IPA 2022

Multi-beneficiary Statistical Cooperation Programme

This Service Contract is funded by the European Union, managed by Eurostat and implemented by ICON consortium.

llll Foreword

Dear Readers,

As the festive season approaches, we are delighted to present to you the first edition of the ICON IPA 2022 service contract 6-monthly newsletter, covering the period from May to October 2024—the first six months of the implementation phase.

This newsletter serves as an essential communication channel to keep you informed about the progress of the contract, with a primary focus on Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo*, while also highlighting important developments in the field of statistics across the other partner countries—Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, Türkiye, and North Macedonia. As we continue the work together, we hope to provide valuable insights into the activities, milestones, and achievements that shape the path towards improvements in providing the users with high-quality statistics, in line with EU standards and the preparation for EU membership.

Over the past six months, partner countries have made good progress in advancing the statistical capacities of their National Statistical Institutes. Their key activities included the delivery of several training workshops aimed at enhancing statistical methodologies, the production of reports on economic and social data, and ongoing efforts to improve overall data quality within the region as part of achieving the projects' objectives.

We are excited to share this journey with you and look forward to providing further updates on our collective progress in future editions of the newsletter. Together, we continue to build a stronger statistical foundation for EU membership readiness.

Wishing you a joyous holiday season and a prosperous New Year!

Warmest regards,
The ICON Team

OVERALL PROJECT DURATION
01/2024 - 12/2027

PARTNER COUNTRIES
7

NUMBER OF INVOLVED EXPERTS
30

FORESEEN SP CONTRACTS
69

STATISTICAL PROJECTS
25

PLANNED EXPERT MISSIONS
172

PLANNED WORKSHOPS
29

FORESEEN NUMBER OF TRAINEES
89

PLANNED STUDY VISITS
35

PLANNED TRAINING COURSES
8 FOR 64 PARTICIPANTS

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*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

Funded by the European Union

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About IPA 2022 service contract

The IPA 2022 Service Contract is part of the European Union's Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) strategy, designed to support candidate countries and potential candidates in aligning their statistical production with EU standards. Specifically, this contract targets the statistical systems of seven Western Balkan countries—Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Türkiye—providing technical assistance to enhance their capacity to produce and disseminate high-quality data in accordance with the EU acquis. Official statistics play a dual role in the EU enlargement process: they are not only a key component of Chapter 18 of the EU acquis but also serve other policy areas by providing essential data to monitor progress and assess the impact of reforms.

The overarching goal of the IPA 2022 Service Contract is to strengthen statistical infrastructure in the partner countries, preparing them for integration into the European Statistical System (ESS). By implementing various projects, the service contract facilitates the adoption of legal frameworks, methodologies, and data requirements essential for EU membership. It also emphasizes adherence to the European Statistics Code of Practice, ensuring trust in the quality and integrity of statistical products.

The contract operates through two main mechanisms: full support and partial support. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo receive comprehensive assistance covering all activities, while Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Türkiye work fully within the scope of the grants but participate selectively in activities under the contract, such as training, workshops, and study visits. This approach ensures resources are tailored to each country's specific needs and level of preparedness.

To achieve these objectives, partner countries collaborate with Eurostat, which supports the countries in implementing statistical projects, monitors progress, and provides detailed guidance. Capacity-building efforts include technical assistance, peer reviews, and regional cooperation activities aimed at fostering a sustainable statistical ecosystem. This collaborative framework ensures that partner countries can meet the dynamic requirements of the EU acquis, paving the way for successful EU integration.

Sectoral Overview: Statistics by Theme

Statistical projects are structured activities designed to improve the production, quality, and dissemination of statistical data. Within the IPA 2022 contract, these projects address a wide range of statistical domains, including macroeconomic, environmental, and social statistics. Between May and October 2024, the Macroeconomic, Environmental, and Social Statistics sectors experienced a vibrant period of innovation and collaboration, strengthening statistical capacities across partner countries. Each sector tackled distinct challenges, showcasing the transformative potential of tailored training and cooperative efforts.

