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**Implementing the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics****Implementing the Fundamental Principles of Official  
Statistics in light of the Global Assessments of national  
statistical systems****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

The paper assesses the implementation of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics with a focus on the national statistical systems of East European, Caucasus and Central Asian countries. The paper explores implementation of the Fundamental Principles from the perspective of the statistical production process. It describes the remaining challenges in implementing the Principles underpinning the following three major production stages: data sources and data collection; data processing, including allocation of resources; and dissemination and communication with users. The paper is based on the experience with the Global Assessments of national statistical systems, and the survey on implementation of Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics in countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, carried out by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe in 2009.

## 1. Introduction and background information

1. Coherent, reliable and internationally comparable statistics are crucial for the monitoring of social and economic progress of countries. Official statistics are essential tools for evidence-based policy making, ensuring transparency and accountability in the process of economic and social reforms and enabling decision makers to formulate policies and to monitor and evaluate their deliveries. Ethical rules are needed for enforcing practices that build confidence and enable availability of objective and independently produced official statistics.

2. One of the first attempts to formalise ethical rules for statisticians was certainly the Ethical Guidelines for Statistical Practice from the American Statistical Association (ASA) adopted in 1979 and revised for the last time in 1999. These were followed by the International Statistical Institute's (ISI) Declaration on Professional Ethics adopted in 1985. These two codes played a major role in the development of international principles for official statistics, but their main purpose is to cover the statistical community at large, including businesses, researchers, academia and students, and not to focus on legal and institutional aspects of official statistics.

3. The need for guidance on how to build up a statistical system and what should be its basic principles became very evident for the transition countries at the beginning of the nineties, when countries of Central and Eastern Europe began to change from centrally planned to market oriented economies. This change brought along the need for a complete transformation of the national statistical systems. It included redefining the role of official statistics, as well as making it clear to governments and other users of statistics that a good system of official statistics must meet certain general criteria. In order to get this message across, and to assist heads of national statistical offices (NSOs), a working group under the auspices of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) was created, with Poland as the lead country, with the mandate to develop a set of principles guiding the transformation of national statistical systems in Central and Eastern Europe. As a result, the "Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics in the Region of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)" were adopted by the CES in 1991 and endorsed the following year by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

4. The Principles had an immediate global outreach and were adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 1994 with some minor amendments, for example the deletion of specific references to the European context. Furthermore, several international and supranational organisations contributed to the endorsement of the Principles. The General and Special Data Dissemination Standards (GDDS and SDDS) of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Statistics Code of Practice rely on the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

5. This paper will address the implementation of the Principles with a major focus on national statistical systems of East European, Caucasus and Central Asian (EECCA) countries from the perspective of the statistical production process. It will describe the remaining challenges in implementing the Principles underpinning the following three major production stages:

- (a) Data sources and data collection;
- (b) Data processing, including allocation of resources;
- (c) Dissemination and communication with users.

6. Analysis, comments and recommendations rely on the outcome of Global Assessments of national statistical systems in EECCA countries that were conducted recently by the UNECE, jointly with Eurostat and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). Nevertheless, some of the issues addressed in this document also relate to other UNECE countries and in general to the increasing stress on national statistical systems for timely and high quality information while strong budget constraints increase the pressure for a profound rethinking of the way official statistics are produced. This should be done without jeopardizing the adherence to the Principles. Improving efficiency and effectiveness of national statistical systems in full adherence with the Principles is at the core of national and international initiatives for renewing the systems of official statistics and will guide our analysis and recommendations throughout this paper.

7. The paper makes use of the results of a survey on implementation of Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics that the UNECE carried out in the South-East European (SEE) and EECCA countries in 2009. The survey was based on the European Statistics Code of Practice self-assessment questionnaire which was considerably shortened and simplified. The questionnaire was sent to 18 EECCA and SEE countries. Twelve countries: Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Serbia, Tajikistan and Ukraine responded to the survey.

## II. Global Assessments of national statistical systems

8. The UNECE carries out Global Assessments as part of enhancing the capacity of national statistical systems of the EECCA countries to implement international standards and guidelines. Particular attention is paid to the adherence to the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics that provide the basis for a sound legal and institutional framework for national statistical systems.

