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Items for information: coordination and integration of statistical programmes

Work of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its forty-third session,** the present report is submitted, summarizing the main conclusions of the nineteenth and twentieth sessions of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, held in New York on 27 February 2012 and in Frankfurt, Germany, from 17 to 19 September 2012. The Commission may wish to take into account the views of the Committee in its discussions under the relevant agenda items. Furthermore, the Commission is invited to take note of the report.

* E/CN.3/2013/1.

** See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2012, Supplement No. 4, E/2012/24*.



I. Introduction

1. The Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities held two sessions in 2012. The nineteenth session of the Committee was held in New York, on 27 February 2012, in the context of the forty-third session of the Statistical Commission, while the twentieth session of the Committee, hosted by the European Central Bank, was held in Frankfurt, Germany, from 17 to 19 September 2012. Both meetings were co-chaired by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (Henri Laurencin, Head, Development Statistics and Information Branch, Division on Globalization and Development Strategies) and the European Central Bank (Werner Bier, Deputy Director General, Statistics, European Central Bank). The report summarizes the main conclusions of the nineteenth and twentieth sessions of the Committee.

2. In addition to holding two annual sessions, the Committee operates actively between sessions through a network of task teams, following up on the decisions taken during the regular sessions. The established teams choose their own working arrangements and hold their own meetings, if appropriate. Task teams prepare documents on the progress and results of their work and report back to the Committee as a whole for decision-making at its regular sessions. As the secretariat of the Committee, the United Nations Statistics Division works closely with the Co-Chairs, facilitates communication among Committee members and prepares the reports of the regular sessions and the annual report to the Statistical Commission; it also maintains the Committee's page on the Division website (http://unstats.un.org/unsd/accsub-public/workpartner_ccsa.htm).

II. Membership

3. The Universal Postal Union (UPU) applied to join the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities by letter in February 2012. During the nineteenth session, the UPU representative presented a brief overview of the UPU statistical service. A written voting procedure in March achieved the necessary quorum of two thirds of the current membership of the Committee as required by the terms of reference. UPU was informed of the outcome of the vote and was welcomed to the Committee in a letter from the Co-Chairs in May.

4. The Committee now has 39 members (see annex for a list), 32 of whom attended at least one session in 2012.

III. Work of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities

A. Special session on the future of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities

5. During the twentieth session, the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities held a special session with a focus on reviewing the working methods and the future agenda of the Committee, following a preliminary exchange of views that took place during the nineteenth session. To facilitate such reflections the

International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (representing the views of larger member organizations), the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) (representing the views of smaller and specialized member organizations) and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) (presenting the United Nations regional perspective) presented their views. In addition, the Co-Chairs provided their views in a presentation that was supported by a note on the history of the Committee, its achievements and the proposed way forward.

6. During the discussion, there was general agreement that the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, which was established in 2003 after the Administrative Committee on Coordination Subcommittee on Statistical Activities (1966-2001) had been abolished, has accomplished a lot, including a number of tangible outputs; for example, the Principles Governing International Statistical Activities and the Global Inventory of Statistical Standards. Members agreed that the current terms of reference (as revised in 2008) were adequate to support the functioning of the Committee. It was mentioned that the diverse membership of the Committee was sometimes a challenge but has proven to be one of its strengths, and that, in fact, cooperation was very fruitful over the past 19 sessions, even in cases where the topics discussed were of immediate concern to only a few organizations.

7. The Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities agreed to strengthen its coordination function among international and supranational organizations in preparation of global meetings. This applies in the first place to the Statistical Commission. The Committee decided to work on joint positions on agenda items of the Statistical Commission that are important to the Committee; at each Committee September meeting, the Statistical Division will inform the Committee on the forthcoming agenda of the Statistical Commission for the following year and the plans for the following years, and the Committee will devote most of its February session to finalizing such joint positions. Depending on whether such positions meet a high degree of support by Committee members, the Co-Chairs may be mandated to speak with a Committee voice. This would not exclude (neither supporting nor diverging) interventions of other Committee members.

8. Topics on the agenda of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities should include and possibly focus on the following: regular updates on other coordination mechanisms (for example, inter-agency expert groups), which should be more detailed for Committee priority topics; recurrent priority topics, such as global projects, data exchange, data hubs, cooperation with countries, and human capital; emerging issues, such as geospatial information; new innovative approaches in data collection and data dissemination; and update of the United Nations Fundamental Principles.

