


**Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**

Committee on Statistics

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Item 3(a) of the provisional agenda \*

**Regional initiatives: economic statistics**
**Progress in implementing the Regional Programme for  
the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and  
the Pacific**
**Note by the Steering Group for the Regional Programme on  
Economic Statistics\*\***
*Summary*

At its third session, the Committee on Statistics endorsed the implementation plan for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, which recommended a phased implementation indicated by three milestone years, 2014, 2017 and 2020. The implementation plan builds on the Regional Programme, which along with the Core Set of Economic Statistics was adopted by the Committee at its second session. The Core Set was subsequently endorsed by the Commission at its sixty-seventh session.

As part of the implementation plan, the Steering Group for the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics is to provide an annual activity report and a report on results achieved at the end of each phase. The first annual activity report was given to the Bureau of the Committee on Statistics verbally by the secretariat in September 2013. The present report, which was prepared by the Steering Group in collaboration with the secretariat, constitutes the first written progress report on the implementation of the Regional Programme. It is being put forward for consideration by the Committee on Statistics.

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\* E/ESCAP/CST(4)/L.1.

\*\* The present document was submitted late owing to the need to include the issues raised during the latest discussions on the development agenda beyond 2015; in particular, the recommendations of the Expert Group Meeting on Statistics and Data for the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the Secretary-General's Independent Expert Advisory Group on the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development.

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## I. Introduction

1. The Committee on Statistics at its second session, which was held in Bangkok from 15 to 17 December 2010, endorsed the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific as a formal strategy for the improvement of economic statistics in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>1</sup> It also endorsed the Core Set of Economic Statistics proposed by the Technical Advisory Group on the Development of Economic Statistics as a guideline for developing capacity of national statistical systems to produce and disseminate economic statistics in line with international standards.<sup>2</sup> In pursuance of decisions taken at the second session, the Technical Advisory Group was replaced by the Steering Group for the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics in 2011, which, in turn, elaborated the implementation plan for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific.<sup>3</sup> This plan was endorsed by the Committee at its third session, which was held in Bangkok from 12 to 14 December 2012. Also at its third session, the Committee decided “to invite representatives of other national producers of economic statistics, such as central banks and ministries of finance, to become members of the Steering Group for the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics” while stressing “the need for the Steering Group to have an efficient and effective membership size”.

2. An invitation for nominations to the member States was sent from the Chair of the Committee on Statistics in order to reconstitute the Steering Group in May 2013 based on the revised terms of reference. Twenty-six nominations were received and accepted with a view to raise interest and commitment and inspire ownership of the Regional Programme among member States. In addition, one member of the Steering Group for Agricultural Statistics was included in the membership to facilitate coordination between the two programmes. Subsequently, a coordination committee comprising eight members of the Steering Group and representatives of three international organizations was established by the Bureau of the Committee on Statistics to reflect diversity across the region based on geographical location and the varying levels of economic development among the members.

<sup>1</sup> See E/ESCAP/67/12, decision 2/6.

<sup>2</sup> See E/ESCAP/67/12, recommendation 2/2.

<sup>3</sup> See E/ESCAP/69/13.

3. The third meeting of the Steering Group (the first meeting for the newly composed group) was held in Bangkok from 29 to 31 October 2013. At the meeting, it was decided that the Steering Group would facilitate nominations of additional members from central banks and ministries of finance.<sup>4</sup> As a result, two additional members, representing central banks, were accepted to serve in the Group. As February 2015, no representatives of ministries of finance have become members of the Steering Group. The terms of reference of the Steering Group, as well as the current membership are available on the secretariat's website.<sup>5</sup>

4. The present progress report on the implementation of the Regional Programme was prepared by the Steering Group with support from the secretariat in accordance with the implementation plan. In section II, the framework for this first progress report and the sources of data for the assessment of progress in the implementation of the Regional Programme are provided. Section III contains a summary of the assessment of progress organized based on the four outputs of the Regional Programme: advocacy; coordination; statistical infrastructure; and skills. In section IV, the future work designated to the Steering Group and recommendations for accelerating implementation at the national level are presented. The last section contains specific questions for the consideration of the Committee at its fourth session.

