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Progress reports and work of the Conference of European Statisticians Teams of Specialists

Biennial performance evaluation 2008-2009

Subprogramme 3: Statistics

Note by the secretariat*

Summary

The note provides the 2008-2009 biennial performance evaluation for the UNECE Programme of Work, Subprogramme 3. Statistics. It presents the performance evaluation in an aggregated way, harmonised with the UN biennial planning and evaluation framework. It complements the reports on the implementation of the UNECE Statistical Programmes for 2008-2009 that have been approved by the Conference in June 2009 and 2010.

The note is presented to the Conference of European Statisticians for approval.

* This document has been submitted late due to technical reasons.

I. Cluster of activities 1. Coordination of international statistical work in the region of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

A. Expected accomplishment

1. Streamlined activity patterns of statistical work between international organizations through elimination of overlaps and gaps.

B. Indicators of achievement

2. The percentage of joint activities in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Statistical Programme undertaken in cooperation with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat), The Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT), and other international organizations:

- (a) 2004-2005: 75 per cent (as of December 2005);
- (b) 2006-2007: 85 per cent (as of December 2007);
- (c) Target 2008-2009: 70 per cent (implemented 69 per cent).

3. The number of international organizations regularly reporting their activities in the Database on International Statistical Activities (DISA, formerly the "Integrated Presentation"):

- (a) 2004-2005: 26 organizations (as of December 2005);
- (b) 2006-2007: 27 organizations (as of December 2007);
- (c) Target 2008-2009: 26 organizations (implemented 27).

C. Accomplishment account

3. The Statistics subprogramme of the ECE provides a forum for the coordination of international statistical activities in the region. The achievements are measurable not only by the two indicators included, but also by the satisfaction expressed by our main clients, national statistical offices, at the meetings of the Bureau and the Conference of European Statisticians (CES).

4. In 2008, some 23 out of 33 activities included in the annual statistical programme of the ECE were joint activities with other organizations and in the annual work programme for 2009 there were 27 out of 39 activities performed jointly with other international organizations. This refers to the methodological work by Inter-secretariat task forces and working groups, where ECE participates, organisation of international meetings, and in some cases technical assistance. For instance, majority of the international meetings under the Statistical subprogramme are organised in cooperation and close coordination with other major international organizations (Statistical Office of the European Commission (Eurostat), OECD, International Labor Office (ILO), etc.) or are held back-to-back to their meetings.

5. The joint activities also raised awareness about the areas of expertise of different organizations and facilitated division of labour between the ECE and other international

partners in order to reduce overlaps and gaps in statistical area. On the other hand, this awareness allowed ECE to look for niches where it can achieve an independent and unique role particularly in respect to the substantive activities on statistical methodology.

6. In the 2008-2009 biennium, DISA added two new reporting partners and now combines information on statistical activities of 27 international organizations. In addition, it includes information on six UN city groups, a number of Inter-secretariat Task Forces and Working Groups, etc.

7. Thanks to this extensive coverage, the DISA serves not only as a coordination tool for the heads of national statistical offices, but it is also a reference tool for statisticians and other experts in respect of international statistical activities in the ECE region. This is a recognised value added for the coordination activities. The classification of statistical activities used in DISA has now been adopted as a global standard by the SDMX (Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange) initiative, and the Paris21 consortium.

D. Lessons learned/areas needing improvement:

8. The international organizations showed an increased readiness to work together in order to avoid duplication of work and attempt to fill the gaps in statistical activities. Presently, the joint meetings and Inter-secretariat working groups are not an issue that would require monitoring. In fact, the level of the first indicator seems to reach the saturation level and the further growth of a percentage of joint activities may mean a loss of identity for the ECE and possibly conflict with the different mandates and objectives of international organizations. Therefore, this indicator should not be carried forward in future biennia.

II. Cluster of activities 2. Collection, processing and dissemination of macroeconomic statistics

A. Expected accomplishment

9. Increased availability of reliable, timely and comparable macroeconomic statistics, particularly about the less advanced countries of the region

B. Indicators of achievement

10. Percentage of available data of good quality in the macroeconomic overview tables in the UNECE macroeconomic database (percentage of filled data cells to the total number of data cells):

- (a) 2004-2005: not available;
- (b) 2006-2007: 53 per cent (estimate in October 2006);
- (c) Target 2008-2009: 60 per cent (implemented 79 per cent).

