



United Nations  
Economic Commission  
for Europe



## **Management Seminar on Global Assessments,**

**Yalta, 23-25 September 2009**

### **Macedonian experience with the use of Global Assessment**

*MSc Blagica Novkovska, Director General of the State Statistical Office*

#### **Introduction**

The aim of this document is to provide information on the experience of the State Statistical Office (SSO) of the Republic of Macedonia (RM) with the use of Global Assessments.

#### **I Background**

In the previous period, two global assessments (GA) of the statistical system of the Republic of Macedonia were carried out: the first one in 2001 and the second in 2004, as a joint mandate by EUROSTAT and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). The Global Assessments has been carried out with the purpose to analyse the institutional environment of the State Statistical Office (SSO) and of the Macedonian Statistical System as a whole and to ascertain the capacity to provide, in a sustainable way, accurate, timely and relevant information to the users. GA 2001 and 2004 exercises have been very useful for the National Statistical System and the GA reports were widely disseminated within the public sector institutions.

## **II Use of Global Assessment**

### ***II.1 General explanations***

The GA exercise was initiated in order to obtain a better understanding of the National Statistical Systems in the beneficiary countries from the Western Balkan Region. The aim was to provide an assessment of the capacity of the statistical systems to provide to its users, in a sustainable way, accurate, relevant and reliable statistics. In addition, it should have analyzed the institutional environment in which the statistical offices operate. On one hand, the assessment was needed for the beneficiary countries to serve as a base for better planning and priority setting. On the other hand, the European Donor Community needed this assessment in order to develop a strategy for development of these countries in the statistical area. However, one should have on mind that the National Statistical System should be mature enough in order to perform this exercise and use its benefits from it.

### **GA 2001**

The first GA of the Macedonian System of Official Statistics was conducted in 2001. It has to be mentioned, that the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) between RM and EU was signed in April 2001. So the preparation for signing and the actual signing were almost at the same time with the GA missions. In addition, in the implementation processes of the SAA and Interim Agreement, the SSO has an obligation to provide reliable, objective, accurate and internationally comparable data, in accordance with the needs of all spheres scoped in the SAA, from one side, and on the other side, the SSO has been nominated as a coordinator of the National Statistical System of the Republic of Macedonia in the harmonization with the Aquis Communautaire in statistics, in accordance with the stipulations of the Article 82 of the SAA. At that period, SSO has already had established excellent cooperation with EUROSTAT, UNECE and EFTA and advanced well regarding the fulfilment of the EU requirements. In addition, during March, also an evaluation mission by EUROSTAT was carried out, SSO hosted two events - the UN/ECE - EUROSTAT Conference on Confidentiality and Disclosure Control and the Workshop on Disclosure Control, as well.

Mr. Heinrich Brungger, at that time coming as an expert from the Swiss Federal Statistical Office, under mandate of EUROSTAT, conducted the assessment. This assessment was to be focused on two main issues: institutional settings (with emphasise on: legal settings, National Statistical System, institutional capacities of SSO and statistical infrastructure) and the capacity for producing statistics in various areas (organising and carry out censuses, carrying out household and business surveys, agricultural statistic, as well as producing monetary, financial and balance of payment statistics).

### *Preparatory activities for the mission*

Since this was a first experience for SSO of this kind, numerous preparatory activities within the Office were carried out before the mission took part. As a first step, Mr. Brungger sent us a check list with questions to be discussed during the mission and the documents he would like to have prior to the mission. Among others, SSO sent the: State Statistics Act, the Statistical Programme 1998-2002, the Master Plan (1997-2001) and the Statistical yearbook with its concise methodological descriptions for each subject area. In addition, the Management Board, as well as subject matter departments discussed the sent questions by the expert in details in order to provide all available information for the mission. At the same time, other producers of official statistics were informed in advance for this very important exercise.