8. In recent years, the UNECE secretariat, jointly with Eurostat and the EFTA, has conducted Global Assessments in several EECCA countries: in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine. In the course of 2012, the partner organizations are in the process of conducting Global Assessments in Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Tajikistan. The Global Assessments of national statistical systems provide an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the institutional, organizational and technical capacity of a country to produce official statistics and comply with international standards and recommendations, including the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. Global Assessments offer recommendations for sustainable development of national statistical systems that, ideally, are incorporated into statistical capacity building strategies developed jointly by the beneficiary countries and international organizations. Global Assessments do not focus exclusively on the national statistical office/statistics committee but encompass all major producers of statistics in a country. Thus, a Global Assessment is a unique opportunity for a country to obtain a comprehensive picture of the whole statistical system.

9. A national system of official statistics (NSS) can be defined as the ensemble of statistical organizations and units within a country that collect, process and disseminate official statistics on behalf of the national government. Ideally, activities performed by organizations or units producing official statistics should be governed by a national law on official statistics in compliance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the European Statistics Code of Practice.

10. The purpose of official statistics is to produce and disseminate authoritative results designed to reliably reflect economically and socially relevant phenomena of the complex

and dynamic reality in a country. These results have to be available to all users. All countries should have at least one major organization for which the production and dissemination of official statistics is the core of its work or is its exclusive task. This organization, often called the national statistical office (NSO) or national statistical service, is also in charge of the coordination of the overall national system of official statistics.

11. Recently, Global Assessments have paid more attention to the organisational and technical capacity of national statistical systems to produce and disseminate official statistics in an efficient and effective way, efficiency being considered in terms of trade-off between outputs and resources used.

12. Global Assessments have identified the following questions related to efficiency and effectiveness.

**A. How effectively does the system meet the priority information needs of users?**

13. The ultimate goal of a statistical system is to satisfy the needs of its “clients”. Identification and establishment of regular relations with different user groups is essential for ensuring that statistical products and services evolve in response to the changing needs of the society. In this context, setting priorities is important since all users’ needs cannot be satisfied. In addition, the statistical system needs the support and trust of the general public and it is, therefore, essential to have an effective public information approach. Transparency and accountability are prerequisites for a sustainable development of statistical capacity.

**B. How effective is the system in exploiting existing data sources or planning new data collections?**

14. Data collection is one of the most, if not the most, expensive stage of statistical production. Not only the costs of statistical production but also those of the respondents should be taken into account. The use of administrative data and sample surveys can be considered a way to reduce costs, especially in countries where data are collected through exhaustive reporting systems. Linking or matching different data sources can provide efficiency gains and improve the quality of statistical products, but increase the risk of breaking privacy and confidentiality principles in countries where the distinction, even in the statistical law, between administrative and statistical information is somehow blurred.

**C. How effective is the system in allocating and exploiting the existing financial, human and technical resources?**

15. Standardising business processes is a valuable opportunity to achieve productivity gains, improve transparency and monitor the quality of statistical products and services. Operational coordination of the national statistical system, improvement of the skills and competencies of staff as well as further development of information technology (IT) infrastructure can contribute to streamlining statistical production. At the same time, these measures may enhance the accuracy and timeliness of statistical information. However, this requires notable investments in countries already struggling with budgetary constraints.

16. It should be noted that the Fundamental Principles that should guide the development of national statistical systems are formulated in a flexible way in order to allow countries to decide the most suitable way to implement each principle. The Principles

should also be implemented through the whole system of official statistics, not only in selected areas. This means that the adherence to the Principles should not be limited to the activities of the NSO/statistics committee. The Fundamental Principles are not to be considered as a rating instrument, but rather as a tool for identifying areas for improvement.

### III. Data sources and collection methods

#### A. Fundamental Principles and good practices in relation to data sources and collection methods

17. The production of official statistics is a complex chain of operations which starts with exploring the primary data sources. Data for statistical purposes may be drawn from all types of sources, statistical surveys, administrative records or a combination of multiple sources. Data collection is the most expensive stage of statistical production, so the choice of data sources should carefully take into account the quality, timeliness and the burden on respondents.