11. Percentage of users that express, through user surveys, satisfaction with the quality, coverage and timeliness of data contained in the UNECE macroeconomic database:

- (a) 2004-2005: 70 per cent of satisfied users (as of December 2005);
- (b) 2006-2007: 81 per cent of satisfied users (as of December 2007);
- (c) Target 2008-2009: 70 per cent of satisfied users (implemented 84 per cent).

C. Accomplishment account

12. During the 2008-2009 biennium the progress has been made in the availability of high quality macroeconomic data in the ECE statistical database. The data coverage in the overview tables rose to 79 per cent and an online survey showed that 84 per cent of users considered the quality of data provided as excellent or good.

13. Starting with the previous biennium the macroeconomic data work of Statistics subprogramme has become more oriented towards external clients, while it continued supplying data to other subprogrammes within the UNECE or the UN secretariat. The change in client orientation and limited secretariat resources demanded some challenging adjustments both to the number of data series to be offered at a satisfactory quality level and to the ability of maintaining customers' satisfaction.

14. The annual user survey was added to the UNECE statistical database home page (www.unece.org/stats/data) from 17 September to 22 November 2009. Registered users of the database were also sent an e-mail inviting them to complete the survey. There were 174 responses to the survey (up from 65 in 2008).

15. The questionnaire asked not only about the satisfaction with the data quality but also about the relevance of the database for their needs and its usability. The following results were obtained:

(a) Over 84% of respondents rated the overall quality of our data as good or excellent;

(b) Over 78% thought the usability of the database web site was good or excellent;

(c) 40% of respondents found the information in the database to be highly relevant to their needs, whilst 55% found it to be partly relevant;

(d) 77% of respondents were satisfied with the timeliness of our data, and 91% were satisfied with the metadata provided.

16. The Survey did not ask to evaluate separately macroeconomic and other data series. However, since the response analysis showed that economic indicators were at par with population and social data in terms of accessed (sought after) series, the Survey results are considered to be valid for them to the same extent.

D. Lessons learned/areas needing improvement

17. The experience shows, that it is difficult to introduce a unique numerical indicator for user satisfaction with database. The focus on data quality, including timeliness, coverage and metadata, may imply that the target level for user satisfaction ranging between 75 and 80 per cent can be considered as desirably high.

III. Cluster of activities 3. Collection, processing and dissemination of social and demographic statistics

A. Expected accomplishment

18. Increased availability of reliable, timely and comparable social and demographic statistics with gender breakdown, particularly about the less advanced countries of the region.

B. Indicators of achievement

19. Percentage of available data of good quality in the social and demographic overview tables (percentage of filled data cells to the total number of data cells):

- (a) 2004-2005: not available;
- (b) 2006-2007: 53 per cent (estimate in October 2006);
- (c) Target 2008-2009: 60 per cent (implemented 64 per cent).

20. Percentage of users that express, through user surveys, satisfaction with the quality, coverage and timeliness of data contained in the UNECE macroeconomic database:

- (a) 2004-2005: 70 per cent of satisfied users (as of December 2005);
- (b) 2006-2007: 81 per cent of satisfied users (as of December 2007);
- (c) Target 2008-2009: 70 per cent of satisfied users (implemented 84 per cent).

C. Accomplishment account

21. During the 2008-2009 biennium progress has been made in the availability of high quality social and demographic data with gender breakdown in the ECE statistical database. The data coverage in the overview tables rose to 64 per cent and an online survey showed that 84 per cent of users considered the quality of data provided as excellent or good.

22. The work of Statistics subprogramme on social and demographic data with gender breakdown has developed noticeably during the biennium. A total number of 25 data series were added or re-defined by adding new indicators. Preparations were also made to introduce series on MDG indicators. The database is oriented towards external clients; however it continued supplying data to other subprogrammes within the ECE or the UN Secretariat.

23. Regarding user satisfaction same findings as mentioned for the cluster 2 (on macroeconomic data) apply.

IV. Cluster of activities 4. Processing and dissemination infrastructure for statistics

A. Expected accomplishment

24. Improved functionality of the processing and dissemination infrastructure for statistics.

B. Indicators of achievement

25. Number of functionalities that were decided by the UNECE Database Coordination Group and successfully implemented:

- (a) 2004-2005: not available;
- (b) 2006-2007: 3 new functionalities;
- (c) Target 2008-2009: 5 new functionalities (implemented 7).

