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Coordination of international statistical work in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region

Topics to be reviewed in depth and seminar topics in 2023 and 2024

Prepared by the Secretariat

Summary

The in-depth reviews carried out by the CES Bureau and the seminars at the CES plenary sessions on topics of interest to Heads of national statistical offices are important vehicles ensuring the relevance of the work under CES.

In the past the topics for in-depth reviews and CES seminars were selected through separate processes. In October 2022, the Bureau agreed on a streamlined process with one consultation on the topics carried out in January each year, and establishing a better link between the in-depth reviews and CES seminars.

The document presents the outcome of the electronic consultation in January 2023 and the proposal on the topics for the next cycle of reviews and CES seminars agreed by the CES Bureau at its February 2023 meeting. The proposal takes into account the votes for the listed topics and new proposals, as well as offers by countries to contribute.

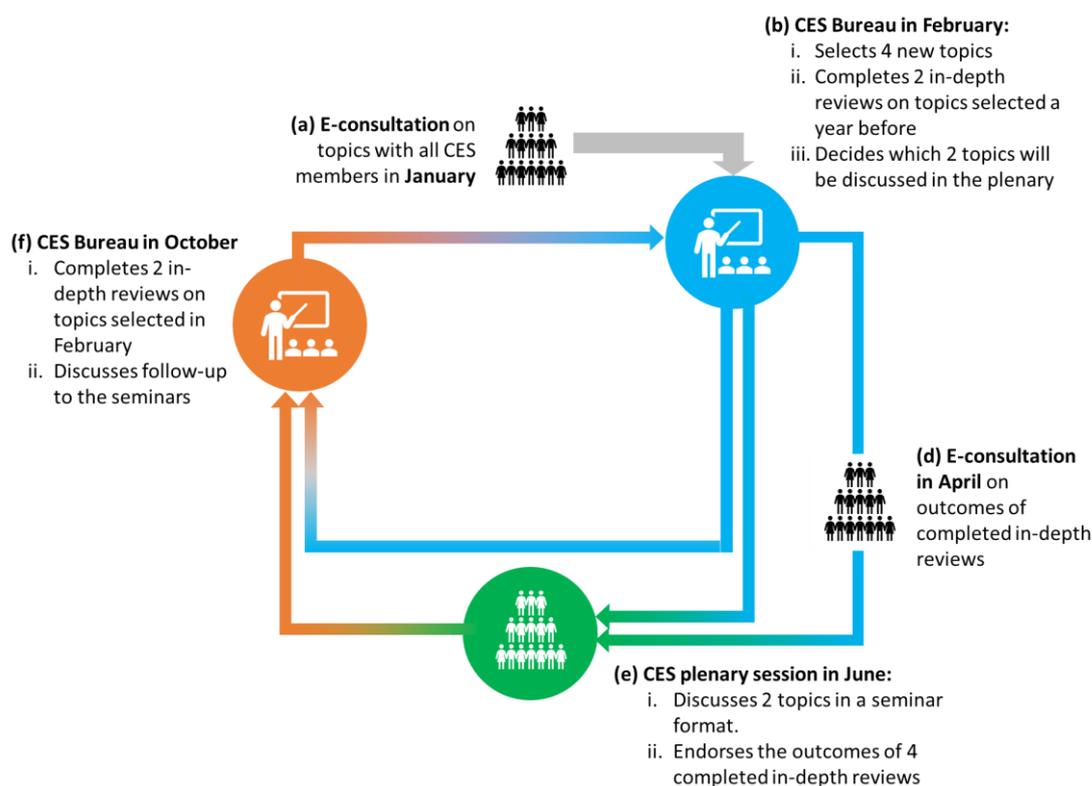
The Conference is invited to approve the proposal for the in-depth reviews and possible CES topics.