Macro-economic Statistics: Bridging Gaps Across Borders
The Macroeconomic sector emerged as a hub of activity, with initiatives aimed at refining methodologies and fostering localized insights. Several important activities occurred during this period and it started with the first expert mission to Serbia under SP 1.5 Regional Accounts, which sparked new approaches to understanding regional economic disparities. Workshops on SP 1.6 Sector Accounts connected experts, inspiring transformative insights into national frameworks. Missions to Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina further enhanced methodologies for key indicators like Purchasing Power Parities (PPP) and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). By October, the sector had achieved significant progress, including harmonized data efforts under SP 1.7 SUIOT, which emphasized cross-regional collaboration and innovative data-sharing techniques.

Environmental Statistics: Turning Data into Action
September 2024 marked a turning point for environmental statistics, with expert missions targeting key areas such as waste and water statistics. These efforts were not just about data collection; they ignited actionable changes in municipal policies and underscored the importance of aligning with EU environmental standards. Experts shared compelling stories of how enhanced data on waste and resources is driving sustainable planning. October saw further advancements, including missions under SP on Environmental Accounts, solidifying the sector's role in shaping informed environmental policies.

Social Statistics: Illuminating Lives Through Data
Social statistics initiatives brought a human-cantered approach to data, focusing on vulnerable populations and their needs. Missions under SP 4.3 ESPROSS in Kosovo revealed crucial insights into social protection expenditures, while labor cost studies illuminated economic integration challenges. Discussions on sustainable development culminated in a report highlighting progress and identifying areas for further focus, such as gender equality. Throughout the period, hands-on training and innovative tools empowered statisticians to deliver more nuanced and timely data, ensuring that the voices of often-overlooked groups were heard.

Across all sectors, the shared commitment to excellence and collaboration fostered a sense of unity and purpose. These activities not only advanced statistical systems but also laid the groundwork for sustainable, data-driven decision-making in the region.

📊 Novelties within IPA 2022 service contract

The IPA 2022 Service contract (re)introduces several new statistical projects to strengthen partner countries' statistical systems. Each project addresses specific areas crucial for aligning with EU standards while supporting development priorities. In this issue, we highlight the practical importance of a few projects.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Statistics: Attracting Growth and Opportunity

FDI statistics provide a clear picture of where capital is flowing across borders, which industries are attracting investments, and how economies are positioning themselves globally. For Bosnia and Kosovo, these statistics are not just numbers—they are a roadmap to creating attractive investment climates. With better data, policymakers can craft targeted incentives, identify growth sectors, and build confidence among international investors, driving sustainable economic progress and EU integration.

Transport Statistics: Building the Roads to Progress

Why do transport statistics matter? Imagine planning a city's public transport system without knowing how many people commute, how goods are moved, or which routes are most congested. This project equips countries with the data needed to modernize infrastructure, reduce travel times, and improve sustainability. For Bosnia and Kosovo, these statistics are the backbone of creating efficient, environmentally friendly transport systems that connect them more effectively with the EU and the region.

Energy Statistics: Powering a Sustainable Future

Energy data isn't just about numbers—it's about making informed decisions that impact daily life. From monitoring electricity consumption to understanding the transition to renewable energy, energy statistics help shape policies that ensure secure, affordable, and sustainable power. This project supports partner countries in managing their energy resources wisely, contributing to the EU Green Deal's goals while addressing local challenges in efficiency and sustainability.

Structural Business Statistics: Uncovering Economic Potential

What drives a country's economy? Often, it's the story of its businesses—how they are born, grow, and adapt. This project dives into the dynamics of enterprise births, deaths, and survival rates, offering insights that go beyond the numbers. For economies reliant on SMEs, these statistics reveal trends that help foster innovation, support entrepreneurship, and build resilient business ecosystems.

📊 High-level meeting - PGSC Meeting: Advancing Statistical Cooperation in the Enlargement Region

The PGSC meeting, held on 3-4 October 2024 in Struga, North Macedonia, brought together key representatives from the Western Balkans, Türkiye, Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine and Eurostat to discuss progress, challenges, and priorities in statistical development as part of the EU enlargement process. The meeting provided a platform to exchange updates on the EU's evolving enlargement policy, recent developments in the European Statistical System (ESS), and their implications for candidate countries.