### *Carrying out of the missions*

Two missions took place - 19 to 23 March and 23 to 27 April 2001. The carrying out of the first mission coincided with the evaluation and planning mission by a World Bank representative regarding the World Bank Grant that SSO was using then. Having on mind also the exceptional political situation in the country that year, SSO staff made utmost efforts and contributed for successful conduction of the mission. Nearly 50 staff members from different levels of organisational structure, of total of 263 employees, actively participated in the discussions and were well prepared for this task. It has to be stressed that the mission would not have been successful if Mr. Brungger was not well informed and even more, well prepared for this mission due to his in-depth analyses of the documents that have been sent to him previously. In the frame of the missions, there were discussions with other producers of official statistics and visited three of SSO's regional offices.

## **GA 2004**

The second global assessment of the Macedonian Statistical System was carried out in 2004. In 2004 the Stabilisation and Association Agreement entered into force, the country submitted the application for EU membership, and in the Autumn delivered the answers on the EU Questionnaire. The GA of the Statistical System of the Republic of Macedonia, as a joint mandate by EUROSTAT and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), was conducted by the following two experts: Mr. Jean-Etienne Chapron, Regional Adviser on Statistics, UNECE, and Mr. Gösta GUTELAND, Senior Consultant, from Statistics Sweden. The assessment was focused on the same issues as the first one, according to the assessments procedure. Having the experience gained during the first GA mission, SSO organised itself in the same way, providing again all necessary information to the experts, prior to the mission. For this mission, great number of documents was already available on the SSO web site. Several preparatory meetings were organised with the Managerial Board and subject matter departments in order to make necessary consultations and be prepared for discussions. During these meetings, SSO staff reviewed the recommendations given in GA 2001, what has been achieved and what has remain as an open issue.

The experts made the first visit to Skopje from 13 to 17 September 2004, which was followed by a second visit from 25 to 27 October 2004. The second visit was used for finalising the draft report of the experts. Besides the discussion with SSO staff, the visits included sessions with representatives from the National Bank and the Ministry of Finance, and a separate session was dedicated for a meeting with media representatives.

## ***II.2 Recommendations made by the experts***

GA has twofold benefits as it provides general picture of the National Statistical Institutes and the National Statistical System as a whole, and on the other side it provides valuable recommendations that can be and must be used in all planning procedures of various kinds of documents and donor assistance by the statistical offices. In addition, the open discussion within GA excursions enables the Statistical Offices to be more aware of their strengths and weaknesses and to use this experience to improve the process of planning.

### **GA 2001**

Main findings of the GA 2001, as recommendations for improvement, are:

- Higher inclusion of the indicators and the analytical comments in the final results;
- An opportunity for access to the increased number of the official statistics, through out database available to all via Internet;
- Implementation of the Statistical Business register in order to become a base for the business surveys and to achieve complete compliance with the relevant EU regulations;
- Introduction of the system for costs calculation on the level of the programs topics;
- Establishing of sample framework for the household surveys that easily could be updated between the censuses 2001 and 2011;
- Enhancing the coordination role of SSO in the National statistical System

### **GA 2004**

In GA 2004, experts have summarised the main priorities for the Macedonian Statistical System, given as short-term and medium-term priorities:

#### *1. Short-term priorities, i.e., till the end of 2005:*

- a. To have the revised statistical law passed by the parliament;
- b. To prepare the new medium-term dissemination policy of the SSO;
- c. To start the development of closer contacts with users in main fields of statistics, and also to increase the contacts with the media;
- d. To implement the new system of administrative and statistical business registers;
- e. To conduct the agricultural census in October 2005 and, if it is possible, the business census in June 2005;
- f. To start the improvement of the industrial production index, following the recommendations of the EUROSTAT expert made in August 2004;

- g. To implement the IMF standards for the government finance statistics produced and disseminated by the Ministry of Finance;
  - h. To change the Five years Statistical Programme and include the Ministry of Finance in 2004 or 2005;
2. *Medium-term, i.e., by 2007:*
- i. If it has not been possible in June 2005, to conduct the business census in June 2006;
  - j. To implement a coordinated policy of quality in the whole SSO;
  - k. To improve the internal system of monitoring of performance and financial programming in the SSO;
  - l. To transfer the administrative population register to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and to develop the statistical population register at the SSO. In the same way, to transfer the administrative territorial units register to the Agency for Geodesic Works and to create the statistical territorial units register at the SSO.
  - m. To create and develop the statistical farm register and the crop production survey;
  - n. To improve the statistical sources used for the compilation of balance of payments statistics by the National Bank, in cooperation with the SSO.

