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Strategy and Goals for the Short and Medium Term

Siena Group on Social Statistics

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STRATEGY AND GOALS FOR THE SHORT AND MEDIUM TERM

<u>Summary</u>: The present document outlines the strategic short-term and medium-term goals of the Siena Group on Social Statistics. It identifies the priority areas to be addressed by the Group as part of its mission to promote and co-ordinate international co-operation in the area of social statistics.

<u>Keywords</u>: Social statistics; statistical policy; Siena Group on Social Statistics

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1. Introduction

The Siena Group on Social Statistics was created in 1993. The main purpose of the Group is the promotion and co-ordination of international co-operation in the area of social statistics by focusing on social indicators, social accounting, concepts and classifications as well as analysis of the linkages and frameworks for integrating social, economic and demographic data for the purposes of policy formulation and analysis.

The Group had seven meetings since 1993. The dates, locations, themes and convenors of the meetings are listed in Appendix 1.

The Siena Group follows a well-established phenomenon of City-named Expert Groups set up under the auspices of the United Nations Statistical Commission. The tradition started with the Voorburg Group on service statistics, which was first set up in 1986 and first met in Voorburg, the Netherlands, in January 1987. According to the United Nations Statistical Commission the role of City Groups is:

- to actively contribute to the development of international standards in their respective areas of work, within the framework set by the international work programme;
- to exchange best practices in their area of work;
- to produce specific outputs (advice, classifications, manuals) requested by the Statistical Commission.

The existence of voluntary networks outside formal structures have proven to be very fruitful in the international statistical community. International co-operation is extremely useful for statistical capacity building by exchanging of information on best practices.

The present paper outlines the strategic short-term and medium-terms goals of the Siena Group on Social Statistics. Section 2 restates the mission of the Group: to promote and co-ordinate international co-operation in the area of social statistics. Section 3 lists the priority areas in social statistics to identify the short, medium and long-term objectives of the Group. The short-term and medium-term strategy of the Group are outlined in section 4. Section 5 turns the short-term strategy into a work programme for the years 2002-2004. Finally, section 6 restates the modus operandi of the Group.

2. Mission statement

The terms of reference of the Siena Group are to promote and to co-ordinate international co-operation in all areas of social statistics by focusing on social indicators, social accounting, social reporting, concepts and classifications and on analysis of the linkages and frameworks for integrating social, economic and ecological data

for the purposes of policy formulation, analysis and monitoring. In particular the Group aims to:

- 1. strengthen the leadership role of national statistical institutes in the area of social statistics;
- 2. foster links between national statistical institutes and researchers to facilitate collaboration on the development, production and analysis of social statistics;
- 3. identify significant conceptual and methodological issues of universal interest but not currently receiving (enough) attention and develop appropriate international statistical activities to address them;
- 4. co-operate with international organisations and complement their work programmes and support international co-ordination;
- 5. act as a conduit for communication and networking among social statisticians from national statistical institutes and international organisations;
- 6. disseminate knowledge on and support education and training in social statistics and social reporting.

The Siena Group sees itself as an independent, focussed and flexible think tank for the development of social statistics at local, national and international level by filling gaps not being addressed through international organisations and by identifying frontier issues not currently receiving enough attention.

3. Priority areas in social statistics

In the area of official social statistics¹ a large number of issues can be recognised that call for attention. These are at a random order:

- relationships with users, both policy-makers and citizens and the growing need for evidence-based policy formulation and monitoring;
- social indicators and social reporting: determining key social issues and key population groups at national, international and local level and strengthening statistical leadership in defining key indicators and disclosing conceptual inadequacies in social policy and analytical models;
- linkages between social, economic and ecological statistics and micro-macro linkages;
- concept and measurement of social capital;
- data sharing and data integration and how to deal with conflicting data;

¹ Although no precise definition of social statistics is given, social statistics are considered to comprise all areas of statistics relating to people and their living conditions: demography; health; education and training; labour; income, consumption and wealth; social protection and social cohesion; housing; mobility; time-use; culture and leisure; crime and justice.

