
Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific

Governing Council

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Item 6 of the provisional agenda

Evaluation of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific

**Preliminary findings and recommendations arising from
the evaluation of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the
Pacific¹**

Note by the secretariat

1. Pursuant to Commission resolution 71/1, an independent evaluation was commissioned by ESCAP in 2024 to review performance of SIAP during the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan period, including the substantive relevance and financial viability of the Institute.
2. The evaluator will brief the preliminary findings and recommendations at the Governing Council of SIAP. The final report will be submitted to the 81st session of ESCAP in 2025.

Action requested from the Council

3. The Governing Council may wish to review the preliminary findings and recommendations, and provide comments.

Background

1. This document provides a summary of the 2024 Evaluation of United Nations Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP). It presents an overview of the evaluation context, scope, methodology and initial findings based on a document review, key informant interviews and group discussions with key stakeholders (including visits to ESCAP HQ in Bangkok and SIAP in Chiba).

2. The evaluation aims to provide the Commission with an impartial and reliable body of evidence regarding SIAP's performance. This will facilitate deliberations during the 81th session of the Commission in April 2025 on SIAP's continued relevance and financial viability. It seeks to provide ESCAP secretariat with forward-looking actionable recommendations to improve the results orientation and performance of SIAP. The specific evaluation objectives are:

- i. To assess the results achieved and performance of SIAP using the standard evaluation criteria of impact, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and gender/disability inclusion mainstreaming.
- ii. To determine ways to enhance the results-orientation of SIAP and identify specific outputs and delivery modalities that are most relevant to the member States, based on needs expressed by relevant stakeholders.
- iii. To recommend actions for improving the results orientation and performance of the Institute.

Through consultation with key stakeholders, particular focus of the evaluation is on the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of SIAP. These relate specifically to issues around how SIAP plans and prioritizes work in the overall context of statistical capacity development needs in the region, ESCAP's mandate and programme of work and the operational realities faced by SIAP and ESCAP more broadly. The criteria of Impact and Sustainability are also examined with limited focus given the scope of the evaluation. Gender equality and disability inclusion are assessed as cross-cutting issues. The evaluation covers the management and implementation of the work programme of SIAP from 2020 to 2024, aligned with the SIAP Strategic Plan for that period.

3. This evaluation comes at a time when data demand across the region continues to increase, including for the monitoring of the 2030 Agenda but also give the rapid pace of change in the use of non-traditional data sources. Demand for statistical capacity development is increasing in complexity and scale. SIAP undertakes an annual needs assessment with National Statistical Offices (NSOs) to determine training priorities. SIAP also responds to some country requests for training. A further source of demand for courses comes from implementing partners. These are included in SIAP's annual workplan which is presented to the SIAP Governing Council for approval. SIAP has continued to play a role in designing and delivering short term training in priority areas of work identified by the ESCAP Committee on Statistics. These priorities include the regional, sub-regional and national-level implementation of global strategies and programmes.

4. SIAP has delivered three main types of training programmes, with different and complementary functions. These are: Long-term training programmes organized in collaboration with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and are of duration of up to three months; Short-term training programmes of up to one week have specific subject focus, such as SDG indicator(s) and the use of big data for official statistics; and e-learning programmes relating to statistical business processes or SDG Indicators. Facilitated e-learning courses include discussion forums where course participants can interact amongst themselves and ask questions to the course facilitator. Training programmes focus on four main thematic areas: Environment and Climate Change; Social Sector; Economic Statistics; and Big Data, Machine Learning, Artificial Intelligence.

Initial findings

5. SIAP remains a very relevant and effective statistical training institute that is valued by members and partner organisations. The training provided by SIAP is highly valued by ESCAP member States.

SIAP is viewed as a trusted and credible partner. There is high demand for SIAP training from member States and also a high demand to work with SIAP as a training partner from a diverse range of implementing partners including UN entities (such as the ILO, UN Women, WHO, UNSD, UNODC), global and sub-regional organizations (SPC, PARIS21) and IFIs (IMF, World Bank, ADB).

6. The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on the work of SIAP over the period 2020-2022. Travel restrictions continued in 2021, with all training programmes delivered through e-learning. In-person training for the Pacific (both subregional and country level) with partners recommenced in September 2022. While the considerable challenges that SIAP faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic are acknowledged, both the number of courses (across different modalities) and participants have steadily increased over the period 2020-2024. SIAP had already begun adopting e-learning as a modality in 2017, which put the institute in a strong position to deliver virtual courses over the period of the pandemic.

7. While recognizing that establishing the impact of SIAP's interventions on national statistical offices and other stakeholders is difficult, there are many success stories in the work of SIAP that demonstrates the results of SIAP capacity development and some of the key factors that contributed to this success. These include SIAP collaboration with UN Women on gender statistics through a comprehensive approach that includes (in-person) short courses, support for training of trainers and e-learning opportunities. This has been guided by a Subgroup on Gender Statistics Training. A further example is the development of disaster statistics through collaboration between SIAP, the Disaster Risk Reduction Section of ESCAP and UNDP which was been guided by the Disaster-related Statistics Framework (DRSF) in the overall context of the Sendai Framework and the SDGs. Another success story is the work undertaken by SIAP in the Pacific, which as a sub-region faces specific and unique challenges. Key to the success of SIAP's work in the Pacific has been collaboration with the Statistics for Development Division of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the ESCAP sub-regional office for the Pacific which has greatly strengthened the relevance and effectiveness of SIAP's activities in the sub-region.

