

Meeting Report:
UNDA 9th tranche: Kick-off meeting
Almaty, Kazakhstan, 10-11 December 2014

The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) jointly organised the Kick-off meeting of the 9th tranche of the United Nations Development Account project on statistics (UNDA9-Stat) in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 10-11 December 2014. The event benefited from substantive contributions from Statistics Norway, TurkStat, Rosstat, Eurostat, the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) and the Higher School of Economics (HSE; Russian Federation) as well as the Eurasian Development Bank and the joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office (Almaty).

The meeting targeted heads and deputy heads of national statistical offices as well as heads of international relations and/or senior staff responsible for programming and planning from Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) countries. The meeting was attended by representatives from seven beneficiary countries of the UNDA9-Stat: Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Representatives from other EECCA countries (Azerbaijan, Belarus and Kazakhstan) and Mongolia participated in the meeting with financial support from EFTA.

The purpose of the Kick-off meeting was to introduce and discuss the UNDA9-Stat project, "*Strengthening national capacity in the most vulnerable UNECE countries for the sustainable development of statistics*," to be carried out by UNECE in 2014-2017. The objective was also to allow beneficiary countries and partner organisations to share results and good practices for implementing recommendations provided in Global Assessments (GAs) reports. Beneficiary countries were expected to express their needs for specific technical assistance in the framework of the project.

The meeting was organised into three substantive sessions. The agenda of the meeting, contributions and background documents can be found on the UNECE webpage: <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2014.12.unda.html#/>

The Kick-off meeting was opened by Mr. Kairat Orunkhanov, Agency of Statistics of Kazakhstan; Mr. Kurt Wass, European Free Trade Association (EFTA); and Mr. Gabriel Gamez, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

Session 1: UNDA9-Stat project – Objectives, implementation and follow-up

The purpose of Session 1 was to introduce and discuss the objective, implementation modalities and coordination and monitoring tools of the UNDA9-Stat. UNECE opened Session 1 with a broad presentation of the project, recalling that its final objective is to strengthen the statistical capacity of beneficiary countries to achieve sustainable results in the development of statistical capacities. Participants were informed that the UNDA9-Stat initially intended to cover all EECCA countries but that eventually, due to budgetary limitations, Azerbaijan, Belarus and Kazakhstan were left out. The final selection was based on various objective criteria, including the level of development of national statistical systems. Thus, the project, as endorsed by the relevant UN entity, intends to support the sustainable development of statistical

capacity of the following eight countries: Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

It was stressed that the project builds on the findings of Global Assessments (GAs) of national statistical systems (NSSs), which were recently conducted, jointly by UNECE, EFTA and Eurostat, in most beneficiary countries. Therefore, in order to participate in both sub-regional and national activities of the UNDA9-Stat project, a country must have conducted a Global Assessment (GA) of its national statistical system. For the last EECCA country that has not requested such an assessment, it was proposed to send an official request to the UNECE statistical Division as soon as possible.

Participants were informed that the project covers both national and sub-regional activities. The UNDA9-Stat foresees four activities under the sub-regional component and sixteen activities under the national component. However, the number of activities can be significantly increased if partner organisations accept to support the project and/or to organise events and conduct activities in line with the objectives of UNDA9-Stat. It was highlighted that activities conducted in the framework of the project must be demand-driven and results-oriented. The sub-regional activities should promote the exchange of good practices and experiences among beneficiary countries and other associated partners, while activities under the national component will focus on the implementation of specific national recommendations provided in GA reports. National activities will also allow each country to target other producers and users of official statistics and other stakeholders.

In addition to Global Assessments and related recommendations, the following essential tools for the coordination, monitoring and follow-up of the achievements of the UNDA9-Stat project were presented: the donor coordination survey and the survey to monitor the implementation of the recommendations from the Global Assessments. Participants acknowledged the importance of participating in these surveys, which were developed by Eurostat and launched in the EECCA region jointly with UNECE. Indeed, the main objective of these surveys is to identify recommendations from Global Assessments for which a country needs support and coordinate technical assistance to be provided by partner organisations in order to avoid, to the extent possible, overlapping activities and bridge gaps.

UNECE also presented the *Confluence Wiki* platform, a collaborative tool widely used by UNECE for its statistical activities and in particular for technical cooperation projects. Participants agreed to use this tool, which is user-friendly, collaborative and interactive. It was decided that UNECE would launch such a page on this platform for the UNDA9-Stat project.

In the second part of Session 1, EFTA, Eurostat, EEC, TurkStat, HSE, Statistics Norway and Rosstat presented their respective technical assistance and cooperation activities in the EECCA region and beyond. It was acknowledged that in general these activities were rather well aligned with the objective of the UNDA9-Stat project and that these projects and programmes would contribute together to the sustainable development of national statistical capacities in beneficiary countries. It was also noted that the donor coordination survey should be sent to Rosstat and TurkStat in order to extend the inventory and coordination of technical cooperation in the sub-region to these two important donors. These presentations were followed by contributions from Tajikistan and Belarus on their respective country experiences

with the implementation of recommendations from the GAs, including their incorporation into statistical programmes.

