

**UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL PROGRAMME ON THE ECONOMIES OF CENTRAL ASIA
(SPECA)**

PROJECT WORKING GROUP ON STATISTICS

**Report
of the fourth meeting of the
Project Working Group (PWG) on Statistics**

** Istanbul, 23-24 March 2009 **



UNITED NATIONS

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I. SESSION 1. OPENING ADDRESSES, AGENDA AND REPORTING

Attendance

1. The Project Working Group (PWG) on Statistics of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) held its fourth meeting in Istanbul at the Polat Renaissance Istanbul Hotel in the Istanbul+Ankara Cabinet on the 23-24 March 2006. It was attended by representatives from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkey.
2. Representatives of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and the European Union (Eurostat) attended the meeting as well.

Opening addresses

3. The Director of the Statistical Division of UNECE opened the meeting and, together with the Head of Section of the Statistics Division of UNESCAP, delivered opening statements. In his statement the Director of the Statistical Division of UNECE welcomed all the participants to the fourth PWG meeting on Statistics in the framework of the SPECA notifying the continued need for statistical capacity building in the Central Asian sub-region and the United Nations organisations' will to assist in strengthening the role of official statistics. He also mentioned that Istanbul had been chosen to serve as meeting place due to good flight connections from all SPECA member countries. The Head of Section of the Statistics Division of UNESCAP for his part also welcomed the participants and emphasized that the agenda of the meeting had been prepared in good co-ordination between UNESCAP and UNECE.

Organisational issues

4. As the Chairman of the State Committee on Statistics of the Republic of Tajikistan, Mr Mirgand Shabozov, who has acted as Chair of the SPECA PWG in the three years period 2006-2008, was not present at the meeting, Agenda Item 11 of the Provisional Agenda – Election of Chair of the SPECA PWG for 2009-2012 - was taken up already at this stage of the meeting.
5. Ms Anar Meshimbaeva, Head of the Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Statistics, was elected to the post of Chairman of the PWG on Statistics for the period 2009-2012. In this meeting Mr Birlik Mendybaev, Deputy Head of the Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Statistics was elected to serve as Acting Chair.
6. The provisional Agenda (ECE-ESCAP-SPECA/PWG-Statistics/2009/1) was adopted after approving the amendment mentioned above in Para 4. All documentation of the meeting can be found at the UNECE web site <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2009.03.speca.htm> .

Reporting of the activities of the StatCapCA Project

Documentation: ECE-ESCAP-SPECA/PWG-Statistics/2009/2
ECE-ESCAP-SPECA/PWG-Statistics/2009/3

6. The Regional Adviser of the Statistical Division of UNECE presented a Report on the activities of the StatCapCA project in the period July 2008 - February 2009. As all planned training workshops had been organized already in 2006-2008, advisory missions and preparation of the evaluation report had been the main remaining content in the reported period. The project is coming to its end in 2009, but there is still room for one or two advisory missions in this year.

7. Mr Oleg Cara, Deputy Director of the National Statistical Bureau of Moldova, had kindly agreed to act as external evaluator of the StatCapCA project (United Nations Development Account project 06/07F). Based on his evaluation work in January-March 2009 he presented his Evaluation Report on the StatCapCA project for the whole project period 2006-2009. His assessment concluded that the project activities were organized very successfully and had been of substantial assistance for the targeted countries. All SPECA member countries had achieved considerable progress in the statistical fields of the project. The translation of all project materials and presentations into Russian and their publication on the relevant UNECE web sites had been very helpful for a large number of experts, managers and other staff members in the National Statistical Agencies of the beneficiary countries, also for staff members that had not directly participated in the training activities of the project.

8. In the subsequent discussion on the evaluation of the StatCapCA project The Director of the Statistical Division of UNECE listed a number of success criteria for additional evaluation the results of the project, among others: Are the Censuses in the SPECA member countries following the Recommendations of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) of 2006? To what extent the results of the regular National Accounts calculations include estimations on the NOE?

The Regional Adviser of the Statistical Division of UNECE pointed out some obstacles in the implementation of the StatCapCA project.