8. Key success factors (that will be further elaborated in the evaluation report as case studies) include the effective leveraging of the strengths and mandates of the different partners in the planning and delivery of training activities that have strong demand from countries. These areas of work have been built on clear linkages and sequencing between normative frameworks (international and regional statistical standards), capacity assessment and the delivery of training through different modalities. Working through agreed frameworks greatly assists in establishing priorities, capacity gaps and in facilitating coordination and collaboration. Co-financing that leverages SIAP's financial resources with support from implementing partners as well as (financial and in-kind) contributions from recipient countries is another key success factor.

9. One of the main strengths of SIAP is its high relevance. This is supported by SIAP's clear mandate and function in responding to training needs of national statistical systems of ESCAP member States in the overall context of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. The areas of focus and competencies of SIAP are sufficiently broad to capture the different training needs of ESCAP members. However, it also needs to be recognised that SIAP has limited resources and cannot respond to all needs across the Asia-Pacific region. This high demand across a broad and diverse region makes strategic planning and priority setting very important. Both the strategic planning and (related) needs assessment process of SIAP can be further strengthened in this connection, leveraging the strong governance structure for the institute including the Governing Council and Committee on Statistics (held back-to-back every second year along with a management seminar). The high-level results hierarchy (including Mission, Focus, Goals and Outcomes) and the Logical Framework Matrix used by SIAP in the 2020-24 Strategic Plan can be streamlined and made more coherent which can improve the value as a planning tool but also help build ownership and an understanding of SIAP's core priorities that can be effectively communicated to stakeholders. A draft

Strategic Plan for the period 2025-2029 has been developed for the consideration of the Governing Council at its meeting in December 2024.

10. SIAP is very effective in the delivery of its mandate and institutional mission. A key dimension of this effectiveness is that SIAP professional staff bring both technical expertise and teaching (pedagogical) experience. SIAP acts as a knowledge broker and is able to draw on partnerships to complement the areas of core competency of staff. SIAP is credited by partners and member States for being responsive and flexible. This requires SIAP to manage what can be a difficult balancing act. SIAP must remain sufficiently agile to respond to emerging needs and requests while also addressing persistent capacity constraints. There are also vast differences between the scale and complexity of needs between and within the different ESCAP sub-regions. In this context, SIAP has prioritised the needs of the Pacific and Central Asia sub-regions over the period of the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan. SIAP is also considered a neutral actor in statistical training, in that it does not advocate for any specific issue within the SDGs (in the way that a specialized UN agency may, for example) and is able to set the substantive focus of all courses (including the long-term JICA courses).

11. In order to expand its reach, SIAP has continued to develop its training modalities and focus to include management and strategic issues, training of trainers and partnering with national statistical training institutes. These reflect the broad strategic directions of the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan for better targeting and greater multiplier effects. The shift to e-learning is a valuable modality, enabling SIAP to reach a wider audience. These are important directions for SIAP but remain work in progress (due in part to the disruption caused by the pandemic). The continued enhancement of e-learning will remain important, based on evidence on where e-learning functions best as a modality. This includes consideration of how it can complement other modalities such as in-person training and coaching/mentoring. Blended and hybrid courses will continue to emerge as important approaches, including the continued adoption of e-learning courses as pre-requisites for in-person training. The use of Open-source software is a key component of the success of e-learning as well as its uptake at the national level.

12. The efficiency of SIAP's operations is also a recognized strength of the Institute. SIAP runs courses in an efficient and cost-effective manner. Again, this involves balancing the strengths of different training modalities (long course, short courses and e-learning) as well as the country, sub-regional and regional focus of these courses. While ESCAP is a regional commission, there is a clear place for country training courses that support the implementation of international statistical standards in the appropriate context. However, SIAP must again balance this country and sub-regional focus with the diverse needs across the region. In this context, coordination and collaboration become imperative. As noted above, SIAP works with a broad range of partners to leverage its position as a statistical training institute.

13. SIAP participates in the Global Network of Institutions for Statistical Training (GIST), an important network of international and regional training institutions, that seeks to build sustainable statistical capacities through efficient, effective, and harmonized delivery of training. There are no equivalent platforms at the regional level. An Asia-Pacific Network of Statistical Training Institutes was discontinued (through a Subgroup on Gender Statistics Training remains active). A Data and Statistics Working Group (WG) functions as one of the means of implementation groups under the Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP) to enhance synergy and complementarity among programmes and activities of UN agencies in the region around SDG monitoring and statistical development. However, the WG does not seem to be fulfilling its function of enhancing synergies in statistical development in the region. While there is (very) limited appetite for additional coordination processes in the region, these existing processes at the global (GIST) and regional level (WG under the RCP) can continue to be strengthened to enhance coordination which is critically important when viewed from the perspective of NSOs and other stakeholders at the country level.