These presentations and contributions were followed by group discussions (1a). Participants were split into four groups. In the first part, they discussed their needs and expectations of the project, possible implementation plans and challenges to be addressed with the support of international and bilateral partners.

After the first group discussions, Eurostat presented different options for the next round of assessment/reviews of national statistical systems in EECCA countries, which were previously discussed with EFTA and UNECE. After Eurostat's contribution, EECCA countries were invited to split again into four groups and discuss the different alternatives presented, what should be kept from the previous GAs and what should be changed according to Eurostat's proposal.

The main outcomes of the plenary session and group discussions were the following:

- Following a request from the beneficiary countries not to be described as “vulnerable,” it was agreed that the official title of the project, "*Strengthening national capacity in the most vulnerable UNECE countries for the sustainable development of statistics*" will be used only for official UN reporting. The title “*Supporting the implementation of the global assessment recommendations in EECCA countries*” will be used otherwise (e.g. on UNECE websites, invitation letters and agendas).
- Beneficiary countries welcomed the UNDA9-Stat project. They stressed that it is crucial for the project to support their efforts to achieve sustainable results in the development of statistical capacities through the implementation of the recommendations provided in Global Assessment reports.
- UNECE, EFTA and Eurostat would continue to pool some of their resources in order to extend the coverage and magnitude of the project without prejudice to rules, procedures and priorities of each of the partner organisations. In general, representatives from donor organisations mentioned their interest in being associated to the project. TurkStat and Rosstat proposed supporting the project in-kind with experts. Participants insisted on the importance of linking this project with other on-going or planned international and bilateral initiatives (e.g. from Eurostat, EFTA and the World Bank).
- EECCA countries and Mongolia not covered by the UNDA9-Stat project requested to be involved in sub-regional and if possible national activities. It was agreed that, to the extent possible, technical assistance and additional funds from donors would be mobilised in order to fully integrate them (Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Mongolia) into the project.
- The countries acknowledged that the first round of the GAs in the EECCA region was successful and stimulated the enhancement of national statistical capacities in the EECCA region. For most of the countries, GA recommendations have been incorporated into statistical master plans or National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDS). Beneficiary countries valued the results of GAs and mentioned that main findings and concrete recommendations attracted support from international and bilateral donors (e.g. World Bank and Statistics Norway).
- Beneficiary countries acknowledged that a review of a national statistical system should be carried out every five to six years. This would be in line with the duration

of master plans in most countries and would allow beneficiaries to implement the recommendations, and donors and other stakeholders to assess the achievement of each strategic plan as it comes to a close and accurately prepare for the next one. Participants stressed the need to find a trade-off between flexibility and comparability in order for these tools to assess progress compared to the previous assessment and at the same time allow results to be compared among EECCA countries (via sub-regional activities). Countries would favour the option of a review against the principles of the Code of Practice complemented by elements of Global Assessments for the review of progress in specific statistical domains. Eurostat, EFTA and UNECE committed to come up with a more elaborated proposal based on feedback from the group discussions at the High-level Seminar for EECCA countries in June 2015.

- At the request of EECCA countries, it was agreed that, to the extent possible, experts from the sub-region should be directly involved in the project and also in the next round of reviews of national statistical systems. This would contribute to sharing best practices and experiences among countries.
- Participants (beneficiaries and donors) acknowledged the importance of participating in the two surveys (coordination and monitoring of implementation of recommendations) for planning, coordinating, implementation and monitoring the UNDA9-Stat project. Rosstat (Russian Federation) and TurkStat (Turkey) agreed to participate in the donor coordination survey.
- Participants welcomed the UNECE proposal to create a Wiki page for the project. This confluence platform should allow restricted partners (donors, beneficiaries and other stakeholders) to share information. It was decided to have one focal point (person) in each participating NSO and partner organisation and to allow restricted access by giving passwords to selected users.
- The Higher School of Economics, the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan supported the request from some countries to establish a special training centre to improve knowledge and competences of staff from NSOs of EECCA countries.

Session 2: Legal and institutional framework of official statistics

The purpose of session 2 was to discuss international recommendations and best practice for the legal and institutional frameworks of official statistics. The session started with a key contribution of Mr. Heinrich Brünger (UNECE Consultant). His presentation focussed on the delineation of a national statistical system (NSS) and its compliance with the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Statistics (UN-FPs) and European Statistics Code of Practice (ES-CoP).