## **II. Framework and sources of information for the progress report**

5. In the implementation plan, the Steering Group is required to submit (a) an annual progress report on the activities pertaining to the Regional Programme; and (b) a report on the results achieved at the end of each phase and progress towards achieving the outcome.

6. The activity reporting in the present document is based on the work plan for the first phase of the Regional Programme. The activities discussed included those that had been coordinated by the secretariat and/or development partners within or with a clear reference to the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics and conceptualized and/or implemented under the general guidance of the Steering Group.

7. The guidance in the implementation plan indicates that the implementation of the Regional Programme ultimately happens at the national level and hence "will be evidenced in the national context". In other words, national progress reports on the results are required (once national plans incorporating the Regional Programme are in place) in order to be able to produce results-based progress reports. In terms of the achievement of the expected outcome of the Regional Programme, that by 2020, national statistical systems of member States would have the capacity to produce and disseminate, in accordance with internationally agreed statistical standards and good practices, the Core Set of Economic Statistics, the implementation plan has provided signposts on the achievement of the Core Set at each phase. Those signposts are recommended frequencies based on international

<sup>4</sup> The report of the Third Meeting of the Steering Group for the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics is available from [www.unescap.org/resources/report-meeting](http://www.unescap.org/resources/report-meeting).

<sup>5</sup> The terms of reference of Steering Group for the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics is available from [www.unescap.org/resources/terms-reference-steering-group-regional-programme-economic-statistics](http://www.unescap.org/resources/terms-reference-steering-group-regional-programme-economic-statistics). A list of the members of Steering Group is available from [www.unescap.org/resources/members-steering-group-regional-programme-economic-statistics](http://www.unescap.org/resources/members-steering-group-regional-programme-economic-statistics).

standards for the basic set of economic statistics. Progress towards the achievement of the Regional Programme outcome is “the total percentage of ESCAP member States that have achieved each signpost”. Table 1 provides the signposts for the three phases, as indicated in the implementation plan.

Table 1

**Core Set of Economic Statistics signposts for the implementation of the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific<sup>a</sup>**

	Signpost 1	Signpost 2	Signpost 3
<b>Prices and costs</b>			
Consumer price index <sup>b</sup>	Q	Q	Q
Producer price index <sup>b</sup>	Q	Q	Q
Commodity price index		Q	M
External merchandise trade price indexes	A	Q	M
Wages /earnings data	A	Q	Q
Labour costs index /wage index		Q	Q
Purchasing power parities		Ad hoc	Ad hoc
<b>Demand and output</b>			
GDP (production) nominal and real	A	Q	Q
GDP (expenditure) nominal and real (including implicit price indices for GDE and components)	A	Q	Q
External trade – merchandise	A	Q	M
External trade – services		A	Q
Short term indicator (STI) – industry output		Q	Q
STI - consumer demand		Q	Q
STI - fixed investment		Q	Q
STI – inventories		Q	Q
Economy structure statistics		5-yearly	5-yearly
Productivity			A
<b>Income and wealth</b>			
Integrated national accounts for the total economy			A
Institutional sector accounts <sup>c</sup>			A
Balance of payments	A	Q	Q
International investment position (IIP)	A	A	A
External debt	A	A	Q
Income distribution		5-yearly	5-yearly
<b>Money and banking</b>			
Assets/liabilities of depository corporations	M	M	M
Broad money and credit aggregates		M	M
Interest rate statistics		M	M
<b>Government</b>			
General government operations		A	Q
General government debt	A	A	Q
<b>Labour market</b>			
Labour supply and demand	A	A	A /Q
Hours worked		A	Q
<b>Natural resources and the environment</b>			
Natural resources		A	A

*Abbreviations:* A, annually; M, monthly; Q, quarterly.

<sup>a</sup> Table 1 and its notes are adapted from table 3 of E/ESCAP/CST(3)/CRP.1.

<sup>b</sup> The General Data Dissemination System recommends that consumer and producer price indices be compiled on a monthly basis. Member States are encouraged to comply with this recommendation when feasible.

<sup>c</sup> It is recommended that institutional sector accounts be developed progressively, for example, beginning with the general government sector, followed by production and generation of income accounts for corporations, and so on. Therefore, in practice, and when feasible, monitoring of this item will be based on availability of individual accounts or modules.

