

International technical support

Newsletter no. 14, June 2020 - INSEE, France



Editorial

This newsletter comes in extraordinary times following the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic. Having brought international travel to a standstill, the epidemic has put a stop to technical support missions and prevented INSEE from welcoming any foreign delegations since the end of March and until further notice.

While this crisis is urging national statistics institutes to review their statistical production and working methods, it is also pushing them to find new ways of providing international technical support remotely – ways which INSEE is working hard to set up.

It is, first and foremost, a question of supporting initiatives launched by the NSIs in developing countries and countries in transition, in order to guarantee the continuity of their statistical production throughout this crisis and the monitoring of its social and economic impact. In this way, INSEE has already used remote exchanges as a tool to provide Morocco's High Commission for Planning with assistance to launch a household survey on the impact of COVID-19. INSEE has also taken part in several videoconferences organised by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Paris 21, etc. For us, it is also a question of continuing our participation, albeit in the form of remote support, in European projects managed by Expertise France, and of continuing with the bilateral funding projects currently under way.

In addition to these new activities, this newsletter also highlights a seminar on governance indicators co-organised by INSEE together with the OECD and the NSI of Cape Verde, held as a side event to the meeting of the United Nations Statistical Commission in New York. This seminar, led by INSEE's Director-General, was an opportunity to present the report on governance indicators drawn up by the Praia expert group, a group in which France will participate from now on. It was also an opportunity to present several experiences in this area, both national (France, Mali, Peru) and regional (OECD, "Governance, Peace and Security" programme in Africa), which support efforts to monitor the "Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions" sustainable development goal (SDG16).

This newsletter is also an opportunity for us to revisit a few European projects in which INSEE has been involved: a European twinning programme with Bosnia led by the Danish NSI and successfully completed in April 2020, and a programme of cooperation with countries on the EU's eastern borders (STEP project), launched a few months ago, as part of a consortium managed by Expertise France in partnership with five Member State NSIs, including INSEE. Klaus Pedersen, the team leader for this project, presents the goals of the project and the adaptations that became necessary as a result of COVID-19.

This newsletter ends with a summary of INSEE's cooperation activities over the first half of 2020, coordinated by the International Technical Support division. We hope you find this an enjoyable read.

► Jean-Pierre CLING

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United Nations Statistical Commission – Seminar on monitoring governance co-organised by INSEE

During the 51st session of the United Nations Statistical Commission, which was held in New York (USA) from 3 to 6 March 2020, INSEE co-organised a seminar held as a side event in parallel to the plenary session together with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the NSI of Cape Verde. Under the title “Trust, Security and Discrimination”, this seminar looked at statistical indicators used to monitor governance, in line with the “Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions” sustainable development goal (SDG16).¹

Hosted by INSEE’s Director-General, Jean-Luc Tavernier, the event covered a rich and diverse programme consisting of seven presentations and was a huge success among the sixty or so participants.



Participants at the side event on monitoring governance, held during the 51st session of the United Nations Statistical Committee – New York (USA), March 2020

- Osvaldo Monteiro Borges, President of the NSI of Cape Verde and coordinator of the Praia City Group for the United Nations Statistical Commission², summarised the findings and recommendations set out in the manual on governance statistics drawn up by the group, which was discussed in a plenary session.

- Paul Schreyer, the OECD’s acting chief statistician, presented the work carried out within this international organisation on confidence in institutions, as a brief overview of the “How’s Life?” report, published by the OECD the following week.

- Christine Gonzalez-Demichel, Head of the Ministerial Statistical Department for Internal Security, shared the French experience in terms of monitoring indicators on crime and discrimination, which is based on the national “Living Environment and Security” survey conducted each year since 2007.

- Anibal Sánchez Aguilar, Deputy Director of the National Institute of Statistics of Peru, presented governance results from the survey on living conditions and poverty conducted continuously among households for two decades, as well as a geo-referenced national crime database (Data-Crim).

- François Roubaud, Research Director at the French Institute of Research for Development (IRD), introduced the programme on governance, peace and security (GPS) carried out in Africa under the umbrella of the African Union, with scientific and technical support from the IRD. Around 12 countries from sub-Saharan Africa now participate in this programme, which has given rise to several regional training courses organised in Africa with support from INSEE.³

- Lastly, Mamadou Founé Tounkara, representative of the NSI of Mali, commented on the results of the

national household survey on governance, peace and security, which has been conducted each year since 2014, making this country one of the GPS programme pioneers in Africa. His comments highlighted the value in conducting a survey such as this in a country that has been at civil war since 2012.

The French Ministerial Statistical Offices for Internal Security and Justice became members of the Praia Group following the meeting of the Statistical Commission.