I. Background

1. The in-depth reviews carried out by the CES Bureau and the seminars at the CES plenary sessions on topics of interest to Heads of national statistical offices are important vehicles ensuring the relevance of the work under CES. They aim to address the pertinent issues that statistical offices deal with today and to scan the horizon for the upcoming issues that they may need to deal with tomorrow.
2. The in-depth reviews aim to coordinate statistical activities in the region, identify gaps and address emerging issues. The topics covered are often novel or deal with new developments in established areas of work. The reviews are based on a paper prepared by some countries or organizations. The Bureau discusses the topic, aiming to identify concrete recommendations and actions to address the issues raised. The outcomes of the reviews are presented to the Conference for endorsement.
3. The CES plenary sessions usually include two seminars which discuss topical, strategic issues of official statistics that are of interest to the Heads of statistical offices. The seminars are organized by volunteering countries on topics selected through electronic voting among CES members. The seminars rely on papers prepared by countries and organizations and are a platform for sharing experiences and good practices, and discussing challenges and common solutions. The seminar session may be organized on a topic which was already reviewed in-depth or which was selected for the in-depth review in the next cycle.
4. In the past the topics for in-depth reviews and CES seminars were selected through separate processes. In October 2022, the Bureau agreed on a streamlined process with one consultation on the topics carried out in January each year and a link between the ongoing or completed in-depth reviews and the CES seminars.
5. The streamlined process runs as follows (see also Figure 1 below):
 - (a) In January, an electronic consultation on topics with all CES members is carried out. In that consultation, all CES countries and organizations ‘vote’ on possible topics and express willingness to contribute to those topics. Countries are also encouraged to propose additional topics.
 - (b) In February, the CES Bureau reviews the outcome of the consultation with the broad CES membership, selects 4 topics for the next cycle of in-depth reviews (2 for October the same year and 2 for February next year) and confirms 2 topics to be discussed at the CES plenary session in the same year. The Bureau also reviews 2 topics in-depth (selected in February the previous year).
 - (c) In April-May, the CES members are consulted on the completed in-depth reviews.
 - (d) In June, the Conference discusses the 2 topics selected by the Bureau in a seminar format and endorses the outcomes of all completed in-depth reviews.
 - (e) In October, the Bureau reviews 2 topics in depth (selected in February) and discusses follow-up to the CES seminars.
6. This paper presents the outcome of the consultation on the topics carried out in January 2023, in line with step (a) of the process described above. Section II lists countries who responded to the consultation. The results of the consultation are presented in section III. The countries and organizations that volunteered to contribute are listed next to each topic. Section IV lists additional topics suggested by countries. Section V presents a proposal for the selection of topics agreed by the CES Bureau. The annex presents the explanatory notes to the topics of upcoming in-depth reviews.

Figure 1.
The cycle of in-depth reviews and CES seminars



II. Outcome of the consultation on topics conducted in January 2023

7. The Secretariat sent out the electronic consultation on a list of possible topics for the CES in-depth reviews and/or seminars in the 2023-2024 cycle on 20 January 2023 (with the deadline for response end January). Forty-two countries and one international organization replied: Albania, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Ecuador, Estonia, France, Georgia, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Mexico, Mongolia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, the United States, Ukraine and OECD.

III. Results of the consultation

8. The list of topics, number of votes they received and offered contributions are presented in a table below.

Table 1.

List of topics with number of votes they received and offered contributions

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Votes</i>	<i>Offered contributions</i>
B. Linking data across domains and sources	30	Australia, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, France, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Mexico, Mongolia, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Türkiye (15)
A. Timeliness and frequency of official statistics	26	Austria, Ecuador, Hungary, Italy, Mexico, Portugal, Spain, OECD (8)

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Votes</i>	<i>Offered contributions</i>
D. Maintaining relevance through providing products meeting user needs	23	Albania, Australia, Belgium, Hungary, Mexico, Slovenia, Sweden, Türkiye (8)
E. Building social acceptability through improving statistical literacy	21	Albania, Belgium, France, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Portugal, Slovenia, Türkiye, United Kingdom (10)
F. Moving towards open-source technologies – strategic and managerial perspective	19	Netherlands, Norway, United Kingdom (3)
G. Administrative microdata for climate, energy and environment statistics	17	Australia, Denmark, Netherlands, OECD (4)
C. Strategic management tools and techniques for NSOs	16	Albania, Austria, Canada, Ecuador, Mexico, United Kingdom (6)
N. Hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources	14	Denmark, Italy, Mexico, Türkiye (4)
K. Use cases for alternative population bases	12	Albania, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, New Zealand, Poland, UK (6)
I. New data sources for gender statistics	9	Albania, Latvia, Mexico (3)
J. Statistics and data on cities – current practices	8	Canada, Netherlands, Spain, United Kingdom (4)
L. Measurement of well-being	9	Denmark, Lithuania, Mongolia, OECD (4)
H. Social and solidarity economy	5	United Kingdom (1)
M. Social cohesion	2	-

