UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
General

ECE/CES/2006/3
22 March 2006

Original: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE **STATISTICAL COMMISSION**

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Fifty-fourth plenary session
Paris, 13-15 June 2006
Item 3(c) of the provisional agenda

COORDINATION OF INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL WORK IN THE UNECE REGION

Technical cooperation

Note by the secretariat

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In February 2005, the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians discussed the Rapporteur Report on Technical Cooperation and Capacity Building prepared by Eurostat. It was agreed that the coordination of technical cooperation in the UNECE region should be improved, and the Bureau requested UNECE, Eurostat and the Interstate Statistical Committee of the CIS (CIS-STAT) to prepare a concrete proposal on this issue. A first draft was prepared by UNECE and Eurostat, and was submitted to the Bureau at the meeting of 24-25 October 2005 in Washington, together with a note prepared by the Interstate Statistical Committee of the CIS.

2. This draft paper was revised after the October 2005 meeting of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians. The present version has been agreed upon by the three organizations.

II. BACKGROUND

3. In the UNECE region, several countries benefit from substantial technical cooperation programmes. Technical cooperation aims at building up the statistical capacity of the beneficiary country. Technical cooperation programmes include training of national statisticians in the country or abroad, participation of external experts in the work of national teams to establish

new statistical tools, short visits of external experts to advise on how to implement new statistical standards, free of charge provision of methodological documents, software and IT equipment, etc.

4. Technical cooperation programmes should be coordinated in order to make the most efficient use of available resources. However, this coordination is not entirely satisfactory in the UNECE region as a whole. There is a need for improvement, which is not an easy task, as experienced over the past fifteen years.

5. The present proposal is focused on the UNECE region. This does not mean that the situation in other parts of the world should be ignored. Several international and national donors that are active in the UNECE region are also active in other regions. The present initiative should be linked with similar initiatives elsewhere in the world.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE COORDINATION OF TECHNICAL COOPERATION

6. It is important to clarify what is actually expected from the coordination of technical cooperation.

(a) Coordination is needed to eliminate duplication and overlaps between technical cooperation programmes organised by different donors.

(b) Coordination should also help bilateral donors to be aware of programmes developed by other donors in the same countries, and therefore to better target their own cooperation. This could be especially useful for small donors, who could develop joint programmes in collaboration with other donors.

(c) Coordination should help to prioritize technical cooperation actions in a way that is consistent with the plans for development of the national statistical system, as defined by beneficiary countries. Beneficiary countries have a limited capacity of absorption of technical cooperation, because of their limited human resources.

(d) Coordination should aim at identifying and addressing major problems of coordination in technical cooperation that offer a clear potential of improvement.

IV. MAIN STAKEHOLDERS

7. A number of international and national organizations are providing technical cooperation in statistics to the UNECE countries. Their technical cooperation activities can be briefly summarized as listed below.

(a) Eurostat is mainly involved in EU candidates and recent EU members of Central and Eastern Europe as well as Western Balkan countries. It is also active in the CIS through the TACIS programme, but will give the priority in the near future to CIS countries covered by the new European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), i.e. Belarus, Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

(b) UNECE is focused on Western Balkan and CIS countries. It often organises training and technical cooperation projects in collaboration with other organizations such as UNDP, UNFPA, the World Bank, etc. In the light of the UNECE reform, which promotes closer collaboration between UNECE and other organizations active in the region so that duplications are avoided and synergies fully exploited, UNECE will launch a new programme of technical cooperation in statistics with Central Asian countries over the

coming years. This programme is in line with a new programme, which is being launched according to the reform to address the specific development problems of countries with economies in transition and emerging market economies. Some cooperation with the UN Regional Commission for Asia (UNESCAP) is also expected.

(c) The Interstate Statistical Committee of the CIS (CIS-STAT) provides technical assistance to CIS countries on the implementation of international statistical standards, in a wide range of areas of economic and social statistics, including national accounts, external trade statistics, population and labour statistics so as to improve the quality of their data and ensure their international comparability both in the framework of the CIS region and in wider international context. This activity is an important element of the work carried out by CIS-STAT on the coordination of statistical activities of the CIS countries in accordance with the decision of the heads of governments of the Commonwealth countries.

(d) The World Bank assists several South-East European and CIS countries by means of loans and grants. Poverty monitoring and general support for statistical capacity building are the main priorities.

(e) The IMF is focusing its technical cooperation projects on macroeconomic statistics. It is active in several Southeast European and CIS countries.