► *Constance TORELLI*

1 - As a member of the “Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators” since its creation in 2015 during the 46th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission, INSEE is heavily involved in monitoring the SDGs.

2 - The objective of the Praia City Group, created by the UN in 2015 as part of its 2030 Agenda, is to support the production of statistical indicators used to monitor governance.

3 - For more information on this subject, see the article published in January 2019 in International Technical Support newsletter No. 11, page 5 (<https://www.insee.fr/en/information/2404021>).

European twinning project to benefit the Bosnian statistical system: a success despite a schedule disrupted by COVID-19

Between January 2018 and April 2020, Bosnia and Herzegovina profited from a European funded twinning project, which provided a budget of 1.5 million euros allocated across four partners: the Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Institute for Statistics of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republika Srpska Institute of Statistics and the Central Bank of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The first three of these organisations make up the Bosnian statistical system. The Agency for Statistics is responsible for aggregating and publishing data, for establishing standards (methods and nomenclatures) and for international cooperation, while the two institutes each produce statistics on their respective territorial entities.

In August 2017, a consortium consisting of four European NSIs, including INSEE, won the tender for this twinning project launched by the European Commission. The project itself was headed up by the Danish NSI, as the head of the consortium. Aside from this NSI and INSEE, the consortium also consisted of the Finnish and Croatian NSIs.

The themes covered by this twinning project were categorised into three components: regional accounts;

business statistics; and balance of payments and international investment position. The business statistics component was itself broken down into five sub-components: business register; structural statistics; indices of production prices for services; indices of production prices for construction; and short-term and tourism statistics.

Over the 28 months of the project, the Danish NSI organised around 60 activities (missions, study visits, remote exchanges) involving around 40 experts from the four European NSIs in the consortium. The project lead was Charlotte Juul Hansen and resident twinning adviser was Katja Møller Hjelvang, both from the Danish NSI.

INSEE, with logistical support from Expertise France, provided technical support on two major themes (indices of production prices for construction and for services) and marginal support on two other themes (regional accounts and turnover indices) in the form of 11 activities providing a total of 31.5 days of expertise (table 1): seven missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina (in Sarajevo or Banja Luka); two study visits to the INSEE head office, each involving a dozen statisticians from Bosnia and Herzegovina, the most recent of which took place in February 2020 and covered the use of fiscal

sources for producing turnover indices; and two remote exchanges.

The two remote exchanges were held in this way due to the COVID-19 pandemic; they had originally been planned as missions to Bosnia and Herzegovina. For the same reason, the closing seminar for the twinning project could not be organised.

Despite the fact that the schedule was disrupted at the end of the project, the outcome of the twinning project has been very positive: the initial objectives for each component have been achieved and the four beneficiary institutions in this Balkan state reported that they were very satisfied with the results obtained.

► *Serge DARRINÉ*

Table 1: technical support provided by INSEE for the Bosnian statistical system, broken down by theme and activity type

Themes of the activities	Missions		Remote exchanges		Visits		Total	
	Number	Number of days	Number	Number of days	Number	Number of days	Number	Number of days
Indices of production prices for construction	4	14	1	0.5			5	14.5
Indices of production prices for services	3	11.5	1	0.5			4	12
Regional accounts					1	3	1	3
Turnover indices					1	2	1	2
Total	7	25.5	2	1	2	5	11	31.5

Interview with Klaus Pedersen, STEP project team leader, Expertise France

As the leader of the STEP project team, could you describe this project?

STEP, which stands for “Statistics Through Eastern Partnership”, is a regional programme financed by the European Union (4.7 million euros), which was launched at the start of 2019⁴ and will last until late 2021. It is managed by Eurostat and implemented by a consortium headed up by Expertise France and comprising five Member State national statistics institutes: INSEE, and the NSIs from Denmark, Hungary, Italy and Lithuania. The overall objective is to improve the quality of statistics, while aiming to achieve compliance with the European Statistics Code of Practice, in the six beneficiary countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. For these countries, the availability of a greater amount of better quality statistics will enable them to increase the transparency and quality of their political decision-making.

STEP provides technical support for producing economic and social statistics in traditional statistics fields, such as national accounts and labour statistics, as well as on cross-cutting themes, such as coordinating the national statistical system, training statisticians and journalists for better mutual understanding or even publishing statistics broken down by sex.

The regional aspect of this project is important. These countries are also known as the Eastern Partnership nations. They share a common past and have similar administrative systems, although these have developed independently in recent years. The regional aspect is therefore brought to the fore in STEP by creating networks at personal and professional level and by encouraging participants to learn from one another.