- existing central concepts and definitions in social statistics vis-à-vis the growing need to use data sources not primarily created for statistical purposes;
- stalemate in social accounting;
- quality assessment of social statistics;
- identifying cases of best practice and benchmarking methodology;
- relationships with academic units;
- joint work on social statistics across countries rather than within individual countries;
- comparability of data across countries and the purport of comparability;
- co-ordination at international level as well as a growing demand for local and infra-regional information;
- ensuring data confidentiality vis-à-vis the growing demand for access to microdata;
- weak role of national statistical institutes in many countries vis-à-vis their task in ensuring confidentiality in the modern world.

4. Short-term and medium-term strategy

Reflection upon the issues raised in the previous section has led to five priority areas that should be the focus of the short and medium-term strategy of the Group²:

- 1. Concept and measurement of social capital;
- 2. Social indicators and social reporting;
- 3. Linking social, economic and ecological statistics;
- 4. Using data sources not primarily created for statistical purposes;
- 5. Education and training in social statistics and social reporting.

These five priority areas will subsequently be discussed.

Concept and measurement of social capital

International organisations and national statistical institutes are increasingly becoming interested in measuring social capital. For example, a recent OECD report "The Well-being of Nations: The role of Human and Social Capital" explores how human and social capital relate to well-being, social outcomes and economic growth. It notes that better measures of social capital will be required, together with reliable

² These priority areas were identified at the Intermediate Meeting of the Group at Geneva, Switzerland on 3 and 4 December 2001.

cross-country measures. The World Bank interest in social capital stems from their concern with sustainable development and their desire to investigate and analyse how and in what forms social capital enables the poor to participate actively and benefit from the development process. The World Bank has undertaken a number of studies examining social capital and is aiming at identifying a core set of 12-15 social capital questions. National statistical institutes with plans to measure social capital include the UK Office for National Statistics, CSO Ireland, Statistics Canada, Australian Bureau of Statistics and Statistics New Zealand. Eurostat and the European Commission are not known to have plans for measuring social capital, although some questions of a social capital nature may be included in the new EU Statistics on income and living condition (SILC). UNESCO have held symposia on social capital formation and poverty reduction, but it is unclear to what extent measurement issues were considered.

Much of the interest in the international measurement of social capital is in developing a core set of harmonised questions which can be applied in a consistent and comparable way across countries. This raises four main issues:

- Among international organisations and individual countries there seems to be some convergence towards a *definition of social capital* that embraces networks and norms of reciprocity. However, there is still some debate, particularly in the academic community, about how to define it. Dialogue will need to be maintained with the academic community to aid mutual understanding of developments both in terms of concepts and measurement.
- 2. Some accepted measures of social capital, such as volunteering, depend on the *cultural context* in which they are used. For example, in many Asian societies certain actions may not be perceived as volunteering but as the norm. Likewise, the perception of neighbourhood or community (to which many of the social capital concepts relate) may differ between societies. These issues need to be understood in order to make sure that inter-country comparisons of measures of social capital are properly interpreted.
- 3. It will be vital to ensure that the different international organisations *co-ordinate* closely to ensure a consistent approach and to avoid both themselves and national statistical institutes in duplication of effort.
- 4. Internationally, comparable measures need to be relevant and applicable in the *domestic context*. Many national statistical institutes and other national agencies will not have given much thought to the relevance of social capital and may need time to consider their data requirements.

Short-term goals: The short-term goals are to organise a one day session at the next General Meeting on the conceptualisation of social capital. Its aims are to share good practice and identify scope for convergence in defining social capital across countries. In particular, some accepted measures of social capital, such as volunteering, depend on the cultural context in which they are used. These issues need to be understood in order to make sure that inter-country comparisons of measures of social capital are properly interpreted. Furthermore, the different international or-

ganisations will have to co-ordinate closely to ensure a consistent approach and to avoid both themselves and national statistical institutes in duplication of effort. A process for achieving this should be identified, building on the planned conferences in the next few years.