This presentation was followed by countries' presentations. The example from Azerbaijan focused on how their statistical law defines and differentiates official statistics, administrative statistics and data. Ukraine presented recent achievements and challenges of their NSS in light of the UN-FPs. Armenia informed participants about rights and obligations of other producers of official statistics in the country. Participants were then split in four groups and discussed current challenges and possible developments related to national legal and institutional frameworks for statistical systems.

In the second part of session 2, Mr. Jan Byfuglien (UNECE Consultant) gave a key presentation on good practice, mechanisms and tools for the coordination of NSSs.

This contribution presented the advantages and challenges of coordinating NSSs and presented concrete institutional set-ups and related mechanisms to improve coordination.

This contribution was followed by presentations of national experiences and challenges in coordinating NSSs by the Republic of Moldova, Mongolia and Georgia.

These presentations were followed by group discussions. Participants had the opportunity to discuss current challenges and possible developments related to the coordination mechanisms for national statistical systems based on specific country experiences.

The main outcome of the plenary session and group discussions were the following:

- Participants acknowledged the need for official statistics to be supported by sound legal and institutional frameworks. It was agreed that a Statistical Law and relevant secondary legislation should define the scope, activities and coordination mechanisms of the NSS based on the UN-FPs.
- Since many recommendations provided in GA reports were related to legal and institutional frameworks of NSSs and several countries requested assistance and support for their implementations, UNECE, after consultation with EFTA and Eurostat, proposed developing a Generic Statistical Law (GSL) to support countries' efforts to align their statistical legislation with the UN-FPs and international best practices. Other donors, such as Turkey, mentioned their willingness to be associated to and support this process to the extent possible by sharing their own experience in the development of sound legal frameworks for official statistics.
- Beneficiary countries welcomed this proposal and urged UNECE and partner organisations to speed up the process in order to come up with a GSL by no later than the end of summer 2015. Participants highlighted the importance of the GSL not being just a translation into Russian of existing models available in English, but instead being tailored to the institutional and legal environments and general circumstances prevailing in EECCA countries. In that respect, attention should be paid to the outcomes and recommendations provided in GAs conducted recently in the EECCA region.
- It was decided that the GSL would be drafted and presented as an explanatory guide for EECCA countries and would provide for each proposed article clear explanations and links to the UN-FPs and the ES-CoP. It was explained that the GLS would not be a binding document but rather support EECCA countries in the process of amending or redrafting their own national statistical laws. If requested, further assistance and advisory services could be provided for the implementation process by the partner organisations at the national (not sub-regional) level.
- UNECE and EFTA would establish an editorial committee for the GLS with international and sub-regional (national) experts/consultants. EECCA countries and Mongolia would be consulted throughout the process of the elaboration of the GSL.

Session 3: Way Forward - UNDA9-Stat project follow-up actions

The main outcome, conclusions and decisions of the Kick-off meeting are as follows:

- The UNDA9-Stat project received full support from the countries. They welcomed the project that would support them in the implementation of the

recommendations provided in GA reports. Partner organisations committed, according to their capacities and priorities, to support the objective of the UNDA9-Stat project.

- The project initially covered eight beneficiary countries but would be extended to Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Mongolia, provided that additional financial and technical support is available. The UNDA9-Stat project will have sub-regional and national activities.
- The title of the project will be renamed “*Supporting the implementation of the global assessment recommendations in EECCA countries*” for all purposes except internal UN reporting.
- Beneficiary countries and partner organisations (donors) acknowledged the importance of the donor coordination survey and monitoring the implementation of recommendations from the Global Assessments not only for the deployment of the UNDA9-Stat project but also, more generally, for the efficient and effective implementation of all projects and programmes conducted in the EECCA region.
- In order to identify recommendations from GA reports to be implemented in the framework of the project and plan related activities under the national component, the countries were requested to send UNECE a maximum of five recommendations that have not been implemented yet and for which it would not be expected to get international assistance in the future. UNECE would then choose two to three of them, depending on their importance and the expertise at the UNECE Statistical division. Both international and sub-regional experts/consultants should be mobilised.
- Beneficiary countries requested that UNECE and partner organisations provide the Generic Statistical Law (GSL) by the end of summer 2015 and, if necessary, support in the revision of their respective national Statistical Laws at a later stage. An Editorial board would be established and EECCA countries regularly consulted.

At the end of the meeting, the representative of the Agency of Statistics of Kazakhstan, UNECE and EFTA thanked participants for their contributions and the very constructive discussions and exchange of experience. The organisers also thanked the multilateral and bilateral donors for their fruitful cooperation and significant assistance in technical cooperation activities.

The participants thanked the organisers and the host country for the excellent organisation of the meeting. The results of the evaluation questionnaire showed keen appreciation and satisfaction with the organisation of the meeting.

The materials from the meeting are available at:

<http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2014.12.unda.html#/>

Thematic focus	Venue	Date	Total participants
Statistics	Almaty, Kazakhstan	10-11 December 2014	39 (F: 14, M: 25)