorporate data innovation in its work, including the integration of geospatial information and statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the sharing of experiences and best practices on monitoring of the Goals, the automation of data and metadata transmission using SDMX, and the development of guidelines for geospatial information and SDMX;*

(j) *Stressed the need for enhanced technical and financial support for countries to build capacity for monitoring, for the production of Sustainable Development Goal indicators and for the modernization of statistical systems, including on SDMX, geospatial data integration and data innovation [..];*

(k) *Encouraged the Group to explore ways to connect and align its work with the efforts of other international working groups and bodies, including the regional commissions;*

(m) *Requested the Group and the custodian agencies to continue their dialogue to enhance the data flow process for global reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals, [..], including by making efficient use of existing regional mechanisms or data platforms where possible;”*

12. CES is carrying out work to support the global processes reflected in the above decisions, including:

(a) In 2021, the [Second Edition of the CES Road Map on statistics for SDGs](#) is submitted to the Conference for endorsement under agenda item 7 (a). The Road Map addresses, among other issues, also the impact of Covid-19 on the work related to SDG statistics and indicators. The Steering Group on statistics for SDGs is continuing its work to provide support to countries in implementing the Road Map, including on improvement of data flows and automation of data and metadata transmission. The Conference is working

closely with the geospatial community for the integration of geospatial information and statistics for the 2030 Agenda;

(c) In 2020, UNECE launched its [regional platform on statistics for SDGs](#), consisting of a knowledge hub and a dashboard and database of selected SDG indicators. The purpose of the platform is to communicate developments on measuring SDGs in the UNECE region, provide easy access to up-to-date indicators on implementing SDGs, and to disseminate data and metadata. Based on the database, annual reports on the progress towards SDGs in the UNECE Region are prepared as input to the annual Regional Fora on Sustainable Development;

(d) UNECE was involved in the United Nations Development Account Programme for Data and Statistics, and provided a number of capacity building activities in the economic, social, environmental and infrastructure pillars of the programme. Furthermore, UNECE is implementing an extrabudgetary project financed by the Russian Federation “Strengthening statistical capacity of the CIS countries for providing high quality statistics and indicators to monitor progress towards SDGs” focusing on environmental indicators.

13. The activities related to Covid-19 response cut across all UNECE work areas, focusing on innovation and building resilience of the statistical systems. All expert meetings and capacity development activities held since the pandemic broke out have addressed the impact of Covid-19 in their thematic area. In addition, several dedicated webinars were organized to share experience, e.g. on statistics and geostatistical data for managing the pandemic; data collection, dissemination and communication in the conditions of the pandemic, including a series of webinars on producing consumer price indices under lockdown; the related human resources management and training issues. The role of national statistical offices in the changing world and business continuity of official statistics was also discussed in a joint informal session of CES and OECD Committee on Statistics and Statistical Policy on 24 June.

14. To support statistical production in the face of the crisis, UNECE has developed a wiki platform on Covid-19 and official statistics to guide statistical producers to existing and newly developed resources from UNECE and partners. The platform offers a space for national statistical offices and international organizations to share experiences and developments. It contains resources both on new statistical needs to support countries in managing the crisis, and on emergency measures to ensure continuity of statistical production in core areas of economic, social and demographic statistics such as national accounts, consumer prices, population censuses and household surveys. The UNECE Steering Group on CPI developed a Guide on producing CPI under lockdown, based on recommendations and good practices collected during the pandemic. The Conference will be informed about the Guide under agenda item 7.

### **C. Decision 52/103 Partnership, coordination and capacity-building for statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

15. *“The Statistical Commission:*

*(c) Recognized the continued effort to prepare for the postponed third United Nations World Data Forum in Bern, currently planned to be held from 3 to 6 October 2021;*

*(g) Noted the need for the working group on data stewardship to maintain a dialogue and ensure synergy with other international and regional groups working on this topic, to take account of different national starting points and circumstances, and to consider the numerous case studies already conducted;*

16. UNECE is a member of the World Data Forum Programme Committee.

17. In 2020, the Conference discussed data stewardship during the joint CES-CSSP session on “Impact of Covid-19 crisis on official statistics”. The session concluded with a proposal to create a roadmap and an action plan to support NSOs. In February 2021, the CES Bureau set up a Task Force on data stewardship aiming to define the concepts and possible

tasks/responsibilities of data stewards in the countries. The work is carried out in close coordination with global working group under UNSD.