(f) OECD has reduced its technical cooperation activities on statistics in the UNECE region. It acts as an expert on behalf of other organizations, especially on purchasing power parities (PPPs) and national accounts.

(g) UNDP is active in the UNECE region through its Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS and the Support Centre established in Bratislava, as well as its country offices. It mainly supports statistical capacity building in the demographic and social area for the monitoring of progress toward Millennium Development Goals.

(h) PARIS21 was not active in the UNECE region until 2005. It is planning to organise a seminar for Central Asian countries on the design of a National Strategy for Development of Statistics (NSDS) in the first half of 2006 in cooperation with UNESCAP and UNECE. It is desirable to include CIS-STAT as a co-organiser of this seminar and other seminars planned in future to be conducted in the CIS region.

(i) Individual donor countries, such as Germany, Italy, Sweden, UK, United States are also providing technical cooperation in statistics to UNECE countries.

V. COORDINATION OF TECHNICAL COOPERATION THROUGH EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION

8. In order to be effective, coordination of technical cooperation should involve all international organizations and donor countries that are active in the UNECE region. A consensus has to be reached among the main stakeholders.

9. Given the main objectives of coordination of technical cooperation that have been described above, the basic tool of coordination is information. In concrete terms, coordination of technical cooperation will be improved if all coordination organizations, donors and beneficiaries can have access to timely and comprehensive information on technical cooperation projects that are planned, in progress, or just completed in a given country.

10. There is an example of such a process in Western Balkan countries. Since 2002, Eurostat circulates a donor questionnaire to all beneficiaries and donors once a year. A sample of the questionnaire is attached in Annex 1. The results of the survey are made public on the occasion of the annual meeting of the Eurostat Management Group on Statistical Cooperation. This donor coordination survey is not easy to carry out, as not all the donors are able to provide the necessary information. Eurostat's experience shows that that there is some reluctance to be coordinated. This could be due to the fact that donors may have different political objectives. However, the donor coordination survey in Western Balkans is appreciated and supported by most national and international donors as well as by beneficiaries. One of the reasons why it has been relatively successful is that there are a limited number of actors.

VI. PROPOSAL

11. It is proposed that Eurostat, UNECE and CIS-STAT implement a joint survey on technical cooperation in statistics in the CIS countries following an agreed format very close to the one used in the Eurostat survey of donor activities in the western Balkans in the field of statistics. The results of the survey would be analysed and reported to the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians. To ensure full transparency, the reports would be available on or through the websites of UNECE, Eurostat and CIS-STAT.

VII. ORGANISING THE COLLECTION OF INFORMATION ON TECHNICAL COOPERATION PROJECTS: SUB-REGIONAL FOCAL POINTS

12. Donor organizations and countries do not evenly distribute their technical cooperation to all potential beneficiaries in the UNECE region. They attach different levels of priority to countries or sub-regions within the UNECE. As a consequence, they do not have the same visibility in countries or sub-regions. Another aspect to take into consideration is the workload attached to the collection of information on technical cooperation. It is generally agreed that collection of information on technical cooperation is not an easy task and that it requires a sustained effort from the coordinating organization. An organization will not be prepared to devote resources to this task in a country or sub-region where it has little involvement.

13. Therefore, it is proposed that different international organizations share the responsibility for the survey on technical cooperation projects in the UNECE, according to their involvement and/or recognised legitimacy in the different sub-regions.

(a) Eurostat would play the role of sub-regional focal point for collecting, processing, storing and disseminating information on EU candidates and new members in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as Western Balkan countries covered by the CARDS programme.

(b) Eurostat would play the role of sub-regional focal point in cooperation with CIS-STAT for CIS countries covered by the ENP initiative. CIS-STAT would collect the information from beneficiary countries, whereas Eurostat would be in charge of collecting information from donors.

(c) UNECE would play the role of sub-regional focal point in cooperation with CIS-STAT for Central Asian countries, with a division of work similar to that in the previous case.

Eurostat and UNECE would be responsible for drafting reports to the CES Bureau for the sub-regions in their responsibility, and making these reports accessible on their websites.

The full range of information collected through the above process will be shared between the three organizations.

14. It is proposed that UNECE, Eurostat and CIS-STAT conclude memoranda of understanding to strengthen the coordination of technical cooperation in the field of statistics in the CIS region, and to specify their respective roles regarding processing and reporting of statistical cooperation activities.

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