IV. Additional topics proposed by countries

9. The following additional topics were proposed by countries:

(a) **Legal and practical implications of using privately held data** – proposed by Estonia;

(b) **Developments in data stewardship – follow up** (as the report of the Task Force on Data Stewardship will be on the agenda of the CES 2023) – proposed by Austria and Serbia;

(c) **Research data infrastructure and cooperation with science** – proposed by Austria;

(d) **Statistical planning instruments**– proposed by Ecuador. Description: to know the international experiences on the creation and application of planning tools aimed at strengthening the technical, dynamic and permanent process of organization and coordination of statistical activities.

(e) **Geospatial information in business statistics** - proposed by Mexico. Description: The use of this information should be promoted to generate detailed statistics allowing a subnational analysis by including additional characteristics of businesses at regional level (province, states and municipalities). Some advantages for developing this kind of data are offering a more in-depth analysis of economic features regarding the demography of businesses.

V. Proposal agreed by the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians in February 2023

A. Topics to be reviewed in-depth by the CES Bureau in October 2023 and February 2024

10. Based on the results of the consultation, the CES Bureau agreed to review the following topics in-depth in October 2023 and February 2024:

(a) **Linking data across domains and sources** (30 votes, 15 countries offering to contribute). This topic is proposed for an in-depth review in October 2023/February 2024 and, building on the outcomes of the in-depth review, for a CES seminar in 2024 when the CES will have a joint plenary session with the UN-GGIM: Europe. Geospatial references have an important role in linking data across domains and sources, therefore it will be good to discuss it together with the geospatial community.

(b) **Timeliness and frequency of official statistics** (26 votes, 8 countries/organizations offering contributions: Austria, Ecuador, Hungary, Italy, Mexico, Portugal, Spain, OECD). The topic is also proposed for a seminar at the CES 2023 plenary session to gather input for an in-depth review.

(c) **Administrative microdata for climate, energy and environment statistics** (17 votes, 4 offers to contribute: Australia, Denmark, Netherlands, OECD).

(d) **Use cases for alternative population bases** – a topic that was already selected for a future in-depth review at the February 2020 Bureau meeting, with the timing to be agreed later as the relevant experts were busy with the 2020 census round. Furthermore, during its discussion on strategic issues in October 2022 the Bureau considered this issue to be of high priority and noted the urgency of addressing the topic. In the current consultation, twelve countries voted for discussing this topic at the CES. Albania and Italy offered to contribute.

11. On the topic of ‘**maintaining relevance through providing products meeting user needs**’ (23 votes, 8 offers to contribute) the communications work stream under HLG-MOS will prepare a paper for the October 2023 meeting. Based on this paper the Bureau will decide whether an in-depth review is necessary.

B. Topics discussed at the CES 2023 plenary session

12. Two new topics from the consultation have been included in the current CES plenary session:

(a) **Timeliness and frequency of official statistics** (26 votes, 8 countries/organizations offering contributions); a seminar on this topic will allow to collect information on what approaches countries are using to increase timeliness and frequency to provide good input for an in-depth review (agenda item 9);

(b) **Moving towards open-source technologies** – strategic and managerial perspective (19 votes, 3 countries offering to contribute (agenda item 3).

13. The Conference usually selected some in-depth review topics to be discussed more in detail to collect input for further work. Based on the consultation ‘**Hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources**’ was added as this topic received a highest number of votes (14) among the topics that have been reviewed by the time for the Conference. This is in addition to the topic “**Data ethics as key enabler of social acceptability**”, which was decided in October 2022 when the in-depth review was conducted. (agenda item 8).

14. Data **stewardship** was also mentioned as an additional topic by two countries (Austria and Serbia). The CES plenary session is considering the final report by the CES Task Force on data stewardship that is submitted for endorsement (agenda item 5b). This will provide an opportunity to also discuss the data stewardship topic at CES.

C. Topics to be considered in the next cycle

15. ‘Building social acceptability through improving statistical literacy’ and ‘Strategic management tools and techniques for NSOs’ received also significant support but due to the time limitations and links with other topics could not be accommodated in the current cycle of reviews and CES discussion. These topics and the additional topics that countries proposed will be included in the list of topics for the consultation in 2024.

