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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Conference of European Statisticians

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Item 4 (b) of the provisional agenda

#### Coordination of international statistical work

#### in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region:

#### Hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources

### In-depth review on hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources

#### Addendum

#### Outcome of the electronic consultation on in-depth review on hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources

#### Prepared by the Secretariat

#### *Summary*

This document presents the outcome of the in-depth review on hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources that the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians carried out in February 2023, and summarizes the feedback from the electronic consultation on the review among members of the Conference of European Statisticians in April–May 2023.

The in-depth review paper (ECE/CES/2023/6) was prepared by Denmark with contributions from Canada, Italy, New Zealand and United States of America. The review paper deals with the concepts and ways of capturing hard-to reach groups in administrative sources, summarizes the experience of national statistical offices in accessing hard-to-reach groups and describes problems and challenges. It also proposes further possible work to improve the access to hard-to-reach groups using administrative data. As an outcome of the February 2023 review, the CES Bureau supported further work in this area and decided to establish a new task force, as recommended in the paper.

The Conference will be invited to endorse the outcome of the in-depth review on hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources (ECE/CES/2023/6) on 23 June 2023 under item 4 (b).



## I. Introduction

1. Each year, the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) reviews selected statistical areas in depth. The purpose of the reviews is to improve coordination of statistical activities in the region of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), identify gaps or duplication of work, and address emerging issues. These reviews focus on strategic issues and highlight concerns of statistical offices of both a conceptual and coordinating nature.
2. The Bureau carried out an in-depth review on hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources in February 2023 based on a paper by Denmark with contributions from Canada, Italy, New Zealand and United States of America (provided as document ECE/CES/2023/6).
3. The UNECE Secretariat conducted an electronic consultation in April–May 2023 to inform all CES members about the in-depth review on hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources and provide an opportunity to comment on its outcomes.
4. The following 15 countries and organizations replied to the electronic consultation: Armenia, Canada, Denmark, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, Russian Federation, the United States, and Eurostat.

## II. Outcome of the Conference of European Statisticians Bureau discussion in February 2023

5. The Bureau made an in-depth review of hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources at its February 2023 meeting.
6. The Bureau supported further work in this area and agreed with the establishment of a new task force, as recommended in the paper, to be chaired by Denmark. In addition to the countries that already contributed to the paper (Canada, Italy, New Zealand and United States), Ireland, Mexico, United Kingdom, Eurostat, the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) expressed interest in joining the task force. The Secretariat will prepare the terms of reference for the new task force, for review by the Bureau at the October 2023 meeting

## III. General comments received in the electronic consultation

7. Countries expressed broad support for the in-depth review, highlighted the relevance of the topic and welcomed the creation of the new task force.
8. Concerning the relevance of the topic, **Hungary** noted that users are increasingly demanding more detailed data for vulnerable groups, which are often not feasible to monitor through traditional statistical data collection, also considering declining response rates of sample surveys. For **Malta**, the inability to identify hard-to-reach groups is leading to substantial under-coverage in the sampling frames, hence leading to severe quality problems in social surveys. Malta also noted that the results of work in this topic will be useful for advocacy, to improve the collaboration between NSOs and data sources managers. **Russian Federation** noted that the results of work in this field could be useful in the transition moving to a register-based census, in view of the 2030 census round. The **United States** noted that the work of the task force on identifying some basic principles focusing on policy relevant groups would be extremely valuable.
9. In the responses it was noted that although the level of development of administrative sources can vary significantly across countries, in general all countries face some issues with regard to measuring hard to reach groups, although the groups may differ among countries. The experience of the countries that developed statistical systems heavily based on administrative data can be useful also to countries that are still developing the use of administrative data. **Hungary** noted that although the circumstances and possibilities of each country vary considerably in terms of the administrative information available, there are

some groups that are problematic to count and measure in all countries. **Ecuador and Mexico** noted the need to also cover the realities of countries with less developed administrations.

10. Some countries made comments on which population groups and what characteristics should be considered in the work of the task force. **Canada** drew attention to the need to distinguish between hard-to-reach individuals/groups, and their difficult-to-measure characteristics. With regard to homelessness, it was noted that the concepts of primary and secondary homeless have not been defined in the paper. **Finland** did some work on producing statistics on homelessness based on register data and is willing to share its experience and the difficulties encountered. **Mexico** noted that three hard-to-reach population groups are not considered in the paper, but are of particular interest in the region: refugees, internally displaced and stateless persons. Mexico also offered to contribute with its experience on collecting information on people with disabilities. Considering the methodology, the **Netherlands** noted that so called capture-recapture models are used to produce estimates of the number of homeless people, while this method seems not to be applicable in **Denmark**. The **Netherlands** also commented on the methods used to deal with under coverage and over coverage of some population groups.

