

**Regular Capacity Building Programme
UNECE Activity Report**

Sixth meeting of the SPECA Programme Working Group on Statistics
Geneva, Switzerland, 16 June 2011

1. The sixth meeting of the SPECA PWG on Statistics took place in Geneva at the Palais des Nations on 16 June 2011 in Geneva. It was attended by representatives from the following SPECA member countries: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Representatives from the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS Stat), the European Commission (Eurostat), The World Bank (WB) and Norway also participated in the meeting. Armenia was also invited to attend the meeting and share its successful experience in implementing the recommendations of the Global Assessment which took place in 2009. Participation costs of the SPECA countries were covered by the World Bank through the UNECE Capacity Building Programme on New Challenges in Economic Statistics.

2. The meeting was organized by Mr. Gabriel Gamez, Regional Adviser of the UNECE Statistical Division, and chaired by Mr. Nurbek Tulegabilov from the National Statistical Committee of Kyrgyzstan. Ms. Lidia Bratanova, Director of UNECE Statistical Division, opened the meeting with a welcome speech and stressed the importance of the SPECA programme for the development of statistical capacities in the region.

3. The first session on the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia was dedicated to the main outcome of the Follow-up Meeting of the 2010 SPECA Economic Forum which took place on 7 and 8 June 2011 in Ashgabat (Turkmenistan). Mr. Marton Krasznai, UNECE Regional Adviser on Economic Cooperation and Integration, explained the importance of SPECA in the perspective of the regional economic integration in Central Asia, including Afghanistan. The Ashgabat Follow-up meeting on “Developing a plan of action to strengthen the stability and sustainable development of Afghanistan through Regional Economic Cooperation in Central Asia” was attended by all SPECA member States (Uzbekistan as an observer), representatives of G8 countries and several other UNECE member States, important multilateral and bilateral donors and several partner organizations. Mr. Jan Kubis, Executive Secretary of UNECE, Mr. Rashid Meredov, Deputy Prime Minister of Turkmenistan and Mr. Miroslav Jenca, SRSG for Central Asia and Head of UNRCCA opened the meeting. The Director General for Economic Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan Mr. Yaar and the Economic Adviser to the President of Afghanistan Mr. Bathija delivered an opening statement and a keynote address respectively. The French Ambassador to Turkmenistan made a statement on behalf of the G8 Presidency. Mr. Krasznai insisted on the highly professional organization of the seminar and the modern infrastructure that were provided by the hosting country. In the framework of this event three projects proposal in the field of statistics were brought to the attention of the participants.

4. UNECE presented to the participant the three projects that were submitted to the Follow-up meeting in Ashgabat:

- **Economic Statistics Capacity Building**

This project was presented by Mr. Carsten Boldsen, Head of Economic Statistics Section at UNECE. He explained that the aim of the project is to increase the capacity of SPECA member countries to produce sound economic statistics according to international standards and recommendations. This project takes stock of the current UNECE capacity building programme on New Challenges in Economic Statistics financed by the World Bank.

- **Strengthening Statistics on International Migration**

Mr. Paolo Valente, from the Social and Demographic section, presented the project on Strengthening Statistics on International Migration which aims to increasing the capacity in SPECA countries to produce high quality statistics on international migration and to use them in policy-making. A major objective of the project is to establish and maintain a migration statistics clearinghouse for the collection, exchange and dissemination of migration statistics for countries in the region.

- **Streamlining statistical production**

The objective of the third project, introduced by Mr. Gabriel Gamez, is to increase the capacity of SPECA countries to produce statistics in a timely, efficient and sustainable manner. The benefits will be achieved by streamlining the data production processes, improving timeliness, leveraging existing expertise in some countries of the region, sharing international and national good practices and promoting the development of an active network of experts (statisticians and policy makers) within the SPECA countries.

5. During the discussion it was confirmed that these projects addressed the needs of National Statistical Committees in the SPECA region and that these issues were clearly identified in UNECE/EFTA/Eurostat adapted global assessments of national statistical systems in the region. Mr. Gamez insisted that these projects were still in the design phase and that their implementation will depend on available funding from bilateral and multilateral donors. At the request of the participants, UNECE will send the project descriptions to the SPECA countries for a final round of comments and proposals. Feedback to the UNECE should be sent by mid-September 2011.

6. Under agenda item 3, Strengthening coordination and partnership in the SPECA region, Mr. Gamez presented the modalities of operation, the programme of work and the funding mechanisms of the SPECA activities in statistics. It was mentioned that the PWG SPECA on Statistics use to be an excellent instrument for strengthening national and regional capacity. In his assessment of the present situation, Mr. Gamez addressed some issues concerning the implementation and follow-up of technical cooperation activities in the region. Participants agreed that the SPECA PWG could be a suitable platform for programming and coordinating capacity building activities in the region. UNECE proposed that the SPECA PWG should better address the following issues:

- Sharing information on capacity building activities conducted in the SPECA countries;

- Further involve SPECA countries in the development of the work programme (demand-driven);
- Invite major multilateral and bilateral agencies to participate in PWG STAT meetings;
- Organize more often PWG STAT meetings in SPECA countries.

7. During the discussion, participants agreed with Eurostat proposal to explore the possibility to use the PARIS21 Press Report for sharing information on ongoing and planned technical cooperation activities in the region. The UNECE offered to address all the issues mentioned during the discussion when drafting the 2012-2015 terms of reference of the SPECA PWG on Statistics. The main conclusion of the discussion was that the PWG should gradually become a Partnership Group for Statistical Capacity Building in the SPECA region.

