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REBUILDING OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM OF ARGENTINA.
SOME LESSONS LEARNED

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Abstract

From 2007 to 2015, the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INDEC) of Argentina underwent damaging political interventions, which undermined the institution and the quality of its products and services, leading to a widespread distrust of the official statistics of the country. In January 2016, a presidential Decree declared a state of administrative emergency in the National Statistical System (NSS), allowing the Director General of INDEC, then recently appointed, to reorganise the agency and the NSS.

To this end, INDEC authorities implemented several strategic, legal and operational actions in order to recover and develop the statistical capacity of Argentina. The work program designed for this purpose involved five strategic pillars, aimed at establishing priorities in the different dimensions of statistical capacity: institutional transformation, improvement of coordination within the NSS, strengthening statistical infrastructure, better dissemination policies and international reintegration. As the law on statistics, established in 1968, a time of military rule, did not legally protect the institution and the NSS from political intervention and had proved ineffective in doing so, modernisation of the statistical legislation represented an important aim of this process.

Achievement of a new statistical law has to date proved elusive, although draft legislation has been prepared drawing especially on the Generic Law on Official Statistics (UNECE), the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (UN), and the OECD Recommendation on Good Statistical Practice. This paper presents the main actions taken to recover the Argentinian statistical system, and derives the lessons learned, especially from the point of view of the implementation of international standards for the modernisation of statistical legislation.

Keywords: *official statistics, modernizing statistical legislation, capacity development, institutional reform, good statistical practices, trust.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

1. From 2007 to 2015, the Argentine National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INDEC) suffered from extensive political interference which harmed its institutional quality and generated a widespread distrust in the official statistics of the country. As of 2015, after a new government took office in Argentina, the new INDEC authorities began to implement several strategic, legal and operational actions in order to recover and develop the statistical infrastructure of Argentina. The work program designed for this purpose involved five strategic pillars, which sought to establish priorities in the different dimensions of statistical capacity: transform the legal and institutional framework for official statistics, improve coordination within the National Statistical system (NSS), strengthen statistical infrastructure, enhance dissemination policies, and revive international statistical cooperation.

2. The objective of this article is to shed light on this experience and to document a case of success in terms of statistical capacity recovery as a window of opportunity to undertake institutional reform and leverage the modernization of the statistical legislation. In doing so, it aims at contributing to a better understanding of the drivers and role of professional independence in the activities of National Statistics Offices (NSOs), as well as the roles of institutions' management teams, political will at the highest level, and the international statistical community. Some key research issues emerge in this context, including: what were the problems and how did INDEC manage to identify and solve them? What lessons have been learned from this experience? To what extent could they be useful if a similar situation were identified in another country? What are the lessons for the international organisations facing similar situations in their partner countries?

3. Relevant information in official documents and media has been collected and important protagonists and key players in the international statistical community have been interviewed to answer these questions. Additional background was found in a series of case studies carried out by the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) and published in "Who cares to Know? The political economy of statistical capacity in Latin America", which includes a specific study on the Argentinian case (Silva Ardila, 2016). Likewise, the OECD report on the "National Statistical System and Official Statistics of Argentina" provides a detailed evaluation of the national statistical system and official statistics in Argentina.

4. The Argentine case likely represents one of the most relevant cases of deterioration and quick recovery of an NSS. The purpose of the following pages is to present the main actions undertaken to achieve this recovery process, and to share the lessons and challenges learned from this experience, in order to provide the international statistical community with useful input to detect similar patterns and provide relevant responses when countries are facing similar situations. To this end, the discussion is divided into descriptive sections on the loss of credibility (section 2) and the rebuilding process (section 3), followed by analytical sections on the key drivers of recovery efforts (section 3) and its success factors (section 4).

5. This paper is dedicated to the memory of Jorge Todesca, Director General of INDEC between 2015 and 2019. Jorge was a source of inspiration, a long-standing public servant, who held multiple high-level positions which he always exercised impeccably, with commitment and ethics. Through his perseverance and endurance, he generated enthusiasm and commitment among INDEC's team, who will surely strive to maintain his legacy.

2. A STEADY LOSS OF CREDIBILITY

6. The National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INDEC) is the governing body of the National Statistical System of Argentina under the current statistical law N°17622, enacted in 1968. The legal framework sets forth, among other matters, that it is INDEC's responsibility to implement a statistical policy for Argentina, to structure and lead the National Statistical System (NSS), to design statistical methodologies, to organise and run statistical infrastructure operations and to produce basic indicators and social, economic, demographic and geographic data.