#### **D. Decision 52/105: Economic Statistics**

18. *“The Statistical Commission:*

*(a) Welcomed the report of the Friends of the Chair Group on economic statistics and commended the Group for creating an inclusive assessment and drafting process to develop its recommendations (...) to support the system of economic statistics;*

*(e) Supported the proposal for regional commissions and (sub) regional agencies to play a key role in the experimentation and testing of methodological revisions of international statistical standards in countries, and recommended that the guidance from the experimentation and testing are made available to all countries and incorporated into regular updates of international statistical standards to ensure their viability;*

*(f) Approved the recommendation to establish a new network of economic statisticians to facilitate networking, coordination, and communication on new innovations, experiments, and best practices for the purpose of making progress on priorities to keep economic statistics relevant (...).”*

19. The CES work programme on economic statistics includes work in the areas of national accounts and global production, wellbeing and sustainability, statistical business registers, consumer price indices and quality of employment statistics.

20. Work in these areas is guided by established UNECE Steering Groups consisting of experts from member countries and partner organisations. Activities are carried out in cooperation with partner organisations, including CIS-STAT, EFTA, Eurostat, ILO, IMF, OECD, World Bank and UNSD. Activities are coordinated with global initiatives through, e.g., the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts (ISWGNA) and the Intersecretariat Working Group on Price Statistics (IWGPS) and participation in established UNSD Committees of Experts.

21. Activities include expert group meetings and regional workshops. Expert group meetings provide important platforms to exchange experiences and good practices, developing methodological guidelines and recommendations and following-up on their implementation in countries.

#### **E. Decision 52/106: National Accounts**

22. *“The Statistical Commission:*

*(a) Welcomed the report of the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts (E/CN.3/2021/8), expressed its appreciation for the activities undertaken by the members of the Advisory Expert Group, the Working Group, the regional commissions, other regional organizations and countries to facilitate the implementation of the System of National Accounts 2008 (2008 SNA) and supporting statistics, and endorsed the programmes of work for 2021 of the Working Group and the Advisory Expert Group on National Accounts;*

*(d) Welcomed the progress made on the preparation and elaboration of guidance on the relevant issues for the update of the 2008 SNA, [...] emphasized the need for coordination and collaboration between countries and (sub) regional and international agencies to facilitate the experimentation and testing of the guidance notes [...];*

*(e) Welcomed the work to develop guidance for measuring the digital economy, the informal economy, unpaid household service work, household income and wealth distribution, [...] stressed that the monitoring and analysis of well-being and sustainability should not compromise, but rather enhance traditional analyses for macroeconomic statistics in extended or supplementary tables [...];*

(f) *Noted the need for an adequate statistical infrastructure, including statistical business registers, legal framework and technology infrastructure to implement the proposed recommendations for the update of the 2008 SNA;*”

23. The CES work programme on national accounts is closely aligned with the global work process, including the following current work areas:

(a) UNECE organizes jointly with Eurostat and OECD regular meetings of the Group of Experts on National Accounts. These meetings provide an important platform for discussing common challenges of national accounts, balance of payments and business statistics, and for monitoring the implementation of global standards and related UNECE guidelines. The meetings, which have been organized in close cooperation with the ISWGNA, have provided a forum for discussing progress with the SNA update and consulting draft recommendations and guidance notes. The meetings will also serve for sharing country experience from the testing of the draft recommendations and guidance notes. Eastern member countries are involved in the consultation and experimentation through organization of training sessions and translating guidance notes into Russian.