8. The Capacity Building Programme on New Challenges in Economic Statistics was the topic of the second session. In the framework of this Programme the UNECE organizes, with support of the World Bank, a training programme for EECCA countries with special focus on Central Asia countries. A first workshop on Short-term Statistics and Seasonal Adjustment was organized in Astana in March 2011. Mr. Boldsen, who presented this programme, thanked the Agency on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan for their support in the organization of the event.

9. UNECE informed the participants about the following forthcoming events in the framework of this programme:

- Challenges in Consumer Price Indices on **10-13 October 2011, Istanbul, Turkey**
- Implementation plans for the 2008 SNA on **29 November – 2 December 2011, Kiev, Ukraine**
- Training in Seasonal Adjustment (follow-up to the First Workshop) in **February 2012, Istanbul, Turkey.**

10. Participants agreed with the comments from CIS-STAT that it was essential for countries in the region to get the 2008 SNA manual translated into Russian but welcomed the organization of a workshop on national and regional implementation plans for the 2008 SNA. CIS-STAT, who have already started some work in this respect, will be invited to participate in the Kiev Workshop.

11. Mr. Boldsen informed participants that most probably some funds would be available for the organization of a fifth workshop in the first half of 2012 and that proposals from SPECA countries on a possible topic could be sent to the UNECE by mid-September 2011.

12. The third session was dedicated to Adapted Global Assessments (AGAs) of National Statistical Systems. Mr. Gamez explained that in 2009, in Yalta, a management seminar on global assessment was jointly organised by UNECE, EFTA for EECCA countries. The main conclusion of the Yalta seminar was that adapted global assessments are powerful tools for the monitoring of the compliance of national official statistics with international standards, norms and recommendations, including the UN Fundamental Principles and the EU Code of Practice. Furthermore, AGAs were also identified as appropriate instruments for the assessment of the

institutional, technical and organizational capacity of each country to produce and disseminate official statistics in all relevant areas. It was also decided that AGA reports should incorporate recommendations for the strategic development of national statistical capacities.

13. Armenia shared its experience in using the recommendations of the AGA as a tool for the development of its national statistical system. The contribution of Armenia was well received by the participants and illustrated that AGAs help to provide a clear picture of the state of development of official statistics in the country, to plan long-term development of statistics for National Statistical Systems, better understand the role and the mission of official statistics and ultimately to allocate additional financial and human resources. During the discussion, participants stressed that on the importance of sharing knowledge and good practices in the implementation of the recommendations of AGAs.

14. The Chairman thanked Mr. Stepan Mnatsakanyan for his excellent presentation and for sharing good practices with his colleagues from SPECA countries.

15. Mr. Misha Belkindas, World Bank, underlined the importance of AGAs for the implementation of the Marrakech Action Plan (MAP). The MAP is based on short and medium-term actions consistent with long-term, sustainable improvements in national and international statistical capacity. The implementation of the MAP in SPECA countries will extensively benefit from the results of AGAs conducted in the region with the main objective to improve national statistical systems and ultimately to lead to improved quality and international comparability of statistics for evidence based decision making and policy monitoring. Participants mentioned that the World Bank has always been a major partner in the development of national statistical capacity and would welcome further support in the implementation of recommendations that would be drawn from AGAs in the region.

16. In the course of the discussion, Ms. Andrea Scheller, Head of the EFTA Statistical Office, proposed to organize in 2012 or 2013 a Yalta II seminar on good practices in the implementation and follow-up of global assessment recommendations. Ms. Scheller mentioned that this event will have to be coordinated with the UNECE, Eurostat as well as other major stakeholders. The Chairmen thanked EFTA for this excellent proposal and underlined the active role of this organisation in statistical capacity building activities in the region.

17. During the final discussion Tajikistan mentioned that a request for an Adapted Global assessment have been recently sent to the UNECE. Mr. Gamez welcomed this initiative and informed the delegation from Tajikistan that the assessment could take place in 2012 but needed still to be coordinated with the partner organisations: EFTA and Eurostat.

18. Mr. Alikhan Smailov, Chairman of the Agency on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan mentioned that the last AGA of the Kazakh Statistical System was conducted in 2008 and it would be appropriate to carry out a new assessment in order to evaluate the progress achieved by the Kazakh Statistical System against the recommendations from the last AGA. UNECE welcomed this idea and asked to send a request to UNECE.

19. At the end of the meeting, the Chairman concluded the meeting by summarizing the main decisions:

- For the UNECE to redraft the Terms of Reference of the SPECA PWG STAT for the next three years (2012 – 2015) and submit them at the next meeting in 2012;
- SPECA member-countries are invited to send by mid-September their comments and review on the projects proposed in Ashgabat.
- SPECA member-countries are also invited by mid-September to send their proposals concerning the additional last Workshop in the framework of the Capacity Building Programme on New Challenges in Economic Statistics.

20. The Chairman thanked all participants for the very constructive discussion and proposed that the next SPECA PWG meeting in 2012 take place in Bishkek. All countries accepted this proposal and thanked the Chairman.

The materials of the meeting are available at:

<http://live.unece.org/stats/documents/2011.06.speca.html>

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