International technical support

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Editorial

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Editorial
Spotlight on the Algerian twinning project
A European twinning to develop Algerian forecasting – Interview with Denis Gournay, resident twinning advisor in Algiers
INSEE takes part in the twinning to support Algerian forecasting
Special report: a new generation of experts at INSEE
Mission in Algeria on population census – Interview with Odile Soulas and Wali Rostam
Mission in Tunisia on the classification of economic activities – Interview with Nathalie Piquerey
Mission in Madagascar on R software – Interview with Mathias André and Olivier Meslin
Mission in Serbia on the economic outlook – Interview with Clément Rousset
Mission in Ukraine on national accounts – Interview with Alice Tchang
A summary of INSEE's cooperation activities in the 1st half of 2019
Farewell, friend 1

Algeria is in the spotlight in this dedition 12 of the International Technical Support newsletter, with a close look at the European twinning from which the Algerian Finance Ministry's Directorate general of Forecasting is currently benefiting.

A special report, including five interviews, lets us hear from young INSEE statisticians who have recently carried out their first foreign technical support mission, either in Algeria, Tunisia, Madagascar, Serbia or Ukraine.

This is the opportunity to find out more about exactly what their missions consisted of, and discover what an experience in cooperation can bring to the new generation of experts.

Details are then given of the cooperation activities carried out by INSEE during the 1st half of 2019.

Happy reading!



"White", INSEE's new head office building, at 88 Avenue Verdier – Montrouge

A European twinning to develop Algerian forecasting: interview with Denis Gournay, resident twinning advisor in Algiers

What is the background to this twinning?

The Directorate general of Forecasting of the Algerian Finance Ministry (the DGP) is benefiting from a 2-year twinning project that started in September 2018, as a cooperation programme that is part of what is known as the European Union's Neighbourhood Policy.

The DGP's task is to inform the Algerian government's choices in the medium and long term as regards economic, social and regional public policies.

Which European administrations are involved?

It's a multi-centre twinning project, mainly involving, on the French side: France Stratégie (a planning agency attached to the Prime Minister's office), the French treasury (DGT), INSEE and the general economic and financial council (CGE-Fi); and on the German side, the



Denis Gournay (right), resident twinning advisor, and Hamid Chaouchi, his Algerian counterpart, who coordinate the "Prospective" twinning activities together

Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, as well as some Länder.

This wealth of expertise addresses

the twinning project's 4 themes: the organisation and internal running of the DGP; its information system and links with data providers, such as the Algerian Office of National Statistics; the prospective methods implemented by the DGP; and lastly, its ability to evaluate policies.

There are precise improvement targets connected to each theme: ultimately, the DGP should thus be the Algerian benchmark when it comes to forecasting.

What are the benefits of an instrument like twinning?

Twinning is a form of cooperation. It involves a transfer of techniques and methods, but there is real value also in the connections that are created between officials, and in the joint search for solutions that are appropriate to the beneficiary country.

> ► Interview by Dominique FRANCOZ

INSEE takes part in the twinning to support Algerian forecasting

Since September 2018, the Algerian Directorate general of Forecasting (DGP) benefits from a European-funded twinning project (see interview above).

Two INSEE experts, one a specialist in re-engineering of information systems and the other an expert in quality, are contributing to these twinning activities in order to establish a system for collecting, processing and disseminating information. The DGP will then be able to rely on this system to develop strategic analyses.

At this stage, the aim is to streamline the different existing databases and to structure them into a single database, based on various available sources, primarily those from the Office of National Statistics (ONS), to cover the DGP's various areas of involvement, whether economic, social or territorial. Requirements are currently being identified in order to define the information to be included in the database on those three dimensions.

The objective is for this database to be accessible via a single, wellidentified data platform with regular data input, if possible done automatically, according to a protocol to be developed with the providers: the idea is to limit non-automated stages as much as possible so that DGP members can give priority to their core business, which is forecasting.

INSEE's contribution to this project is both technical, to compile and update the database, and organisational, to guarantee the quality of the information produced. Indeed, a quality approach has been proposed to DGP to define the processes, from data input to the provision of pooled resources for carrying out statistical and forecasting analyses, mapping and production of publications.