11. The recommendations in the paper were supported, and the decision taken by the CES Bureau to create a new task force on this topic was welcomed. **Armenia, France** and the **Netherlands** expressed interest in joining the new task force, in addition to the countries listed above (see para. 6).

12. INEGI (**Mexico**) offered to contribute to the new task force with its experience on collecting information on people with disabilities in sociodemographic surveys, as well as in the Population and Housing Census and the Census of Social Welfare Accommodations. Mexico also noted that it would be desirable to include and expand the task force so the experience of less developed public administrations is considered. There are specific characteristics for these countries, such as challenges to link administrative records while sharing similar challenges regarding hard-to-reach populations. Other challenges are lack of infrastructure, interoperability, and constant update.

13. Detailed substantive comments are provided in the annex. Countries also sent editorial corrections and additional information which are not listed here. The comments will be taken into account in the CES discussion and in further work in this area.

## Annex

### Detailed substantive comments received from electronic consultation

<i>Country / Organization</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Canada	<p>Para. 3 - The paper needs to distinguish between hard-to-reach individuals/groups, and their difficult-to-measure characteristics. (...) Yes, it's difficult to measure minority status using admin data, but is there any reason to think that admin data would fail to detect or count these populations?</p> <p>Para. 15 – The meaning of the second sentence is not clear. The person who has been assigned housing will be easily identified in the housing register, but will be difficult to find on a homeless survey (if they cannot be found at their assigned housing).</p> <p>Para. 40 - The concepts of primary and secondary homeless have not yet been defined in this paper.</p> <p>Para. 80 (e) - Are we talking here about people who, for reasons of privacy or distrust, avoid being detected by administrative data, statistical registers, or the census? For example a person who wants to live alone in a cabin in the woods? This was not a type of person identified in any of the country sections, and no strategy has been articulated for how to measure those people.</p>
Ecuador	<p>The document “Hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources” exposes the challenges that face developed countries when using administrative sources to characterize their population and the strategies implemented to get information of hard-to reach groups like illegal migrants, homeless people, populations of high mobility, newborns, elderly, ethnic minorities, among others. Nonetheless, in order to deepen the analysis about the subject, a working group has been created to foster the exchange of experiences and strengthen the administrative sources of information.</p> <p>Hence, taking part of this working group would be an excellent opportunity to know better practices to identify hard-to reach groups, and contribute to the development of new methodologies, and tools to strengthen the production of censuses and another types of statistical operations, from administrative sources. Yet, to Ecuador it is important the group to count with the participation of Latin American countries that share similar social realities.</p>
Finland	<p>Finland shared some information on the work done in this field in its country. During the last year Statistics Finland has been studying how to produce statistics on homelessness based on register data. The work showed that such register-based statistics are not feasible, at least for the time being. However, the new task force might be interested to hear how Statistics Finland did the work and what difficulties we encountered.</p>
Hungary	<p>Thank you for the insights on the study of statistically hard-to-reach groups. We believe this is a very important initiative. Our experience has shown that users are increasingly demanding more detailed data, especially for vulnerable groups, which are often not feasible to monitor through traditional statistical data collection. Declining response rates further complicate the accuracy of sample observations, especially for smaller subpopulations. We also believe that in many cases combining and matching survey data with administrative data may be a solution. We</p>

