

DRAFT REPORT

1. The following countries and organizations participated in the meeting: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO) (Asia and Pacific Regional Office), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (Europe and CIS Regional Office and Uzbekistan Country Office), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (Tajikistan Country Office) and the World Health Organization (WHO).
2. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Petteri Baer (UNECE Statistical Division). In his opening remarks, Mr Baer outlined the purpose of the meeting as an opportunity to exchange experiences, learn about the issues facing Central Asian countries and Azerbaijan in the production and use of MDG-related statistics and receive guidance in the calculation of some of the MDG indicators. The meeting also aimed to discuss and agree on indicators relevant to the sub-region as well as common disaggregations of MDG indicators that will provide a better understanding of challenges facing various sub-populations.
3. Mr. Zhaslan Omarov, Deputy Chairman of the Agency for Statistics for the Republic of Kazakhstan (ARKS) welcomed the participants to Astana and the offices of ARKS. He expressed his gratitude to the UNECE for choosing Astana as the venue, informed the participants that this Expert Group Meeting is the first event to take place in the renewed premises of the Training and Research Centre of the ARKS. He also made a short analysis on where Kazakhstan presently stands on the road of implementing the Millennium Development Goals.

Session 1: Overview of monitoring progress and development in Central Asia

4. Internationally agreed development goals, development aid frameworks, crises and natural disasters are increasing demand for up-to-date official statistics. Governments must balance the need for information to inform national and local development plans with global priorities, such as those embodied in the MDGs.
5. A study of capacity to produce MDG-relevant statistics in Eastern and South Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia was conducted in 2005 by the UNECE, UNDP and UNICEF. The report (available in [English](#) and [Russian](#)), published in 2008, found a limited capacity to: maintain regular survey programmes in order to produce MDG statistics; and produce data disaggregated by sub-population groups. The report makes the following recommendation:
 - a) review the quality of the data obtained from administrative registers
 - b) streamline the great amount of data produced through administrative records
 - c) develop comprehensive and sustainable national survey programmes
 - d) improve the size and design of household samples
 - e) conduct the population and housing census
 - f) improve the dissemination and accessibility of MDG-related data.
6. As it has been several years since this study was conducted, and some issues, such as conduct of the population and housing census, have begun to be addressed, this information was presented as background in setting the scene of the discussions to follow.
7. An analysis of current data availability in the global MDG database was presented. This revealed limited coverage over time. Furthermore, the majority of global data reported for these six countries in the global MDG database are adjusted, estimated or modelled by international agencies. This suggests that country estimates may require improvement to align with international definitions and standards and highlights the need for international agencies to be transparent in the methodologies followed to produce global estimates.

Session 2: Collection and production of MDG-relevant data: national experiences

8. A pre-meeting questionnaire of participants revealed the following challenges existing at the national level: producing estimates at sub-regional level; a need for additional surveys to be able to report on some MDG indicators; a lack of coordinating mechanism to oversee the reporting of MDG estimates; and a need to create national databases. Many of the responses revealed that the national statistical office has the authority to coordinate the reporting of data and in some cases, verify the quality. For at least two of the six countries, this coordination role is mandated by law.
9. Discussion on the experiences of countries in producing MDG-relevant data raised the following points:
- Participants were not aware that the MDG indicators were revised from the original list of 48 indicators to 60 in January 2008.
 - Training and methodological guidance is urgently required by the participating countries. Publishing of the MDG Metadata Handbook in Russian is requested as soon as possible.
 - Some indicators are not relevant to the sub-region, such as those relating to malaria. In some cases, additional indicators, such as those relating to quality of education are more relevant than the MDG indicators on universal primary education. Countries asked for guidance on how to report against indicators that are not relevant in the national context. Countries were advised to report a zero figure where there are no cases of malaria rather than reporting nothing. It was also stressed that for goals that are considered to be achieved, such as those relating to primary education, countries should continue to monitor and report on the indicators in case the trend takes a negative turn.
 - Countries were unsure how to collect data on indicators such as family planning and condom use at last high-risk sex. The metadata handbook provides guidance on this.
 - Communication and coordination within the country is needed. Where multiple sources exist, the authoritative source for MDG reporting needs to be clarified. This issue was covered further under session 5 below.
 - Methodologies followed in internationally coordinated surveys, such as MICS and DHS, create some problems, in that some indicators are measured differently, resulting in discrepant estimates.
 - Countries mentioned the challenges that exist in using the DevInfo interface, which have been reported to UNICEF. A new version of DevInfo (version 6.0) has recently been released and it is likely that some of the usability issues have been addressed. This was presented by UNICEF Tajikistan in session 7.
 - Guidance on how to incorporate use of information and communication technologies (ICT) into household surveys was requested. The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) have recently published a [Manual for measuring ICT access and use by households and individuals](#) (2009), currently available in English only.
10. International agencies represented at the meeting reported on the challenges they face in collecting MDG data from countries in this sub-region:
- Data is often missing for some indicators.
 - Non-response to questionnaires is relatively high.
 - The communication channels are unclear and there is concern over whether the right ministry or person has received the request for data.
 - Some countries have a limited capacity to produce statistics according to international standards.
 - Countries were asked to send any publications of MDG-relevant data to contacts in the international agencies and to update their websites so that agencies can find the data directly and reduce the reporting burden on countries. Where questionnaires are necessary, countries are urged to provide responses within the requested deadline.