18. The Fundamental Principles supporting and guiding national statistical systems in primary data collection include the following:

(a) **Data for official statistics** [FP 5] should be available for statistical authorities. They should have the right to acquire unit-level information from administration, enterprises and households for official statistical purposes. The statistical law should explicitly give this right to the members of the national statistical system to have access to unit-level data and no other law should restrict the access to administrative data and records;

(b) **Statistical confidentiality** [FP 6] aims at protecting the privacy of individual units: physical persons, households and legal units. The confidentiality principle is not only about disclosure but also ensures that data collected are used strictly for statistical purposes;

(c) Members of the national statistical systems may exchange confidential data for statistical purposes and it is therefore important that the statistical law [FP 7] and the statistical programme [FP 8] clearly define who is a part of the system.

19. The data collection right of NSOs should be reflected in the publicly available statistical legislation [FP 7]. Principle 9 of the European Statistics Code of Practice regarding the non-excessive burden on respondents should be taken into account in implementing the right of data collection. The statistical law must be explicit in giving the right at least to the NSO to collect data from respondents through statistical surveys, with the possibility to impose sanctions if respondents do not provide the required information. It is also essential that the statistical office has the legal right to receive, for statistical purposes, regularly and on an ad hoc basis, micro data sets from other ministries and public entities. Data received in this way should never be given back to the data owner or transferred by the statistical producer to a third party for administrative purposes. Statistical producers should be the only government units that have the legal right to match data from various sources for statistical purposes.

20. Statistical registers, especially the business register, agricultural register and register of dwellings, are cornerstones of the statistical system. In some countries, these include the statistical population register. The statistical registers are different from administrative registers because they can be updated from all sources, including statistical surveys. They have to be in the hands of the national statistical system and managed for the purpose of official statistics only.

21. Fostering confidentiality is extremely important for the quality of statistics. Individual data collected by statistical agencies for statistical production, whether they refer to natural or legal persons, are to be strictly confidential and used exclusively for statistical purposes [FP 6]. Producers of official statistics are entitled to use data about individual units but for statistical purposes only. Under no circumstances do the producers of official statistics disclose, either directly or indirectly, information about individual units to any third party. For statistical confidentiality, a “third party” is everybody outside the narrow limits of producers of official statistics, for example NSO and the listed statistical departments within ministries. Confidential data collected for statistics or those in the hands of producers of official statistics are never used for decisions by a government unit or a court. Exceptions to this principle are limited and should be mentioned in the statistical legislation. For example, such a borderline case is the use of addresses from statistical registers for statistical surveys outside official statistics (research purposes) or for commercial or marketing purposes by private actors.

22. Response burden has to be assessed and tested in advance for all new surveys and measured regularly thereafter. In principle, response burden should be spread over survey populations through appropriate sampling techniques, for individuals, households and enterprises. All respondents have to be informed about the purpose and legal basis of the survey, and particularly about the confidentiality measures. Recently, NSOs have started testing questionnaires more exhaustively to ensure that they are understandable, non-intrusive and easy to answer.

## **B. Main findings regarding data sources and collection methods**

23. Statistical offices are professionals in information collection and processing. In light of the Fundamental Principles of official statistics, there are still many challenges regarding data collection methods and data provider relations.

24. Global Assessments have identified the following main challenges in this respect:

(a) Defining the boundaries of the national systems of official statistics. This issue is linked to the statistical infrastructure, but also to the way data are collected and shared between organizations. Distinction between data collected for statistical and administrative purposes should be clarified. Activities that are not considered as official statistics according to the Fundamental Principles should be excluded from the system;

(b) All employees of producers of official statistics should sign an explicit confidentiality pledge which explicitly mentions that any wilful violation of the rule of confidentiality is punished. According to the UNECE survey in 2009, statistical confidentiality is guaranteed by law in all EECCA countries and in most cases the instructions and guidelines for protection of confidentiality exist. However, the practical side of giving access to microdata is not always firmly in place. In several countries, researchers are not allowed access to microdata at all. In some cases, the anonymized microdata are given to researchers without any special conditions, assuming that the anonymization is sufficient to guarantee confidentiality. In several countries, other government agencies (e.g. the courts) can request access to microdata for non-statistical purposes based on other legislation, and there are cases when individual data have been provided;