8. In the implementation plan, no indicators are suggested for monitoring progress towards achieving the four programme outputs. One planned task for phase 1 was, therefore, the development of a monitoring framework for the Regional Programme. However, there are multiple complications with developing such a monitoring framework at this stage. On the one hand, a domain-specific approach to monitoring cross-cutting elements, such as advocacy, coordination and partly statistical infrastructure (quality assurance frameworks or metadata repositories), has been found to be inefficient in numerous discussions with various groups associated with the Committee on Statistics, as it leads to duplication of efforts being undertaken by member States, the Committee on Statistics groups and the secretariat. More coordinated delivery and monitoring of regional programmes is discussed at length in the Committee document entitled “Strengthening data and statistics for monitoring of and accountability for the development agenda beyond 2015: challenges and opportunities in Asia and the Pacific” (E/ESCAP/CST(4)/1). On the other hand, the development of a monitoring framework without sufficient information on national implementation of the Regional Programme would be highly hypothetical. Current fundraising efforts led by the secretariat are geared towards enhancing the national implementation plan and hence this information base.

9. In the absence of a fully fledged monitoring framework for the Regional Programme, the available information on the four outputs of the Programme was compiled. Some additional information was sought from Steering Group members and development partners. The data sources for the present progress report are:

- (a) Results of a capacity screening conducted in 2013, with responses received from 50 countries in the region;<sup>6</sup>
- (b) Core Set elements disseminated in Asia and the Pacific (desk review by the secretariat);
- (c) Content of the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics or similar strategies in the region relevant to the Core Set of Economic Statistics (desk review by the secretariat);
- (d) Survey of Steering Group members;
- (e) Survey of partners;<sup>7</sup>
- (f) Outcomes of meetings and workshops coordinated by ESCAP.

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<sup>6</sup> The report of the region-wide capacity screening on economic statistics in Asia and the Pacific and reports for the Pacific subregion and the ASEAN region are available from [www.unescap.org/resources/capacity-screening](http://www.unescap.org/resources/capacity-screening). Based on the results of the capacity screening, national summary sheets were prepared and are available from [www.unescap.org/resources/regional-programme-economic-statistics-national-summaries-capacity-screening-findings-2013](http://www.unescap.org/resources/regional-programme-economic-statistics-national-summaries-capacity-screening-findings-2013).

<sup>7</sup> No comprehensive source of information on the activities implemented on economic statistics by development partners is readily available. The Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21) Partner Report on Support to Statistics (PRESS) can be used as a complementary source of information to get an estimate of funding invested in the region, but the 2013 report did not significantly cover Asia and the Pacific. The Steering Group in session 3 of its third meeting took stock of the technical assistance provided by development partners through presentations by different organizations and an overview provided by the secretariat.

### **III. Activity and results monitoring towards the achievement of outcomes: activities implemented under the workplan for the first phase (2013-2014) <sup>8</sup>**

#### **A. Programme implementation activities**

##### **1. Advocacy**

###### **National-level activities**

10. National focal points were asked to disseminate the results of the capacity screening, particularly the national summary sheets. According to the Steering Group members' survey results, 11 out of 12 respondents had shared the capacity screening results among their agencies, 7 with their central banks and 5 with their ministries of finance.

###### **Regional-level activities**

11. The secretariat has developed a brochure on the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics in English and in Russian. The implementation plan has also been translated into Russian. A PowerPoint presentation on the Regional Programme, which was given at the third meeting of the Steering Group for the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics,<sup>9</sup> can also be used by national focal points for advocacy purposes.

12. The secretariat, together with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the National Research University-Higher School of Economics, the Russian Federal State Statistics Service and the Statistics Division, organized the High-level Meeting for Coordinated Implementation of International Standards for Macroeconomic Statistics in Vladivostok, Russian Federation, on 3 and 4 September 2014. The meeting was attended by more than 50 high-level officials from national statistical offices, central banks and ministries of finance of 11 countries and four international organizations. At the end of the meeting, the Vladivostok Outcome Statement was adopted. In the statement, the meeting participants called for increased political and financial support at the national and international levels for the implementation of macroeconomic statistical frameworks and improvement of basic economic statistics within an integrated statistics approach. This statement constitutes a firm reference for the uptake of integrated approaches to developing economic statistics in the participating countries and in the region at large, highlighting the importance of coordination within national statistical systems and among development partners.