(b) UNECE contributes to the global advancing of the 2008 SNA research agenda in the areas of globalization, wellbeing and sustainability, communication and informal economy. This includes the publication of the following guides:

- (i) *Guide to Sharing Economic Data in Official Statistics* (UNECE 2021) aiming at increasing statisticians’ ability to analyse multinational enterprises. The UNECE Steering Group on National Accounts will consider a country survey to identify operational models for data sharing and exchange of expertise and best practices. It will also organize a meeting of MNE coordinators, including the EU MNE coordinators’ network.
- (ii) *Satellite Accounts for Education and training: Compilation Guide* (UNECE 2020) assists countries in constructing internationally comparable satellite accounts for the education sector and improving cost-based measurement of human capital.
- (iii) *Poverty Measurement: Guide to data disaggregation* (UNECE 2020) gives guidance on disaggregation for measuring poverty and helps improve the quality and comparability of poverty statistics. The Guide is designed to enhance methodologies that aim at identifying disadvantaged or vulnerable members of society, who often experience the highest levels of poverty.
- (iv) *Guide on Poverty Measurement* (UNECE 2017) provides practical guidance to statistical offices on poverty measurement. It discusses the availability and comparability of key poverty measures and measurement challenges such as self-employment income, goods and services produced for own consumption, transfers between households, social transfers, and transfers in kind.
- (v) *Guide on Valuing Unpaid Household Service Work* (UNECE 2017) consolidates the existing experience and presents an internationally agreed approach to valuing unpaid household service work. It discusses the concept of unpaid household service work and methodological and implementation challenges.

(c) UNECE, in collaboration with partner organizations such as EFTA, Eurostat and UNSD, facilitates the implementation of the 2008 SNA and Balance of Payments Manual, sixth edition in the EECCA and SEE countries through the organization of workshops, special sessions, development and translation of training materials.

## **F. Decision 52/107: Business and Trade Statistics**

24. *“The Statistical Commission:*

*(b) Endorsed the proposed work plan for 2021 and 2022, including the preparation of [...] a manual on the maturity model for statistical business registers;*

(d) Welcomed the release of the *Global Group Register* to address issues of globalization and the role of multinational enterprises (MNEs), and noted that the need for the sharing of data among countries and agencies is essential for a comprehensive and coherent measurement of global value chains in the *Global Group Register*. Moreover, requested guidance how to preserve confidentiality in the sharing of data on MNEs based upon country best practices; (...)"

25. UNECE in cooperation with Eurostat and OECD organises the biennial meetings of the Group of Experts on business registers. The Expert Group serves as a forum for sharing experiences and best practices for the development and maintenance of statistical business registers. Through international cooperation the Group aims to improve the quality of statistical business registers as basis for data collection, data integration and efficient production of coherent economic statistics.

26. UNECE is a member of the Steering Group of the Wiesbaden Group on Business registers, and is involved in work related to the Committee of Experts on Business and Trade Statistics and participates in the task teams on globalization and digitalization and business dynamics, demography and entrepreneurship.

27. The Conference endorsed the [Guide to Sharing Economic Data in Official Statistics](#) in 2020. The Guide highlights the importance of data sharing to capture economic stocks and flows correctly in official statistics and introduces practical ideas and common tools to make data sharing possible. In 2021, UNECE will follow up with activities in this area. The Group of Experts on National Accounts will serve as a forum for the network of experts on multinational enterprise groups.

## G. Decision 52/108: Environmental-economic accounting

28. *"The Statistical Commission:*

(a) *Expressed its appreciation for the work done by the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting over the past year, particularly in finalizing the revised System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) Ecosystem Accounting [..];*

(g) *Welcomed the progress of the Committee in mainstreaming the use of SEEA in policy, including climate change, circular economy, sustainable finance and biodiversity policy [..];"*

29. The CES work programme in support of SEEA implementation is closely aligned with the global work programme, and includes the following key activities:

(a) OECD and UNECE jointly organize regular seminars on the implementation of SEEA. These seminars provide a platform for exchange of knowledge and experience, and support the coordination of capacity development. The topics discussed at the seminar are aligned to a large extent with the work programme of the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting, with a focus on priority issues for the UNECE and OECD regions. The last seminar, held on 9-11 March 2021 online, discussed SEEA Ecosystem Accounts and its relevance in policy and decision making, measuring circular economy with SEEA, and the role of waste accounts, and using SEEA for policies on climate change and sustainable finance.

