

**UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL PROGRAMME ON THE ECONOMIES OF CENTRAL ASIA
(SPECA)**

PROJECT WORKING GROUP (PWG) ON STATISTICS

**Report
of the first meeting of the
Project Working Group (PWG) on Statistics**

** Paris, 16 June 2006 **



UNITED NATIONS

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I. SESSION 1. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PWG ON STATISTICS

Attendance

1. The Project Working Group (PWG) on Statistics of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) held its first meeting in Paris at the UICP Building in Salle G. Stevenson on the 16th of June 2006. It was attended by representatives from Azerbaijan, Germany, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and United States of America.
2. Representatives of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), United Nations Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP), The Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS 21) and the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of the Independent States (CIS-STAT) attended the meeting as well.

Opening statements

3. The Director of the Statistical Division of UNECE opened the meeting and, together with the Director of the Statistics Division of UNESCAP, delivered opening statements. In his statement the Director of the Statistical Division of UNECE welcomed all the participants to the first PWG meeting on Statistics in the framework of the SPECA notifying the great need for statistical capacity building in the Central Asian sub-region and the United Nations organisations' will to assist in strengthening the role of official statistics. The Director of the Statistics Division of UNESCAP for his part also welcomed the participants and emphasized that the voluminous agenda of the one-day meeting had been prepared in good co-ordination between UNESCAP and UNECE.

Organisational issues

4. The Chairman of the State Committee on Statistics of the Republic of Tajikistan was elected to the post of Chairman of the PWG on Statistics. After the election the Chairman of CIS-STAT emphasized that the Chair elected is presently also Chairman of the Council of the Heads of Statistical Services of CIS-STAT and that good coordination of the activities can also in this way be achieved.
5. The provisional Agenda (ECE-ESCAP-SPECA/PWG-Statistics/2006/1) was adopted after approving a slight amendment striking out the number of countries to present information on their preparations of the 2010 round of Population and Housing Censuses.

Establishment of the Project Working Group (PWG) on Statistics

Documentation: ECE-ESCAP-SPECA/PWG-Statistics/2006/2

6. The Director of the Statistical Division of UNECE presented the prepared draft of the Terms of Reference for the SPECA PWG on Statistics. He referred to the flexible contents of the TOR, which provide that also new themes can be taken up in the work and activities of the PWG. He also notified the option for Afghanistan to participate in the activities and regretted the non-participation of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in the present meeting expressing his hope that ways will be found to achieve an active participation in the future work of the PWG also from those two countries.

7. A strong willingness to in different ways support the forthcoming activities of the PWG on Statistics were explicitly expressed by meeting participants from UNSD, UNFPA, PARIS 21, Germany and CIS-STAT.

Presentation of the UN SPECA Project on Strengthening the Statistical Capacity of the Central Asian Countries

Documentation: ECE-ESCAP-SPECA/PWG-Statistics/2006/3

8. The Director of the Statistical Division of UNECE presented the UN Project on Strengthening the Statistical Capacity of the Central Asian Countries, adapted in March 2006 for a three years period (2006-2008) by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), supported with financial resources from the United Nations Development Account. The plan has been first proposed by UNECE to the International Conference on SPECA in Astana, Kazakhstan, in May 2005 and later, in June and September 2005, discussed with the heads of the National Statistical Offices (NSOs) of six countries in the region by the UNECE. The contents of the plan have in the preparation process also been endorsed and supported by UNESCAP and UNSD.

9. In presenting the Project, the Director of the Statistical Division of UNECE emphasized its linkage to building up the statistical capacity in general and especially for Millennium Development Goals (MDG) monitoring activities. The project is focusing on three areas of statistical activity, all being of core importance in any statistical system: population and housing censuses, measurement of the health status of the population and defining and measuring non-observed economy. A number of preconditions for a well working system of official statistics in these spheres are of great importance: the existence of a Law on Statistics as well as professional independence of the Statistical system, referred to in the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

10. In his presentation of the UN Development Account financed project the Director of the Statistical Division of UNECE emphasized the importance for all participating NSOs from Central Asia to be in contact with the respective SPECA coordinators in their countries, so that the work made in the field of statistics would receive the due attention it deserves as a monitoring tool for development in general and for the numerous activities of SPECA programme in particular.