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<sup>8</sup> This section is based on the framework provided in annex II of the implementation plan for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, which refers to the workplan for 2013-2014. More information on the workplan, which was designed by the Steering Group at its third meeting is available from [www.unescap.org/resources/background-document-agenda-item-3-work-plan-implementation-regional-programme-improvement](http://www.unescap.org/resources/background-document-agenda-item-3-work-plan-implementation-regional-programme-improvement).

<sup>9</sup> This presentation and other documents of the third meeting of the Steering Group for the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics are available from [www.unescap.org/resources/report-meeting](http://www.unescap.org/resources/report-meeting) and [www.unescap.org/events/third-meeting-steering-group-regional-programme-economic-statistics](http://www.unescap.org/events/third-meeting-steering-group-regional-programme-economic-statistics).

## 2. Coordination

### National-level activities

13. Fifty member States responded to the capacity screening questionnaire (responses continued to come in until the end of 2013 and the national summary sheets were checked and updated by focal points throughout 2014). Focal points were asked to verify and share the results across their national statistical system.

14. The secretariat, together with the Economic Commission for Europe and the European Free Trade Association, conducted the Adapted Global Assessment of the National Statistical System of Mongolia. Two assessment missions were undertaken, in October 2013 and in January 2014. A report on the assessment was published and presented at an international seminar, which was held in Ulaanbaatar in October 2014. The assessment covered legal, organizational and institutional issues that were common to all statistical activities and domain-specific assessments, such as the production, processing and dissemination of macroeconomic and business statistics.<sup>10</sup> This activity is notable in that Mongolia is the first country in Asia and the Pacific outside of the North and Central Asia subregion to have undertaken this type of national statistical system-wide assessment. It consequently demonstrates the usefulness and applicability of the tool for the region as a whole and the important role it can play in the effort to achieve the Regional Programme of Economic Statistics outcome.

### Regional-level activities

15. Capacity screening was conducted by the secretariat using a questionnaire developed by the Steering Group. Responses were received from 50 member States and synthesized in a regional report, various subregional reports and national summary sheets. The syntheses were disseminated electronically and presented at international and regional events.

16. The terms of reference for the national focal points have been prepared and a call for nominations and confirmation of members will be made by the Steering Group after its fourth meeting, which will be held in March 2015.

17. The secretariat, acting on a recommendation of the Steering Group, has been preparing an annotated outline of guidelines for the preparation of national economic statistics development plans and the incorporation of the Core Set of Economic Statistics into existing national plans. Members of the Steering Group will be invited to discuss the outline and form a small working group to develop the guidelines at the fourth meeting of the Steering Group.

18. With regard to coordination among partners, two activities funded by the Russian Federation — a training workshop on GDP Compilation in Astana (with the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific) in June-July 2014 and the High-level Meeting for Coordinated Implementation of International Standards for Macroeconomic Statistics, which was held in Vladivostok, Russian Federation, on 3 and 4 September 2014 — were leveraged to expand collaboration with IMF and other partners. In addition to the technical assistance it has provided, the contributions of IMF to the two events have been highly beneficial, as they increased collaboration among

<sup>10</sup> A copy of the assessment is available from [www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/technical\\_coop/GA\\_Mongolia\\_EN.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/technical_coop/GA_Mongolia_EN.pdf).

partners in implementing the Regional Programme.<sup>11</sup> Steering Group members were involved in the design of the concept of the activities discussed above. One member also served as a resource person at the High-level Meeting.

19. The Steering Group and the secretariat are committed to coordinating with subregional organizations and complementing efforts to improve economic statistics. In that regard, the membership of the Secretariat for the Pacific Community in the Steering Group and participation of the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the third meeting of the Steering Group has helped facilitate this. Also of note, the Association has made reference to the Core Set of Economic Statistics in formulating part of the ASEAN Statistical Indicators.