(c) Improving efficiency of data collection by organizing data collection to enhance re-use of data, by applying sampling and using administrative data sources more widely. One survey could serve many statistics. The process of work with territorial statistical bodies in data collection could be streamlined. Further consideration of response burden is needed, in particular in economic statistics. The growing impact of small

enterprises and individual entrepreneurs in the economy should be taken into account in sampling. According to the UNECE survey, many questionnaires are not tested before they are used in data collection and the procedures to manage over- or under-coverage are not always in place. Statistics from different surveys and sources are not regularly compared and reconciled. At the time of the survey, most of the responding countries did not have any enterprise surveys available by electronic means, and only a few countries had a limited number of surveys available electronically;

(d) Introduction of a unique identification number for all administrative registers, both for persons and enterprises, would help to match data sources for statistical purposes. Regular and systematic mirror exercises between alternative data sources should be carried out, which requires access to all relevant administrative records for the production of official statistics.

25. The statistical legislation should grant access for the NSOs to all administrative data and registers, whether they are considered as confidential or not. Data exchange from authorities in charge of different administrative registers to the NSOs would help improve consistency of data, for instance in migration, population and foreign trade statistics. The 2009 survey showed that, while in all countries the statistical agency is allowed to use administrative sources for statistical purposes, in most of the countries ministries sometimes refuse to provide data based on their own specific legislation.

26. The boundaries of the system of official statistics need to be re-thought and defined in most EECCA countries. It would enhance adherence to the confidentiality principle. In several countries, the statistical business register should be separated from the administrative registers. The latter can be used as a source for the statistical business register, but the administrative tasks related to registration of enterprises should be assigned to other than statistical agencies. Further development of statistical business registers would help to improve the quality and coherence of economic statistics and would streamline the production process.

27. All UNECE member countries are faced with the challenges of developing data collection. NSOs need to systematically explore new data sources, and learn how to utilise them. Finding new ways to produce statistics from data already available is challenging. Potential new data sources can be found either among the growing number of formalised administrative registers, or less formalised as electronic traces of existing processes or hidden in the vast amount of information kept on the Internet.

## **IV. Data processing and allocation of resources**

### **A. Fundamental Principles and good practices in relation to data processing and allocation of resources**

28. The development of new approaches to statistical production is driven by the need to respond to new information requirements including complex cross-cutting issues such as the impact of globalization on economic statistics, measuring sustainable development and climate change. Whilst the recent global economic crisis and its impact on public finance will most probably reduce the capacity of national statistical systems to adapt to emerging requirements, rapid technological developments have created new possibilities for collecting, processing, integrating and disseminating statistical information in a more efficient way.

29. The strategic and operational planning of the work, not only for the NSOs but for the entire national statistical system, is an important prerequisite for ensuring effectiveness.

Productivity gains can be generated by standardisation of business processes, along with the availability of adequate staff, financial and information technology (IT) resources, both in magnitude and quality. Effectiveness can also be generated through the use of appropriate methodological approaches and imputation tools.

30. The Fundamental Principles supporting and guiding national statistical systems in modernizing and streamlining statistical processes, improving the efficiency of statistical production and strengthening the coordination of national statistical systems have been identified as follows:

(a) **Professional independence** [FP 2] from other policy, regulatory or administrative departments and bodies, as well as from the private sector, should be ensured. Decisions on the choice of sources, methods, procedures to be used in the compilation of official statistics are strictly the competence of the national statistical systems and must be free from any potential interference from an authority outside the statistical system;

(b) **Coordination** [FP 8] should be provided among producers of official statistics to ensure the system-wide coherence and compliance with the statistical law and the Fundamental Principles. Major tools for the coordination of the activities, deliveries and strategic development of the national statistical system are the annual and multi-year statistical programmes. Through the statistical programme, the assignment of responsibilities and tasks should be made on the basis of criteria, such as synergies with other statistical activities and efficiency.

31. For different reasons, the Fundamental Principles do not state important operational principles with regard to efficiency and effectiveness of production processes. However, some of these principles such as adequacy of resources, sound methodology, appropriate statistical procedures, non-excessive burden on respondents and cost-effectiveness are clearly mentioned in the European Statistics Code of Practice.