7. The Institute is a “deconcentrated” administrative body under the aegis of the Argentine Ministry of Treasury. Deconcentrated agencies enjoy delegated authority from their supervising ministry for some of their tasks. Deconcentrated status is different from, and weaker than, “decentralised” status: deconcentrated agencies do not possess their own legal personality, nor can they undertake obligations on their own authority, as decentralised entities may.

8. INDEC has regulatory authority both over the central statistical services of the National Government and over the peripheral services, such as the Provincial Statistical Offices (PSOs). The PSOs are in charge of the main part of domestic data collection, and although they fall under the provincial governments, they are linked to INDEC through agreements and transfers of financial resources. Coordination of this task is complex for INDEC, given that it involves interacting with offices that depend on provincial governments in the context of a federal government system, but that are linked to INDEC as members of the NSS.

9. INDEC’s Director General now has the rank of Secretary of State, reporting directly to the Minister of Finance. He is appointed by the National Executive Power without a specific selection process and can be dismissed for any reason by a presidential decree. The organizational structure is divided into a Technical and a Management Directorate, comprising a total of 12 National Directorates, 30 Directorates and 9 Units. In 2019, INDEC’s staff numbered around 1,500 employees and its annual budget for current expenses was USD 40 million.

10. For most of its more than 50 years of existence, INDEC was recognised as an institution which promotes and complies with the highest professional standards in statistics within the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region. Up until at least 2007, successive governments respected INDEC’s independence with regard to sources, methodology, production process and results, and dissemination. INDEC also participated in many international initiatives to exchange statistical experience which strengthened the perception of its profession independence. While this independence was not fully guaranteed in a *de jure* sense by the legal framework of Argentinian official statistics, it was implemented *de facto* through appropriate practices.

2.1. Institutional deterioration

11. However, between 2007 and 2015, INDEC suffered a period of political interference, widely reported both nationally³ and internationally⁴, with strong pressure by the government administration to produce and release statistical data that appeared to justify official policies.

³ See <http://casos.lanacion.com.ar/indec-the-lying-machine>

⁴ See <https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2011/04/20/lies-and-argentine-statistics>

While the interference initially focused on the Consumer Price Index (CPI)⁵, the credibility of almost all the technical reports released by INDEC was progressively called into question. Scepticism grew among the users of all official statistics, who began to employ alternative indicators to measure social and economic realities.

12. International criticism made it clear that *the problem was neither irrelevant nor an exaggeration of the political opposition or the local press* (Dargent, Lotta, Mejía, Moncada, 2018). The IMF took the exceptional steps of issuing a Statement of Concern in 2012 and then a Declaration of Censure in 2013⁶. The situation was also widely reported in international media, as for example, in 2012 when *The Economist* announced that it would stop including the official inflation figures of Argentina in its publications as they were considered not credible, and published a series of articles about the situation of the country's official statistics⁷.

2.2. Organizational deficits

13. According to Todesca (2019), by 2015 the agency had serious organizational deficits mainly reflected in five aspects:

(a) An obsolete legal framework based on the law on statistics adopted in 1968 and occasionally amended afterwards;

(b) Serious negligence of office accommodation and facilities, including in particular ICTs, threatened with collapse due to obsolescence⁸;

(c) Serious deterioration of human resources;

(d) An old and inefficient organizational structure; and,

(e) An absence of planning, operational and administrative procedures, that were neither established nor formalized.

14. Political interference with organizational matters had exacerbated these problems, leading to the replacement of several directors and the arbitrary displacement of many statisticians, who either resigned, were dismissed, or, in many cases, continued their work in a hostile environment⁹. Their positions were filled by professionals ideologically aligned with the government. The concept of “militant statistics”, meaning statistics produced to support a political project, was adopted. The dire consequences of this institutional deterioration were only fully identified in December 2015, when a new management took over the institute. According to the testimonies of those who participated in the reconstruction of INDEC, “the

⁵ A technical report from the University of Buenos Aires in 2010 determined that “the discrepancies observed in terms of prices between the official statistics of Argentina and other statistics and indicators, both public and private, far exceed methodological debates and point mainly to the institutional framework for the production of these statistics”. Link: <http://www.uba.ar/download/informe.pdf>