A central focus was the revised European Statistics Regulation (EC 223/2009), which introduces key changes in areas such as professional independence, access to administrative data, and innovation in statistics. Participants were encouraged to reflect on these updates for future national legislative reforms.

Innovative practices from EU Member States, including the use of modern IT tools, new data sources, and advanced census methods, were shared to inspire countries to enhance their statistical systems. Cooperation with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine was also highlighted, outlining steps to strengthen their statistical frameworks in alignment with EU standards.

The meeting emphasized the importance of effective coordination within National Statistical Systems (NSS), particularly in managing roles between data producers and providers. Discussions also focused on preparing for the upcoming peer reviews, which will serve as a tool to assess and strengthen statistical systems in the enlargement region. Eurostat confirmed its commitment to support countries in addressing new data needs, emerging from the EU's pre-enlargement reforms and policy priorities.

In conclusion, participants reaffirmed the importance of collaboration, innovation, and knowledge sharing to ensure alignment with EU standards. The PGSC meeting not only underscored progress but also set the direction for future efforts, with a shared commitment to strengthening statistics as a cornerstone of the EU enlargement process. The next PGSC meeting will take place in Türkiye in 2025.

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PGSC meeting, Struga, North Macedonia

📊 Spotlight Interview

Driving Sustainable Development through Statistics: Insights from Pietro Gennari
In this edition of the IPA 2022 6-monthly newsletter, we are honoured to feature Mr. Pietro Gennari, an expert in the field of statistics and sustainable development. With extensive experience in statistical development projects across diverse regions, Mr. Gennari shares valuable insights into the ongoing Sustainable Development project aimed at empowering national statistical systems. This initiative, aligned with EU accession priorities, emphasizes the importance of robust statistical indicators for monitoring and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
Below, we delve into the project's goals, challenges, and strategies with Mr. Gennari, exploring the ways it strengthens statistical capacity in partner countries and enhances their readiness for EU membership.

Pietro Gennari

ICON: Can you tell us about the main goals of the Sustainable Development project you're leading? Why are these goals particularly significant for partner countries?
Mr Gennari: The project seeks to strengthen the capacities of national statistical systems in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo to effectively measure and monitor progress toward the SDGs. In practice, its main objectives are three: 1) the development of a dashboard of at least 50 national SDG indicators, aligned with the EU SDG indicator set; 2) the enhancement of existing online data platforms for the dissemination of the national and EU SDG indicators; 3) the promotion of the above SDG indicators though various communication tools. These objectives are crucial as the production, dissemination and use of statistics on Sustainable Development are instrumental in the process of EU accession for partner countries, enabling to monitor economic, social, environmental and institutional progress in an integrated and comprehensive way.

ICON: How does the alignment of national SDG indicators with the EU SDG indicator set benefit each country in terms of statistical development and international comparability?
Mr Gennari: Discrepancies between national and EU SDG data can create credibility problems of the statistics published at national level and tension at international level due to the lack of data comparability across

countries. On the contrary, there are many benefits to be gained in aligning the national and the EU SDG monitoring frameworks. Using the same indicators: a) leads to consistent progress assessments, enabling to benchmark the performance of one country with another; b) allows to adopt more effective evidence-based policies and attract development funds; c) reduces the data requirements and reporting burden on countries, and d) opens the possibility of benefitting from EU technical assistance programs in statistics.

ICON: Could you describe the process of selecting the 50 national SDG indicators for this project? What criteria are considered most important?
Mr Gennari: The main criteria being followed for selecting the 50 national SDG indicators are the following: first, the relevance of the indicators in monitoring national and EU wide development policies; second, their even distribution among the 17 goals, in order not to emphasize certain goals at the expenses of others; third, the feasibility of the indicators, given the level of development of the national statistical system and the existing national statistical programme.

ICON: As part of the project, partner countries should develop/enhance an online data platform for the dissemination of national and EU SDG indicators. In your view,

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what features this data platform should have?