INSEE carried out five expert missions at the DGP in the 1st half of 2019. These facilitated the start of a collaboration between the DGP and the ONS, with the latter being a traditional partner in cooperation with INSEE.

Again, within the context of this twinning project, in March 2019 IN-SEE hosted a study visit of DGP executives on the following three themes: statistical coordination, the National Council for Statistical Information relations with its users and INSEE's work on modelling.

► Dominique FRANCOZ

Mission in Algeria on population census – Interview with Odile Soulas and Wali Rostam

What did your mission entail exactly?

Algeria's Office of National Statistics (ONS) is preparing its sixth general population and housing census, called the RGPH, scheduled for 2020. It wants to take advantage of the RGPH to get a geographical information system (GIS) capable of defining the data collection areas and producing the census results.

Our mission had 3 key objectives:

- to share our experience in the organisation and management of geospatial information in the context of the French census with the Rorcal app for managing the Register of Localised Buildings (RIL);

- to detail the procedures for disseminating localised data and, in particular, to present the new interactive mapping tool from INSEE's Local Statistics website¹;

- to talk about the difficulties and best practices regarding GIS management, as well as the resources to be allocated to it (human, material and organisational dimensions).

The ONS is facing a substantial challenge in modernising its methods of collection and dissemination. The people we spoke to were very interested in our experience, for improving their system.

The challenge for us was to properly identify their needs in order to ad-



Wali Rostam (2nd from the left) and Odile Soulas (right) with Algerian colleagues – Algiers (Algeria), April 2018

just our presentations. The country of Algeria is actually divided into 48 regional provinces, called "wilayas", some of which are in the middle of the desert, with a nomadic population, while others, including Algiers, are facing great urbanisation related to the rural exodus. Under these conditions, identifying the households' address and collecting data are proving to be particularly complex issues.

What did you get out of this experience?

Although the country is suffering from great political uncertainty, we were given a very warm welcome and under very good conditions. We shared with the participants the challenges to be taken up in order to develop and make best use of their GIS in terms of skills, infrastructure and dedicated resources. The people we worked with were highly motivated by a cooperative drive to support them in their plan.

Conversations with the ONS team continued at lunchtime over grilled sardines or some other local specialities, and at the end of the mission, we visited the famous Jardin d'Essai botanical garden in Algiers.

> ► Interview by Serge DARRINÉ

Mission in Tunisia on the classification of economic activities – Interview with Nathalie Piquerey

What did your mission entail exactly?

In March, I accompanied Clotilde Masson, Head of the Economic Classification Division, on a mission to Tunis, to assist Statistiques Tunisie, the Tunisian national statistical institute. The mission theme was the implementation of an economic activity classification system. As INSEE experts, we took part in a panel discussion arranged by the Tunisian NSI and National Council of Statistics (CNS), to raise awareness amongst the partners of the Tunisian official statistical system about the use of the new Tunisian economic activity classification system. At this meeting, we presented the various stages of the 2008 revision of the French classification of economic activities (NAF) and the European statistical classification of economic activities (NACE), and we explained the reasons why it is important for the NSI and its partners to cooperate in this field.

^{1 -} https://statistiques-locales.insee.fr/#c=home



Our participation was part of the continued technical support regarding classifications that INSEE has been giving to Statistiques Tunisie in recent years.

What did you get out of this experience?

This was a rewarding experience for me. From a professional point of view, it enabled me to talk to people working on classification outside IN-SEE and find out more about other ways of proceeding.

I was also impressed by the quality of the classification section of the Statistiques Tunisie website.

From a personal point of view, I got to see a Maghreb country for the first time. Following the advice of our Tunisian colleagues, I was able to visit the Medina and the Bardo Museum. That took me right away from all the stress of Paris for a few days!

► Interview by Serge DARRINÉ

Mission in Madagascar on R software – Interview with Mathias André and Olivier Meslin

What did your mission entail exactly?

