

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

For discussion and
recommendations

Meeting of the 2015/2016 Bureau
Ottawa (Canada), 11-12 October 2016

Item 3(g) of the Provisional
Agenda

**CAPACITY BUILDING RELATED TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
AND MODERNIZATION OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS**

Note by the Secretariat

*The Bureau considered the new challenges and ways to adapt the UNECE capacity building activities to meet them at its February 2016 meeting, and decided to continue the discussion in October 2016 taking into account the decisions and developments in CES and at the global level. **The Bureau provided advice on the way forward.***

I. BACKGROUND

1. The CES Bureau considered at its February 2016 meeting how to adapt the statistical capacity building activities to the new challenges arising from statistics for SDGs and modernisation.
2. The discussion considered both the capacity building for the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA), and the needs for capacity building in developed countries to be able to meet the new challenges arising from SDGs, modernisation and geospatial data.
3. In EECCA countries, UNECE tailors its capacity building activities to address priorities of these countries identified in Global Assessments of national statistical systems carried out jointly by UNECE, EFTA and Eurostat. Some donors, including Eurostat and the World Bank, plan their capacity building activities based on the conclusions of Global Assessments. In this connection, the Bureau noted the following:
 - (a) Cooperation in global assessments of national statistical systems between UNECE, Eurostat and EFTA works well and the new, more regular 'rotating scheme' assessments provide effective support to countries;
 - (b) Future Global Assessments should take into account the statistical needs for SDGs. This may necessitate involving the United Nations specialized agencies as partners in the assessments.
4. Concerning capacity building in all countries, the Bureau noted that the new challenges, such as producing statistics for the monitoring of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), linking statistics and geospatial information, using big data and modernizing statistical production are extending the need for capacity building. In addition to EECCA countries, many UNECE countries would benefit from capacity building in these new areas

of statistics. The Bureau suggested that UNECE, OECD and Eurostat could consider joint organization of capacity building seminars for all countries.

5. The Bureau also noted that plans for statistical capacity building for SDGs will be part of the CES road map on statistics for SDGs, and that this document should make reference to all relevant stakeholders.

6. **In conclusion**, the Bureau strongly supported the proposal to continue capacity building activities to address the specific needs of the countries with developing statistical systems. At the same time, work should be undertaken through the organization of training workshops and expert meetings for all UNECE countries to share experience on how to respond to new demands, in particular to:

- (a) Produce statistics for SDGs, and
- (b) Modernize statistical production to make use of the latest technological possibilities, including geospatial information and big data.

7. The Bureau decided to continue the discussion on statistical capacity building at its October 2016 meeting, to take into account the decisions and developments in CES and at the global level, such as on SDGs, modernization, geospatial information, etc.

II. UPCOMING UNECE STATISTICAL CAPACITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES IN EECCA COUNTRIES

8. The UN Development Account (UNDA) 10th tranche **Programme on Statistics and Data** has been approved. The Programme includes capacity building activities by ten implementing agencies (UNSD, five Regional Commissions, UNCTAD, UNODC, UNEP and UN-HABITAT). The aim of the Programme is to support the production of indicators to measure progress towards SDGs. The Programme will include a range of workshops and other capacity building activities scheduled up to the end of 2019.

9. UNECE will be involved in the implementation of the project in six statistical areas: means of implementation (institutional environment), environment, population, gender, poverty, and economic statistics. UNECE activities under this programme are expected to start in 2017, after finalising the necessary administrative procedures to access the funds.

10. In addition to the UNDA 10th tranche, the other UNECE capacity building projects will continue, such as the UNDA project to strengthen the capacity of countries for the sustainable development of statistics in eight beneficiary countries¹, the multi-donor Programmatic Trust Fund to Support Statistical Capacity Building in Eastern Europe and CIS Countries (ECASTAT) for the implementation of the 2008 SNA, and the Project to Strengthen Statistical Capacity for Producing Comparable and Reliable Poverty Indicators in EECCA countries.

III. MODERNISATION

11. The global statistical community has recognised the need to modernise official statistics to improve the timeliness, accuracy, accessibility, and transparency of their

¹ Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan

statistics. SDGs strengthen further the case for modernising official statistics. No country is currently able to produce all of the required indicators, and although funding may be available in some cases, the pressure to produce additional SDG outputs by making efficiency savings is growing. All statistical organisations, from the most to the least developed, face the same challenges, so working together as a "Statistical Modernisation Community", and avoiding duplication of effort, has clear attractions.

12. The greatest potential for such savings comes from the standardisation of production processes across different statistical domains. The High-level Group for Modernisation of official Statistics (HLG-MOS) has developed various standards and models to facilitate this, including the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) and the Generic Statistical Information Model (GSIM). Applying these models greatly increases the potential benefits of using common software, both within and across statistical organisations, so the HLG-MOS has also created a blueprint for developing software that is designed from the start for sharing - the Common Statistical Production Architecture.