20. The Australian Bureau of Statistics, the secretariat and the Statistics Division co-hosted a workshop to build awareness and to assess the current status, needs and priorities of Pacific economies in the areas of economic and environment statistics in Apia from 20 to 23 August 2013. The secretariat, which serves on the Pacific Statistics Steering Committee, has prepared a number of inputs for the development of the second phase of the Ten Year Pacific Strategy on Statistics, including a paper prepared jointly with IMF on improving coordination in economic statistics in the Pacific subregion.<sup>12</sup>

### **3. Statistical infrastructure**

#### **National-level activities**

21. The Adapted Global Assessment of the National Statistical System of Mongolia has also been relevant in evaluating the development of statistical infrastructure, given that it covers such issues as the state of business registers, quality assurance and metadata frameworks.

#### **Regional-level activities**

22. Based on the capacity screening results and discussions at the third meeting of the Steering Group, improving business registers is one of the priority areas for building statistical infrastructure. In that regard, the secretariat is collaborating with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to improve business registers within the ADB project entitled “Statistical Business Registers for Improved Information on Small, Medium-Sized, and Large Enterprises” developed under the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics. The inception workshop was held in Colombo from 30 June to 2 July 2014 with the participation of Bhutan, Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. As the ADB project focuses on country-specific implementation of business registers, in-country consultations were organized in each participating country. In addition, the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific together with the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the secretariat has developed a course on business statistics, which was scheduled to be offered for the first time in January 2015. The secretariat also has been participating in the Economic Commission for Europe Task Force on International Guidelines on Statistical Business Registers.

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<sup>11</sup> IMF is not formally a member of the Steering Group, but it participated in the third meeting of the Steering Group, which was held in 2013, and has been available for substantive consultations.

<sup>12</sup> This meeting predates the current Steering Group. Documents for this meeting are available from <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/nationalaccount/workshops/2013/Samoa/Apia1.asp>.



23. The secretariat has collaborated with ADB on a project to promote the use of the Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX) for the exchange of economic statistics, with a focus on national accounts and balance of payments statistics. As part of the project, two workshops were held, in Malaysia and Thailand, in March and April 2014, respectively. On the basis of the experiences from the project, a SDMX starter kit is being developed to facilitate the uptake of the standard by national statistics offices.

#### 4. Skills

##### National-level activities

24. The secretariat organized an expert mission to Mongolia for the improvement of the industrial production index in November 2013. As a result of the mission, a report with detailed recommendations on how best to compile the index, including deflation and seasonal adjustment procedures, was produced.

25. The Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific organized a national course on input-output table compilation for the Philippines in Manila from 6 to 10 May 2013.

##### Regional-level activities

26. During the period 2012-2013, more than 800 government statisticians/officials became more proficient in matters relating to official statistics, including internationally agreed standards, methods and frameworks for statistical activities covering a range of subject matters, such as population statistics, agricultural statistics, the System of National Accounts and the Millennium Development Goals, through 45 training courses and workshops organized by the Institute. In 2014, another 729 government officials/statisticians became more proficient in internationally agreed standards, methods and frameworks for official statistics through trainings organized by the Institute. It is worth noting that the demand for e-learning courses on the System of National Accounts has increased. Four courses were organized during the period 2013-2014, with a three-fold increase in the number of participants compared with previous years. Meeting the increased demand was made possible in part through the cooperation with the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which provided three experts to serve as instructors of the courses.<sup>13</sup> Against this background, the training courses that related directly to the Regional Programme during the period 2013-2014 were:

(a) Regional training programme on the 2008 System of National Accounts at the fifth regional workshop on changes in the 2008 System of National Accounts (Greater Noida, India, 22-26 April 2013);

(b) First intermediate-level e-learning course on the System of National Accounts (3 June-9 August 2013);

(c) First subregional course on the System of Environmental Economic Accounting, which was organized by the Institute and the secretariat and hosted by Malaysia, in September 2013;

<sup>13</sup> For further details on the training activities of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific, please refer to E/ESCAP/CST(4)/13.