⁶ See <https://www.imf.org/es/News/Articles/2015/09/14/01/49/pr1333>. The IMF acted according to the procedure detailed in Article VIII, Section 5 of its Articles of Agreement: [https://www.imf.org/external/SelectedDecisions/Description.aspx?decision=13183-\(04/10\)](https://www.imf.org/external/SelectedDecisions/Description.aspx?decision=13183-(04/10))

⁷ See <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2014/06/20/dont-lie-to-me-argentina>

⁸ The General Audit Office of Argentina, in its reports 155 of 2010 and 223 of 2016, warned about the critical situation of the ICT infrastructure, the low level of investments and the risk regarding data security. See <https://www.agn.gov.ar/informes/evaluacion-de-la-tecnologia-informatica-2>
<https://www.agn.gov.ar/informes/tecnologia-de-la-informacion>

⁹ See: <https://exactas.uba.ar/el-indice-de-yrigoyen/>

first few days nothing worked properly, power outages were frequent, computer systems failed and there was no storage capacity on the servers. No formalized processes were in place and the main people responsible for the critical statistical operations, as CPI, left their positions without notice. We had to start from nothing”. Likewise, conflicts with the main workers’ union were a pervasive problem. With the status of staff representatives being legally protected, some delegates seemed to have adopted the objective of destabilising the institution.¹⁰ Given this scenario, the new management was considering whether to try to recover INDEC, or dissolve it and create a new statistical office.

2.3. Impact on the statistical infrastructure

15. The institution was in a phase of decline that included a decrease in its investment budget and in its capacities to carry out statistical operations. This combination resulted in a deterioration of the statistical infrastructure (see Table 1). A failed Agricultural Census in 2008 and a deficient Household Expenditure Survey in 2012 provide evidence of this situation. In the absence of reliable baseline data from these failed exercises, many indicators and sample frames had to be based on the last fully successful operations of 2002 and 2004, respectively. Likewise, the last Economic Census was more than ten years old, and no business register was available. Regarding the 2010 population census, identification of some serious inconsistencies motivated a criminal complaint¹¹.

Table 1: Status of major statistical operations as of December 2015

Statistical operation	Latest reliable data	Recommended frequency
Agricultural Census	2002	5 years
Household Expenditures Survey	2004	5 years
Economic Census	2004	5 years
Population Census	2010 (deficient)	10 years

