



United Nations
Economic Commission for Europe

BETTER EVIDENCE FOR BETTER DEVELOPMENT RESULTS
Strengthening relevant approaches for measuring development and progress

10 June 2009. 14:30 – 17:30

REPORT OF THE MEETING

1. The following countries and organizations participated in the meeting: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Russian Federation, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Ukraine, the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS STAT), the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).
2. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Petteri Baer, UNECE Statistical Division.
3. Ms. Shahnaz Kianian-Firouzgar, Deputy Regional Director of the UNICEF CEE/CIS office, opened the meeting by welcoming the participants. In her opening remarks, Ms. Kianian-Firouzgar highlighted the importance of improving the relevance of measures of development and progress through strengthening the capacity of national statistical systems. Ms Lidia Bratanova, Director of the UNECE Statistical Division, also welcomed participants to the meeting. Ms. Bratanova stressed the value of United Nations agencies working together to strengthen the capacity of countries to report on progress against the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as well as the importance of continuing to work closely with the OECD and its project on measuring the progress of societies.

BACKGROUND

4. The responsibility to provide high-quality statistics on measures of progress and development falls upon national statistical systems and the international statistical community. It is important that agencies work together to ensure that monitoring and reporting systems are efficient, timely and relevant to the needs at global, regional and national levels.
5. This meeting was an opportunity to continue a dialogue with Chief Statisticians, present in Geneva for the Conference of European Statisticians meeting, on the issues involved in monitoring progress. The organizing agencies presented outcomes of analysis on the current situation and proposed activities and priorities for the future. The Chief Statisticians of Kyrgyzstan and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia gave short presentations on their experiences in MDG reporting. Time for discussion provided participants with the opportunity to raise issues and suggestions for the future.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION AND MAIN CONCLUSIONS

6. The following points were made during the discussion:
- a. Training in statistical literacy is needed to encourage more frequent and appropriate use of the data available on development and progress. Such training should be tailored to a particular user group (e.g. policy makers or students) and focus on the content most relevant to them. Examples from others, such as Statistics Lithuania¹, can provide guidance on establishing a program to increase statistical literacy.
 - b. National Statistical Offices should concentrate on adapting their communications to the needs of the data users. For example, policy makers often need brief data highlights to incorporate in their documents, rather than analytical details. It is important to bring users and producers of statistics together in order to understand each others needs and develop ways to address them.
 - c. Well-developed databases are needed in order to get maximum benefit from the data available.
 - d. National Statistical Offices wish to be considered an equal partner in the monitoring of progress in the country, rather than as simply technical support for preparing statistical tables. International agencies can help by: organizing forums that bring producers and users of statistics together; illustrating the value of databases; stressing the important role that NSOs can play; and providing opportunities for NSOs to demonstrate their professionalism through presentations of their work.
 - e. Many NSOs are currently focused on the next round of the population and housing census and resource pressures demand they produce more with less. The current capacity for developing new indicators and disaggregations is limited. It was stressed that the development of new indicators for measuring progress does not necessarily imply additional data collections nor significant changes to existing work programs. It may be possible to achieve more with less by determining the data needs in the country and reviewing existing data production processes to meet those needs more efficiently.
 - f. When discussing the need for “relevant” indicators and disaggregations, it was stressed that determining relevance is an issue specific to each country. However, to allow cross-country comparisons, harmonization between countries should be the aim wherever possible. This issue will be discussed in the countries of Central Asia during a meeting to be held in Kazakhstan from 5-8 October 2009. Invitations will be sent by UNECE to Chief Statisticians in those countries before the end of June 2009. Other countries in the CIS/SEE region will be informed of the outcomes.
 - g. The importance of ongoing statistical capacity building was stressed. International organizations should continue to help countries produce their own statistics.
 - h. It may be useful to involve the line ministries responsible for funding statistical work programs at future forums in order to increase their understanding of the resources needed to produce internationally comparable statistics that meet local requirements.

¹ “Developing statistical literacy in relation to helping users understand statistics” (Lithuania), 2008 Work Session on the Dissemination and Communication of Statistics, Geneva. Available on-line at <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2008/05/dissemination/wp.9.e.pdf> and <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2008/05/dissemination/wp.9.e.ppt>. Statistical literacy was a topic of discussion at the 2006 Work Session on Dissemination and Communication of Statistics, Washington D.C. (<http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2006.09.dissemination.htm>).

ONGOING AND FUTURE INITIATIVES

7. The organizing agencies presented their plans for future activities and products related to the monitoring and reporting on development and progress in countries. These include:

- 2009 Regional MDGInfo – this is currently being updated and will be available online by July 2009 (www.regionalmdginfo.org).
- UNICEF works to improve the quality and availability of MDG data produced by countries through Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) the development and support of DevInfo databases. MICS4 is to be rolled out in 2009 including new modules on: Youth and Adolescent; Child Development; and Life Satisfaction.
- A Joint UNECE / UNESCAP / UNICEF / UNDP / UNFPA Expert Group Meeting on the Development of MDG-relevant Indicators and Disaggregations for Central Asian countries will be held on 5-8 October 2009 in Kazakhstan.
- 2010 Regional MDG database – this will provide a dissemination platform for MDG-relevant data on CIS/SEE countries. Its development will involve the creation of a network of national MDG focal points in each NSO, the identification of capacity building needs and development of strategies to address them. The database should increase the dissemination and use of statistics in the region as well as identify and address gaps in information.
- Joint UNECE/Eurostat Meeting on Population and Housing Censuses, 28-30 October 2009, Geneva. The UNECE is able to provide technical assistance to support countries with their next census.
- The UNDP Regional Human Development (HD) Network has been developed to create demand for data and to roll out new statistical literacy training.
- The OECD and partners are coordinating a Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies. It is the first systematic global effort to go “beyond GDP” by enabling and promoting new ways to measure societal progress. More information is available from www.oecd.org/progress. The OECD is organizing a World Forum in Busan, Korea at the end of October 2009 on this topic.
- UNECE, UNICEF, UNDP and UNFPA continue to work together on a Joint Regional MDG Monitoring Initiative. The aim of this cooperation is to strengthen regional MDG monitoring by supporting and enhancing countries capacity to monitor MDGs, as well as other important aspects of human and social development not encompassed in the MDGs. Priorities for the future include:
 1. increasing communication between stakeholders at national, regional and international levels to improve the quality and use of statistics on development;
 2. considering other relevant indicators and disaggregations for the CIS/SEE region;
 3. continuing to address discrepancies through the work of international organizations involved in reporting on MDG indicators;
 4. improving the dissemination and use of data through better use of technology, awareness-raising, training in statistical literacy; and
 5. building the capacity of national statistical systems through training, information sharing, provision of tools and resources and other relevant forms of technical assistance.

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