

**Concept Note on the  
International Seminar on Early Warning and Business Cycle Indicators  
14 – 16 December 2009, Scheveningen, The Netherlands**

**Background**

1. The programme statement of United Nations Statistics Division/Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNSD/DESA) at the fortieth Session of the United Nations Statistical Commission in 2009 calls for swift and coordinated statistical initiatives by countries and international organizations in response to the global economic crisis. These initiatives should focus on identifying and remedying data gaps to monitor the unprecedented financial and economic turmoil to allow for timely and measured policy responses as well as to improve the dissemination and communication on available relevant information. This call for action followed the extensive consultations with countries and international organizations during a series of high level meetings such as the *High Level Forum on the Long term Development of the SNA* held at the World Bank in Washington DC, November 2008, and the *High Level Forum on Globalization and Global Crisis* and the *Informal Meeting on the Global Financial Crisis and the Role of the Official Statistics* both held at the United Nations, New York in February 2009.

2. The UNSD/DESA programmes of work for 2009 foresees a number of international seminars on the methodology on generating high quality rapid or ‘flash’ estimates of economic performance, their international comparability, the communication strategy of such estimates and the development of additional synthesis indicators on the performance of the real economy and the financial markets for effective monitoring.

3. The first of these meetings, the *International Seminar on Timeliness, Methodology, and Comparability of Rapid Estimates of Economic Trends* took place in Ottawa from 27 to 29 May

2009 and was hosted by Statistics Canada. The main outcome of this seminar is the support for an international data template and the request to assess its relevance and feasibility in terms of availability, periodicity and timeliness by the international statistical community and its relevance to users in fulfilling analytical and policy needs. The need was also identified to develop a glossary of terms and definitions to clarify the high frequency statistics framework and its compilation methodology and to update existing handbooks and guidelines on composite indicators, GDP flash estimates, and economic sentiment indicators given their extensive use in tracking economic activity. The global assessment on the availability, periodicity and timeliness of rapid estimates in countries will be conducted in September and October 2009.

4. The second meeting of the series is the *International Seminar on Early Warning and Business Cycle Indicators*, which is scheduled for Monday 14 to Wednesday 16 December 2009 in Scheveningen, The Netherlands, hosted by Statistics Netherlands. UNSD and Statistics Netherlands agreed to jointly organize this seminar and obtained the support of Eurostat as co-organizer of the seminar.

### **Purpose of the seminar**

5. It is expected that this seminar will discuss the results from the global assessment of the data template on availability, timeliness and comparability of high frequency and first estimates; problems in collection early warning and business cycle indicators; and the usefulness of early warning and business cycle indicators in actually tracking economic developments. Moreover, it is expected that the seminar would lead to an inventory of existing country practices in the preparation of: first GDP estimates; composite indicators; sentiment surveys and their application in tracking the economic crisis; propose an analytical indicator template derived from the data

template to monitor and report on the performance and turning points of the real and financial economy and markets.

6. This expected outcome of the seminar should be appreciated as part of the overall regional and global assessment of the availability, timeliness and quality of basic economic statistics in the context of the SNA implementation programme as mandated by the Statistical Commission in its fortieth session in 2009. Moreover, the new initiative by the UNSG to monitor the vulnerable countries through Global Impact and Vulnerability Alert System (GIVAS) has identified the need to work on an international agreed set of indicators to monitor economic and financial developments as part of an early warning system for taking appropriate policy actions.

### **Organizers of the Seminar**

7. This seminar will be jointly organized by UNSD/DESA, Eurostat and Statistics Netherlands in close collaboration and consultation with countries, regional commissions and international organizations.

### **Participation**

8. Senior officials from national statistical offices who have regular interactions with the national policy departments and the business community are invited with the intent to initiate a meaningful global discussion on the policy relevance of the high frequency estimates for monitoring monetary and fiscal policy making.

9. Senior representatives of the national statistical offices and their national counterparts in the Central Banks and/or Ministries of Finance are encouraged to attend this seminar to allow for country-level initiatives in strengthening the compilation of rapid estimates following their joint assessment of priorities.

10. With the objective to improve the geographical coverage, scope and quality of the collection of early warning and business cycle indicators for the measurement of economic and financial vulnerability and tracking economic activity, this seminar will seek appropriate coverage of large systemic countries and appropriate regional representation. Based on these considerations, about 40 countries are invited.

11. With the role and responsibility of the regional commissions in strengthening basic statistical infrastructure under the SNA implementation programme and their reporting requirement on the economic and financial performance of the region, UNECA, UNECE, UNESCAP, UNECLAC and UNESCWA are invited.

12. Other partners such as UNDPAD/DESA, UNCTAD, UNIDO, ILO and FAO are interested in participating in this series of seminars given their mandates on statistical and policy reporting on the economic and financial performance of the global economy. The representatives from the Bank of International Settlement (BIS) and the European Central Bank (ECB) are invited in addition to the five member organizations of the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts (ISWGNA) consisting of the Eurostat, IMF, OECD UNSD/DESA and World Bank.