Kyrgyzstan commented that the training activities of all the targeted fields had been of great importance for their National Statistical Bureau. The Census of the 2010 Round, which in the Kyrgyz Republic in fact will commence during this SPECA PWG Meeting (on 24 March) is the first Census in which the international recommendations have seriously been taken into consideration in the preparations. Here the assistance of the StatCapCA project in the form of trainings and a specific advisory mission to Kyrgyzstan, have been, together with other forms of assistance from international organizations, of great importance. As to methodological issues of Non-Observed Economy (NOE) it is now more possible for us to fully include the impact of NOE in the National Accounts data. In the field of measuring the health status of the population we still have a lot to learn from international recommendations, but an interest to fill the data gaps has been raised. A continuation of this kind of training support would be most desirable.

Uzbekistan expressed their gratefulness for the project informing that they now have developed and put into practice all necessary questionnaires concerning NOE. Measuring the health status of the population according to the international recommendations is still not taking place in Uzbekistan, as

the approach was quite new for us, but we are working on this. So far the government has not yet made a decision on performing a Census in the 2010 Round. The State Statistical Committee has, however, accumulated full readiness to act on this question, as soon as the government hopefully will make a positive decision.

Kazakhstan informed that they had significantly benefited from all components of the StatCapCA project. The Census is now well being implemented according to international recommendations and there are also efforts to make more use of administrative registers in data collection for statistical purposes. A reform of the Statistical law will guarantee that the Statistical Agency will have access to administrative registers and this also will provide a possibility to have influence on their content. Non-observed economy measurement is being implemented in the production of National Accounts. Kazakhstan will act as a pilot country in measuring disabilities in a UNESCAP project with the assistance of UNECE and a question related to disabilities was included in the Census questionnaire. In Kazakhstan the Census information collection took place in February 2009.

The Head of Section of the Statistics Division of UNESCAP mentioned that in this project the countries' interest in the statistical topics, the sufficiency of funding plus the project's ability to attract also additional funding and the providing of services in the Russian language could also be seen as success factors.

Eurostat expressed satisfaction over the in the discussion expressed support for cooperation on a sub-regional level, which has not always been clearly demonstrated when developing other projects in the Central Asian sub-region.

All participants expressed the importance in supporting more staff members in the SPECA member countries to be able to communicate in the English language. As long as this ability is not in existence, probably still for the next 10-15 years, it will be very desirable to have also future activities, trainings and training materials translated into the Russian language.

9. Mr Cara, external evaluator of the StatCapCA project, concluded that in all target countries, except Uzbekistan, the Census preparations or already commenced implementation is based on the CES recommendations. The observations of non-observed economy are today included in the National Accounts reporting and that National Statistical Agencies have an orientation on additional cooperation with the Ministries of Health and other authorities, aiming at improving measuring of the health status of their countries.

II. SESSION 2. PRESENTATION OF COMMENCING AND ONGOING PROJECTS IN SUPPORT OF STATISTICAL CAPACITY BUILDING IN THE SPECA MEMBER COUNTRIES

Presentation of ongoing and commencing projects, lead by UNECE

Documentation: ECE-ESCAP-SPECA/PWG-Statistics/2009/4-6

10. The Regional Adviser of the Statistical Division of UNECE gave a presentation on this topic.

11. Two projects are presently being implemented – the last activities of the StatCapCA project and the project on “Engendering Statistical Information”. In the latter the World Bank is the main

funding source. In the framework of the latter a handbook on gender statistics is being produced. Numerous multimedia presentations on gender statistics have been produced to serve as training materials both for target groups of gender statistics and trainers of this topic, see www.unece.org.stats/video. The latter project will continue also in 2010. In 2009 new activities on gender statistics are planned for Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