Source: INDEC

3. THE REBUILDING PROCESS: MAIN ACTIONS

3.1. The administrative emergency in the national statistical system

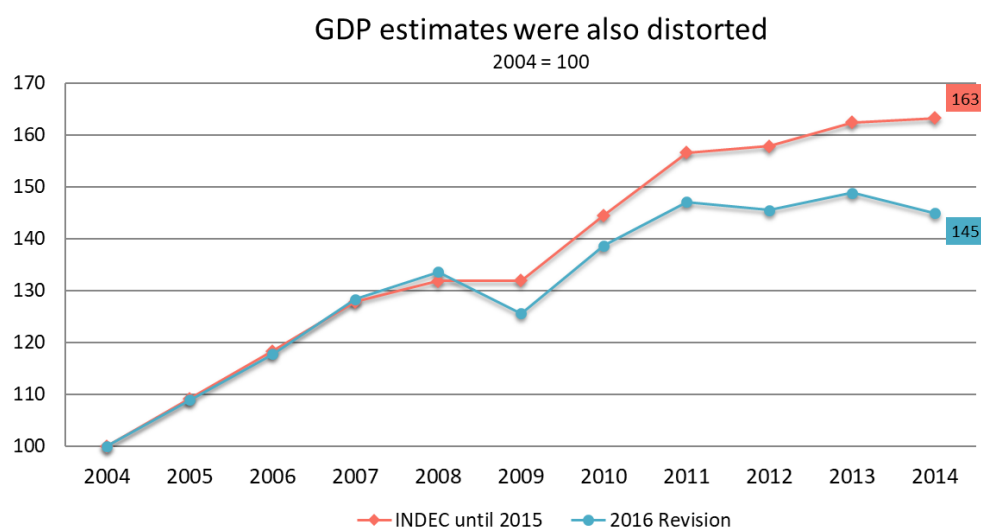
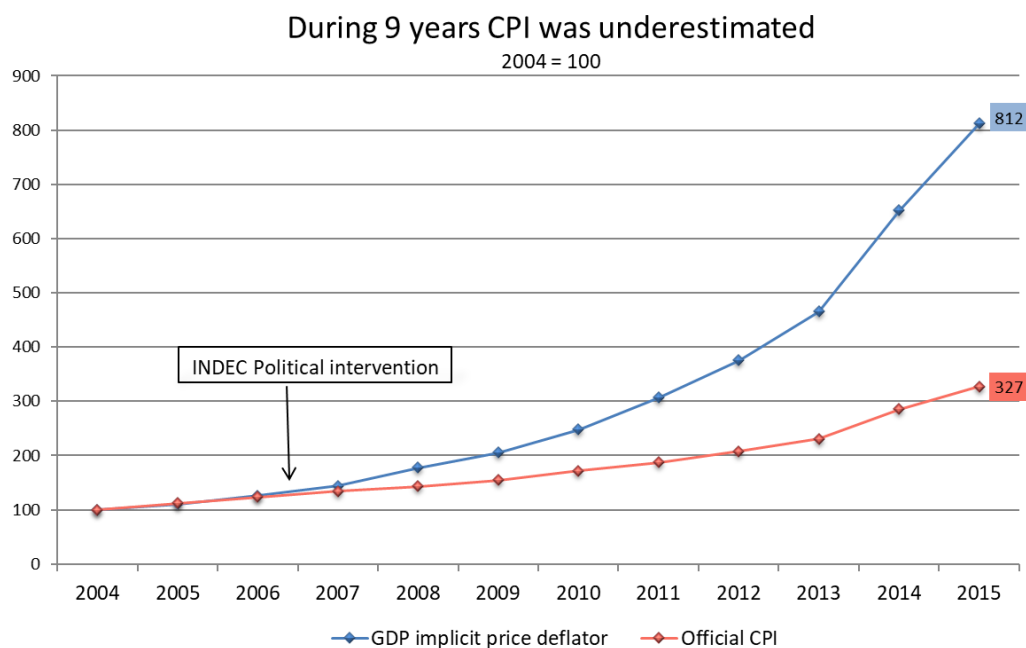
16. The first actions and decisions of the new authorities that took office in December 2015 were focused on recovering the credibility of official statistics produced by INDEC and within the NSS. Thus, the decision was made to suspend the publication of all indicators until an exhaustive review of their methods and calculation procedures had been carried out. The length of this review ranged from several weeks for statistical operations based on administrative data, to several months for field operations. In the case of the CPI, the most troubled indicator at that time, regular publication of revised indices became possible only six months after the interruption. Each statistical program was assessed for consistency and coherence, the validity of the source and methodology, sampling design, estimation methods, accuracy, treatment of non-responses, missing data imputations, IT and quality processes, dissemination standards

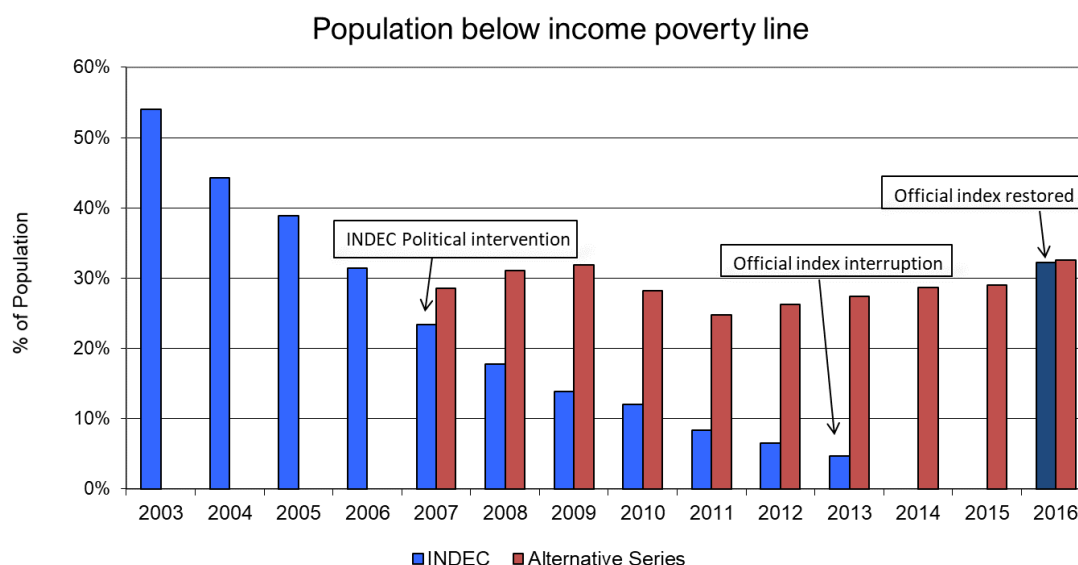
¹⁰ See <https://www.perfil.com/noticias/sociedad/el-legajo-prohibido-de-los-barras-y-narcos-del-indec-20141018-0089.phtml>

