



SIXTY YEARS WITH LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

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**PROGRESS REPORT ON THE PROJECT ON INTEGRATION AND HARMONIZATION
OF INSTRUMENTS FOR SOCIAL STATISTICS (INAES) ***

* Report prepared by Colombia, the coordinator of the INAES project.

A. INTRODUCTION

This document has been prepared in order to inform the Executive Committee of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) of progress in the activities planned for the execution of the Project on integration and harmonization of instruments for social statistics (INAES), in the framework of the eighth meeting of the Executive Committee, to be held in Santo Domingo from 22 to 24 October 2008.

This report provides a general description of the activities conducted to date in each of the phases of execution of the project and the methodology applied, as well as the results obtained and the outcomes to be presented at the fifth meeting of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), to be held in mid-2009; the date of that meeting will mark the end of the INAES project.

B. OBJECTIVES

1. Overall objective

To achieve the highest levels of harmonization, endorsement, comparison and integration of instruments and methodologies for the production of social statistics, with emphasis on health, education and the labour market.

2. Specific goals

To determine the extent to which statistical production in the countries of the region is consistent with the international standards recommended for each of the project's three themes.

To make decisions on the best statistical practices for each theme in order to adopt them as regional standards. Each of the following subregions: Central America and Mexico, the Andean Community countries and the Extended MERCOSUR countries will make a consensual decision in this regard.

To disseminate information and provide training and advice to interested countries on agreed statistical standards for each theme, in order to achieve improved standardization and harmonization of the region's statistical data.

C. PHASES OF THE PROJECT

The execution of the project comprises four basic phases:

- Phase 0 Effective country participation
- Phase I Assessment of the status of the countries of the region
- Phase II Determination of regional standards
- Phase III Training in the standards agreed by the countries of the region

Phase 0 Effective country participation

This phase took place entirely in the first half of 2007, following the formation of the project working group.

Phase 1 Assessment of the status of the countries of the region

This phase began in the second half of 2007 and continued until December 2008, as agreed in the mid-term assessment of the Project in June 2008. The participants included representatives of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) of Colombia, the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics (INEGI) of Mexico, the National Statistical Office (INE) of Spain and ECLAC.

The activities which have been conducted as of the date of this report are detailed in annex 1. They include the following:

- Publication of electronic questionnaires on health, education and the labour market.
- Monitoring, assisting and advising the technical experts responsible for completing the questionnaires, by means of forums, e-mail and conference calls.
- Collection, screening, processing and analysis of the data from the electronic questionnaires on the three themes.
- Preparation of descriptive analyses on the consistency of practices in the region with international standards for the themes of health and the labour market.
- Delivery of the descriptive analyses on the themes of health and the labour market to participants in the workshops on specific themes.
- Organization of the workshop for specific discussion of the labour-market theme.

Phase II Determination of regional standards

This phase, which will take place in December 2008 and January 2009, involves the following activities:

- Preparation of qualitative analyses for each theme, on the basis of the conclusions and agreements reached during the workshops on specific themes.
- Delivery to the participating countries of the qualitative analyses for the three themes, with their respective indicators and standards for their production.
- Preparation, review and approval of the manual of standards for the labour-market theme.

Phase III Training in the standards agreed by the countries of the region

Phase III will take place in the first half of 2009. The planned activities are as follows:

- Holding of the training workshop for the application of the standards agreed for the labour-market theme, with the participation of representatives of the countries of the region wishing to attend.
- Preparation and delivery at the fifth meeting of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC, to be held in 2009, of a proposal for the adoption of the manual and the standards agreed by the participating countries.

- Preparation of the final report and delivery of products to the corresponding bodies (the IDB Regional Public Goods Program, ECLAC and DANE).

D. METHODOLOGY

The INAES project is among the efforts by the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean to achieve substantive improvements in the quality and comparability of statistical information systems. The project is taking place in the framework of the integration and globalization of the region's economies, which in turn requires measures to adjust and adapt the countries' existing statistical production systems.

To achieve comparability, the INAES project is focusing on identifying any common elements (methods, processes, practices, indicators) present in the statistical systems of the countries of the region, in order to bring about harmonization in a number of areas such as commerce, social issues, employment, education and agriculture. The starting point is a system of standards, classifications and nomenclatures developed by the United Nations and specialized international bodies; over time, a body of international standards and recommendations has come into being, with the participation of a number of countries which have adopted them and adapted them to their needs and characteristics.

The statistical standards are a body of guides and standards for statistical production. They relate to the different components of the production process, such as methodologies, concepts, definitions, classifications, nomenclatures, instruments, indicators and variables. The INAES project uses as its methodological basis the Inventory of International Statistical and Geographical Standards produced by INEGI (Mexico) for employment, educational and health statistics, with a few revisions, and the identification of its main indicators. The Inventory is a thematic map of international statistical standards which facilitates the identification of specific standards.

The electronic questionnaires (integrating the corresponding manuals and glossaries of definitions) were designed and produced jointly by DANE and INEGI so that they can be completed by the persons designated by the participating countries. They request information on the variables related to the various components associated with the statistical production of the main health, education and labour-market indicators, and they provide the basic information inputs to identify the level of application and consistency of national statistical production in relation to international standards and recommendations for each theme.