9. To improve its working mechanisms, the Committee considered the following approaches: providing task teams with better guidance and expected timelines; the use of sherpas in addition to task teams; inviting users and competitors (for example, commercial data providers) to special sessions; and making better use of available advocacy tools; for example, organizing a side event at the Statistical Commission or arranging a session at the International Statistical Institute World Statistics Congresses.

10. The Committee acknowledged the substantial support that the United Nations Statistics Division provides to the Committee by ensuring secretariat activities. It expressed the wish that this support be reinforced to more effectively follow up on the inter-session activities brought about by the decisions taken during the regular sessions. The Committee also called for a renewed commitment by member organizations. On balance, the Committee was of the opinion that its five organizational pillars — (i) the Co-Chairs; (ii) the secretariat; (iii) the task teams and sherpas; (iv) the sessions of the Committee; and (v) the Committee members — provide an appropriate structure.

11. Taking due account of the discussion, the Co-Chairs and the secretariat will propose a draft agenda for the 2013 February and September Committee sessions for comments by the Committee in a written procedure well before the next meeting. The recurrent priority topics will thereby contribute to a medium-term orientation of the Committee agendas. Moreover, a short member survey on preferred topics and potential barriers that prevent better participation in Committee sessions will also be launched.

B. Human capital

12. During a special session on human capital, organized in conjunction with its sixteenth session in Vienna in 2010, the Committee had decided to establish two task teams to address the current challenges in human resources management in the specific environment of international organizations. Task team 1, led by the World Trade Organization, had been tasked to explore best possible ways for identifying talent pools and to review the relevant experiences in this field. Task team 2, led by the United Nations Statistics Division, had been tasked to work on training of international statisticians, staff exchange and mobility.

13. Task team 1 is developing a database to analyse job profiles of statisticians in various international organizations and serve as a repository for further inquiries.

14. At the twentieth session, task team 1 presented the questionnaire “HR Job Profiles”, which it developed, sent to Committee members and distributed in July 2012. Until then, approximately 20 submissions had been received. Two thirds of the vacancies submitted through the questionnaire were in the area of economic statistics (question 2); as for the main responsibilities demanded, half of the received replies focused on research and analysis, production and dissemination (question 4). The survey will be open until the end of 2012.

15. Task team 1 will present its final report to the Committee at its twenty-second session in September 2013.

16. In the period 2011-2012, task team 2 conducted a survey within Committee member organizations on current training strategies, the possibility of offering training for international statisticians, their practical experience with staff exchange and mobility, and their suggestions to improve training opportunities for international statisticians.

17. The United Nations Statistics Division, the leader of task team 2, provided an overview of the results of the task team survey at the twentieth session. The secretariat is currently restructuring the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities website on training according to suggestions made by the task

team (including links to websites of member organizations where vacancies are actually posted). Member organizations may still provide further documentation on successful staff exchanges and e-learning opportunities for this website.

18. Task team 2 accomplished most of its tasks and was abolished by the Committee at the twentieth session. However, the network of statisticians working in international organizations will look further into the topic of training and staff exchange.

C. Establishment of a network of statisticians working in international organizations

19. In January 2012 a small group of animators was constituted to start practical arrangements for the network. The animators are staff from ESCAP, Eurostat, the World Bank and the United Nations Statistics Division. The animators created a LinkedIn group in May and September 2012; the group had 25 members, who have contributed to six discussions.

20. The Co-Chairs, together with the animator group, will report back and provide final recommendations to the Committee at its twenty-second session, to be held in September 2013.

D. Global inventory on statistical standards

21. At its forty-first session, held in February 2010, the Statistical Commission gave the Committee the mandate to develop and maintain an inventory of global statistical standards.¹ The Committee's project team, consisting of the Economic Commission for Europe, the United Nations Statistics Division, the World Bank and the International Labour Organization, with support from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía), submitted a progress report to the Commission at its forty-second session.²

22. The inventory was released to the public on the United Nations Statistics Division website in 2012 and was presented to the larger professional community at a side event of the forty-third session of the Commission. The United Nations Statistics Division will work on some remaining issues of the Global Inventory of Statistical Standards, including making it compatible with other repositories, and will constitute an editorial board, including country representatives, to take over the management of the inventory. The United Nations Statistics Division will also send annual reminders to member organizations requesting them to update information in the Global Inventory and asked all members concerned to update their entries by end-October 2012.

23. The Committee abolished the task team.

¹ See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2010, Supplement No. 4 (E/2010/24)*, decision 41/111.