¹¹ See <https://www.perfil.com/noticias/politica/el-indec-denuncio-que-trucharon-datos-del-censo-2010-20160715-0047.phtml>

and scientific rigor, and other factors (OECD, 2019). The review found that many of the statistical programs did not meet the required standards. Thereafter INDEC warned users that series for the 2007-2015 period should be used with caution since although some could be recalculated, in many other cases gaps in reliable data would persist.

Figure 1: Distortions in the statistical series





Source: Todesca (IAOS, 2016). Comparison between alternative/revised series and pre-2015 INDEC data.

17. The state of emergency in the NSS, declared by the government on 7 January 2016, did not go without criticism, in particular because of the so-called statistical "blackout" that followed. The decision to discontinue all publications was a difficult and unprecedented one. It unleashed serious consequences for national and international users, including policy makers, who turned to other sources; but in the following months, as publication of consistent indicators was gradually restored, INDEC quickly rebuilt trust among users¹². The return of many of the statisticians displaced during the political intervention helped rebuild credibility, and the technical assistance of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the revision of the CPI and the National Accounts contributed greatly to the new legitimacy. Further key interventions by the international statistical community in the reconstruction of INDEC would follow.

18. Tampering with inflation figures in a high-inflation country causes major distortions in estimates of economic growth and poverty rates (see Figure 1). In September 2016, the re-release of the poverty and indigence index – interrupted since 2013 – was the milestone that represented the complete reestablishment of the official statistical service of Argentina. A few months later, the IMF lifted the Declaration of Censure on Argentina’s official data, and the statistical emergency decreed by the incoming government was terminated within the originally stipulated twelve-month period.

19. A less visible feature of the emergency situation referred to INDEC’s organizational deficits, which were similar in severity to what happened statistically. To address this situation, some emergency actions were taken, which were later complemented by a comprehensive plan implemented as of 2017. Initially, the efforts were focused on solving urgent issues, mainly in terms of infrastructure and human resources, which prevented the normal development of the activities.

20. The effective combination of a series of political measures was fundamental for the quick recovery of the statistical service and the future development of INDEC:

¹² See <https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2017/05/25/argentinas-new-honest-inflation-statistics>

(a) First, the emergency declaration of the NSS declared for 12 months through Decree 55/2016¹³ by the new National Government that took office in December 2015, based on the initial crisis situation at INDEC. This administrative tool served to restore the normal operation of the Institute in the short term and gave expanded powers to the Director General of INDEC, including the faculty to "terminate the services of the acting directors and designate the staff of the Institute". Following the usual procedures of general public administration, this task would have required several months. Likewise, the emergency declaration was useful in terms of accessing increased financial resources, since the inherited budget barely allowed to cover basic expenses (Vázquez, 2019).

(b) The initial reorganization of INDEC implied changing almost all of its most senior and responsible personnel, a total of 40 officials from all hierarchical ranks, and recruiting qualified staff displaced by the former management. The human factor was the main catalyst that enabled the improvement of INDEC's statistical and technical capacities (Silva Ardila, 2016).

(c) Another constitutive event with important implications for the future of INDEC was the Decree 181/2015 appointing Jorge Todesca as the new Director General. Appointing a career politician with a strong technical background was critical to successfully passing through the storm. But the Decree also contained two prescriptions, which would later be especially useful, both to administratively facilitate the management to the Director General, and to pave the way for a new statistical law. First, the Decree established a rank of Secretary of State for the Director General, who in the past had the rank of Undersecretary. A higher hierarchical status allows not only direct access to higher levels of the National Public Administration, but also the power to issue certain administrative rules and documents without the approval of a higher authority. On the other hand, the Decree instructed the Director General of INDEC to "propose to the Executive Power the reforms to Law 17622 that he considers necessary for the better administration of the National Statistical System".