II. SESSION 2. POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES

Tour de table by SPECA member countries on Population and Housing Censuses

Documentation: ECE-ESCAP-SPECA/PWG-Statistics/2006/4/Add.1 (Kyrgyzstan)
ECE-ESCAP-SPECA/PWG-Statistics/2006/4/Add.2 (Tajikistan)
ECE-ESCAP-SPECA/PWG/Statistics/2006/4/Add.3 (Azerbaijan)

ECE/CES/2006/20 (Kazakhstan)

11. Four SPECA member countries presented information on the already on-going preparations of the 2010 round of Population and Housing Censuses in their countries. The issues taken up in the presentations followed the disposition provided for in the Agenda of the meeting, i.e.

- (i) The state of preparations for the Population and Housing Census of 2010 and on major issues to be decided on the Census preparations in the near future;
- (ii) Main arguments in convincing national budget authorities to supply enough finances for the Census to be done;
- (iii) Lessons learnt from the previous Census round to be taken into account in the preparations of the new Population and Housing Censuses; and
- (iv) Building contacts with the users of information materials built on the Census results.

12. A summary of the presentations is presented in Attachment 1 of this Report.

13. After the Tour de table presentations a lively discussion took place. Among others following points were made:

- As the financial side of the census preparations is of great importance, a meeting involving donors for Census activities in the SPECA member countries could possibly help the process of fund raising;
- A number of training activities organised by UN and other international organisations on Census processes will be arranged in the next few years. The project, introduced by the Director of the Statistical Division of UNECE, includes three training activities on this theme. The UN Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP) will in September 2006 organise a seminar for Heads of NSOs of ESCAP countries on challenges in planning, managing and conducting a Population and Housing Census;
- The challenge to reconcile the new international recommendations on Population and Housing Censuses, in particular the recommendations adopted at the 2006 Plenary Session of the Conference of European Statisticians was noted to be of great importance;
- It would be recommendable to plan publication and dissemination activities of the Census results well in advance as e.g. the data needs and structures for effective use of the new cartographic possibilities and the use of geographic information systems (GIS) may also have an impact on the information collection processes of the Population and Housing Censuses;
- UNFPA stated its willingness to participate and financially support the activities related to the forthcoming workshops and other capacity building activities related to Population Censuses
- The challenge to use modern IT-technology in a cost effective way will need deliberation and training;
- The impact of migration processes between the SPECA member countries and especially to the Russian Federation on the census outcome is today a highly important methodological and practical problem in the Central Asian countries and should be given special attention in the Population and Housing preparations;
- The recommendations on the 2010 Population and Housing Census, adopted by the Plenary Session of the Conference of European Statisticians in the very same week enlightens the handling of the migration questions in a developed manner but, seen both from the training and

the methodology development aspect, there are still numerous activities to be taken for achieving satisfactory results;

- Even if the legal definitions of emigrants are different in different (CIS-)countries, the main Census results should be based on the international recommendations on the “12 months rule” in defining resident population; ad hoc tables for specific purposes can respond to national definitions that refer to a subset of the resident population as based on international definitions;
- The existence of a separate project plan for dealing with migration issues in the SPECA member countries was greeted with great pleasure already in this part of the discussion (see more on migration issues in Point 25 of this Report);
- The close timing of the Censuses in different CIS countries is important both from the migration aspect as well from other aspects of providing good comparability of the census data between countries. In the previous round the time gap between the first and the last census of CIS countries was more than 5 years, which made some comparisons methodologically questionable;
- There are abundant possibilities for analysing and processing the rich Census materials. Possibilities to make special compilations also in co-operation between different NSOs in the sub-region should be encouraged, protecting confidentiality and exploring new possibilities for the use of the Census materials;
- Contact building with users should be seen as two, partially interlinked, processes: (i) before census for achieving a maximum participation in the information collection process and (ii) after census for making different user categories of statistical information aware of the rich information the Population and Housing Census materials contains and the numerous possibilities there exists to make analyses on the basis of the voluminous information collection.

Recent UNESCAP Activities on Population and Housing Censuses

Documentation: ECE-ESCAP-SPECA/PWG-Statistics/2006/7

14. The Director of the UNESCAP Statistics Division gave a presentation of recent UNESCAP Census activities, stressing their relevance for the current census round. He then introduced the tentative framework of the multi-year (2007-2009) Asia-Pacific Regional Census Programme that UNESCAP is currently preparing. The main activities foreseen by the Programme include: establishing regional guidelines; facilitating the exchange of experiences among countries in the use of IT and GIS for census operations; assisting countries in field testing Census questionnaire, modified to include topics as disability, literacy, fertility, mortality and, more generally, MDG indicators; developing protocols for the analysis and dissemination of census data; and developing, in collaboration with SIAP, distance learning modules for Census enumerators. The Director also mentioned that an Expert Group Meeting is planned in November 2006 in Bangkok to discuss with UNESCAP member countries the guidelines and institutional arrangements of the Regional Census Programme.