C. Accomplishment account

26. During the biennium 2008-2009, seven major new functionalities were introduced in the statistical database system:

- (a) Automated data transfers from Eurostat for economic data;
- (b) Introduction of new calculation methods for social and demographic data;
- (c) Introduction of new automatic data validation checks;
- (d) Implementation of an indicator to record and display the date of last update for public data sets;
- (e) Improvements to the web interface of the statistical database in response to user needs;
- (f) Introduction of a simplified user registration process;
- (g) Introduction of a bulk import function for text information such as footnotes.

V. Cluster of activities 5. Methodological work in economic statistics

A. Expected accomplishment

27. Increased development of internationally recommended standards and practices to ensure comparable economic statistics.

B. Indicators of achievement

28. The number of new and revised international standards and recommendations in the field of economic statistics endorsed by a statistical authority to which the UNECE has contributed in substance:

- (a) 2004-2005: 1 standard/recommendation (as of December 2005);
- (b) 2006-2007: 1 standard/recommendation (as of December 2007);
- (c) Target 2008-2009: 1-2 standard/recommendation (implemented 2).

29. The number of statistical areas (according to the DISA classification) related to economic statistics in which the UNECE undertakes substantive methodological work:

- (a) 2004-2005: 5 statistical areas (as of December 2005);
- (b) 2006-2007: 5 statistical areas (as of December 2007);
- (c) Target 2008-2009: 4 (implemented 6).

C. Accomplishment account

30. Over the 2008-2009 biennium, the ECE Statistical Subprogramme has contributed in substance to the development of two major statistical standards and recommendations in economic statistics that were endorsed by the Inter-secretariat Working Groups, or UN Statistical Commission:

(a) *The 2008 System of National Accounts* (two volumes, adopted by the UN Statistical Commission in February 2008 and 2009);

(b) *Export and Import price Index Manual* (approved by the IWGPS (UNECE, OECD, International Monetary Fund (IMF), ILO, Eurostat, and the World Bank in 2008 and published by the IMF in 2009).

31. In addition to these standards, the Statistics subprogramme produced methodological materials on economic statistics comprising good practices. These were endorsed by the expert level working groups:

(a) *Non-Observed Economy in National Accounts - Survey of Country Practices* (published by UNECE in 2008);

(b) *Practical Guide to Producing Consumer Price Indices* (published by UNECE in 2009);

(c) *Potential indicators for measuring quality of employment* developed by the UNECE Task Force.

32. Overall, during this biennium the ECE undertook substantive methodological work in 6 statistical areas related to economic statistics that are included in the database of international statistical activities.

D. Lessons learned/areas needing improvement

33. The number of statistical areas (in economic statistics) in which UNECE takes active part may remain unchanged in the future due to the limited resources and feasibility to provide value-added in these areas at the international level. However, the methodological work in some new areas like statistics on globalisation, may take over at the expense of reduced activity in some statistical fields.

VI. Cluster of activities 6. Methodological work in social and demographic statistics

A. Expected accomplishment

34. Increased development of internationally recommended standards and practices to ensure comparable social and demographic statistics.

B. Indicators of achievement

35. The number of new and revised international standards and recommendations in the field of social and demographic statistics endorsed by a statistical authority to which the UNECE has contributed in substance:

(a) 2004-2005: 1 standard/recommendation (as of December 2005);

(b) 2006-2007: 1 standard/recommendation (as of December 2007);

(c) Target 2008-2009: 1-2 standards/recommendations (implemented 2).

36. The number of statistical areas (according to the DISA classification) related to social and demographic statistics in which the UNECE undertakes substantive methodological work:

- (a) 2004-2005: 10 statistical areas (as of December 2005);
- (b) 2006-2007: 10 statistical areas (as of December 2007);
- (c) Target 2008-2009: 8 statistical areas (implemented 9).