32. Moreover, neither the Fundamental Principles nor the European Code of Practice mention an important type of competence of the Chief Statistician: the managerial autonomy.

33. In most EECCA countries, as in many other UNECE countries, statistical production processes have to strictly follow the administrative organisation of the state. Though the district and regional statistical bodies are often directly subordinated to the central office, the allocation of human and financial resources between regional and central statistical authorities is the competence of the Ministry of Finance or the Ministry of Interior. This is a very strong impediment against the reorganisation of data collection and processing in the country and may block important initiatives.

34. Another problem, at least in some countries, is the appointment of civil servants for specific positions in the NSO through national competition that does not allow for any lateral mobility of staff members. Optimum allocation of human resources is then, even within the central office, hardly possible, not to mention the low salaries compared to other ministries and agencies that make it very difficult to retain or promote competent junior staff in the NSOs.

35. These are only a few examples, but to some extent it is quite clear that the professional independence of the Chief Statistician can be hampered by the lack of managerial autonomy.



## B. Main findings regarding data processing and allocation of resources

36. In some EECCA countries, Global Assessments have identified the following challenges related to streamlining the statistical production processes, improving the efficiency of statistical production and strengthening the coordination of national statistical systems:

(a) The annual and multi-year statistical programmes, as major coordination tools of the statistical system, should cover all statistical activities carried out by the organisations and units which are part of the statistical system;

(b) Statistical Councils should be revitalised (or even established in some cases) and be consulted in the process of adoption of the statistical programmes, including for strategic development programmes developed by international donors;

(c) In many countries, it would be recommended to include in the statistical law the function of the Head of the NSO as a national Chief Statistician with a strong role of coordination and supervision;

(d) In a few countries, there is still a need to guarantee in the legislation the professional independence of the statistical offices; in other countries, laws or regulation on the organisation of the administration are potentially breaking the principle of professional independence. In the UNECE 2009 survey, several countries replied that the choice of statistical methods, standards and procedures is subject to ministerial approval;

(e) In some countries, as far as it is within the competence of the Chief Statistician, the territorial organisation of the statistical production could be simplified in the light of new data collection and processing methods and techniques. More integrated and centralised production processes with storage of micro data in the central office would avoid duplication of tasks and improve synergies within the NSO;

(f) Introducing a comprehensive quality policy for official statistics and establishing a process for quality monitoring and management, including standard documentation for all statistics. According to the 2009 survey, all responding countries monitor some aspects of quality (e.g. accuracy) but only three countries had a comprehensive quality management procedure in place. Ukraine had obtained and Kazakhstan was in the process of obtaining the ISO 9001-2001 certificate for quality management;

(g) Human resource management should be enforced: existing training programmes should be reinforced and complemented with non-technical courses such as project management, quality management and communication skills. Often the staff of the statistical office are well educated and a large majority (in some countries, all) are university graduates. However, the challenge is to maintain and improve their expert knowledge to follow the developments in statistics over the course of their working life. Gaps between salaries offered by the NSOs and the private sector should be reduced.

37. As a result of Global Assessments, a number of countries have reviewed or are reviewing their national statistical legislation and have adopted the coordination function. As the coordination role is new to many statistical offices, the cooperation mechanisms often require strengthening. Among the countries who responded to the survey in 2009, in all except one there are other producers of official statistics, ranging from 1-2 to over 10. In most countries these producers are subject to the Statistical Law. One of the tools of coordination is the promotion of the application of standard concepts, definitions and classifications. While in all responding countries a special entity is responsible for this, in several countries this entity is outside the national statistical office.

38. Currently, modernizing statistical production and the organisational structure of statistical offices is a fundamental challenge for EECCA countries. The territorial organisation could also be simplified in many countries when introducing new communication and data capture techniques. The integration of separate main computing centres to the NSOs should be one of the development goals. It is expected that the EECCA countries will benefit from the work of the CES High-level Group on business architecture in statistics who work to implement a vision for industrialising the future production and products of official statistics.

39. The scarce financial, human and technical resources remain an obstacle for development in many areas of the statistical systems. Professional staff members should improve their knowledge of English further in order to be able to participate actively in international meetings and benefit from the large volume of materials available on statistical methodologies. In recent years, the contributions of experts from EECCA countries have visibly increased in UNECE meetings.