Last April, we ran a five-day training course on the R software for statisticians at INSTAT, the Madagascan NSI. The objective was to show them the possibilities offered by this software and enable them to use R independently after completing this training.

The week was split into three stages. The first two days were focused on presenting the software basics, alternating between theory and practical exercises.

The next two days were spent on database processing and on creating customised graphics. We also presented collaborative tools for efficient program sharing and for backing up their change log (version control with the GIT system)

On the final day, those attending took everything they had learnt in the first two stages and put it into practice on their own projects. It could be a case of converting an existing statistical data processing sequence in SAS or SPSS software to R language.

Some also sought to replicate with R the statistical processing on which recent publications about the population census and regional statistics are reliant.



What did you get out of this experience?

The things that have stayed in our minds include the participants' great motivation as well as the work atmosphere, which was both studious and friendly, and the wonderful welcome that INSTAT gave us.

This training course, held in a context that was far from our everyday environment, enabled us to become aware of the human and technical challenges faced in the transition of statistical data processing sequences to R, not just in Madagascar but in France too.

During discussions we had with INSTAT colleagues, we were also able to measure the low level of resources available to the Madagascan statistical system and the scale of the difficulties faced.

Lastly, this cooperation mission gave us the chance to discover the natural and cultural riches of Antananarivo, the capital, and the surrounding area.

> ► Interview by Serge DARRINÉ

Mission in Serbia on the economic outlook – Interview with Clément Rousset

What did your mission entail exactly?

In April 2019, I carried out a mission at SORS, the Serbian NSI, on the country's economic outlook. This NSI, like INSEE, publishes a quarterly report on the national economic outlook. It wanted the benefit of a clearer understanding of the way INSEE conducts its economic analysis in order to transpose our methods to the Serbian situation, if possible.

So, my Serbian colleagues and myself talked about our ways of working, the mathematical models and software that we use, and also the relations that each of our NSI has with the government and press.

We also touched on the issue of leading indicators, regarded as the "holy grail" of forecasting because of their ability to provide reliable information in advance. Conversations between economic forecasters are often about these indicators that sometimes need to be worked out in an ingenious way, as they can be so specific to the country's economic structure. In Serbia, for example, in order to anticipate change in gross domestic product, the NSI takes a precise count of trucks crossing the border. Imports of construction materials enable our Serbian colleagues to anticipate the number of building sites. As a final example, in order to measure Serbia's economic activity in agriculture, knowledge of the amount of rainfall at the start of spring and sunshine in the summer is proving very effective. bian economic situation and learnt more about some of the methods used by my counterparts at SORS. On my return, I checked whether some indicators used by the Serbians might help improve the accuracy of the forecasts we produce in France. INSEE is also going to study the possibilities offered by the free economic analysis software, CACIS², developed by the OECD and used by the Serbian NSI.

> Interview by Serge DARRINÉ

What did you get out of this experience?

Thanks to this mission, I have enhanced my knowledge of the Ser-



Clément Rousset (centre), INSEE economic outlook expert, together with Katarina Stančić, Head of prompt and complex reporting and Public Policies Support Division, and Goran Katic, econometrician and analyst in that division – Belgrade (Serbia), April 2018

Mission in Ukraine on national accounts – Interview with Alice Tchang

What did your mission entail exactly?

I went on mission to Kiev in April, to present to SSSU, the Ukrainian NSI, the sources and methods used by INSEE's national accounts department for calculating investment.

As a specialist in non-financial businesses, a theme that only covered part of the mission programme, before leaving I had to have conversations with my INSEE colleagues with responsibility for other economic agents, and then summarise their work, which allowed me to gain an overall view as regards the calculation of that key variable, which is investment.

What did you get out of this experience?

Understanding my counterparts' needs, preparing and then carrying out such work is an intense but very rewarding exercise: you learn a lot about the host country's practices and tools, but also about the work of your French colleagues as well as your own field!

Passing on knowledge directly in a foreign language or through an interpreter, as happened in my case, is very stimulating: I would willingly repeat the experience.