(b) In 2020, the updated CES Set of Core Climate Change-related Indicators and Statistics Using SEEA, its implementation guidelines and accompanying metadata sheets were finalized by a dedicated Task Force and endorsed by the Conference. The Task referred to the SEEA Central Framework as far as possible and identified some issues for the SEEA research agenda during its work.



## H. Decision 52/109: Migration statistics

30. *“The Statistical Commission:*

*(h) Acknowledged the need (a) to provide guidance on data integration and on the potential of using non-traditional data sources, in particular to measure international temporary mobility, and (b) to strengthen statistical capacity and resources in support of countries’ efforts to improve migration data;*

31. The following work streams of the CES work programme are of particular relevance:

(a) A dedicated task force prepared [Guidance on data integration for measuring migration](#); the Guidance endorsed by the Conference and published in 2019;

(b) The UNECE Task Force on the Use of Longitudinal Data for Migration Statistics developed a [guidance on how to incorporate longitudinal data into annual migration statistics](#) and complement the available cross-sectional measurements; the guidance was endorsed by the CES in 2020;

(c) A UNECE task force is currently working to develop guidance for national statistical offices on the use of new data sources (including big data and other innovative sources) for measuring migration and cross-border mobility. The new guidance is expected to be completed in the course of 2022.

(d) UNECE organized in October 2020 two online meetings on migration statistics, to exchange experiences on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on migration and remittances, and on the collection, production and dissemination of international migration statistics. Similar meetings are planned in October 2021.

## I. Decision 52/111: Management and modernization of statistical systems

32. *“The Statistical Commission:*

*(a) Welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on management and modernization of statistical systems, and congratulated the drafting team on the achievement of the fourth edition of the Handbook, entitled ‘Handbook on Management and Organization of National Statistical Systems’;*

*(b) Endorsed the revision process and the work of the advisory group, and expressed appreciation to the members of the advisory group for their valuable role in guiding and contributing to the drafting of the Handbook;*

33. The UNECE Secretariat was an active contributor to the revision of this handbook, which draws heavily on various CES outputs, particularly those of the High-Level Group for the Modernisation of Official Statistics. UNECE is a partner with UNSD, Eurostat and EFTA in a proposed conference to promote the Handbook in the Eastern part of the UNECE region. The conference will be held when conditions allow.

## J. Decision 52/112: Big data

34. *“The Statistical Commission:*

*(b) Urged the Global Working Group to continue strengthening the institutional environment, methodology and quality assurance framework in the use of big data, including in the form of manuals on big data and data science for official statistics, [...];*

*(c) Supported the creation of a new task team on the acquisition of global private sector data, and requested that the task team establish constructive arrangements with global companies in sharing data with the global statistical community;”*

35. In 2019-2020, a project on machine learning was carried out under the UNECE High-level Group for Modernisation of Official Statistics (HLG-MOS) to investigate where machine learning can add value, increase the capability of statistical organizations to use machine learning, and identify common challenges in advancing its use in statistics. The

project produced a number of outputs, including a summary report with recommendations on how to advance the use of machine learning in statistical organizations, a report on 21 pilot studies, a quality framework for statistical algorithms (QF4SA), a report on the integration of machine learning into production and accompanying materials (codes, data). In 2021, the work on machine learning for official statistics will continue under the Machine Learning 2021 Group will be led by the Data Science Campus of the UK Office for National Statistics in partnership with the UNECE HLG-MOS.

## **K. Decision 52/113: International statistical classifications**

36. *“The Statistical Commission:*

*(h) Welcomed the proposed work programme of the Expert Group, including the work on the classification of business functions and the classification of statistical activities;*

37. In 2020, the CES Bureau launched the update of the Classification of Statistical Activities to take into account the emergence of new statistical areas, such as climate change-related statistics and statistics on governance. The update is currently ongoing, undertaken by a small task team led by Mexico (members: Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, Eurostat, UNSD, UNECE).

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