(d) Sixth Regional Workshop on Changes in the 2008 System of National Accounts (Daejeon, Republic of Korea, 14-18 October 2013);

(e) Training course entitled “Improving statistical capability in compiling national accounts for international comparison: basics of the 2008 System of National Accounts (SNA) in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea” (Manila, 7 October-6 November 2013);

(f) Second intermediate-level e-learning course on the System of National Accounts (14 October-20 December 2013);

(g) Fourth basic-level e-learning course on the introduction to the System of National Accounts (21 October-20 December 2013);

(h) Fifth basic e-learning course on introduction to the 2008 System of National Accounts (12 May-11 July 2014);

(i) Third intermediate-level e-learning course on 2008 System of National Accounts (12 May-11 July 2014);

(j) Subregional technical training on work statistics and labour migration statistics for the Pacific islands countries organized by the International Labour Organization, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the University of the South Pacific and the Institute (Nadi, Fiji, 28 July -1 August 2014);

(k) Sixth e-learning course on introduction to the 2008 System for National Accounts (8 September-7 November 2014);

(l) Fourth intermediate-level e-learning course on 2008 System for National Accounts (8 September-7 November 2014);

(m) Modules on basic economic statistics for the second group training course in improving capability in producing official statistics relating to Millennium Development Goals Indicators and the System for National Accounts organized jointly by the Institute and the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (Chiba, Japan, 18 August-19 December 2014);

(n) The first phase of the regional course entitled “Statistical business registers: making a business case for an Operational Statistical Business Register” was designed and delivered by the Institute and the Statistics Division with contributions from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (Perak, Malaysia, 26-30 January 2015).

## **B. Programme management activities**

### **1. Governance**

#### **National-level activities**

27. Steering Group members of national statistical offices act as national focal points in their respective countries. For member States not represented on the Steering Group, the focal points indicated for the capacity screening are considered focal points for the overall programme.

#### **Regional-level activities**

28. The Steering Group was reconstituted in July 2013, with representatives of central banks confirmed as members in July 2014.

29. At the third meeting of the Steering Group, which was held from 29 to 31 October 2013, it was decided that the frequency of face-to-face meetings would be determined as needed.

30. The fourth meeting of Steering Group was planned to be held in March 2015.

## **2. Resource mobilization**

31. The secretariat has two types of funding, namely regular budget and extra-budgetary funding. In preparing proposals for those sources of funding under the guidance of the Steering Group, the foundations for a resource mobilization strategy were built. As in the case of the monitoring framework, the resource mobilization strategy shall also be considered across different statistical domains and encompass various regional programmes. The current status of funding of the Regional Programme of Economic Statistics is given below:

(a) Two Development Account Projects with a focus on national accounts and the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting. One project is specifically for the Pacific region and the other one is being implemented with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean;

(b) After the completion of the first phase of the project: strengthening capacity of national statistical systems in priority countries to produce and disseminate economic statistics, including national accounts in accordance with the 2008 System of National Accounts, the Russian Federation approved funding for the second phase. This phase is designed to follow up on the regional activities conducted in the first phase with national activities focusing on improving the quality of economic statistics;

(c) The secretariat has submitted a proposal for funding at the programme level to the United Kingdom Department for International Development. The proposal is under evaluation and if approved would be the largest funding received for the Regional Programme to date.

## **3. Monitoring and reporting**

### **National-level activities**

32. The capacity screening results have provided participating countries with baseline information across the four programme outputs, as well as information pertaining to institutional setting, information technology and human resources.

33. Additional information for the present progress report was compiled through a desk review, given that the capacity screening was completed at the end of 2013 with revisions continuing throughout 2014.

### **Regional-level activities**

34. A monitoring framework has yet to be completed owing to ongoing discussions on cross-cutting issues. An expert group meeting on the implications of the emerging development agenda beyond 2015 on statistics development in Asia and the Pacific, which was held in Bangkok on 9 and 10 December 2014, focused on common elements in different domain-specific capability-building programmes, such as institutional, legal, statistical infrastructure and business process improvements needed in order to achieve sustainable and effective improvements in capacities of national statistical systems.

35. The capacity screening results come directly from the national statistical systems on the current standing of the implementation of the Core Set, making them the most recent and reliable source of information. Table 2 provides the results against the milestones that correspond to a benchmark analysis. It should be noted that the assessment covers the 50 members and associate members of ESCAP that responded to the capacity screening questionnaire in order to ensure comparability.