Klaus Pedersen, STEP project team leader, Expertise France

What are the challenges that you are facing and how will you overcome them, especially during this COVID-19 period?

This project is a challenge from a logistical point of view as the participants come from several different countries. There are also different languages and significant cultural differences to take into consideration. But fortunately, the people we work with are very professional and dedicated to their work.

COVID-19 has, however, made our mission more difficult. The beneficiary countries have different approaches to tackling this challenge. Belarusian statisticians are continuing to work as normal, while 80% of staff in Azerbaijan have been put on leave. As not everyone is connected to their workstation via a virtual private network (VPN), it took some time to get everyone linked up to the

professional network. But today's IT tools have helped us to stay connected.

The persistence of the virus has forced us to consider implementing more activities remotely. This is an additional challenge for everyone involved. The majority of experts are not used to carrying out activities remotely and online and, in this respect, it is more difficult to have interaction between the participants, which is necessary for the success of the project. There are also technical obstacles to take into consideration. As all our activities are carried out in both English and Russian, simultaneous interpretation must be provided, which is difficult with the majority of conference software. Added to this are technical problems caused by the varying quality of internet connections or IT security issues that prohibit the use of conference software in some statistics institutes, to name just two examples. A great many technical challenges to overcome while international travel is not possible, but everyone involved has shown a strong desire to continue with the project.

Indeed, in some respects, we have been in closer contact with the beneficiary companies since the COVID-19 crisis began, which is, at the least, something positive to have come out of this situation.

► *Comments recorded by Dominique FRANCOZ*

⁴ - Technical assistance activities, however, only really started towards the end of 2019.

INSEE's contribution to the STEP project

From now until the end of 2021, INSEE is set to contribute to the STEP project in a range of ways: organising study visits, sending experts to participate in workshops, and carrying out technical support and remote assistance missions

The French experts should be able to assist in several areas: statistical

coordination and quality, business statistics, employment statistics, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indicators, and data confidentiality.⁵

Since the start of the programme, INSEE has been involved in three activities, which have either been completed or are still ongoing: organising a study visit on the use of IT

tools for conducting surveys among households (10 and 11 December 2019); leading an online training session on accessing microdata (29-30 June and 8-9 July 2020); and participating in a remote workshop on statistical coordination (2 July 2020).

5 - With, for this last area, participation of the Secure Data Access Centre (CASD) – <https://www.casd.eu>.

In brief – Cooperation activities undertaken by INSEE in H1 2020

Africa

Central Bank of West African States

In January, two experts from INSEE ran a training course on processing time series using R software, attended by around 15 members of the BCEAO management team in Dakar. The programme also included the development of an economic turning point indicator⁶ used for forecast models.



INSEE experts, Dominique Ladiray and Alain Quartier La Tente, first row, third from the left and third from the right, respectively, together with BCEAO participants at a training session on processing time series using R software – Dakar (Senegal), January 2020

institute's senior management team. This training session was organised as part of the Pan-African Statistics Programme (PAS), funded by the European Union and managed by Expertise France.



Luc Rouvière (right), INSEE expert, together with participants from the Institut national de la statistique et de l'analyse économique (Benin National Statistics and Economic Analysis Institute, INSAE) at a management training session – Cotonou (Benin), January 2020

NSI to deepen several complex topics over this half of the year, the following four in particular: processing indirectly measured financial intermediation services (FISIM)⁶; processing the activities of the Central Bank and insurance companies; processing government accounts; and classifying tax. However, the schedule planned for the end of the benchmark year will undoubtedly have to be revised.

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)

In May, INSEE held a videoconference on the French experience in producing the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in the context of the COVID-19 epidemic. This conference was held as part of a series of daily videoconferences on the CPI, spread over 10 days, organised by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). INSEE's presentation, given in English, covered new processes for collecting data, allocation methods for missing prices and the effects of the epidemic on the pattern of consumption. It was attended by over 130 participants and was followed by numerous questions.

Cape Verde

In the first half of 2020, given the global crisis caused by COVID-19, the technical support provided to the national accountants of the NSI of Cape Verde, which began in Praia in 2018, continued in the form of intensive remote work: 30 days from the INSEE expert and 10 days from the expert from Afritac West 2.

This cooperation, the aim of which is to implement a new benchmark year compliant with the 2008 System of National Accounts (SNA), enabled the

Benin

In January, a training session on management methods, run by an INSEE expert, was held at the Institut national de la statistique et de l'analyse économique (Benin National Statistics and Economic Analysis Institute, INSAE), for members of the

6 - <https://www.insee.fr/fr/metadonnees/definition/c1966>

7 - FISIM services represent the share of services rendered by financial intermediaries that is not billed to the clientele (source: <https://www.insee.fr/en/accueil>, Definitions tab).

