

Developing Data Dissemination Systems in CIS Countries

Action Plan

UNECE, May 2008

Introduction

Dissemination of statistical information provides the public with a window on the work of a statistical agency, as well as providing decision makers, professional data users and customers with access to the data they need. A user-friendly data dissemination system, providing flexible access to view and download statistical data, is therefore a key part of national statistical infrastructures. This action plan follows the UNECE Workshop on Developing Data Dissemination Systems, held in Geneva on 12 May 2008, and aims to assist CIS countries in implementing better dissemination methods and tools.

Based on a survey of all fifty-six UNECE member countries, the only generic internet dissemination tool used widely by national statistical agencies in the region is the PC-Axis software suite. At least seven statistical agencies from CIS countries have started implementing, or are considering using PC-Axis. Many of these have asked the UNECE for technical support. The UNECE uses the PC-Axis software suite for data dissemination itself, so can provide direct practical experience of implementing it. For these reasons, this action plan recommends that national data dissemination systems follow the PC-Axis approach.

About PC-Axis

The core PC-Axis software has been developed by Statistics Sweden, who now leads a consortium of over thirty regional, national and international statistical agencies that use PC-Axis tools. The members of this consortium have produced additional components, e.g. graphing and mapping tools, and meet annually to exchange experiences and decide on future development priorities. There is an annual license fee for the core software (typically under 2000 US dollars for CIS countries), which supports software development activities. For more information see <http://www.pc-axis.scb.se/>.

Obstacles

The main obstacles met by statistical agencies in CIS countries in planning the implementation of user friendly statistical dissemination databases, have so far been identified as the following:

- The lack of PC-Axis documentation in Russian
- The lack of the necessary technical infrastructure in some national statistical agencies
- The lack of knowledge of database dissemination systems
- The lack of financial resources

The following action plan is designed to tackle these obstacles, but is clearly limited by the availability of suitable experts and of funding. Sponsorship will be sought for the items marked as provisional, and to find resources to accelerate this plan.

Action Plan

Action	Timing
UNECE to add an item to the agenda of the SPECA Project Working Group meeting in Paris on 13 June, to inform heads of CIS statistical agencies of the outcomes of the Workshop, and this action plan.	June 2008
UNECE to produce Russian versions of material from the Workshop on 12 May, and of basic PC-Axis documentation.	End-August 2008
UNECE to produce a paper on the technical infrastructure requirements for implementing PC-Axis in CIS countries, including options for hosting a mirrored server in Western Europe to provide faster access for international users (for initial thoughts on this topic see Annex 1).	September 2008
Informal discussions between UNECE and the national statistical agencies of CIS countries to determine requirements and assess the available infrastructure for statistical databases.	Summer / Autumn 2008
Provisional – UNECE to seek sponsorship and external technical contributions for a regional workshop on implementing PC-Axis in Central Asia in early 2009.	Summer / Autumn 2008
Provisional – UNECE to arrange follow-up technical support and/or expert missions for countries developing PC-Axis dissemination systems.	2009
UNECE to provide written guidelines on the effective implementation of data dissemination systems, including the design of data cubes.	Mid-2009

Annex 1 – Initial thoughts on technical infrastructure requirements

The following is a first attempt at listing the technical infrastructure elements required for a full implementation of a PC-Axis dissemination system in CIS countries. Note – some of these requirements are not strictly necessary for test or partial implementations.

1. SQL Server 2000/2005 Database Management System
2. Several modern workstations for users of the UNECE metadata input application (paxAdmin).
3. Windows Web Server.
4. IT staff to support SQL Server 2000/2005 and Windows Web Server. The staff should have the necessary skills to support and customize PX-Web, including some knowledge of ASP programming. The level of ASP programming skills required depends on the scope of changes/customization to the basic PX-Web application.
5. English manual for the metadata input application (paxAdmin) – to be developed by the UNECE.
6. Russian version of the English manual.

For a successful implementation of PC-Axis, it is helpful if there is a single central data repository (or only a small number of repositories). This is not strictly necessary when there are only a few data sets to be disseminated, but will greatly increase efficiency as the number of data sets grows. The UNECE proposes to:

- Either find a tool to help manage data uploads (which would also be useful within the UNECE);
- Or further develop the visual data mapping query designer to more easily accept data from text files, or Microsoft Excel / Access files.