36. According to the results, natural resources is the least available Core Set component in the region. Consumer price index (CPI), on the other hand, is provided by the vast majority of member States at the recommended frequency. Following CPI, balance of payments and international investment position statistics can be provided by two thirds of the member States at the recommended frequency.<sup>14</sup> At this point, it must be noted that in assessing data quality, frequency is a necessary dimension but needs to be complemented with other dimensions. Hence, the principal limitation of the signposts is that the percentage of countries that produce those statistics fully in accordance with international standards, as indicated in the programme outcome, is not fully known. It is therefore necessary to incorporate further quality assessment criteria in the monitoring framework of the Regional Programme. A balance has to be struck, however, between detail and comparability.

37. In a desk review conducted by the secretariat in August 2014 by means of checking data dissemination platforms of national statistical offices and central banks of the member States, it was found that, in some cases, capacity screening results and the statistics disseminated electronically did not match. For instance, in the case of external trade-services statistics, only 25 country websites had data available, as opposed to a total of 36 countries that reported to be meeting/exceeding recommendations. In the case of the short-term indicator services output, data were found for only seven countries. The desk review illustrates the possible mismatch between data production and dissemination, as well as the appropriateness of the dissemination tools. In order to evaluate progress towards achieving the Regional Programme outcome that refers to the production and dissemination of the Core Set, it is necessary to analyse carefully discrepancies between what the national statistical system produce and what is readily available to the users.

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<sup>14</sup> Guided by the capacity screening results, the Steering Group at its third meeting agreed that capacity-building should focus on the following: labour and employment statistics, household income and expenditure statistics, and natural resources statistics. For more details, please review the report of the third meeting of the Steering Group for the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics, which is available from [www.unescap.org/resources/report-meeting](http://www.unescap.org/resources/report-meeting).

Table 2  
Results of the capacity screening against Core Set signposts: benchmark analysis

	Signpost 1 <sup>a</sup> (recommended frequency)	Members and associate members that met or exceeded recommendations (out of 50 respondents to the capacity screening)	
		Actual number	Percentage
<b>Prices and costs</b>			
Consumer price index	<b>Q</b>	49	98
Producer price index	<b>Q</b>	27	54
Commodity price index	<b>Q</b>	13	26
External merchandise trade price indexes	<b>A</b>	11	22
Wages /earnings data	<b>A</b>	23	46
Labour costs index / wage index	<b>Q</b>	11	22
Purchasing power parities	<b>ad hoc</b>		
<b>Demand and output</b>			
GDP (production) nominal and real	<b>A</b>	23	46
GDP (expenditure) nominal and real (including implicit price indexes for GDE and components)	<b>A</b>	21	42
External trade – merchandise	<b>A</b>	32	64
External trade – services	<b>A</b>	27	54
Short term indicator (STI) – industry output	<b>Q</b>	30	60
Short term indicator (STI) – services output <sup>b</sup>	<b>Q</b>	21	42
STI - consumer demand	<b>Q</b>	17	34
STI - fixed investment	<b>Q</b>	17	34
STI – inventories	<b>Q</b>	14	28
Economy structure statistics	<b>Every 5 years</b>	22	44
Productivity	<b>A</b>	17	34
<b>Income and wealth</b>			
Integrated national accounts for the total economy	<b>A</b>	30	60
Institutional sector accounts	<b>A</b>	19	38
Balance of payments	<b>A</b>	33	66
International investment position (IIP)	<b>A</b>	33	66
External debt	<b>A</b>	28	56
Income distribution	<b>A</b>	22	44
<b>Money and banking</b>			
Assets/liabilities of depository corporations	<b>M</b>	24	48
Broad money and credit aggregates	<b>M</b>	24	48
Interest rate statistics	<b>M</b>	31	62
<b>Government</b>			
General government operations	<b>A</b>	21	42
General government debt	<b>A</b>	21	42
<b>Labour Market</b>			
Labour supply and demand	<b>A</b>	24	48
Hours worked	<b>A</b>	26	52
<b>Natural Resources and the environment</b>			
Natural resources	<b>A</b>	8	16

*Abbreviations:* A, annually; M, monthly; Q, quarterly.

<sup>a</sup> The frequencies in bold are not provided under signpost 1 in the implementation plan, indicating that the corresponding statistics are not part of the expected results of phase 1. The recommended frequencies are drawn from the next phase during which a recommendation is made, such as either from signpost 2 or 3.