13. There has also been a call for increased use of data collected initially for non-statistical purposes (such as "Big Data" and administrative records) as a way to improve the efficiency of statistical production. Calls for increased use of private source data and statistics for the calculation of official statistics also gain considerable support. New types of data sources are expected to offer significant potential for efficiency savings, as well as facilitating the production of new indicators.

14. The HLG-MOS commissioned two projects to consider the usefulness of so-called "Big Data" sources for official statistics. These projects showed that such sources can be useful in some specialised areas, such as social media data for sentiment and mobility analysis, and "web-scraping" for job vacancy statistics. However, the main conclusion was that such sources are rarely sufficient by themselves, and often need to be combined with statistical or administrative data to be really useful. Therefore, current research activities are focusing on techniques for more efficient data integration, and investigating the potential of geospatial data, both as a source and as a linking mechanism.

15. There is a clear need for capacity building to help statistical organisations to understand and implement the standards mentioned above, and to be able to take advantage of new data sources. This work is underway, with a range of capacity building activities already completed, and others planned. As such activities are designed to cover all statistical domains, it is relatively easy to incorporate requirements related to SDGs. A "Modernisation Road map" and a set of "Modernisation Maturity Models" are currently under development, to be used from 2017 onwards. These will provide the basis for each statistical organisation to assess its current state, and determine the next steps, based on the experiences of those that are further ahead in the modernisation process. This will allow tailored capacity building plans to be developed for each organisation, according to their needs. Standard resource kits, comprising existing and new materials, to support the different steps of the modernisation process could also be envisaged.

16. The current priorities are therefore to finalise the Modernisation Road map and maturity models, and to use them in practice to identify common needs. The existing capacity building activities can then be adapted where necessary to ensure those needs are met as efficiently as possible.

III. STATISTICAL CAPACITY BUILDING AND SDGS

17. The text below is based on the Section on statistical capacity building from the “CES Road Map on statistics for SDGs” and the discussion that took place at the meeting of the CES Steering Group on statistics for SDGs on 5-6 September 2016 in Neuchatel, Switzerland.

18. The 2030 Agenda calls “for increased support for strengthening data collection and capacity-building in Member States, to develop national and global baselines where they do not yet exist”. Member States commit to address “this gap in data collection so as to better inform the measurement of progress, in particular for those targets below which do not have clear numerical targets.” The SDG targets 17.18 and 17.19 refer directly to statistical capacity building. The first target expresses the need to enhance capacity-building support to increase significantly the availability of high-quality data latest by 2020. The second target calls for a development of a system to measure progress that complements the measurement of GDP. It states that capacity building is necessary and the development should be based on existing measurements.

19. The Steering Group recognises that capacity building is crucial for the 2030 Agenda, given the multitude of indicators and the required methodological development in some of them. The first step for a capacity building strategy is an assessment of where the country stands not only with respect to data availability for SDGs, but in general on capacity building to produce data in all statistical domains. Secondly, countries are suggested to develop concrete strategies for capacity building at national level, taking into account existing structures and mechanisms.

20. Funding issues and the need for partnerships are very important components of successful capacity building projects. On funding, it is essential that the statistical community and the responsible for national statistical systems have a dialogue with policy makers, in order to ensure that they are aware the current reporting limitations, and recognize the coordinating role NSOs should have in the process.

21. The road map highlights the importance of partnerships as way of pooling resources and expertise to prioritise needs among CES member countries. Four kinds of partnerships are described: a) with actors within the official statistical community; b) with data producers outside of the official statistics c) with other (political) ministries and d) with funding associations. Depending on what partnership with whom should be worked out, the procedure could differ. This determination helps to see the advantage or disadvantage or in what forum a partnership could be established.

22. Capacity building related to SDGs has to take into account several aspects:

(a) results of the assessment of readiness of countries to provide data on SDG indicators. The focus of capacity building is expected to be on Tier 2 indicators, as the Tier 3 indicators will first require development of internationally agreed methodologies before their capacity building can start;

(b) develop principles for the SDG capacity building, such as focusing on developing coherent underlying statistics that enables the production of indicators, have an integrated and standard based approach, etc.;

- (c) take into account all stakeholders in capacity building: donor countries, recipient countries, international organizations and funds, private funds, etc.;
- (d) need for efficient coordination:
 - i. from donor country or international organization viewpoint to avoid duplication, have a clear division of labour and cooperation mechanisms;
 - ii. from recipient country viewpoint – there is a recommendation for countries to set up a national body/focal point to coordinate the statistical capacity building in countries to avoid duplication and have a coherent and coordinated approach;
- (e) partnerships in capacity building;
- (f) absorption capacity and capability of donors to manage the funds and projects (both on the side of donors and recipients).

23. The Steering Group calls for a venue where countries and international organizations could coordinate their actions on issues related to capacity building under CES.

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