D. Summary of the proposal

16. The following table summarises the agreed proposal.

Table 2.

Summary of the proposal agreed by the CES Bureau

Topic	CES 2023 discussion	In-depth reviews		CES 2024 discussion (tbc)
		Oct. 2023	Feb. 2024	
Linking data across domains and sources		X		(X)
Timeliness and frequency of official statistics	X		X	
Maintaining relevance through providing products meeting user needs			(X)	
Administrative microdata for climate, energy and environment statistics			X	
Moving towards open-source technologies – strategic and managerial perspective	X			
Hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources	X			
Data stewardship	X			
<i>Topics decided earlier (for information):</i>				
<i>Use cases for alternative population bases (decided in Feb. 2020)</i>		X		
<i>Data ethics and social acceptability (decided in Oct. 2022)</i>	X			

Annex

Explanatory notes to the topics of upcoming in-depth reviews

I. Timeliness, frequency and granularity of official statistics (topic A)

1. Official statistics exist to measure characteristics of the economy, society and environment for evidence-based decision-making by citizens and policymakers. Timely data produced with sufficient granularity and frequency are needed for this purpose. If official statistics do not meet the timeliness demands of users, those users will turn to other sources that are available when they need them, even if they are of lower quality in other dimensions such as accuracy and validity.

2. Discussion of timeliness of official statistics relates to fundamental questions about what official statistics is, users' needs, whether there is inevitably a trade-off between accuracy and timeliness, and what constitutes 'acceptable' in such a trade-off, both for producers and for users. The pandemic created heightened demand for timeliness as compared to other dimensions of quality; and in responding to these shifts in demand, NSOs achieved great gains in timeliness which were widely welcomed by many kinds of stakeholders. These gains need to be sustained and spread to different areas of statistics and among countries. Having seen that statistics can be produced rapidly; users are unwilling to return to the pre-pandemic status quo. A balance should be found between the core statistics, where the classical quality dimensions such as accuracy cannot be compromised, and the more experimental statistics, where the results can be 'good enough' and still give useful insights with a faster turnaround.

3. An in-depth review will:

(a) Collect and share examples of approaches to improving timeliness, frequency and granularity from different countries and statistical domains, e.g. nowcasting, leading indicators and flash estimates in economic statistics; quarterly GHG emissions in climate change-related statistics and others;

(b) Examine the extent to which the value offered by statistics declines with decreased timeliness: for example, does a delay in releasing census statistics while errors are checked and corrected lead to a reduction in the usefulness of those statistics to users?

(c) Identify which approaches could be spread to other statistical areas in which they are not yet applied, and in which there is significant demand for more timely, frequent and granular data;

(d) Collect good practices in ensuring transparency and communicating about ality dimensions.

II. Linking data across domains and sources (topic B)

4. In recent years, the issues at the top of global and national policy agendas, such as the Covid pandemic, climate emergency, or energy and cost of living crises have shown clearly that society, economy, environment, and health are connected and can no longer be treated in silos. Addressing these issues requires interoperable data from different subject areas and different sources that can be linked and integrated. NSOs are in a good position to undertake such integration, and it can be a competitive advantage of NSOs as compared to other data providers.

5. An in-depth review on this topic could:

(a) Collect examples of statistical outputs produced using integrated/linked data from different subject areas and different sources;

(b) Take stock of the progress in this area and international initiatives supporting undertaking such activities by NSOs;

(c) Discuss best practices, challenges and approaches to organizing such projects in the NSOs.

6. One of the HLG-MOS projects for 2022-2023 has been the Data Governance Framework for Interoperability. The objective of the in-depth review is not to duplicate the project but explore more examples and provide a platform for a high-level discussion, taking into account the outcome of the project. If this topic is selected, it could be discussed at the CES 2024 plenary session, which will include a joint day with UN GGIM: Europe.

III. Maintaining relevance through providing products to meet new user needs (topic D)

7. Staying relevant is a primary concern of NSOs in a changing data landscape. The report on “Measuring the value of official statistics” endorsed by the Conference in 2022 emphasized that the value of official statistics is derived from responding to user needs and hence relies on knowing who users are and what their needs are. Traditionally, a “pyramid” of users and their information needs was often considered – from insights for the media and the general public to the most detailed data for the scientific community and analysts.