Planning of project activities concerning Population and Housing Censuses

15. Session 2 on Population and Housing Censuses was ended by an iterative discussion process looking for a need structure based definition on the sub-themes to be taken up in the three forthcoming seminars and workshops foreseen by the Development account project on Statistical Capacity Building, introduced in Session 1 and based on the discussion referred to in Points 8-13 of this Report. A number of sub-themes had been listed as an outcome of the lively discussion during the lunch break. The listing can be found as Attachment 2 to this Report.

16. The finalising discussion produced the result that at least the following sub-themes should be taken up in the forthcoming seminars/workshops. Strong support among the participants from the SPECA member countries enjoyed (i) Technology for collection, processing and dissemination, (ii) Donor conference, (iii) Migration/Usual residence issues, (iv) The planning and management of the Census process. Participants from international organisations in addition gave an emphasis to the need of development of (v) Mapping and cartography abilities and (vi) Building relations with different user categories of the Census materials.

17. It was agreed that the UNECE Secretariat in the following weeks will provide a plan for the thematic issues of the activities of the UN Development Account project on the 2010 round of Population and Housing Censuses and also sort out the times and venues for the three planned seminars and workshops. In general terms the original proposal by the Regional Adviser of UNECE to the meeting participants from the Central Asian countries to have the (i) first seminar/workshop taking place in Azerbaijan in October 2006, the (ii) second workshop in Tajikistan in March 2007 and the (iii) third in Kazakhstan in October 2007 was approved, with the reservation to change the venue of the first seminar/workshop, depending on final approval from the planned hosting country¹⁾.

III. SESSION 3. PREPARATION OF SPECA ACTIVITIES ON OTHER TOPICS

Recent UNESCAP and UNECE activities in Statistics on Health Status

Documentation: ECE-ESCAP-SPECA/PWG-Statistics/2006/8
ECE-ESCAP-SPECA/PWG-Statistics/2006/11

18. The Director of the Statistics Division of UNESCAP presented the ongoing activities the secretariat is conducting within the context of the project on “Improving disability statistics and measurement in support of the Biwako Millennium Framework”. This project, carried out in partnership with WHO, aims at improving disability statistics by applying the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) in the collection of data. Future directions of work of the ESCAP secretariat comprise the extension to other countries of pilot testing the standard set of disability questions in preparation for the 2010 Census Round and the organization, in collaboration with SIAP, of country-based training courses using a disability statistics training manual developed by the project. Follow-up project activities can be extended to the SPECA member countries to ensure full use of the accumulated experiences.

19. Due to time constraints no presentation on this subject was presented by UNECE. Only a reference to the close co-operation of UNECE with the Washington group and the Budapest initiative in this field of activities was mentioned.

20. The Associate Director of Science at the National Center for Health Statistics of the United States, representing the work being done by the Washington group and the Budapest initiative, gave a condensed presentation on activities related to health and disability statistics in the UNECE region and globally.

Planning of Project Activities concerning Statistics on Health Status

21. It was agreed that the UNECE Secretariat will in the following weeks make efforts to prepare the thematic workshops on Statistics on Health Status, foreseen in the UN Development Account project in accordance with the original proposal by the Regional Adviser of UNECE to the meeting participants from the Central Asian countries. The (i) first workshop is planned to take place in Uzbekistan in November 2006 and (ii) the second in Turkmenistan in September 2007. The UNECE Secretariat will, as part of the mentioned obligation, also sort out the times and venues for the two planned workshops. As neither of the countries mentioned participated in the PWG meeting on Statistics, it was also agreed that the hosting country for the first workshop would be Kyrgyzstan and the second Kazakhstan, in case either one of the primarily proposed hosting countries should decline to express an interest to host one of the planned workshops on Statistics on Health Status.

