

# **Report of the 11<sup>th</sup> Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia Working Group on Statistics**

## **I. Introduction**

1. The Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan Committee on Statistics, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) jointly organized the 11th meeting of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) Working Group on Statistics in Astana, Kazakhstan, from 19-21 October 2016. It was attended by representatives from the statistical offices of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Norway, Switzerland, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. This event also benefited from the participation and substantive contributions of the Statistical Department of the Eurasian Economic Commission.

2. The aim of the meeting was to support SPECA countries in their efforts to further develop their national statistical systems in line with the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, and other international standards and best practices. There was a particular focus on preparations to meet the requirements for data to monitor progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to develop a sound basis for coherent economic statistics through the strengthening of statistical business registers.

3. The meeting was targeted towards senior managers of national statistical organisations of SPECA countries and senior staff with responsibility for SDGs and statistical business registers. Experts from the national statistical organisations of Norway and Switzerland were invited to present examples of good practices from leading statistical organisations.

4. The meeting included three substantive sessions:

- Progress in developing indicators for the sustainable development goals
- Implementation of international recommendations for statistical business registers
- Priorities for future technical cooperation activities in the SPECA region

5. The agenda of the meeting, contributions and background documents can be found on the UNECE webpage: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=43265#/>

## **II. Outcomes and conclusions of the substantive sessions**

### **A. Progress in developing indicators for the sustainable development goals**

6. The UNECE presented the on-going work under the Conference of European Statisticians to support member countries to meet the challenges of the SDG data requirements. SPECA countries presented national progress, issues and priorities.

7. SPECA countries are currently able to provide between 26% and 43% of the data required. Discussions are on-going with other government agencies to identify additional data sources and determine national priorities.

8. Three main priorities were identified at the institutional level:

- How can national statistical organisations ensure effective cross-government coordination to ensure SDG data requirements are met to the greatest extent possible? Participants agreed that further exchanges of experiences and good practices on this topic would be very useful. This topic is therefore proposed for discussion at the next meeting of the SPECA Working Group on Statistics
- How to manage demands for disaggregation of data by many different dimensions (age, gender, disability, geography etc.)? The UNECE informed participants that this topic will be treated in specific workshops to be organised in the context of a United Nations Development Account 10<sup>th</sup> tranche project.
- How to ensure an effective flow of information about good practices, so that national statistical organisations can learn from the experiences of others? Participants highlighted the value of discussions such as those within the SPECA Working Group on Statistics, and also welcomed the wider activities of the Conference of European Statisticians to develop a road map for developing official statistics for SDGs.

9. Due to on-going cross-government discussions in many countries, participants felt that it was too early to identify clear priorities in terms of statistical domains in which technical cooperation activities would be needed. However, most countries mentioned that areas such as environment, water management and climate change were likely to emerge as priorities.

10. In summary, the SPECA member countries expressed a strong wish to continue the dialogue on SDG implementation at future SPECA meetings, and in the context of other technical cooperation activities at the national, sub-regional and global levels.

## **B. Implementation of international recommendations for statistical business registers**

11. The UNECE introduced the Guidelines on Statistical Business Registers. Since recently, the Guidelines are also available in Russian and all participants received paper copies of them. Statistics Norway presented their Generic Statistical Business Register project.

12. SPECA countries presented their national experience in building, maintaining and improving statistical business registers. The presentations by the Swiss Statistical Office mainly focused on the maintenance aspects of the Guidelines taking up issues from participants and enriching the discussion with concrete examples from Switzerland.

13. Discussions focused on the following main topics:

- Common guidelines and new technologies are important drivers of development.
- On-line data flows from administrative sources and regional offices have been integrated into statistical production processes in many SPECA countries. Well-established cooperation with administrative data providers and agreements defining data transfers are vital.

- Unique identifiers are key to proper maintenance of the statistical business register. It is important to define who is responsible for assigning unique identifiers and do these identifiers include any information about the unit.
- Maintenance of statistical business registers requires developing a strategy for dealing with the different groups of statistical units, such as individual entrepreneurs' data mostly derived from administrative sources; legal units with additional information from surveys and censuses; and complex enterprises or groups where profiling is needed to clarify the organization and activities.
- Updating the different unit characteristics (identification/contact, demographic, economic/stratification) also needs to be scheduled depending on the possible stability rules and validity period of each characteristic. Data sources for the updates need be clearly defined.
- Proper metadata and the use of the Generic Statistical Business Process Model considerably support the maintenance work.
- Confidentiality of data in statistical business register was discussed at length: What can be published on unit level? What kind of data flows can happen among producers of official statistics and administrative data providers? Should respondents be allowed to access and edit their own data any time? What kind of on-line services should respondents be provided with (schedule of surveys they belong to, feedback data to compare with other units in the same activity etc.)?
- Statisticians should listen to users, both internal and external, when developing the statistical business register. Defining different user segments may be useful to take into account their varying needs. Users can be a catalyst for quality improvements.

14. In summary, participants noted that the Guidelines on Statistical Business Registers are very useful for development work. In addition, countries would benefit from concrete country examples (e.g. a web-based inventory) of cases to implement parts of the Guidelines. Examples on profiling would be useful. Countries asked UNECE to organize training workshops and opportunities to discuss with colleagues from other countries. The training should reach a wider group of experts either by organizing practical national training workshops or by offering training of trainers. Participants also highlighted the usefulness of bilateral cooperation with neighbouring countries.

### **C. Priorities for future technical cooperation activities in the SPECA region**

15. All participants indicated that support for implementation of the SDG indicators remains the top priority for technical cooperation activities in the SPECA region. Other topics suggested as priorities were the development and use of agricultural registers for statistical purposes, and the implementation of the 2008 version of the System of National Accounts. The latter topic will be covered by a new World Bank-funded project, managed by the UNECE, which is expected to start in 2017.

16. The provisional topics for the 2017 meeting of the SPECA Working Group on Statistics will therefore be:

- Progress in the implementation of the SDG indicators – due to rapidly evolving priorities, the exact focus of this topic will be determined nearer the time, to ensure maximum relevance for participating countries
- The development and use of agricultural registers

17. The importance of sub-regional cooperation was highlighted by participants, and also stressed by the Chairman of the Committee on Statistics of Kazakhstan in his closing remarks.