### ***II.3 Main use of the Global Assessment***

The Global Assessments of the National Statistical Systems should not be an exercise for itself, but should lead to further concrete activities with measurable results. In this direction, SSO has used the findings and recommendations from the assessments as a base for:

1. Assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of SSO and the National Statistical System - immediately providing information for areas needed to be improved;
2. Preparing of strategic documents:
  - Five-year Statistical Programme
  - Yearly working programme (including planning of the required resources)
  - Strategic Plan
  - National Programme for Adoption of Acquis
3. Planning of the donor assistance:
  - o Improvement of the Agricultural statistics in Macedonia (2003-2004) - Macedonian- Swedish Partnership
  - o Twinning Project: Support to the State Statistical Office supported by EC
  - o Multi-beneficiary programmes for statistics supported by EC
  - o Other donor assistance (EFTA, World Bank etc.)
4. A guide for answering of the EU Questionnaire
- 5 For continuous monitoring of the progress achieved of the Macedonian Statistical System, since the GA.

### III Lessons learnt

GA exercises were useful from more aspects. SSO was able to identify gaps in many areas like legal settings, coordination of the statistical system, production of statistics, planning procedures and especially written procedures. The experience gained from this exercise, especially from the way it is conducted is used for permanent upgrading of the institutional capacity and strengthening its capabilities for planning and programming procedures.

In general, we can say that we have learnt the following:

- GA represents a lot of work, but it gives valuable results;
- By implementing the recommendations, GA has supported the process towards modernization of the Macedonian Statistical System and further alignment with the EU Acquis;
- GA showed that it could rely only on facts, supported with written materials. Sometimes, one might think that has achieved a lot, but when you are faced to prove it with a written material it requires a lot of paper work;
- There is a need for:
  - A strong commitment by the top management to support this activity and to implement the recommendations;
  - Excellent organization of the Institution in order to answer the posed questions and to provide the requested documents;
  - Awareness of the employees on the strategic plans of the institution;
  - Good cooperation and coordination with other players in the statistical system;
  - Close and open cooperation with the experts

In general, main challenges are:

- How to conduct the exercise in the best manner;
- How to assess the need of written documentation to be provided on time
- How to implement the findings in order to ensure a sustainability of GA results.

When discussing sustainability of GA results that are usually formulated as recommendations for improvement both the experts and the beneficiaries should pay serious attention on the following:

- The recommendation should be as realistic as possible;
- The beneficiaries should be as objective as possible.

The usefulness of the recommendations is seen in their practical implementation in the coming period. On the other side the beneficiaries should describe their current situation as it is, nothing more, nothing less. They should be especially carefully discussing the future plans. Sometimes we think that our plans are reachable, but very often we neglect simple facts like human resources capacities, financial capacities, and especially the lack of analyses of the environment where we operate. This results in unrealistic planning and it is usually reflected in unrealistic recommendations by the GA experts in terms of time for their implementation.

## **IV Conclusions**

GA is a good mechanism for assessment in a certain stage of development of the statistical system. Generally, it raises the awareness of the statistical offices and other official providers of statistics to recognise and to realise their role in the society. The main point is that these institutions should be active players in planning of government strategies, but in order to do that they should be pro-active, instead of re-active. Producing of statistics with high quality should support this. The SSO is using the most of the donor assistance received for harmonisation of statistics and in this direction the recommendations from GA are used for planning of further steps. Therefore, it is an essential prerequisite that the recommendations should be as much realistic as possible. However, the experience gained is invaluable and we are proud of the results of the implementations of most of the recommendations.