<sup>b</sup> This particular statistic was not indicated in table 1, which is taken directly from the implementation plan.

#### IV. Next steps and recommendations

38. As indicated in the implementation plan, the implementation of the Regional Programme will ultimately be undertaken at the national level. This requires the integration of the Core Set and the outputs of the Programme in national plans covering the entire national statistical system and reflecting national priorities. The regional guidelines for doing this have not yet been completed, making it difficult to assess to what extent the reflection of the Programme in national plans or strategies has been achieved. The secretariat conducted a short survey among the Steering Group members from May to July 2014 to which 12 countries responded. Eleven of the respondents said that the Core Set was fully incorporated in their national statistical plan.

39. In a desk review of National Strategies for the Development of Statistics and similar national plans conducted by the secretariat in August 2014, a set of criteria was applied for assessing the level of incorporation of the Core Set (the Core Set component mentioned with or without strategies and activities or not mentioned at all in the national plan). This review revealed that in order to gain a better understanding of the selection of the components incorporated in national plans, a detailed evaluation must be undertaken. A particular focus should be the relevance of each Core Set component to national priorities.

40. Similarly, an effective and sustainable way of coordinating within the Regional Plan at the subregional level can occur only if the Core Set and the programme outputs are reflected in subregional statistical strategies, such as the one set by ASEAN and the Ten Year Pacific Strategy for Statistics.

41. The Chair of the Steering Group sent a letter in September 2014 to 19 development partners as part of an effort to reach out to partners and to gather information on opportunities and challenges for coordinating technical cooperation on economic statistics in the region. Based on the nine responses received, the following are seen as the main challenges to coordinating technical cooperation activities within the Regional Programme: insufficient information-sharing, (including lack of knowledge about the Regional Plan among partners); lack of staff; insufficient coordination at the national level; the absence of National Strategies for the Development of Statistics or similar plans; and national statistics offices not being involved in statistics development activities. Those responses point to the important role of member States in coordinating development partners at the national level, as international organizations should operate in accordance with national priorities that are indicated in National Strategies for the Development of Statistics or in similar plans. In addition, existing coordination mechanisms, such as the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities and the Partners for Statistics Development in Asia-Pacific, may reflect on how to make information-sharing among development partners more effective. In the case of the Regional Programme, enhancing representation of international organizations on the Steering Group is essential to better coordinate efforts aimed at improving economic statistics in the region.

42. The current workplan for the implementation of the Regional Programme is available on the secretariat's website.<sup>15</sup> The key activity that has yet to be implemented is the incorporation of the Regional Programme

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<sup>15</sup> The workplan for the implementation of the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific is available from [www.unescap.org/resources/background-document-agenda-item-3-work-plan-implementation-regional-programme-improvement](http://www.unescap.org/resources/background-document-agenda-item-3-work-plan-implementation-regional-programme-improvement).

and its Core Set in the national planning process through a systematic approach. This is a necessary requirement in that it makes the Regional Programme tangible, builds a sense of ownership among the participating countries and enhances coordination among the development partners.

43. The development agenda beyond 2015 and the data revolution required to complement it clearly emphasizes the importance of statistics development. Synergies between the Regional Programme and the new development agenda must be fully utilized for building national capabilities in order to improve economic statistics. As far as the scope of the Core Set is concerned, however, an analysis of the impact of the sustainable development goals, targets and indicators will need to be done in order to assess whether modifications in the basic set of economic statistics are required, such as new statistics or further disaggregation.

## **V. Issues for consideration**

44. Given the above progress report on the implementation of the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics and the recommended next steps, the Committee is invited to:

(a) Provide advice and guidance on modalities for obtaining increased political support and investment in the development of economic statistics;

(b) Confirm its commitment to concrete steps for implementing the Regional Programme at the national level, including the full integration of the Core Set of Economic Statistics in national plans, such as the National Strategies for the Development of Statistics;

(c) Provide advice and guidance on how to actively support increased effectiveness of regional coordination, especially through creating stronger links with subregional statistics strategies and plans;

(d) Provide recommendations on how to ensure that the Regional Programme supports the implementation of the development agenda beyond 2015.