40. The EECCA countries have progressed in applying international recommendations on statistical concepts, classifications and methods. The major challenge in economic statistics will be the switch to the 2008 System of National Accounts (SNA), while still working to implement a full system of accounts and introducing the new classification of economic activities (ISIC Rev. 4). The majority of these countries have successfully conducted the 2010 round of the population and housing censuses and implemented the CES recommendations on census taking. The countries will need further support for disseminating the results with modern technologies, such as dynamic web pages and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) tools. With regard to the Millennium Development Goals indicators, their availability and quality remains an issue, despite the notable progress achieved by the countries.

## **V. Communication and relations with users**

### **A. Fundamental Principles and good practices in relation to communication and relation with users**

41. As mentioned earlier, good relations with users are a necessary precondition for securing the relevance of statistical information, which is an important attribute of the quality of official statistics. Furthermore, a system of official statistics should be in a position to smoothly adjust its production and services in order to satisfy evolving user needs. Identification of major user groups, and direct interaction with them, can help to obtain information on their present needs and expectations.

42. This was somewhat of a challenge for national statistical systems of transition economies. The main duty of statisticians in the former centrally-planned economies was to check that the most important economic and social results were in accordance with the requirements of the Central Planning Authority. The distinction between administrative data and official statistics was not established. On the contrary, the main users of information, ministries and administration, requested individual information from the statistical authorities. To this end, statisticians were in charge of a huge national book-keeping activity based on a systematic and exhaustive reporting scheme from enterprises. The new market-oriented system gave decision-making powers to a far greater number of individuals within the economy and society. They needed access to sound and relevant statistical information. Thus, it was vital for statisticians to gain the confidence of the public.

43. In order to gain public trust in statistical products and the system, and to satisfy the needs of major groups of users also outside the government, the following criteria should be satisfied:

(a) **Relevance** [Fundamental Principle (FP) 1a]: statistics should be compiled only if they meet recognised needs for a large variety of users; user groups should be regularly consulted in order to identify and prioritise statistical products and services that need to be compiled and disseminated;

(b) **Impartiality** [FP 1b]: statistical products and services should be produced and disseminated in an objective and independent way, removed from any pressure of political or other interest groups, particularly regarding the choice of techniques, definitions, concepts and methodologies;

(c) **Dissemination and equal access to official statistics** [FP 1c]: statistical products and services have to be publicly accessible at the same time for all users, including the public at large, and presented in a way that facilitates proper interpretation and meaningful comparisons;

(d) **Transparency and accountability** [FP 3]: national authorities in charge of the collection and production of statistics should also make public all information on the sources, methods and procedures, as well as on the laws, regulations and measures under which the statistical system operates;

(e) **Prevention of misinterpretation of official statistics** [FP 4]: National authorities involved in the production and dissemination of official statistics should prevent (ex-ante) any misinterpretation of statistical information by improving the statistical literacy of the public at large. Clear explanatory notes (metadata) for non-experts should accompany any publication of figures. Regular contacts with main user groups could also avoid misinterpretation of data. Furthermore, producers of official statistics should have the right to react publicly to the misuse of statistics, but also to any attempt to jeopardise their integrity and the independence of the system.

44. To ensure relevance [FP 1], production of official statistics should start by investigating the needs of major user groups and to prioritise those needs in relation to the available human, financial and technical resources. Whereas NSOs and other producers of official statistics are independent in deciding “how to do” statistics, in most countries, decisions on the “which” statistics to produce are a result of a dialogue with users, especially government. The final decision often lies with an authority outside the statistical system. In order to carefully review which request statistical information should be given a priority, many countries have established a Statistical Council. The Statistical Council is an advisory body which includes representatives from the government but also from other user groups (e.g. media, business community, researchers, academia and civil society). The Council collects, analyses and prioritises user needs to be incorporated in the multi-year and annual statistical programmes.