12. Four new projects will commence in 2009, providing support for capacity building in SPECA member countries. These are
- (i) Challenges in Economic Statistics, focusing on Short-term economic statistics, seasonal adjustments and price statistics. The first 5-days training will take place in Astana 28 September – 2 October. The next is planned to take place in Baku in February 2010 and the third in Bishkek in September 2010. It is recommended that participants, taking part in the first training would also participate in the second, as the themes of these two workshops are closely related to each other. Besides SPECA member countries also Mongolia will be invited;
 - (ii) Supporting MDG Strategies – a joint project of UNESCAP and UNECE. The UNECE part of this project is focusing on statistics, the other parts are focusing on other MDG-related issues. An expert group meeting focusing on disaggregation of MDG indicators will be organized in Astana in October 2009, followed by a training workshop in spring 2010. SPECA member countries will be the focus in both events;
 - (iii) Migration flows and stocks. This is a global project of all five UN Regional Commissions, led by UNECLAC. UNECE has selected the Central Asian countries to be targeted in this project aiming at better availability and quality of data on international migration. Another aim is to strengthen evidence-based policy making and research in the field of international migration;
 - (iv) Violence against Women. This is also a global project of all five UN Regional Commissions, also led by UNECLAC. The project will support the organizing of two meetings of a Task Force, composed of countries in the UNECE region, on supporting improved information access on this important theme and test a module to measure violence against women in statistical population based surveys.

13. In the discussion on the forthcoming UNECE-lead projects Eurostat and the Director of the Statistical Division of UNECE emphasized the importance of good coordination and cooperation in the implementation of the projects. Kyrgyzstan congratulated UNECE for having made a good choice of the themes of the topics: Short-term economic statistics is very much to the point, as the present financial crisis shows; price statistics is continuously important and migration is a very important topic for all Central Asian countries. Also Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan acknowledged the actuality of the selected themes. The Director of the Statistical division of UNECE raised the idea of possibly asking the countries to provide wishes of themes to be dealt with in the training on price statistics, as this workshop will not take place before autumn 2010. The Regional Adviser of the Statistical Division of UNECE informed that the first project also includes the option to finance the participation of the Heads of the National Statistical Agencies of the SPECA member countries in the Conference of European Statisticians in the years 2009-2011.

Presentation of ongoing and commencing projects, lead by UNESCAP

Documentation: ECE-ESCAP-SPECA/PWG-Statistics/2009/9

14. The Head of Section of the Statistics Division of UNESCAP gave a presentation on this topic. In his presentation the role of SIAP was strongly emphasized as a training and support giving body also for Central Asian countries. SIAP had a regular two-month training course on collection and analysis of official economic statistics conducted in Russian language for Central Asian and Caucasus Countries. He also mentioned that most technical documents produced by the UNESCAP disability measurement project, where Kazakhstan was one of the pilot counties, were available in Russian. UNESCAP would be organizing regional workshops in late 2009 to share findings of its two projects on the measurement of disability and the measurement of the informal sector and informal employment. He also informed that, after one year's absence, regional advisory services in statistics were again available from UNESCAP and that Kazakhstan had recently been elected to the Bureau of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics for 2009-2010.

15. In the discussion it was notified that the year 2008 had been the beginning of jointly organized training activities by SIAP and UNECE: one national training workshop on migration statistics in Tajikistan and one on new challenges in economic statistics in Iran for SPECA member countries and Iran. Kazakhstan informed that a new Training and Research Centre for Statistics has now been established in Astana and its facilities could be used for joint training activities also for the SPECA member countries. Also other countries provided short information on their training activities and their willingness for sub-regional cooperation in the field of training. Funding certainly continues to be a bottleneck for enhanced training activities, but much can be done also with a clearly expressed will for sharing experience and good practices and good sub-regional coordination. This co-operative orientation was encouraged both by UNECE and UNESCAP.

Presentation of other projects in 2009-2011 - European Commission

16. Eurostat informed that the European Commission has worked out a long term strategy for the Central Asian sub-region for the years 2007-2013. This strategy defines a number of priorities. For each of the five Central Asian countries there are five conceptual documents and additionally one conceptual document is in place for the sub-region as a whole.

17. In the preparation of the abovementioned documentation Eurostat did a great work on lobbying for the importance of statistics as a basis for evidence-based decision making. Based on the abovementioned documentation Eurostat continues the work, already commenced with the financial support of the TACIS projects in the Central Asian sub-region.