8. However, the user community, their expectations and needs keep evolving, including the emergence of new user groups, e.g. data journalists or data bloggers who have very different needs than traditional media and “the general public”. To meet the needs of various user groups, the NSOs have started producing a much wider offering of statistical products and outputs – from raw data tables and APIs, through reports and press releases, to infographics or even podcasts. The organizational capability to identify user groups, understand their needs and propose relevant statistical products may be especially important in new, rapidly-growing topics.

9. The review could cover the following questions:

(a) What approaches and methods NSOs use to identify their user groups, understand what products and services they need and how they use them;

(b) What new groups of users are and what types of products and outputs they are looking for;

(c) How NSOs can engage with these various groups of users and provide support so they can fully take advantage of NSOs offering.

IV. Administrative microdata for climate, energy and environment statistics (topic G)

10. Significant information demands in the areas of climate, energy and environment statistics call for the use of new data sources, which can complement traditional methods, to increase the efficiency of data production or enable producing new statistics and indicators. Particularly promising are administrative microdata, such as data from utility meters, building energy ratings/certificates or vehicle tests data.

11. At the request of the 2022 Expert Forum for Producers and Users of Climate-Change-Related Statistics, a webinar was held on this topic in spring 2023 to share knowledge between countries that already have access to this kind of data and use them for statistical production as well as identify the main obstacles faced by the NSOs in doing so. An in-depth review will build on the outcomes of the webinar, bring its conclusions to the attention of chief statisticians and provide basis for a high-level discussion on what is needed to enable progress in this area. In particular, an in-depth review could:

(a) Summarize the assessment of the availability and existing uses of environment-related administrative microdata (utility meters, building energy ratings/certificates, vehicle tests data), including the broad environment domain (energy and

climate) and other domains such as macro-economic, business, social, and demographic statistics;

(b) Assess the legal basis for obtaining access to the administrative microdata including customer registers in countries; identify obstacles and possible solutions that can be helpful to NSOs who do not have yet access to such data:

(c) Gather national examples of existing large-scale uses of administrative microdata for producing statistics;

(d) Explore value added of combining administrative microdata files using common unique identifiers as well as linking administrative microdata with data from other domains and sources;

(e) Identify synergies, approaches, tools and methods that would be helpful for countries planning to use such data.

V. Use cases for alternative population bases (topic K)

12. The CES Bureau conducted an in-depth review of diversification in census methodology in October 2015 and published a report, *New Frontiers for Censuses Beyond 2020*, in February 2020. One of the issues raised in both analyses is that the concept of population may need a paradigm shift.

13. Population counts can be made according to one of several different bases—where people usually live, where they are legally resident, where they hold citizenship, where they own or rent property, where they pay taxes, where they work or study, etc. The evolution of the use of these different bases and their appearance in international recommendations—in particular, the “usually resident” base and the development of its detailed definition in the UNECE region—was presented in a working paper by Eurostat (Lanzieri, 2019) at the 2019 UNECE-Eurostat Expert Group Meeting on Population and Housing Censuses. The paper examines the currently used concepts and definitions and the practices followed to determine the size and location of the population across European Union (EU) countries.

14. The CES Recommendations for the 2020 Censuses of Population have recognized that countries may wish to produce additional population counts using other bases but called for countries to produce a count for international comparisons using the “usually resident” base. This recommendation rests on the assumption that the most policy-relevant information about the spatial distribution of people is where people usually spend the night, since it corresponds to where people have their homes, pay taxes and consume domestic goods and services. Yet, where people spend their daytime – at work or school, on roads, in commercial centres, in transport hubs, in leisure facilities or outdoor spaces – might be more relevant for making certain kinds of decisions on service provision. The allocation of resources for health services, electricity, waste collection or communications infrastructure might be better based on information about where people are during the day, while information about commuting routes and times would help inform transport planning and the provision of new homes.

15. Existing analyses have looked at this question from several angles, ranging from the imperatives deriving from data sources (for example, what can actually be achieved with administrative data sources), to the more philosophical ones (what does ‘population’ really mean?).

16. A review will consider examples of actual or potential uses of population counts using an alternative base to inform policy, the ways of collecting this information from different sources, and the implications for the next census rounds.