Using the electronic questionnaires, the project sought to establish first, the extent to which the current national practice differs from the international standard, that is, its degree of consistency (complete, partial or zero), and second, if consistency is partial or zero, the national standard or practice used and the particular advances made by each country.

The information obtained using the questionnaires will be used to construct a database of the standards applied by each country, which will be validated online and subjected to subsequent screening and consistency processes. This database is the project's basic methodological instrument and its main contribution in terms of regional public goods.

On the basis of the database, a descriptive analysis will be produced on the current state of the region in respect of the degree of comparability of statistics on each of the themes. That analysis will specify the levels of homogeneity or heterogeneity present in the region's statistical production, the gaps

and the needs for comparison, harmonization and integration, as well as a number of proposals for short-term solutions.

The analyses which identify various comparability and harmonization issues (such as areas, themes, variables, production and calculation methodologies, quality assessment methods and technologies) will be analysed, validated, screened and agreed with the participating countries in a workshop on specific themes, in order to reach basic agreements on adjustments and define indicators and possible standards and practices more appropriate for the region in respect of each theme.

The outcomes of the workshops will be the basis for producing a qualitative analysis for each theme, including the proposed standards and best practices. Also, the technical manual and training workshop for the labour-market theme will be prepared with participation by the technical experts designated by those participating countries wishing to do so.

E. RESULTS

The following has been achieved to date in the framework of the INAES project:

- Active and effective participation by 19 countries in relation to the three themes;
- The compilation of directories containing the contact information of the directors, contacts and technical experts designated for each theme by the participating countries;
- The compilation of directories containing the contact information of producers of statistical data by country and by theme, published on the project's Web page;
- The production of output tables containing information on producers and users of information, by country and by theme;
- The production of output tables on the main limiting factors on information by user, country and theme.
- The production of reports on the main information needs of users, by subregion.
- The production of electronic questionnaires on the themes of health, education and the labour market, with the corresponding advisory and support forums.
- The implementation of a mid-term assessment of the project, with participation by representatives of IDB, ECLAC, DANE, INEGI and the National Statistical Office (INE) of Spain (see annex 2).
- The production of a descriptive analysis by country, subregion and region on the labour-market theme.
- The holding of a workshop to discuss specific issues relating to the labour-market theme.¹

¹ All the aforementioned documents are available on the website of the virtual community of the INAES project [online] <http://www.dane.gov.co/inaes>.

F. END PRODUCTS

The end products of the INAES project, which will become regional public goods and may be used by any of the countries of the union, are as follows:

- A base of agreed standards, common to the countries of the region, for the production of social statistics relating to the themes of health, education and the labour market;
- A database of the countries' responses to the electronic questionnaires, relating to the themes of health, education and the labour market;
- A thematic analysis of the current situations of the countries and subregions and the region in relation to consistency between statistical practices and the standards agreed for each theme;
- A training workshop on the agreed standards, with the corresponding manual;
- A proposal for the fifth meeting of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, to be held in Santiago, Chile, in mid-2009, for the adoption of the standards agreed by the participating countries.

TIMETABLE

[illegible]

Annex 2

CONCLUSIONS OF THE MID-TERM ASSESSMENT

1. The progress made to date must be systematized in order to share the experience acquired.
2. Concrete progress includes the production of the Inventory of International Statistical and Geographical Standards, which is available to all the region's national statistical institutes.
3. When the analyses have been completed for the three themes, they will be made available to all the participating national statistical institutes.
4. The analyses will comprise:
 - Concepts and definitions relating to integration and harmonization, with emphasis on the latter;
 - The description of the results;
 - The qualitative analysis;
 - Draft versions of the proposed standards; and
 - The recommendations.
5. The analyses will be submitted to the members of the group for consideration..
6. The seminar for discussion and consensus on the standards to be adopted by the region on each theme is not included in the timetable of activities.
7. The time limit for the project is extended until 30 April 2009.
8. On the basis of the project's end products, a proposal will be prepared, to be presented at the fifth meeting of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC, to be held in July 2009. The aim is to ensure that the directors of the countries' national statistical institutes are politically committed to the adoption of the manuals and standards recommended in the framework of the project.
9. The budget for the project will be revised and adjusted in accordance with the activities proposed during the assessment of 30 April 2009.
10. The activities provided for in the terms of reference for the contracts of the consultants for each theme will be reviewed.
11. When the corresponding analyses have been concluded, the pending parts of Phases I and II will be executed as follows:
 - Discussions on specific themes (the seminar initially proposed) will be divided into three workshops, one for each theme, with the participation of technical experts designated by the participating countries.

- The workshops for the three themes will be designed and conducted with the following goals:
 - To refine and validate the analyses with participants from each of the national statistical institutes, in order to give their analytical work a qualitative rather than descriptive nature.
 - To agree on duly defined indicators and to define the standards which will be the basis for their production.

Before each workshop, those attending will be informed of the analysis prepared by the consultant and the technical instructions.

- The participants in the workshops will be technical experts from each of the countries who are responsible for the production of the related statistics and who will complete the electronic questionnaires.
- The workshops will take place on different dates.
- The training workshop will be designed for technical experts in the labour-market field, with the objective of teaching them how to use the corresponding manual.
- Organizers will ensure that the commitment to participate of the director of each national statistical institute extends to the official responsible for technical participation in the conduct of the project.
- The group is gratified to note the progress made to date and wishes to emphasize the importance of the project.

