



EVALUATION BRIEF

Enhancing coherence and integration of economic and social statistics in support of the implementation of 2008 System of National Accounts (SNA)

UNECE PROJECT E264 – 2017-2023

BACKGROUND

Since 2010, the UNECE has been actively working to support the implementation of 2008 System of National Accounts and supporting statistics in countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and Central Asia (EECCA). This project was intended to enable the UNECE in carrying out its mandate to support its implementation in the region and build on the activities and progress achieved since 2010.

The project was part of the ECASTAT regional trust fund established by the World Bank for assisting countries to improve their statistical systems. The work on the project was guided by the Steering Group on National Accounts.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was conducted using a mixed-method approach to assess whether the planned objectives were met and to assess their relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability. Cross-cutting issues such as human rights and gender equality were considered at all stages of the evaluation.

The review consisted of a desk review of over 75 available project documents, analysis of the results from the two on-line surveys designed for the purpose of this evaluation and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders/partners to gather more information and assessment of results.

Key findings were triangulated and presented in line with the questions contained in the Evaluation Matrix.

FINDINGS

The evaluation determined that the project was fully **relevant** to the objective of the UNECE to increase the capacity of target countries in compiling national accounts and supporting statistics according to the recommendations of the 2008 SNA and other relevant international standards by focusing on the outstanding

priorities identified by the countries. The needs of the countries formed the basis of regional workshops and special sessions designed to address their specific issues or challenges.

The evaluation determined that the project was **effective** by deploying both traditional and innovative methods to ensure that the objectives and results were achieved. The project consisted of four-interrelated modules with the goal to enhance coherence and integration of economic and social statistics in support of the implementation of 2008 SNA. All activities were completed, and additional ones added with the project extension.

The most significant **challenge** the project faced was the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. All planned results for 2020 were delayed and had to be realigned. The UNECE quickly adapted to the new global reality and implemented the use of online/virtual meetings to continue the momentum of the project during unprecedented times.

The evaluation determined that the project **efficiently** achieved its objectives within the allocated budget and adjusted timeframe. The savings associated with the new way of doing business (described above) and the UNECE's ability to draw on established partnerships to obtain additional resources through in-kind or financial contributions, extended the project to the benefit of the targeted countries. A no-cost extension (granted from 2020-2023) expanded the scope of the project to address outstanding issues, identified by the EECCA countries, resulting from the pandemic.

The benefits of the project will continue after its completion although there will be some challenges. By nature of their mandates, the UNECE Statistical Division and the Steering Group on National Accounts are committed to maintaining and progressing the work undertaken during the project. For the EECCA countries, lack of funding, insufficient experienced staff, staff turnover and limited technical capabilities are likely to be a significant challenge in **sustaining** the work.

CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation has determined that the project met its overall aim and achieved its stated objectives. However, the following limitations were identified and should be considered in future action plans.

All UNECE work is designed to be as inclusive as possible, however the human rights dimension is a difficult aspect to cover. The human rights dimension was not incorporated in the project proposal and the project outcomes make no explicit reference to human rights.

It was evident through the evaluation that women and youth were involved in the project activities and in the evaluation process. However, no gender consideration was recorded in the project's proposal and no indicator established.

It was difficult to determine whether the knowledge and expertise of the staff in national statistical offices improved and/or their capacity to implement standards and recommendations in practice increased. To properly assess these elements could only be achieved through an in-depth country peer review or an update to the Global Assessments. This was not done as part of this evaluation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the spirit of continuous learning and based on the findings and good practices identified throughout evaluation, a series of recommendations are intended to help improve future UNECE projects.

1. The global pandemic forced the UNECE to rethink the way it conducted business to ensure continuity of the project. These innovative solutions introduced good practices that should be continued. The UNECE is encouraged to use a hybrid model when organizing its meetings, workshops, and regional sessions in the future. The

introduction of short webinars and the video capture of in-person sessions provided additional learning opportunities. A combination of face-to-face activities and virtual offerings reaches a broader group of people. Using appropriate and tested technologies that accommodates everyone's participation is encouraged.

2. To properly assess the degree to which the knowledge and expertise of the staff in the national statistical offices of EECCA countries improved and/or their capacity to implement standards and recommendations increased, an in-depth country peer review or update to the Global Assessments should be conducted.
3. Continued sharing of experience and lessons learned is critical to the ongoing improvement of the statistical system in the beneficiary countries. EECCA participation in the Expert Group meetings is encouraged and where possible regional workshops or special sessions would continue to offer continuous growth and learning.
4. To ensure sustainability, future activities should continue to be linked to the work programme of the UNECE Statistical Division. Although the budget of the UNECE Statistical Division is limited, it is encouraged to use its exceptional collaboration and outreach skills to secure additional funding from key project stakeholders, be it in-kind or financial resources to expand the scope of its work.
5. For gender and human rights perspectives to be better included in future projects, there should be an explicit objective built into the project design that can be monitored and evaluated during and at the end of the project. Expertise in gender quality, disability inclusion, environment and or human rights should be sought in the development of these objectives and with the evaluation process.