Recent UNECE and UNESCAP Activities in Statistics on the Non-Observed Economy

Documentation: ECE-ESCAP-SPECA/PWG-Statistics/2006/5
ECE-ESCAP-SPECA/PWG-Statistics/2006/9

22. The recent findings of a UNECE Survey performed in 2005 on Non-Observed Economy (NOE) with a special focus on the Central Asian countries were presented. According to the findings of the Survey the share of the Non-Observed Economy in the five countries of the Central Asian sub-region ranges between 17 to 30 % of the GDP. Turkmenistan and Afghanistan did not participate in the Survey. A number of difficulties, especially important in CIS countries, were reflected in the presentation: the lack of a commonly agreed conceptual framework for tackling problems of NOE, the large number of unregistered enterprises, difficulties related to conducting sample surveys, measurement of illegal activities and a number of other problems. Information was given about the methodological frameworks of NOE and about the plans to include a chapter on informal and illegal activities in the SNA 93 update.

23. Due to time constraints no presentation on this subject was presented by UNESCAP.

Planning of Project Activities concerning Statistics on the Non-Observed Economy

24. It was agreed that the ECE Secretariat will in the following weeks do planning work to organise the thematic workshops on Statistics on NOE, foreseen in the UN Development Account project in accordance with the original proposal by the Regional Adviser of UNECE to the meeting participants from the Central Asian countries. The (i) first workshop was agreed to be organised in

Kyrgyzstan in April 2007 and (ii) the second in Geneva in April 2008 back-to-back with a larger Meeting on National Accounts.

Migration Statistics

25. A joint UNECE-OSCE-IOM-ILO Project Proposal for Improving International Migration Statistics and Research in SPECA member countries was presented by the Section Chief for Social Statistics of UNECE. As the discussion on migration issues had already been quite intensive and a number of methodological problems in connection with the performance of a high quality Population and Housing Census in conditions of substantially big constraints from migration issues had been identified (See Point 11 of this Report), the proposed project was strongly applauded by the participants of the PWG meeting on statistics. It was agreed that the UNECE Secretariat will formulate an action plan on proceeding with the Project Proposal presented also under the umbrella of the SPECA activities on Statistics and put available information about the project on the SPECA Statistics web site.

IV. FINAL SESSION AND OTHER BUSINESS

SIAP Activities

Documentation: ECE-ESCAP-SPECA/PWG-Statistics/2006/10
ECE-ESCAP-SPECA/PWG-Statistics/2006/6

26. The Director of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP) presented the main activities of SIAP, the training institute of UNESCAP, related to the development of statistical capacity of the NSOs of the SPECA countries. She informed that SIAP, together with Japan International Cooperating Agency (JICA), has been conducting 2-month Tokyo Metropolitan Area-based (TMA) training programmes specially designed for Central Asian and Caucasian countries in Russian since 2001. The Director highlighted that in order to be selected to attend the TMA-based statistical training courses and to get a fellowship from JICA, the governments of the ESCAP countries must give a high priority to the participation of their official statisticians in the TMA-based training courses. As for the regional/ sub-regional and country training initiatives, SIAP conducts a regular survey and uses the survey results for planning and designing its 3-year outreach-training programme. The main education language is English.

Final Session

27. It was agreed that the next session of the PWG on Statistics will be held in Geneva, Switzerland, in the week 24 in the first part of June 2007 back-to-back with the Plenary Session of the Conference of European Statisticians. Taking into consideration the numerous topics of the present meeting and having expectations of an increased number of activities to be reported and discussed, a suggestion was made to have the June 2007 PWG meeting as a 1 ½ - 2 days meeting.

28. The Regional Adviser of UNECE briefly presented the possibility for SPECA member countries to have a Global Assessment of their Statistical System performed by UNECE in co-operation with some other organisation, e.g. Eurostat of UNESCAP. It was notified that the

Statistical System of Kazakhstan had been object of a Global Assessment in 2004. The Chairman of the Agency on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan emphasized the usefulness of a Global Assessment for inducing good pressure for future development of the national statistical system.

29. It was agreed that the Secretariat of UNECE will produce the minutes of the meeting within the two following weeks and that they will be circulated for comments of the participants in July.

30. The Chairman of the meeting expressed his gratitude to the participants for having an effective and fruitful first meeting of the SPECA PWG on Statistics extending his thanks to the interpreters and other personnel assisting the achievement of the good results of the meeting.



¹⁾ The approval of the NSO of Azerbaijan to host the first Seminar on Population and Housing Censuses, referred to in Point 17, has been received in the beginning of July – pb.