

MEETING OF THE BUREAU OF THE UN COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON ENVIRONMENTAL ACCOUNTING

17 November 2021, teleconference

Meeting minutes

- **Present:** Bert Kroese (UNCEEA Chair, Statistics Netherlands); Carolyn Cahill, Jeff Fritzsche, Mariam Iqbal, Greg Peterson (Statistics Canada); Graciela Marquez and Jose Eduardo de la Torre (INEGI Mexico); Sjoerd Schenau (Statistics Netherlands); Neil Wilson (United Kingdom Office of National Statistics); Anton Steurer (Eurostat); Paulo Augusto Nunez, Gary Jones (FAO); Simon Felgendreher (Destatis, Germany and London Group on Environmental Accounting); Jim Tebrake (IMF); Roberto Astolfi, Sarah Barahona, Myriam Linster (OECD); Catherine Van Rompaey (World Bank); Anthony Dvarskas (UNESCAP); Alessandra Alfieri, Jessica Ying Chan, Julian Chow, Marko Javorsek (UNSD)
- **Regrets:** Australian Bureau of Statistics, MOSPI (India), Philippine Statistical Authority, Statistics New Zealand, Statistics South Africa

1. REPORT TO THE UN STATISTICAL COMMISSION

- Each area lead provided a summary of their section of the report. Overall, the Bureau supported the report, though there was discussion on the issues of climate change and data and tools, which are detailed below (sections 2 and 4, respectively).
- The report will need to be finalized by 24 November. Thus, UNSD requested all Bureau members to send any written edits/comments by COB 18 November. The report will then be circulated to the broader Committee for comment, with a deadline of 23 November.

2. CLIMATE CHANGE

- Several Bureau members raised the issue of climate change in the context of the Area A section of the report. The report includes the UNECE climate change initiative as well as the upcoming Data Gaps Initiative (DGI), in which UNCEEA members have been actively engaged.
- The report also mentions future engagement with the Expert Group on Environment Statistics (EGES) to ensure that the SEEA is better reflected in the Global Set of Climate Change Statistics and Indicators. In particular, the area lead for coordination and communication (Statistics Canada) informed the Bureau that he had reached out to the Chair of the Expert Group on Environment Statistics (EGES), which is responsible for the global set of indicators to see how the UNCEEA and EGES communities can build better bridges and work in a more coordinated fashion.

- Several members voiced concerns over the absence of the SEEA in the global indicator set and the fact that it is a long list that does not provide guidance to countries on the choice of indicators. It was suggested to develop a process to develop a short list of indicators, along the lines of the SDGs. While it was understood that the indicators list has been developed in support of developing countries that may not yet have compiled the SEEA, the Bureau expressed the need to have a common message for both developed and developing countries and considered this split counterproductive.
- In this context, it was considered important that the list is properly communicated. In particular, it was considered important to highlight the complementarity of the list with the SEEA, and the Bureau suggested that a hierarchy of indicators be developed, with indicators derived from standards such as the SEEA being identified as desirable, and others being identified as proxies that can be used in the interim.

3. DATA GAPS INITIATIVE (DGI)

- The IMF provided an update on the DGI, which is an upcoming initiative of the G20. Over the past decade, there have been various DGIs from the G20 and the implementation of the DGIs have been led by the IMF and other international organizations. Under the current G20 presidency, there is a proposal for a new DGI which contains four pillars: climate change, economic inclusion, financial inclusion/fintech and public/private data partnerships. Recommendations for each pillar are currently being drafted and will be put forth under the new presidency (Indonesia) early next year for approval by central banks/finance ministries.
- The climate change pillar provides a significant window of opportunity for the Committee. There are seven recommendations (i.e. specific data items and indicators) under this pillar, including those for air emissions and energy accounts.
- Once the recommendations have been approved early next year, the IMF and other organizations will make suggestions to the G20 on the appropriate methodology, targets and second-best targets for each recommendation. It will be proposed to use the SEEA as the methodological underpinning for the climate change pillar.
- The Bureau welcomed this development and agreed that it provides an excellent opportunity for the Committee to help national statistical offices become more involved in the climate change space. At the same time, it was noted that careful coordination and collaboration was needed with other groups active in climate change statistics.
- The Bureau stressed the importance for the UNCEEA to be engaged in the climate change pillar in particular, as well as the importance of using the DGI momentum to

advance the development of methodologies, global data collection and capacity building beyond the G20 countries.

4. DATA AND TOOLS

- Bureau members suggested that the sections of the report on ARIES for SEEA could be made more nuanced. In particular, it was noted that different aspects of the tool are more useful to certain countries than others. The ability of the ARIES for SEEA to compile the accounts using global databases and models is more useful for countries which face limited data sources and capacity. On the other hand, developed countries may find the ARIES for SEEA modeler more useful, as it allows to share national data and models with others.
- It was agreed to refine the text accordingly.
- The question of the sustainability of ARIES for SEEA was also raised. As ARIES for SEEA is being hosted and run out of the Basque Centre for Climate Change and was funded by NCAVES project, it was not clear to all how ARIES for SEEA would function in the long run.
- UNSD informed the Bureau that this was an important issue which they are trying to address. UNSD is currently working on an MoU with the US Geological Survey and the Basque Centre for Climate Change with the goal of linking ARIES for SEEA to the UN Global Platform. It was noted that additional conversations on the role and future of ARIES would be beneficial.
- Finally, it was suggested to clarify in the report that the landing page for the global databases will not be on the ARIES website, but on the main SEEA website (which provides a link to the ARIES platform).
- It was recommended to put ARIES for SEEA on the agenda of the Bureau to discuss the longer-term vision of its role in the compilation of the SEEA accounts.

5. AOB

- UNSD noted the upcoming [Forum of Experts](#) from 7-8 December and urged the Bureau to register if they have not already.
- The next UNSC is intended to be hybrid, though with some potential constraints. Almost all side events will be held virtually. Possible options for side events include one on biodiversity, as the COP will be coming up in April, as well as a side event on the DGI. Given the usual size of the Bureau meeting during the UNSC, it may be possible to have the meeting face to face.
- It was noted that Teams will be used for future Bureau meetings, and that UNSD would try to schedule some meetings at a time more convenient for Asia and the Pacific.