The UK ONS is co-ordinating a project to ensure a consistent approach within UK government to understanding and measuring social capital. This work will form the foundation for ONS contributions to the international conferences with the aim of creating a co-ordinated programme of future work. Work undertaken already includes a workshop to explore Government Departments' conceptualisation, utilisation and understanding of social capital and a report showing which UK surveys contain questions of a social capital nature.³ The plans for taking this work forward fall into three main categories:

- i) analysis of existing data sources;
- ii) development of a co-ordinated approach to measurement and definition of social capital across government;
- iii) investigation of new data and development of new statistics.

Medium-term goals: The medium-term goals concerning social capital are to continue to share good practice and identify scope for convergence in and suitable survey instruments for comparing social capital across countries. Further meetings will be organised to find out what policy interventions are being tried involving social capital and what works. In the long run, this may be followed by a policy conference on social capital. The feasibility of developing a bank of harmonised questions on social capital will be investigated. Initially, this will be based on an analysis of existing sources. This may be followed by further question development. Work will also be undertaken to develop and promote an operational definition of social capital for use across government. Other medium-term goals include investigations of administrative data sources of social capital, time series analysis of measures of social capital, development of both aggregate and neighbourhood level measures (the latter may involve modelling techniques) and further examination of the relationship between measures of social capital and social and economic outcomes of interest.

Social indicators and social reporting

Policy-maker's demands for social statistics have changed drastically during the last decades, referring to the vast and growing use of indicators for monitoring national and European social policies as well as in the follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits. Monitoring social developments using performance and

³ Several UK surveys contain questions relevant to the measurement of social capital. Two of these (the General Household Survey 2000/'01 and the Citizenship Survey 2001) contain explicit social capital modules. Results from these two surveys and the Time Use Survey

2000/'01 will be published in 2002. The reports will include analysis of social capital variables in their own right and in relation to social and economic outcomes of interest, particu-

larly health outcomes.

policy indicators has become an important element of modern evidence-based policy-making. As a consequence, the work on social indicators and social reporting has developed well during the last few years. However, there are still some weaknesses, especially in the promotion and the proper use of indicators. Additional work needs to be done in the area of statistical capacity building for monitoring: how to use indicators properly and how to ensure the use of the proper indicators.

Short-term goals: At the next General Meetings, a half-day discussion should cover indicator development, awareness and use of indicators for policy debate and good practices. This applies to the use of indicators for monitoring national policy goals and priorities as well as in providing international benchmarks for national policy.

Medium-term goals: To integrate the experiences from individual countries and international organisations and to publish the outcomes in form of articles or in form of propositions to the UN Statistical Commission, bearing in mind the state of play with linking social, economic and ecological statistics.

Linking social, economic and ecological statistics

Recent years have seen a growing interest in the inter-relationships between social, economic and environmental aspects of life. There is interest in whether and how economic growth affects health, education, crime and other social concerns. There are debates about the sustainability of economic growth and a recognition that the environment is neither an inexhaustible source of raw materials nor capable of absorbing an unlimited amount of waste. Human well-being and economic progress are multidimensional and their dimensions are intertwined. For the proper monitoring of human development or the 'state of the nation' links between social, economic and ecological statistics need to be developed and strengthened. Furthermore, statistical information systems should allow for making meaningful comparisons between countries and between regions. First of all, comparable data is necessary to develop and monitor international policy. In the second place, national policy is also influenced by developments in other countries and has strong regional dimensions.

In the past decade a lot of work on these issues has already been done. Labour accounting has become a well established method to combine data from household surveys, business surveys and registers. Similarly, educational and health accounting as well as time-use based satellite accounts are in different stages of development. National Accounts have been extended to data on the labour market, social protection, household production and the environment. Social Accounting Matrices are being further developed. Sets of social indicators have now been developed and various countries and international organisations already use several sets of key and summary indicators in specific policy fields (employment, health, social inclusion, sustainable development). Conceptual frameworks linking monetary and non-monetary phenomena are being developed and tested. The developments as described above of course differ between countries with respect to content, policy impact and timing. However, the globalisation of society demands comparable infor-

mation, not only for those countries organised in alliances or international cooperation but also for individual countries, institutions and businesses.