45. Statistics should fulfil a great number of user needs, those of “all citizens”, and not be targeted exclusively to one user group. Official statistics should be publicly accessible to all users simultaneously and equally. These needs have to be translated into the best methods of collecting and compiling data from respondents and secondary data sources. Dissemination involves more than just the release of the results in the pre-defined forms (press releases, publications, Internet, etc.). It may include subsequent publications with more detail or analytical content or additional statistical services for specific user groups. NSOs should also guide users in the correct interpretation of statistics, and they have a right to react to the erroneous use of statistics [FP 4].

46. Since users cannot easily replicate the results of statistical production, they need to be able to trust the published results. Trust in statistics has its roots in the confidence that producers are professionals, and that the institutional framework in which they operate allows them to act professionally in all situations, even when the results of official statistics are bad news for some actors on the political scene. This refers to the principle of impartiality [FP 1], reflected in practice as professional independence. As a corollary to professional independence, all the methods used must be fully transparent to the users [FP 3] so that statistics can be correctly interpreted. As a last phase, the whole production process is evaluated in order to identify and address possible improvement needs in efficiency and relevance from the user perspective. Here again, the Statistical Council is the ideal body to advise on improvement of efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, trust and relevance of the statistical system and its outputs.

## **B. Main findings regarding communication and relations with users**

47. It seems that the general trust and public confidence in official statistics is improving in the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, and the user orientation of statistical production has gained more attention.

48. Global assessments have identified the following main challenges related to user relations:

(a) Existence of a high-level advisory body, composed of main users, to ensure that the system of official statistics remains relevant. Maintaining a broad network with academia, researchers, the business community, civil society and other stakeholders outside the government. The UNECE survey showed that many countries do not have a Statistical Council or user council in place. However, in all responding countries there is some kind of a formal process to consult users about their statistical needs. Most, but not all, of the countries carry out user surveys on a regular basis;

(b) Improving communication with the media, drafting effective press releases and organising press conferences when key indicators are published. According to the UNECE survey, only half of the countries organized training for staff on writing press releases and dealing with the media;

(c) Development of communication and information technologies is challenging. To meet the increasing information needs, on-line dissemination databases become inevitable as they allow users to select, extract and generate tailor-made tables and figures. All EECCA countries have at least some statistical data available on Internet. In most cases, the data are presented in Excel format and only one EECCA country provides access to the statistical database through Internet;

(d) Drafting of modern communication and marketing strategies, possibly also establishing a special department responsible for this area of work. This includes providing an up-to-date advance release calendar of all official statistics, allowing revisions to improve the accuracy of already published statistics and offering sufficient metadata to guide the users of statistics. All countries responding to the survey have an advance release calendar and all, except one country, make this calendar public. All countries release information to the users at the same time. However, there is not always a clear policy on how to document and release major revisions to users.

49. All UNECE member countries are balancing between the tightening budgets and increasing user demand. Users' requirements, including the general quality, relevance, timeliness, accuracy and reliability of statistics, should be the main objective of producers of official statistics. The statistics also need to capture topical conditions of societies, such as the increasing social and economic disparities between urban and rural areas.

50. Sometimes the statistical production process is considered to end in statistics dissemination. Therefore, prevention of misuse of statistics is one of the least implemented Fundamental Principles. This was one of the conclusions from the survey carried out by the United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD) in New York in 2004 and it was further confirmed by the UNECE survey in 2009. NSOs may not know how to follow up on the way in which the data are used, and in conditions of limited resources it may not be considered a priority. Prevention of misuse is linked with educating the users of statistics. Most EECCA countries have some activities to educate users through seminars, lectures, press-briefings, etc. In some cases, is considered sufficient to include methodological explanations in statistical publications and make available the legislative acts regulating the work of the statistical office.

51. To facilitate dissemination and communication of statistics, a number of workshops have been organized for EECCA countries on new dissemination technologies, such as the PC-Axis widely used by European statistical offices. Several countries have recently started using this software to improve dissemination of statistical data.

## VI. Main conclusions

52. The statistical systems of EECCA countries have developed considerably during the last 20 years due to the transition towards the market economy. This meant redefining the role of official statistics and setting clear criteria for the legal and institutional framework.