Mr Gennari: The data platform should be based on an open-source software, benefiting of all the advantages of this solution in terms of transparency of its code, freedom to use it and change it, flexibility and adaptability to the NSO requirements, cost-efficiency, scalability. After evaluating different options, the recommendation is to adopt the OpenSDG platform which is built exclusively with open-source libraries and tools and can be hosted and maintained using free services. OpenSDG is the result of a collaboration between the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS), the US government, and the nonprofit Center for Open Data Enterprise (CODE). OpenSDG has already been adopted by other 5 EU accession countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina; Kosovo; Moldova; Montenegro and Türkiye) with the support of UNECE and about 23 countries worldwide. Given its wide implementation, another important benefit of adopting the OpenSDG platform is to be part a community where software developments are shared at no cost and technical support is provided. The EU could join forces with the UN Country Teams of BiH and Kosovo helping the NSO of these countries to further develop the OpenSDG platform with a section dedicated to the dissemination of the EU SDG indicators.

ICON: When developing communication tools like press releases and visualization tools, what strategies do you employ to engage the public? How do you ensure that the messages are accessible and resonate with people from all demographics.

Mr Gennari: Users of official statistics have different data needs and requirements, in terms of type of data, specificity, disaggregation, frequency and dissemination modalities. Users' needs also change over time and so do the users of statistical information. An essential component in the process of developing a comprehensive communication strategy for the SDGs, is to develop multiple types of communication products tailored to meet the specific needs of different users' groups. Each communication product should be designed with the specific user group in mind to ensure the information is accessible, relevant, and impactful. The most important users' categories include policymakers, journalists, academics/students, NGOs, the private sectors and the public at large. By translating these users' typologies in distinct profiles based on users' statistical literacy and type of data use, we can come up with a more articulate classification of users' type and associated dissemination products to effectively inform the diverse range of users and maximize the relevance of the statistics published.
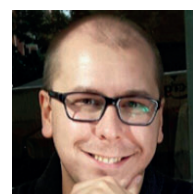
ICON: In your view, how does your work on this project contribute to the country's readiness for EU membership, particularly in the field of official statistics and sustainable development?

Mr Gennari: The world is not on track to achieving the SDG targets. And one of the key reasons is that there are still many data gaps for most SDG indicators. Poor SDG data inevitably lead to poor implementation of the commitments inscribed in the 2030 Agenda. I see this project as way to build awareness in target countries on the importance of SDG monitoring and reporting. At the same time, this project can play an important role in providing an overall result framework for all the different projects of statistics capacity development funded by the EU, by linking their results to the overarching objective of improving SDG monitoring.

📊 About ICON and its IPA 2022 Team

ICON-INSTITUTE is a globally recognized consultancy delivering expert services across various sectors, with a strong focus on delivering sustainable results through innovative and cost-effective solutions. Based in Cologne, Germany, ICON boasts nearly 55 dedicated staff members at its headquarters and a network of over 600 national and international consultants. ICON supports clients throughout the full project cycle—from initial planning and concept design to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation—leveraging interdisciplinary and integrated approaches to meet complex challenges.
The IPA 2022 Multi-Beneficiary Program (MBP) is one of ICON's flagship projects, funded by the European Union, and implemented in partnership with Eurostat, experts and stakeholders across Europe. The ICON IPA 2022 Team consists of a highly skilled and diverse group of professionals, including Mirza Demirovic, Contract Manager, Christophe Dietrich, Deputy Contract Manager, Adrienne Meunier, Project Manager, Daria Lambrecht, Project Assistant, Dovile Minkeviciute, Project Manager from partner company DevStat, and our local coordinators for Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, Selma Bavcic and Agron Hoti. Together with staff from partner companies, the team is committed to achieving the program's goals of improving statistical capacities and data quality in preparation for future EU membership.
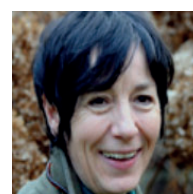This collaborative effort reflects ICON's dedication to fostering excellence and delivering impactful outcomes tailored to the needs of partner countries.

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**Funded by
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