Maghreb

Tunisia

In January, the Tunisian National Council of Statistics organised a seminar on the governance at the official statistics department as part of a TAIEX⁸ European funding project. The Head of INSEE's Statistical and International Coordination department described the French experience in terms of coordinating ministerial statistical offices, while representatives from the Spanish, Estonian, Finnish and Latvian NSIs presented the governance principles applied in their national statistical systems. These presentations were followed by workshop exchanges with managers from the Tunisian official statistical system.

In February, a videoconference on quality was held between INSEE and Statistics Tunisia, following the launch of a multi-year project on this theme in October 2019. This videoconference was the first in a series of monthly meetings for which the agenda has been fixed. It was followed by the adoption of a two-year action plan and an exchange on the indicators that report on the application of the principles of the Tunisian Official Statistics Charter.

Also in February, as part of a project to change the basis for the Tunisian national accounts, an expert from Banque de France led a project at the NSI to take stock of the availability of data and the progress of the work carried out to draw up the financial accounts.

Morocco

In April, INSEE held four videoconferences with Morocco's High Commission for Planning (HCP). In April, four videoconferences were held between INSEE and the Moroccan High Commission for Planning (HCP). The first two focused on the establishment by the HCP of a household survey on the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19: organizational device of a survey via telephone, sampling and the survey methodology.⁹

The next two concerned the compilation of the consumer price index during an epidemic and the sampling of the HCP Labour force survey.

8 - Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Instrument.

9 - A summary note of the results of this survey is online: https://www.hcp.ma/Enquete-sur-l-impact-du-coronavirus-sur-la-situation-economique-sociale-et-psychologique-des-menages-Note-de-synthese_a2506.html

Eastern Europe



Odile Rascol, Editor-in-Chief of the *Courrier des statistiques* (second from the right) and Maryse Cadalanu, Deputy Editor-in-Chief (third from the right), together with the Albanian NSI delegation, from left to right: Elsa Dhuli, Director General of Statistical Production, Helda Mitre, Director General of IT and Data Collection, Alma Kondi, IT Director, Altin Xhikneli, Communications Director, Blerina Subashi, Head of the Development of Social Statistics division, and Ermir Lico, Head of the Quarterly National Accounts division; far right, Sonila Tavassoli, French-Albanian interpreter – Montrouge (France), January 2020

Albania

In January, INSEE organised a study visit for the Albanian NSI on the way in which INSEE organises its editorial cycle for three publications: *Economics and Statistics*⁸, the *Courrier des statistiques* journal⁹ and the Insee Références collection¹⁰.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

In February, INSEE welcomed a delegation of two statisticians from Bosnia and Herzegovina to support them in using fiscal sources to produce turnover indices.

In March, two INSEE experts (one an expert on indices of production prices for construction, and the other on indices of production prices for services) carried out a technical support task in the form of a remote exchange to provide assistance to the Bosnian statistical system.



Laurence Jaluzot, INSEE expert (first on the left), together with the Bosnian delegation – Montrouge (France), February 2020

These three activities were organised as part of the European twinning project that was implemented for the benefit of the statistical system of this Balkan state between January 2018 and April 2020 (see article on this).

10 - <https://www.insee.fr/fr/information/2410168>

11 - <https://www.insee.fr/fr/information/3622502>

12 - <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques?debut=0&collection=117&idfacette=5>

Expertise France

In March, INSEE welcomed an Expertise France delegation consisting of 12 people for a session covering the following five themes: statistics coordination in France; peer review and INSEE's experience in this area; INSEE and the European Statistical System; population census; the SSP Lab¹³ and its experiments in data science.

This study visit was an opportunity to strengthen the skills of the employees from various Expertise France departments, particularly those from the Official Statistics division, and to help them better understand INSEE's missions and work, and the way in which French and European official statistics work.



Sylvie Eghbal (first on the left) Head of INSEE's Statistical Coordination mission, together with the Expertise France delegation – Montrouge (France), March 2020

13 - Included under INSEE's Methodology, Statistical Coordination and International Relations Directorate, the SSP Lab is a resource and leadership centre for applied research and experimental development that aims to promote innovation and new developments in data sources, technology and methods in data science, for the purposes of statistical production by the French official statistical system (<https://www.insee.fr/fr/information/3559883>).

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About Expertise France

The International Technical Support Division works closely with Expertise France, a French agency of international technical experts.

Expertise France manages the budget allocated to INSEE as part of programme 110, "Economic and financial development aid", launched by the Ministry for the Economy and Finance.

INSEE participates in consortia led by Expertise France with international funding in the area of statistics.