Short-term goals: Identify the consensus on best practices in linking social, economic and ecological statistics. Organise a half-day session at the next General Meeting of the Group to wrap up the discussions at previous meetings. Tune the work on linking social, economic and ecological statistics in particular to the needs of social policy-makers and to the findings of the work on social indicators and social reporting.

Medium-term goals: The compilation of a reader on intersections of social, economic and ecological statistics showing best practices in the development of policy-relevant frameworks on social reporting, the harmonisation of concepts, definitions and classifications in different data sources, the combined use of register data and survey data and avoiding publication of conflicting information.

Using data sources not primarily created for statistical purposes

Concepts and methodological issues should always be on the agenda of the Siena Group, with varying contents according to emerging needs. Substantial discussions on concepts and methodology at every meeting is an important contribution which will be reported in the proceedings and ideally lead to recommendations on best practices. One of the first methodological issue to be dealt with the coming years will be the conceptual impact of new types of data sources.

The Nordic European countries have a long tradition of using administrative records on persons as a primary source for social statistics. The foundation for this development was the introduction of the personal identifier and the subsequent use of these identifiers in all administration – both public and private. As a result, a broad range of social statistics such as demographic statistics, labour statistics, income statistics and social security statistics and health statistics is grounded on registers for the total population.

The use of administrative registers in social statistics has in the last decade evolved in many countries – also in countries without unified personal identifiers. This development is partly based on growing economic constraints and partly for the benefits in these new data sources such as use of total population data instead of sample data, creation of longitudinal data and harmonisation between sources.

Using national administrative information, however, creates problems concerning international comparability. The foundation for international comparability is common concepts and the concepts in social statistics are developed from household survey methodology, i.e. based on personal interviews. A well-known example is the definition of households. Internationally, the housekeeping concept is accepted, but this concept cannot be used in statistics based on registers. Instead, it may be possible to define households as a household-dwelling unit. These two concepts are not identical, but how will the use of the two concepts influence the results in for example income statistics?

Short-term goals: Organise a half-day session at the next General Meeting of the Group on the use of data sources not primarily created for statistical purposes. The purpose of this session will be to examine concepts based on administrative sources with concepts based on personal interviews.

Medium-term goals: Wrap-up the discussions on the statistical implications of the use of data sources for social statistics that were not primarily created for statistical purposes and produce recommendations on best practices.

Education and training in social statistics and social reporting

The promotion of capacity building in social statistics is a major goal of the Siena Group. Transfer of know-how and best practices in all areas of collection, analysis and dissemination of social statistics between statisticians working for national and international agencies is an important condition for the further development of social statistics.

Short- and medium-term goals: Contribute to statistical capacity building by supporting current training programmes of the UN, in particular on human development reporting.

5. Programme of work 2002-2004

The Siena Group is a voluntary, independent think tank for the development of social statistics. Managing the work of the Group towards concrete results is therefore not easy. Nevertheless, there is much to be gained by its members in working towards concrete and attainable goals. Planning for several years will make it easier to achieve outputs. Outputs can take the form of manuals, readers on conceptual and methodological issues, surveys of best practices or advice to the international statistical community.

Based on the short-term strategic goals outlined in the previous section, the work programme of the Group for the years 2002-2004 contains 5 programme elements which can be summed up as follows.

(i) Concerning the *concept and measurement of social capital* the work programme includes the organisation of a session at the next General Meeting. The main theme of this session will be the conceptualisation of social capital. Its aims are to share good practice and identify scope for convergence in defining social capital across countries. In particular, the cultural context in which some accepted measures of social capital are used needs to be understood to guarantee that inter-country comparisons of measures of social capital are properly interpreted. Furthermore, the different international organisations active in this field will have to co-ordinate closely to ensure a consistent approach and to avoid both themselves and national statistical institutes in duplication of effort. A process for achieving these results should

be identified at the next General Meeting, building on the planned conferences in the next few years.

The UK ONS and the OECD will take the lead on this programme element during the forthcoming years.