Interview by Serge DARRINÉ



Alice Tchang (left) and Ukrainian colleagues – Kiev (Ukraine), April 2019

2 - Cyclical Analysis and Composite Indicators System.



A summary of INSEE's cooperation activities in the 1st half of 2019

Sub-Saharan Africa

CEMAC and WAEMU countries

In May, AFRISTAT held two training seminars on the economic outlook, the first in Douala (Cameroon) for member countries of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) and the second in Lomé (Togo) for countries in the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU).

In the first seminar, those attending received training led by an expert from INSEE on how to deal with seasonality.

The second seminar focused on methods of forecasting inflation. An economist from the Moroccan NSI, the High Commission for Planning (HCP), attended in order to give a presentation on Morocco's experience in this matter.

Côte d'Ivoire

In May, two experts from INSEE carried out a mission to Abidjan at the Côte d'Ivoire NSI as part of a project to support the compiling of regional accounts.



In the 3rd row, Benoît Hurpeau, INSEE expert on regional accounts; in the 2nd row, from left to right: Moïse Enoh, Director for Statistical Coordination, Regional Action and Dissemination, Joséphine Eby, Assistant Director for National Accounts, Yvette Attéméné, Regional Director for Agboville, one of her employees and Constance Torelli, INSEE; in the front row: Magloire Ligbet, National Accounts Director – Agboville (Côte d'Ivoire), May 2019

The objective was to carry out an inventory of the available statistical sources so as to initiate work on measuring regional gross domestic product.

Burkina Faso

In March, a national accountant from INSEE carried out a mission in Ouagadougou at Burkina Faso's NSI, in order to continue work begun in the 1st half of 2018.

This involved consolidating the tools for automating the calculation of the supply and use balances for goods and services.

Madagascar

In April, two experts from INSEE ran a training course on the R software for INSTAT, the Madagascan NSI, in Antananarivo (see interview about this on page 4).

Africa

In April, INSEE hosted an African delegation for a study visit on economic forecasting methods.



Participants in the study visit on economic outlook forecasting methods - INSEE, Montrouge (France), April 2019

Three institutions presented their experiences in this matter: INSEE, the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO), and the Moroccan High Commission for Planning (HCP).

The visitors came from the Maghreb (Moroccan HCP and Tunisian NSI) and from Sub-Saharan Africa (AFRISTAT, Africa's three high schools of statistics, the WAEMU and the BCEAO). Also in April, an expert from INSEE attended a workshop held in Tunis (Tunisia) on Sustainable Development Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). Work focused on the analysis of GPS surveys, instruments for measuring "governance, peace and security".



Participants at the SDG 16 workshop, Tunis (Tunisia), April 2019

This workshop was held as part of the Pan-African Statistics Programme, under the aegis of the African Union.

In total, the workshop brought together around fifty people from about twenty African countries, including statisticians from the various NSIs and representatives from regional and international institutions. Of course, the Tunisian delegation was well represented, with people from the NSI, Ministry of Local Affairs, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Justice and Ministry of the Interior.

Cape Verde

In February, an expert from the Moroccan High Commission for Planning (HCP) carried out an IN-SEE-funded mission in Praia (Cape Verde), as part of a Franco-Moroccan project to support the setting up of the ERETES system.

The mission focused on formatting data sources for the new benchmark year of 2015, established in accordance with the UN 2008 System of National Accounts (SNA).

Maghreb and Mediterranean countries

Algeria

In March, an expert from INSEE carried out a mission in Algiers at the Office of National Statistics (ONS) to monitor implementation of the ERETES system, notably in producing current year accounts³.

Morocco

Human Resources project: a study visit took place in January on the theme of human resources development.

Experts from the Human Resources department gave a presentation to their Moroccan counterparts on the various aspects of HR management at INSEE: skills assessments, strategic workforce planning as regards jobs and skills, mobility campaigns, and training pathways.

South-South cooperation: in May, INSEE supported the attendance of an economist from the Moroccan High Commission for Planning (HCP) at an economic outlook training seminar in Lomé (Togo) for WAEMU countries (see news review of this on page 6).