Country / Organization	Comments
	therefore support the launch of this work in a working group and further investigation of this topic. Although the circumstances and possibilities of each country vary considerably in terms of the administrative information available, there are groups that can be identified everywhere that are problematic to count statistically. In addition, learning about good practices in different countries and formulating international recommendations can be extremely useful in improving the statistical monitoring of hard-to-reach groups.
Malta	This is a very significant issue for Malta, especially with respect to social statistics, and it represents a major concern for the NSO. The inability to identify hard-to-reach groups is leading to substantial under-coverage in our sampling frames, hence leading to severe quality problems in our social surveys. In view of this, we support this effort and the creation of a TF to study this issue and propose solutions that can be implemented in different national scenarios. It is also important to highlight the need for advocacy, since this problem cannot be addressed by NSI's alone – unless effective collaborations with our data sources are gained, significant progress in overcoming this challenge cannot be achieved.
Mexico	<p>Mexico, through INEGI, endorses the outcomes of this in-depth review and confirms its willingness to participate in the extended working group. It would be desirable to include and expand the working group, so the experience of less developed public administration is considered. There are specific characteristics for these countries, such as challenges to link administrative records while sharing similar challenges regarding hard-to-reach populations. Other challenges are lack of infrastructure, interoperability, and constant update.</p> <p>There are four hard-to-reach population groups that the review does not consider, and that are of particular interest for the region: refugees, internally displaced and stateless persons. For all these groups, an international common framework of concepts and guidelines to measure and assess these populations have been developed, so it is important to take those efforts into account.</p> <p>INEGI could contribute to this new working group with its experience on collecting information on people with disabilities in sociodemographic surveys, as well as in the Population and Housing Census and the Census of Social Welfare Accommodations.</p> <p>Likewise, we could present how it is planned to take advantage of the upcoming operation of the Electronic Certificate of Disability, in charge of the Health Sector, and of the Guidelines to capture, integrate, and present data on the population with disabilities in the programs of information from the National System of Statistical and Geographic Information.</p>
Netherlands	Five countries (Denmark, Canada, Italy, New Zealand and United States of America) prepared an in-depth review on 'Hard-to-reach groups in administrative sources'. This has led to a valuable document that may benefit statistical offices in different countries in different ways. The good thing is that the discussed countries all differ with respect to their administrative setup, but their binding factor is that they have a very big dataset that contains information on a large part of the population. This binding factor is an international trend emerging in other countries as well. A common problem in the five countries is that they miss data on some 'hard-to-reach' groups, while the group specifications differ per country (e.g., older, children, ethnic groups, homeless, etc.). In order to obtain statistics that also cover these groups, the five countries discuss their experiences and employed methods designed to deal with their country-specific issues. It seems likely that many

<i>Country / Organization</i>	<i>Comments</i>
	<p>countries will recognize one or more of these issues as the stories of these countries together give a broad overview of many of the issues that may be encountered in reaching hard-to-reach groups. This overview therefore seems beneficial for other countries that are, or aim to be, in a similar administrative situation.</p> <p>A description of the administrative situation of the Netherlands seems to be most similar to Denmark, because both countries use a population register (PR) that contains unique identification keys that can be linked to other sources. A difference is however, that in Denmark also a census is conducted, which is not the case in the Netherlands. The administrative similarity also shows in the categories of hard-to-reach groups, which in both countries are homeless and illegal immigrants. A difference between Denmark and the Netherlands seems to be that in the Netherlands there are a few data sources available that, although they cover only a small part of the homeless or illegal immigrant population, allow for an estimation of their size by the use of so called capture-recapture models. An estimate for the number of homeless is produced annually by Statistics Netherlands . It seems from the description that the Danish data does not suit this capture-recapture approach, but maybe this conclusion deserves a second opinion after a closer inspection. The number of illegal immigrants was estimated a few times over the years with a similar method by the Dutch Research and Documentation Centre.</p> <p>Two other issues that are discussed and play a role at Statistics Netherlands are under- and overcoverage. Undercoverage are people receding in the country but missing in the population register (PR), and overcoverage are people in the PR that are not receding in the country. Both of these groups can be considered hard-to-reach. The Dutch PR is of very high quality in terms of undercoverage, as it is estimated to be quite low. At Statistics Netherlands undercoverage was periodically estimated by combining probabilistic linkage and capture-recapture models, which introduced work on some methodological issues. However, it is unclear how much the Dutch PR suffers from overcoverage. On this topic the Netherlands may benefit from the work done at Istat and Stats NZ. Istat employs the ‘Signs of Life’ approach which allows for the identification of inactive people in the PR. This method could also be beneficial for Statistics Netherlands, as it gives an estimate of the size of overcoverage. However, it is not directly clear which data sources could be used. Customs control data that is available at Stats NZ (but currently not at Statistics Netherlands) could potentially fill that gap.</p>
Russian Federation	<p>The basic principles of hard-to-reach population groups classification in administrative sources is in demand in the national statistical services practical activities. Information on how to develop the characteristics of these population groups will be used in development of changeover methods of moving to a register-based census in Russia.</p>
United States	<p>The 2030 round population census in the Russian Federation will be based on the population register. The results of the task force work will be important methodological help during preparation for this census.</p> <p>The U.S. agrees with the recommendation to establish a task force to find common ground and to apply those concepts to a few specific hard-to-reach population groups. The task force work on identifying some basic principles and focusing on policy relevant groups would be extremely valuable. The U.S. is interested in continuing to participate in this task force and being involved in further work on this topic.</p>