53. But the transition to a market economy was not the only stimulus for these transformations, and most of the UNECE countries had to face major changes in the economy and society:

(a) The globalisation of the markets driven by progress in transport and communication technology, the liberalisation of trade, investments and financial markets. These all resulted in strong interdependence of national economies and the necessity to improve international comparability of statistical information;

(b) In many parts of the world economic, monetary and political integration had a huge impact on the development of statistical systems. The European Union is one of the most often mentioned examples but, in the UNECE region, the Eurasian Economic Community (EurasEC) initiative might also have an important effect on the statistical systems of the EECCA countries;

(c) The rapid technological evolution, especially in the field of new information technologies and the increasing availability of data on the web;

(d) A stronger focus from international organisations, governments and civil society on issues concerning sustainable growth, human development, natural environment and renewable energies.

54. The consequences of these changes for the production and dissemination of statistical data were, and still are, very important and the United Nations Fundamental Principles are still relevant in guiding and supporting statistical systems in meeting the evolving user needs. The Principles were formulated in a flexible way, in order to leave countries to decide on the most suitable way to implement each principle in their national setting. However, this openness in the methods of implementation should not be interpreted as the decision to implement the Principles being left to the discretion of national authorities. Furthermore, the implementation of the Principles should cover the whole system of official statistics (all producers of official statistics in a country) and not only the NSO. Stakeholder awareness of the requirements of the Fundamental Principles should be enforced.

55. In order to assess the implementation of the Principles, UNECE, jointly with Eurostat and EFTA, conducts, at the request of national authorities, Global Assessments. Global Assessments, in the light of the Fundamental Principles, assess all elements of an accountable and efficient statistical system.

56. Furthermore, the UNECE carried out a survey on the implementation of the Fundamental Principles among the EECCA and SEE countries in 2009. Out of 18 EECCA and SEE countries, 12 countries responded. Analysing the results of the questionnaire showed how difficult it is to obtain a realistic picture about the implementation of the Fundamental Principles based on a survey. Although the questionnaire included 81 questions, these provide only superficial data and it is challenging to pinpoint the real problems based on this information. For example, the existence of a Statistical Council does not ensure that it carries out the expected functions in reality; the legal protection of confidentiality does not guarantee that all the organizational and technical procedures are in place and used in practice, etc. The results of the survey have been used in the paper to illustrate the wider relevance of the issues identified by the Global Assessments.

57. A set of questions based on “good practices” in implementing the Fundamental Principles and related benchmark criteria would be helpful for countries to be used as a self-assessment tool (similarly to the EU Code of Practice questionnaire). A self-assessment based on concrete questions could help to clarify what the Fundamental Principles mean in practical terms and to identify where the country practices deviate from the “good practice”. It could also be helpful in communicating with the other agencies/ministries belonging to the national statistical system to promote the Principles.

58. To conclude, the international and bilateral partners are also responsible for enhancing the adherence to the Principles through projects for development of statistical capacities in countries. Conducting Global Assessments from time to time is probably not sufficient to sustain national statistical systems’ full adherence to the Fundamental Principles. Partner organisations should also:

(a) Assess whether the production process from data collection to dissemination is in full compliance with the Principles. Since all activities related to the production of official statistics should be covered by the national statistical legislation, it would be recommended to include them in the annual statistical programme of work. It will allow national statistical authorities to refuse any external demand for disclosure of unit-level data;

(b) Strategic development programmes are important tools for the development of national statistical capacity. In order to enhance national ownership and promote the adherence to the Principles among national authorities, these programmes should be incorporated into the regular multi-year programme and be submitted for approval according to the procedure foreseen in the law. It would also reinforce the coordination role of the NSO;

(c) To think and act in a holistic way. Many technical cooperation activities are focused on very specific statistical domains and it would be worth assessing to what extent some elements of the project, such as new data capture techniques, innovations in IT infrastructure and dissemination tools could benefit the entire system. Partner organisations would then also contribute to a more comprehensive development of statistical capacities and work for a more integrated approach to statistical production.

59. Confidence in official statistics of all categories of users can be reached only if all stakeholders including international partners accept certain ethical rules and good practices. This means that the statistical community has to promote and adhere to a set of professional principles (deontology) and good practices in all circumstances. It also implies that governments, guided by the international statistical community, have to sustain an adequate

environment and to provide a fair legal and institutional framework, granting the necessary resources to produce and disseminate statistical data which meet all users' needs and not only the needs of the government or of some other very specific user group.

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