C. Accomplishment account

37. Over this biennium, the ECE Statistical subprogramme has produced and/or contributed in substance to the development of two major statistical standards and recommendations in the social and demographic statistics area that were endorsed by the CES or Inter-secretariat Working Groups:

- (a) *Guidelines on the use and dissemination of data on international immigration* (endorsed by the CES in 2009);
- (b) *Manual on victimization surveys* (endorsed by the CES in 2009).

38. In addition to these standards, the Statistics subprogramme produced methodological materials on social and demographic statistics comprising good practices. These were endorsed by the expert level working groups:

- (a) *Measuring Population and Housing - Practices of UNECE Countries in the 2000 Round of Censuses* (published by UNECE in 2008);
- (b) *Register-based Statistics in the Nordic Countries - Review of Best Practices with Focus on Population and Social Statistics* (in Russian, published by UNECE in 2008);
- (c) A manual *Developing Gender Statistics: a practical tool* developed together with the World Bank.

39. Overall, during this biennium the ECE undertook substantive methodological work in 9 statistical areas related to social and demographic statistics that are included in the database of international statistical activities.

D. Lessons learned/areas needing improvement

40. The need of certain statistical standards and recommendations to be endorsed by the CES are reviewed during the biennium. The Bureau of the CES decides on an annual basis, whether a specific methodological material should be submitted to the CES for adoption or whether it can be published after being agreed by a team of specialists. Consequently, the targets and baselines may have to be updated closer to the reporting period.

VII. Cluster of activities 7. Methodological work on environment and sustainable development statistics

A. Expected accomplishment

41. Increased development of internationally recommended standards and practices to ensure comparable statistics.

B. Indicators of achievement

42. The number of new and revised methodological papers/reports on cross-cutting issues of official statistics endorsed by a statistical authority to which the UNECE has contributed in substance:

- (a) 2004-2005: 1 standard/recommendation (as of December 2005);
- (b) 2006-2007: 1 standard/recommendation (as of December 2007);
- (c) Target 2008-2009: 1 methodological paper/report (implemented 1).

43. The number of statistical areas (according to the DISA classification) related to on cross-cutting issues of official statistics in which the UNECE undertakes substantive methodological work:

- (a) 2004-2005: 1 statistical area (as of December 2005);
- (b) 2006-2007: 1 statistical area (as of December 2007);
- (c) Target 2008-2009: 1 statistical area (implemented 2).

C. Accomplishment account

44. Over the 2008-2009 biennium, the ECE Statistical subprogramme has produced and contributed in substance to the development of one statistical conceptual report on *Measuring Sustainable Development* (published by UNECE in 2009).

45. In addition to this work, the Statistics subprogramme took an active part in reviewing the list of indicators proposed by the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (WGEMA) in its Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. This was done with an aim to provide practical recommendations on the necessary adaptation of statistical classifications and data collection forms and procedures for the production of indicators from the point of view of official statistics.

46. During this biennium the ECE Statistical subprogramme undertook substantive methodological work in 2 statistical areas related to the sustainable development and environment statistics that are included in the database of international statistical activities.

VIII. Cluster of activities 8. Methodological work on cross-cutting issues of official statistics

A. Expected accomplishment

47. Increased development of internationally recommended standards and practices to ensure comparable statistics:

B. Indicators of achievement

48. The number of new and revised international standards and recommendations on cross-cutting issues of official statistics endorsed by a statistical authority to which the UNECE has contributed in substance:

- (a) 2004-2005: 1 standard/recommendation (as of December 2005);

- (b) 2006-2007: 1 standard/recommendation (as of December 2007);
- (c) Target 2008-2009: 1vii standard/recommendation (implemented 2).

49. The number of statistical areas (according to the DISA classification) related to on cross-cutting issues of official statistics in which the UNECE undertakes substantive methodological work:

- (a) 2004-2005: 5 statistical areas (as of December 2005);
- (b) 2006-2007: 5 statistical areas (as of December 2007);
- (c) Target 2008-2009: 3viii statistical areas (implemented 11).

C. Accomplishment account

50. Over the 2008-2009 biennium, the ECE produced and/or contributed in substance to the development of two major statistical standards and recommendations that were endorsed by the CES, Sponsor Group:

(a) *Principles and Guidelines on Confidentiality Aspects of Data Integration Undertaken for Statistical or Related Research Purposes* (endorsed by the CES in 2009);

(b) *Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX): Content-oriented Guidelines* (endorsed by the SDMX sponsors in 2009).