Greeting of the Turkish Statistical Institute to the 4th SPECA PWG Meeting

18. Mr Zeki Bostanci, Director of the Istanbul Regional Office of the Turkish Statistical Institute, wished the participants of the meeting welcome to Istanbul and Turkey and wished the meeting good success in making decisions promoting statistical capacity in the SPECA member countries.

III. SESSION 3. NEEDS FOR FUTURE STATISTICAL CAPACITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES IN SPECA MEMBER COUNTRIES

Tour de Table

19. Kyrgyzstan reported that their National Committee of Statistics works on the basis of a 4-5 years strategic plan combining this with working plans of international organizations. The present focus is on data dissemination, use of administrative data sources, renewal of the information architecture and building up a modern business register. Kazakhstan highlighted the importance of building relations with users, making it easier for respondents to deliver data and the human resource development. Information technology is important for all three categories mentioned. Uzbekistan informed they have a strategic plan for three years, 2008-2010. The focus is on work with users and respondents, methodological work, IT and training of the staff. Recently the government has funded substantially more development projects than in earlier years. Governmental tenders for assisting upgrading statistical services on the web are meant mainly for private companies. Training activities can be implemented by local universities but also by international organizations.

20. The Director of the Statistical Division of UNECE commented that it is a very good thing that cross-cutting themes seem to have more importance in the development need structures than earlier, when the focus was almost solely on specific subject matter issues. The Regional Adviser of the Statistical Division of UNECE asked if the tender materials of Uzbekistan could be sent to UNECE and received an affirmative response on this request. Eurostat underlined the importance of a strategic concept in defining technical assistance needs. The European Union sees statistics today as an important component of good governance and implementing Rule of Law. It aims at having a number of Global Assessments performed in the next years on the statistical systems in the European Neighbourhood Policy countries and in Central Asia. Country Reports from Central Asian countries to Eurostat are also expected to be received. The Regional Adviser of the Statistical Division of UNECE informed about the recent Global Assessments in Kazakhstan and Armenia and about a seminar on Global Assessments, planned to take place in Ukraine and organized jointly by EFTA, Eurostat and UNECE. The Director of the Statistical Division of UNECE informed that recently a Questionnaire on the implementation of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics has been sent out to South East European and CIS countries. Kazakhstan informed that they have profited very much from the Global Assessment performed in 2007-2008 as a tool for advocacy of statistical development and that they plan to make a new request in 2011, inter alia for documentation the good development in recent years. Kyrgyzstan mentioned that the need for such an assessment is presently not so pressing. Maybe it will become so in the future, but now we know what our challenges are.

IV. ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES

Revision of the Terms of Reference of the SPECA PWG on Statistics

Documentation: ECE-ESCAP-SPECA/PWG-Statistics/2009/8
ECE-ESCAP-SPECA/PWG-Statistics/2006/2

21. As some paragraphs in the Terms of Reference (ToR), adopted in June 2006, had become outdated a new Draft ToR had been prepared by the UNECE Secretariat and published on the meeting web site. The Regional Adviser of the Statistical Division of UNECE introduced the proposed small changes. As the amendments were technical to their nature the discussion focused on whether the ToR can be adopted as only three SPECA member countries were represented in the meeting. An adoption was deemed non-problematic, as (i) the amendments were only technical to their nature, (ii) no defined quorum exists and (iii) the draft had been published and no country had given any negative feed-back. Thus the new Terms of Reference of the SPECA PWG on Statistics were adopted.

Election of Chair of the SPECA PWG for 2009-2012

22. The issue was already decided upon; see above paras 4 and 5.

Other upcoming items

23. Kyrgyzstan, Eurostat, Mr Cara, UNESCAP, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan expressed their gratitude to UNECE for good preparation of the meeting. A special thank was directed to the Director of the Statistical Division of UNECE as this was his last international meeting before retirement in the end of April 2009.

24. The Chair of the meeting expressed his gratitude to the participants for having an effective and fruitful meeting of the SPECA PWG on Statistics, extending his thanks to the interpreters and other personnel assisting the achievement of the good results of the meeting.