In addition, again with INSEE's support, a national accountant from the HCP carried out a mission to provide technical support in Praia (Cape Verde) to monitor implementation of the ERETES system (see news review of this on page 6).

Tunisia

Training project: an expert from IN-SEE went on mission to Tunis to continue training activities started between 2016 and 2018, as part of the European twinning for the benefit of the Tunisian NSI.

The work is to focus on two key aspects: firstly, setting up a dedicated unit for training management and development, and secondly, the sustainability of the process for designing and assessing the training plan. Dissemination-communication project: an expert from INSEE carried out a mission to support Statistiques Tunisie in two projects: one to compile a three-year communication action plan (2019-2021) and the other to prepare typical communication action plans for a future event and surveys.

The President of the National Council of Statistics (CNS), Lamia Zribi, and the new Director General of the NSI, Adnen Lassoued, came to INSEE in April on a study visit concerning the various aspects of the French official statistical system [SSP] and, in particular, the respective roles of the different organisations within the SSP (INSEE, the National Council for Statistical Information [CNIS], the Official Statistical Authority [ASP], and ministerial statistical offices).

The delegation met the Director General of INSEE and attended a meeting of the Environment and Sustainable Development Commission of the CNIS. mission for Planning and the Senegalese NSI.

The objective of this workshop was to assist participants in writing an article on the effects of Ramadan on consumer prices, taking account of a regional dimension.

An expert from INSEE led the activities, which alternated between theory-based presentations and practical work, and were focused on data correction techniques (seasonal variations, working-days effect, etc.) applied to monthly and quarterly time series.

Maghreb and BCEAO

A study visit took place in June in regards to the new online survey systems.

Tools used for household surveys as well as those for business surveys were presented: online data collection, mobile technology and questionnaire design, and online household surveys (with the case of the population census).



From left to right: Dominique Francoz, Head of the International Technical Support Division, Jean-Pierre Cling, Head of the Statistical Coordination & International Relations Department, Lamia Zribi, President of the Tunisian National Council of Statistics, Jean-Luc Tavernier, INSEE Director General, and Adnen Lassoued, Director General of Statistiques Tunisie – INSEE,

Montrouge (France), April 2019

Maghreb and Senegal

In February, a workshop on writing scientific articles about calendar effects was held in Tunis.

Participants came from Statistiques Tunisie, the Moroccan High Com-



Christelle Rieg (left), economic outlook survey expert, and participants (BCEAO and Maghreb) on the study visit regarding online surveys – INSEE, Montrouge (France), June 2019

Those attending were statisticians and IT engineers from the Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian NSIs, and from the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO).

3 - Current year accounts are produced to demonstrate changes compared with the previous year's accounts (as opposed to the benchmark year's accounts which show the set level).



Maghreb

In June, an expert from INSEE attended a workshop on the SDMX standard⁴, run jointly by INSEE and Statistiques Tunisie in Tunis.

The workshop enabled the Tunisian NSI to share its experience on the subject, gained during a recent European twinning.



The seminar was attended by representatives from the different NSIs in the Maghreb but also from four Sub-Saharan African countries (Cameroon, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal).

AFRISTAT and the African Development Bank presented the prospects regarding implementation of SDMX in Africa, in particular in the context of data exchange concerning Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicators.

The representative from INSEE spoke about the experience of the UN group, chaired by France, regarding implementation of SDMX for SDGs.

Palestine

In June, an expert from INSEE carried out a mission to monitor the implementation of ERETES in Ramallah.



Jean-Samy Aziz, expert on the ERETES system (left foreground), Ola Awad, President of the Palestinian NSI (right foreground) and Palestinian colleagues – Ramallah (Palestine), June 2019

This mission enabled this system to be used to compile two supply and use tables, one for the West Bank and the other for Gaza, for the year 2017, the new benchmark year chosen by the Palestinian NSI for its accounts.

Mediterranean countries

Egypt: in April, INSEE hosted a delegation from CAPMAS, the Egyptian NSI, for a study visit on the dissemination of population census data and, more especially, mapping work. INSEE's "local statistics" website was demonstrated during the visit.