51. In addition to these standards, the Statistics subprogramme produced a number of methodological materials comprising good practices. These were endorsed by the expert level working groups:

(a) *Making data meaningful, Part 2* (published by UNECE in 2009);

(b) *Common Metadata Framework Part A: Statistical Metadata in a Corporate Context* (published by UNECE in 2009).

52. Overall, during this biennium the ECE Statistical subprogramme undertook substantive methodological work in 11 statistical areas related to the cross-cutting issues of official statistics that are included in the database of international statistical activities.

IX. Cluster of activities 9. Progress in implementation of international standards and good practices by statistical systems, particularly in less developed countries of the region

A. Expected accomplishment

53. Progress in implementation of international standards and good practices by statistical systems, particularly in less developed countries of the region.

B. Indicators of achievement

54. The number of countries ensuring better compliance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics through revision of their statistical systems:

- (a) 2004-2005: 3 countries (as of December 2005);
- (b) 2006-2007: 6 countries (as of December 2007);

(c) Target 2008-2009: 6 countries (implemented 4).

55. The number of UNECE recommendations implemented to improve national institutional frameworks for official statistics:

(a) 2004-2005: 45 recommendations (as of December 2005);

(b) 2006-2007: 45 recommendations (as of October 2006);

(c) Target 2008-2009: 45 recommendations (implemented 45).

56. Percentage of participants to training workshops related to specific subject areas, who expressed the view that the workshop was useful for their future work:

(a) 2004-2005: not available;

(b) 2006-2007: not available;

(c) Target 2008-2009: 80 per cent (implemented 97 per cent).

C. Accomplishment account

57. In 2008-2009, three UNECE member countries have revised or updated their statistical legislation to be more in line with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and other international standards.

58. During the 2008-2009 biennium only Armenia requested a global assessment, which was done by ECE together with Eurostat in two stages. A set of 20 mutually agreed recommendations for better compliance and more comprehensive institutional framework was accepted by Armenia as the result of a global assessment of its state statistical system.

59. The alignment of national institutional frameworks and practices to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics is primarily of concern for ECE countries with emerging market economies; however, other ECE countries also attach high importance to it. The process aims at better functioning of national statistical offices and assuring their greater independence, as it is stated in the ECE Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

60. The fulfillment of this accomplishment depends greatly on the initiative, collaboration and political will of our member states and external partners. These include first of all national statistical offices and respective governmental authorities, under request of which the assessment is done. The successful collaboration with international organizations like Eurostat, EFTA Secretariat, and some other organizations is an important prerequisite to carry out assessments of national statistical systems and to develop recommendations for improvement.

61. The advisory services provided by UNECE contributed to improved understanding of the role of Official Statistics, communication of statistical information, and other topical issues. In addition to the advisory missions, 755 participants took participation in 24 workshops and seminars organized by the UNECE Statistical subprogramme (often in cooperation with international partner organizations) that contributed to enhancing capacity of National Statistical Offices of countries with less developed statistical systems in a number of areas (e.g. Population and Household Censuses, Millennium Development Goals, Non-Observed Economy, Migration, Short-Term Statistics, Price Statistics and Business Registers, etc.). Based on the evaluations, 97% of participants rated the usefulness of the training as good or excellent.

62. While there was a decrease in the number of global assessments undertaken in 2008-2009 compared to the previous two biennia, the results prove that our clients and external partners consider the ECE a credible partner. The ECE role in strengthening of official

statistical systems in countries with emerging market economies through training workshops, advisory missions and technical assistance is also recognised.

D. Lessons learned/areas needing improvement:

63. After several rounds of global assessment reviews that initiated changes in legislation on official statistics in many ECE emerging economies, the demand for new reviews is naturally diminishing. There is an unavoidable lag between the time when existing institutional frameworks are reviewed and sets of recommendations are agreed upon for the fuller compliance with the Fundamental Principles and when the new or amended statistical laws and procedures are adopted by countries. Therefore the impact of recommendations based on reviews could be seen only over longer time span, sometimes over a couple of budgetary cycles.

64. The monitoring of actual implementation of these standards could be improved via the actively sought feedback on given recommendations or specific surveys and not only based on the global assessment of national statistical system, which is performed upon the request of the individual country.