(ii) Concerning *social indicators and social reporting* a substantial discussion at the forthcoming General Meetings should cover indicator development, awareness and use of indicators for policy debate and good practices. This discussion will have to focus on the use of indicators for monitoring national policy goals and priorities as well as on providing international benchmarks for national policy.

The OECD supported by Statistics Netherlands will take the lead on this programme element during the next few years.

(iii) Concerning *linking social, economic and ecological statistics* consensus on best practices in linking social, economic and ecological statistics needs to be identified. At the next General Meeting a session will be organised to wrap up the discussions at previous meetings.

Statistics Netherlands will take the lead on this programme element during the coming years.

(iv) Concerning using data sources not primarily created for statistical purposes a session at the next General Meeting will be organised on the statistical implications of using administrative data sources. The purpose of this session will be to examine concepts based on administrative sources with concepts based on personal interviews.

Statistics Denmark will take the lead on this programme element for the forthcoming General Meeting.

(v) Concerning *education and training in social statistics and social reporting* current training programmes of the UN will be supported, in particular those on human development reporting.

UNECE supported by Statistics Netherlands is willing to co-ordinate activities under this programme element during the next few years.

Next General Meeting

The UK Office for National Statistics will be the convenor of the next General Meeting of the Group in the autumn of 2002. The Meeting will last three days and the various sessions will cover the programme elements mentioned above. If relevant, a session will be included on special reports (i.e. reports on important international projects not covered by other sessions). The Meeting will be concluded by a session on future work.

6. Modus operandi

The work of the Siena Group on Social Statistics is organised in the following ways:

- a) General meetings with a frequency of about 18 months;
- b) **Intermediate meetings** on an ad hoc basis;
- c) **Partnerships** of members working together on joint projects of mutual interest;
- d) Networking through Internet contact;
- e) **Statistical capacity building** by knowledge dissemination and supporting education and training programmes in social statistics and social reporting.

The activities of the Siena Group are managed by a **Bureau**.⁴ The Bureau will coordinate and further the work programme and activities of the Group, identify thematic priorities to be worked on in an international context, facilitate and co-ordinate the establishment of networks and partnerships studying specific issues, liaise with international organisations⁵ and reach agreement with an organisation to host a General Meeting having regard to timing, theme and broad approach to the meeting.

The Bureau will be comprised of representatives of national statistical institutes and international organisations. Membership will be nominated from a General Meeting of the Group.

The activities of the Group and the Bureau are supported by a **Secretariat**.⁶ The Secretariat also acts as a clearinghouse for information for anyone interested in the activities of the Group, maintains a contact list of members of the Group, disseminate information on the work programme and activities of the Group, prepare reports on activities as required for tabling at meetings of international organisations, provide a link between the Bureau and other members of the Group, liaise as appropriate with institutes interested to publish reports on the activities of the Group and liaise with the convenor of a meeting of the Group.

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⁴ The present members of the Bureau are listed in Appendix 2.

⁵ A selection of international organisations, associations and societies relevant to the field of social statistics are listed in Appendix 3.

⁶ The present address is listed in Appendix 2.

Appendix 1. Previous meetings of the Siena Group on Social Statistics

	Date		
	Location	Convenor	
	Theme of the meeting		
I	17-20 October 1993		
	Siena, Italy	Instituto Nazionale di Statistica (ISTAT) and University of Siena	
	International Conference in Memory of Sir Richard Stone		
II	6-7 June 1994		
	Stockholm, Sweden	Statistics Sweden (SCB)	
	Social Reporting and Social Accounting		
Ш	8-9 June 1995		
	Oslo, Norway	Statistics Norway (SSB)	
	Youth and Social Exclusion		
IV	6-7 June 1996		
	Paris, France	Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques (INSÉÉ)	
	Intergenerational Relations and Social Mobility		
\mathbf{V}	5-6 June 1997		
	Neuchâtel, Switzerland	Swiss Federal Statistical Office (BfS/OFS/UST)	
	On the way to a multicultural society?		
VI	7-9 December 1998		
	Sydney, Australia	Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)	
	Families at the end of the twentieth century		
VII	22-24 May 2000		
	Maastricht, Netherlands	Statistics Netherlands (CBS)	
	Accounting in social statistics and indicators for social development		
VIIA	3-4 December 2001		
	Geneva, Switzerland	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)	
	Intermediate meeting on strategic short-term and medium-term goals		