Session 3: National and international cooperation to bridge discrepancies

11. Discrepancies between national and international estimates may exist for a number of reasons: adjustments made by agencies to ensure international comparability; different definitions; lack of coordination within countries and between countries and agencies; and a lack of dissemination and reporting resulting in agencies imputing estimates.
12. Participants explored the situation for certain indicators, such as mortality estimates, where there can be a lack of clarity on the authoritative source of data (e.g. national statistical office or the Ministry of Health). In

some countries, home births are becoming more common and these are not included in Ministry of Health estimates.

13. Participating international agencies shared some information on how they produce global estimates for the indicators they are responsible for. Rather than making adjustments, some agencies explain discrepancies in footnotes, whereas others adjust for international comparability or make imputations where data points are unavailable.

14. The following actions for addressing discrepancies were suggested:

- a) Streamline methodological approaches across the countries of the region, in line with international standards.
- b) Ensure international agencies publish their methodologies for producing country and global estimates so that countries can understand the differences in approach and consider them in producing national estimates.
- c) Metadata is a key issue to resolving discrepancies as definitions and methodological approaches are clearly explained.
- d) Some countries requested technical support for their DevInfo implementations in order to improve their approach to dissemination.
- e) Guidance on which sources to use for each of the indicators was requested. This information is available in the metadata handbook, the revised version to be available in the Russian language by early 2010.
- f) Global analysis on country specific progress was requested in addition the reports that indicate regional progress. This request was noted by the UNECE as such reporting is usually done at the regional level.
- g) Multi-faceted disaggregation is necessary, but production is costly. Guidance on which disaggregations to focus on was requested. The UNECE will circulate a questionnaire to national statistical systems to gauge currently available disaggregations as a first step towards identifying data availability across the sub-region.
- h) Clarify communication channels and ensure clear processes for getting clearance by countries for global estimates that are eventually published in the global MDG database and reports.
- i) Specific examples of discrepancies between multiple national and international estimates of water and sanitation indicators were discussed. These may be due to weak interdepartmental coordination and legal framework. In order to address the discrepancies in estimates for Azerbaijan and to provide an example of concrete outcomes of this expert group meeting, the two represented Azerbaijan organizations (Ministry of Health and State Statistical Committee) will prepare a briefing note about their compilation approaches. The same will be done by the WHO representative. These briefing notes will then be discussed between the three parties with the aim of finding common definitions for information to be reported in future years. If needed, the UNECE can facilitate this process, which later could be an example of a good practice in reconciliation of estimates.

15. Countries stressed the importance of using country data wherever possible, increasing communication between national and international agencies, clear and comprehensive metadata and improving contact lists. The UNECE will act to facilitate cooperation between the Inter Agency Expert Group on MDG Indicators and countries by confirming contact details and strengthening the MDG Focal Point Network in national statistical offices.

Session 4: Additional development indicators and disaggregations relevant to Central Asia

16. The ILO introduced the Decent Work framework, which comes as a sectorial support to the MDGs, and the related statistical indicators. The UNECE also presented plans to enhance the current regional MDG database with a more sustainable approach to collection and dissemination on MDG-related statistics, including indicators that are more relevant to the South East Europe and CIS region. Reviews of national MDG reports and databases conducted by the UNECE over recent months have revealed a number of additional indicators that are consistently being used in the region to monitor progress against the MDGs. For example, national poverty lines, school attendance ratios, share of women in managerial positions, gender pay gap, prenatal mortality rates and breast feeding rates.

17. Discussions mainly focussed on the need for additional indicators, disaggregations and the relevance of a regional MDG database to be maintained by the UNECE. There was limited support for developing a common set of additional indicators that countries would report on. Each country has developed their own framework of MDG-relevant indicators comprising the core indicators and others relevant to national development goals but a consensus on a common set of indicators relevant to be included in the regional database was not reached.