Medstat IV Programme: in February, INSEE took part in two workshops held as part of this programme: one in Athens on indicators for monitoring sustainable development goals, and the other in Lisbon on quality in statistical business registers.



Participants at the SDG workshop, held as part of the Medstat IV Programme – Athens (Greece),

The Medstat IV programme, funded by the European Union, will come to an end in August 2019.

Since the start of this programme in the 1st half of 2016, INSEE has taken part in 12 cooperation activities, totalling 36 days of expert missions.

Europe BALKANS

Serbia

Three INSEE expert missions were organised in Belgrade for the benefit of SORS, the Serbian NSI. One of them is described on page 5 (interview with Clément Rousset).

4 - Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange, a standard aimed at promoting the dissemination and exchange of statistical data and metadata.

In January, a national accountant continued the work already started with the Serbian NSI regarding supply and use tables (European funding IPA2015).

In May an expert in employment and jobs market statistics drew up an assessment of the progress made by SORS in this area, in order to establish cooperation activities to be carried out as a priority in the 2nd half of 2019 and in 2020.

Albania

In March, an expert from INSEE carried out a mission in Tirana at the Albanian NSI to provide technical support in setting up a new population census in 2020.



census expert (at the back of the room), together with Albanian colleagues – Tirana (Albania), March 2019

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Between March and June, four missions were carried out by INSEE experts in Banja Luka and Sarajevo for the Bosnian statistical system: two concerned Services Producer Price Indices, and the other two focused on Construction Producer Price Indices.



Participants on a mission regarding Services and Construction Producer Price Indices (SPPI and CPPI) – 5th from the left: Yann Leurs, INSEE expert on SPPI; 2nd from the right: Gérard Vittek, INSEE expert on CPPI – Banja Luka (Bosnia and Herzegovina), March 2019

These missions were arranged as part of the current European twinning project led by Statistics Denmark to assist Bosnia and Herzegovina.

EASTERN EUROPE

Ukraine

In April, one of INSEE's national accountants carried out an mission in Kiev to assist the Ukrainian NSI with measuring Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) [see interview on page 5].

Europe and Asia

Czech Republic, Georgia and Turkmenistan

Three exploratory missions were carried out by an INSEE expert to Georgia in February and to the Czech Republic and Turkmenistan in May. They were in response to a request from these countries who were interested in seeing a presentation of the ERETES system, with a view to its potential use in compiling their national accounts.

Asia

WESTERN ASIA

Turkey

In May, an expert from Banque de France carried out a mission to Ankara to assist Türkstat, the Turkish NSI, regarding public finance statistics and excessive deficit procedures. This was a European-funded mission.

SOUTH-EAST ASIA

Vietnam

In April, two French experts on measuring activity in the informal sector carried out a mission in Hanoi to assist the Vietnamese NSI.

One of the experts works for DIAL, a research centre that is part of the French National Research Institute for Development (IRD), and the other works for INSEE.

This mission was part of a project providing the NSI with INSEE's technical support on national accounts.



Centre: François Roubaud (IRD-DIAL) and Constance Torelli (INSEE), French experts in measuring the informal sector, surrounded by Vietnamese colleagues – Hanoi (Vietnam), April 2019

South America

ECLAC

In May, an expert from INSEE took part in an annual national accounts seminar held by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

This was an opportunity to renew contact, notably aimed at involving Brazil and Peru, the two South American countries that use the ERETES system, in defining new developments envisaged for it.

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Farewell, friend

t is with great sadness that we must inform you of the death of our friend and colleague, Georges Bourdallé, international cooperation officer for the Mediterranean Countries. He fought a relentless battle for the last year against the illness that finally got the better of him.

Georges was highly committed to his work and was a real enthusiast. He chose to live life to the full. Throughout his career, he placed great importance on cooperation and provided his support to our partners in the field of automatic coding (the SICORE tool) and household survey data collection. George had also been a SAS software trainer.

In his last position, he had forged close ties with his partners in the Maghreb, for whom he had a special affection.

Georges leaves a great void in our small team.



Georges Bourdallé