Appendix 2. Members of the Bureau of the Siena Group

At the last General Meeting of the Group in May 2000 the following members were elected to the **Bureau**:

Dr. PIETER EVERAERS, Chair (Statistics Netherlands)

Dr. PAOLO GARONNA (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe)

Mr. **MICHEL GLAUDE** (Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques, France)

Ms. MARION McEWIN (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

Mr. **JOHN PULLINGER** (Office for National Statistics, UK)

Since May 2000, due to a change in function, Dr. Garonna, Ms. McEwin and Mr. Pullinger have left the Bureau. At the Intermediate Meeting of the Group in December 2001 Ms. **KAREN DUNNELL** (Office for National Statistics, UK) was co-opted to the Bureau to replace Mr. Pullinger, as the ONS will be the convenor of the next General Meeting. New members of the Bureau will be elected at the next General Meeting.

The Bureau is assisted by a **Secretariat**. The Secretariat is maintained by Statistics Netherlands. The Secretariat is co-ordinated by Mr. **PAUL VAN DER LAAN**. The address is:

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Appendix 3. International organisations, associations and societies relevant to the field of social statistics

A. International organisations

- a) United Nations (Statistical Division, Population Division and Criminal Justice Division)
- b) United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) (Statistical Division, other Divisions and Population Activities Unit)
- c) Other United Nations Regional Commissions (Economic Commission for Africa / ECA, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean / ECLAC, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific / ESCAP and Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia / ESCWA)
- d) Conference of European Statisticians (CES)
- e) Eurostat
- f) European Commission
- g) European Union Council Advisory Committee on Statistical Information in the Economic and Social Spheres (CEIES), Sub-Committee on Social Statistics
- h) Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT)
- i) Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Statistics Directorate and Directorate for Education, Employment, Labour and Social Affairs)
- j) European Science Foundation (ESF)
- k) Euresco Conferences (European Commission, High Level Scientific Conferences)
- 1) Council of Europe (CoE)
- m) International Labour Organization (ILO)
- n) United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- o) World Health Organization (WHO) (Headquarters and Regional Office for Europe)
- p) United Nations Centre for International Crime Prevention (CICP)
- q) United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI)
- r) European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control, affiliated with the United Nations (HEUNI)
- s) The World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development)
- t) United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

- u) United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA)
- v) United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- w) United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- x) International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)
- y) United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS)
- z) United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)
- aa) European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions
- bb) Paris Group on Labour and Compensation Statistics (City Group)
- cc) Rio Group on Poverty Statistics (City Group)
- dd) Delhi Group on Informal Sector Statistics (City Group)
- ee) "Friends of the Chair" (FoC) Expert Group on Indicators (United Nations Statistical Commission)

B. International associations and societies

- a) International Statistical Institute (ISI)
- b) International Association of Official Statistics (IAOS)
- c) International Association for Survey Statisticians (IASS)
- d) International Social Science Council (ISSC)
- e) International Federation of Social Science Organizations (IFSSO)
- f) International Sociological Association (ISA), Working Group 6 on Social Indicators and Social Reporting
- g) International Economic Association (IEA)
- h) International Association for Cultural Economics (IACE)
- i) International Association for Research in Economic Psychology (IAREP)
- j) International Association for Research in Income and Wealth (IARIW)
- k) International Social Security Association (ISSA)
- International Association for Social Science Information Services and Technology (IASSIST)
- m) International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP)
- n) International Health Economics Association (IHEA)
- o) International Political Science Association (IPSA)
- p) International Society for Quality-of-Life Studies (ISQOLS)

- q) Society for Advancement of Behavioral Economics (SABE)
- r) Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics (SASE)
- s) European Association of Labour Economists (EALE)
- t) European Society for Population Economics (ESPE)
- u) European Sociological Association (ESA)
- v) International Organization for Migration (IOM)
- w) International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP)
- x) International Bureau of Education (IBE)