² See E/CN.3/2011/30.

E. Use of different data sources for the production of international statistics

24. Recalling that many countries follow well-established data quality frameworks and insist that international and supranational organizations also follow best practices, the Committee set up a respective task team in September 2010. The task team was originally led by the Economic Commission for Europe and since the eighteenth session, by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). At the twentieth session of the Committee, UNODC presented a consolidation of the discussions of the Committee on this topic of the past two years.

25. The objective is to publish a document on best practices in the course of 2013 as a reference document to which members of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities may refer to when discussing specific cases with countries. Given the variety of cases with which the Committee members are confronted, not all of the best practices can be sufficiently operational to determine concrete cases. One of the most essential elements is a well-organized consultation process with countries before publishing statistics. This introduces in the majority of cases a reconciliation process, eliminates misunderstandings and will lead to higher-quality statistics. In a few cases, reconciliation may not be possible. The forthcoming best practices of the Committee may then support an appropriate way forward.

F. Other issues discussed

1. Fifth Conference on Quality in International Statistics

26. The fifth Conference on Quality in International Statistics was hosted by the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities in Athens, on 29 May 2012. It was organized and chaired by the Co-Chairs; the speakers were: Maurine Haver, founder and Chief Executive Officer of Haver Analytics; Professor Paul H. Dembinski, Chair, International Strategy and Competition at Université de Fribourg and Director Observatoire de la Finance, at Geneva; Per Nymand-Andersen, Adviser of the European Central Bank; Ethan Weisman, Deputy Chief, of the Data Dissemination and Review Division of the International Monetary Fund; and Henri Laurencin, Head of the Development Statistics and Information Branch of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

27. All material is available on the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities website on data quality.³

2. Statistical capacity-building activities of international organizations in developing countries

28. During the twentieth session, PARIS21 briefed the Committee on its work, especially on the implementation of the Busan Action Plan.

3. Dissemination of microdata by the international organizations

29. In the third quarter of 2012, the World Bank agreed to take over the leadership of the task team on the dissemination of microdata by international organizations,

³ <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/acsub-public/data-quality.htm>.

which was originally led by UNODC and subsequently by the United Nations Children's Fund.

30. Given the continued interest of many Committee members in the topic, the World Bank is preparing a two-page draft on best practices in the area of disseminating microdata. The members of the task team and other organizations that produce and/or distribute microdata are invited to contribute to this draft.

4. The Virtual Statistical System: future plans

31. At the twentieth session, the World Bank briefed the Committee on its work on the Virtual Statistical System (www.virtualstatisticalsystem.org). In the light of its growing importance for Committee members, the Committee decided to discuss the Virtual Statistical System further at its twenty-second session in September 2013.

5. Fifty-ninth International Statistical Institute World Statistics Congress (Hong Kong, August 2013)

32. The Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities will organize a session on the role and challenges of international statistics at the fifty-ninth International Statistical Institute World Statistics Congress.

6. Wikipedia page

33. The Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities now has an entry in Wikipedia, prepared by the Co-Chairs and the secretariat, that is based on the Committee terms of reference. Members will check and update the links to their organizations and will add links from their respective websites to the Committee webpage.

7. Post 2015 development agenda

34. At the twentieth session, the United Nations Statistics Division briefed the Committee on the recent development in this area.⁴

G. Administrative matters

35. The Committee agreed that its twenty-first session would be held in New York, on the morning of 25 February 2013, in conjunction with the forty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission. The Committee was pleased to accept the offer of the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries to host the twenty-second session in Ankara in September 2013.

⁴ See also www.un.org/millenniumgoals/beyond2015.shtml.

Annex

Members of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities^a

African Development Bank
Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics
Asian Development Bank
Bank for International Settlements
Caribbean Community
European Central Bank
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
International Atomic Energy Agency
International Labour Organization
International Monetary Fund
International Telecommunication Union
Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States
Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century
Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries
Eurostat
Economic and Statistical Observatory of Sub-Saharan Africa
United Nations Children's Fund
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
United Nations Development Programme
Economic Commission for Africa
Economic Commission for Europe
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
United Nations Environment Programme
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
United Nations Human Settlements Programme

^a As of November 2012.

United Nations Industrial Development Organization

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs

United Nations Population Fund

Universal Postal Union

United Nations Statistics Division

World Bank

World Health Organization

World Tourism Organization

World Trade Organization