18. The following points were raised during discussion:

- a) Concerns about comparability, maintainability and feasibility of a regional MDG database were raised. To avoid duplication in data reporting and conflict between nationally and internationally reported data, the database should make use of the internationally comparable data published by agencies. Consultation with agencies on additional indicators should occur as part of database development.
- b) UNECE clarified that the 60 core MDG indicators, which are agreed by the General Assembly, are not open to revision. Additional indicators that are relevant to the sub-region are intended to be complementary.
- c) To facilitate the harvest of data on MDG and other development indicators, countries should be given assistance to create their own databases. The UNECE provides fora and technical assistance for the dissemination and communication of statistics and has conducted a number of activities related database development in the region. UNICEF also provides support through the availability of DevInfo.
- d) Data relevant to the monitoring of progress in countries is currently scattered across a number of databases. National reports are being produced intermittently - a regional MDG database could assist countries in the preparation of these reports.
- e) The regional MDG database would not include regional estimates. These are currently prepared by the international agencies responsible for reporting on the core MDG indicators.
- f) Extra reporting burden on countries should be avoided. It will be important to have MDG focal points in national statistical offices and high level support will be needed. There will need to be a clear process and guidance for the reporting of data identified as relevant to the region.
- g) A single location for data on the region was supported. The resolution of multiple sources was raised as a potential issue.
- h) Disaggregation is important for detailed analysis. However, if regional data is disaggregated too much, it will result in many blank cells.
- i) A regional database could also provide a place for maintaining contact details within the national statistical systems, sharing MDG publications/products, and a forum for discussion.

Session 5: Strengthening national coordination mechanisms

19. Each country reported on the current mechanisms for coordinating the production and dissemination of national estimates for MDG indicators. The approaches differ from country to country, from no central coordination, to established committees comprising all ministries involved in data production.

20. In order to facilitate improved national coordination and communication with international agencies, participants were asked to provide the contact details of the people responsible for national coordination of MDGs to the UNECE. This information will be shared with the international agencies responsible for collection of MDG statistics.

21. The strengthening of national coordination will be a topic for discussion at the training workshop on MDGs currently being planned for the CIS region in March 2010.

Session 6: Improving dissemination and use of MDG data

22. MDG-related statistics provide an internationally comparable measure of progress against globally agreed priorities. As with all statistics, they serve to inform decision making and the development and implementation of policies. They are only useful if they reach their potential audience and are in fact used by them. There are many mechanisms for disseminating statistics, such as databases and publications, but communication about the existence of data and guidance in understanding them, is also required.

23. The session included an overview of the importance of both dissemination and communication, emerging visualization tools, features of the new version of DevInfo (6.0), tools for improving the dissemination and use of data, and information about Statistics Kazakhstan's approach to dissemination and communicating statistics. Participants shared current initiatives to improve the dissemination and use of data, such as regular meetings with media representatives and open doors day at the national statistical office.

24. Suggestions for improving dissemination and use of MDG data were made:

- a) Be proactive by producing brochures, newsletters and other products, targeted at particular audience groups.
- b) Introduce a thematic page or section on MDGs into NSO and line ministry websites.
- c) Develop a separate publication on MDG-related statistics.
- d) Include a chapter on Millennium Development Goal Indicators in their annual Statistical Yearbooks.
- e) Educate users on the MDGs and how the statistics can be useful to them.
- f) Hold seminars to share best practices. The UNECE Work Session on Dissemination and Communication is a good forum for sharing experiences with other countries on this topic.

Conclusions and next steps

25. As the first meeting on MDGs that has been run in this region for some time, countries were very pleased to have the opportunity to discuss the issues they face in producing MDG-related statistics. Throughout the meeting a number of items requiring follow-up were mentioned:

- a) Further training and methodological guidance is urgently required. A training workshop is being planned for the CIS region in March or April 2010. UNDP Uzbekistan expressed interest in hosting that workshop in Tashkent.
- b) Publishing of the MDG Metadata Handbook in Russian is requested as soon as possible.
- c) The UNECE will act to facilitate cooperation between the Inter Agency Expert Group on MDG Indicators and countries by confirming contact details and strengthening the MDG Focal Point Network in national statistical offices. The UNECE will send a questionnaire to countries to gather this information and liaise with agencies to confirm contacts at the international level.
- d) In order to gauge the availability and usefulness of different levels of disaggregation of the MDG indicators, the UNECE post-meeting questionnaire will request feedback from countries on this issue.
- e) The two represented Azerbaijan organizations (Ministry of Health and State Statistical Committee) will prepare a briefing note about their approaches to producing estimates for the indicators on water and sanitation. The same will be done by the WHO representative. These briefing notes will then be discussed between the three parties with the aim of finding common definitions for information to be reported in future years.
- f) International agencies are requested to publish their methodologies for producing global estimates so that countries can understand the differences in approach and consider them in producing national estimates. Information in Russian is greatly appreciated.
- g) Countries were asked to send any publications of MDG-relevant data to contacts in the international agencies and to update their websites so that agencies can find the data directly and reduce the reporting burden on countries. Where questionnaires are necessary, countries are urged to provide responses within the requested deadline.
- h) The UNECE will present its plans for developing a regional MDG database at the IEAG on MDG Indicators being held in Geneva in October 2009. Member states and other stakeholders will be consulted about the database as it is being developed.