14. Related to this, at an operational level SIAP staff and Statistics Division staff continue to coordinate and cooperate in support of the objectives of ESCAP Sub-programme 7 (Statistics). There is a need for this cooperation to be enhanced and institutionalized through pragmatic steps that enhance collaboration without adding additional processes, noting that ESCAP staff in both the Statistics Division and SIAP have limited bandwidth given existing priorities and demands. The respective strengths of both ESCAP entities can be effectively leveraged to bring about greater capacity development impact for ESCAP members, recognising that training is an important aspect of a broader capacity development approach. As noted above, SIAP has also collaborated with other ESCAP divisions including the Social Development Division on gender and disability statistics and the ICT and Disaster Risk Reduction Division on disability statistics. These are good practices that can be built on.

15. SIAP's overall resource and funding position remains an important strength. Despite financial pressures including the post-pandemic context, support from the Government of Japan has been unwavering. Other ESCAP members have also provided valuable financial and in-kind support for SIAP operations. The post-COVID context makes it important for SIAP to continue to be cost-effective. Continued emphasis must be placed on increasing core contributions from ESCAP members and for co-financing contributions from countries receiving support from SIAP.

16. Gender issues and disability inclusion are important dimensions of SIAP's work programme through the prioritization of different dimensions of gender statistics and the emergence of disability statistics (an area of increasing demand). Further, SIAP consistently trains more women than men (see gender ratios in Table 1 below) across all focus areas of training. While it is acknowledged that this is just one dimension of gender equality, it is an important one.

General recommendations

17. These are initial recommendations noting that data gathering is ongoing at the time of writing. Specific and actionable recommendations will be made in the evaluation report. It should also be noted that these recommendations are focused on fine-tuning the work of SIAP rather than addressing any substantial problems identified through the evaluation (as none have been found).

- A. **Strategic planning and priority setting are critically important to SIAP and should continue to be strengthened and streamlined.** The approach to Strategic Planning can be strengthened and should be informed by continued monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL). SIAP's evaluation cycle should be aligned with the Strategic Planning process. An internal mid-term review of the Strategic Plan could be considered to help ensure the ongoing relevance and effectiveness of SIAP's work. The results framework and logframe can also be streamlined and harmonized to improve the value of these in planning, rather than compliance. SIAP is also encouraged to review its approach to needs assessment, which appears to have remained unchanged (using an annual survey) for many years. All other ESCAP regional institutes develop an institutional project document to support the implementation of their Strategic Plan that includes clear outputs and indicators of achievement. Adopting this approach would greatly assist in ensuring that the Strategic Plan and institutional logframe are effectively utilized in programme planning, implementation and MEL.
- B. **SIAP and the Statistics Divisions should continue to find practical ways to expand and institutionalize collaboration.** Working with the Statistics Division to help set priorities, establish capacity gaps and pool expertise and resources would better leverage the strengths of both would bring about sustainable capacity development for member States national statistical systems and the uptake of evidence-based policy. Similarly, successful collaboration between other ESCAP substantive divisions and regional institutes (such as APDIM on disaster statistics and APCICT on 'big data') could be prioritized and expanded.
- C. **Use existing platforms to help set regional, sub-regional and country level training priorities.** SIAP has been highly successful in working with implementing partners with complementary

mandates and functions. Working with partners remains an essential dimension of SIAP's work programme. Coordination and cooperation could be enhanced and institutionalized using existing platforms at the regional and sub-regional levels. This could build on the success of working with and through sub-regional organizations such as SPC to expand collaboration with ASEAN, for example.

- D. Build on good practices and successes to foster comprehensive capacity development.** SIAP contributes to sustained capacity development when the training is planned and delivered based on the implementation of normative standards (international statistical standards) that respond to clear national and sub-regional demands with training modalities designed to meet these needs. Core competencies of SIAP professional staff in both technical and pedagogical approaches are a key defining success factor in SIAP's work.

Table 1 – Participants by training focus and participant numbers (with gender ratio)

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024*
Total	15	31	18	38	21
Principles and practices of official statistics	1	3	-	1	-
Strategic and management issues	2	1	4	7	3
Population and social statistics	3	4	4	6	2
Economic statistics	3	6	1	6	4
Environment and disaster statistics	2	6	5	8	5
Methodology and statistical process	1	4	2	6	4
Country-specific courses	3	7	2	4	3

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024*
Total	2,709	3,102	3,431	3,197	2,192
Principles and practices of official statistics	719	155	-	10	-
Strategic and management issues	113	81	124	236	91
Population and social statistics	670	134	775	268	272
Economic statistics	136	379	48	351	378
Environment and disaster statistics	617	1,387	1,768	1,188	209
Methodology and statistical process	385	635	643	849	1,059
Country-specific courses	69	331	73	295	83
Gender Ratio	1.76	1.40	1.53	1.37	1.31

*As of September 30, 2024