(d) A milestone of great relevance for the future development of INDEC was the formal request of the Argentine Government to adhere to the Council Recommendation on Good Statistical Practice (hereafter the OECD Council Recommendation) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Shortly before, the Argentine Government had expressed its willingness to access the OECD, and this commitment was one of the first steps in this regard. A preliminary review of OECD experts was carried out in late 2016, in order to provide its Committee on Statistics and Statistical Policy (CSSP), composed of the heads of statistical authorities in OECD Member countries, with elements to form a judgement on the willingness and capacity of Argentina to put in place a sound statistical system, in line with the OECD Council Recommendation. The adherence to this recommendation, the first legal instrument of the OECD on statistics, was granted in July 2017 based on a committed action plan that included strengthening the institutional framework and statistical infrastructure. INDEC received more detailed indications from the OECD after it carried out a full review of Argentina's statistical system and official statistics in 2018 and 2019. This joint work with the OECD provided a roadmap for establishing and ordering INDEC's strategic, methodological and operational priorities. (INDEC, 2019).

¹³ See <http://servicios.infoleg.gob.ar/infolegInternet/verNorma.do?id=257615>

(e) Lastly, during the emergency period, a financing program began to be designed with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), to strengthen the statistical capacity of INDEC¹⁴. This program included many of the resources for investments that would be required in the near future. The early start on this financing program was very important, since the approvals of the authorities of the national and multilateral organizations are not immediate, and budget items must be included in the budget laws of the following years. In this case, funds were made available in the second half of 2017. In addition, the initial assessment carried out by the IDB for the design of the program led to a first roadmap for the work programs to be implemented after the emergency was overcome.

3.2. Back to normality and catch up

21. The post-emergency take-off required simultaneous intervention in the different dimensions of statistical capacity. With this objective, INDEC designed a work program for the period 2017-2020, later formalized through Resolution 141/2018¹⁵. The plan involved a series of actions that required effective coordination, given the need to complete, in a four-year cycle, a set of tasks that INDEC would normally have planned to carry out over a decade. Actions designed for catching up with international standards were grouped around six strategic axes related to institutional transformation, strengthening technical capacity, NSS coordination, improving dissemination, facilitating access to statistics and developing international relations.

22. Some of these actions may sound obvious in a well-established NSO. But the challenge of this task must be understood in the context described above, as well as considering the vast set of actions carried out simultaneously and in a short period of time. All the actions were necessary and urgent, so the setting of priorities and effective coordination played a fundamental role. Bottlenecks had to be avoided as the organization progressively rebuilt its capabilities. The experiences documented by the international community and transmitted through cooperation initiatives were very useful to guide the design of actions and improve their implementation.

23. The post-emergency phase that began in January 2017 was affected by the arrival of a new Minister of Finance, which involved changes both in the vision of the future of INDEC and in the relationship with the Director General. However, the support from the highest level of political power to the reconstruction process remained strong and was mainly reflected in four essential aspects for this new stage. First, the political will to continue respecting INDEC's technical independence remained firm. Second, the executive branch approved the modification and expansion of the Institute's organizational structure in a general context of shrinking state offices. Thirdly, political support for the human resources policy and overcoming conflicts with the main union of workers. Finally, INDEC was granted a substantial increase in its budget for current expenses and investment¹⁶, which was maintained until the end of the mandate of the government in place at that time.

24. Regarding the last point, the 2017 budget – the first prepared by the new administration – experienced an increase of 41% in real terms, which continued at those levels thereafter. INDEC also obtained extraordinary resources for specific statistical operations such as the

¹⁴ IDB loan contract AR-L1266.

¹⁵ <https://www.boletinoficial.gob.ar/detalleAviso/primera/185868/20180618?busqueda=1>

¹⁶ The budgetary allocation for investment in renovation of the building, goods and equipment increased from less than USD 0.5 million in 2016 to USD 3.3 million in 2017 and USD 3.1 million in 2018.

2018 National Agricultural Census, carried out despite the generalized budget cuts in the rest of the Central Administration, during the economic crisis that affected the country as of the second quarter of 2018.

25. In this sense, from the aforementioned crisis, the development of INDEC encountered two major obstacles in terms of financial and human resources. On the one hand, the Ministry of Finance set spending ceilings for all public agencies, regardless of the source of income. Therefore, although INDEC managed to maintain the budgetary improvements initially achieved, part of the additional resources from the credit granted by the IDB to complete the institutional strengthening program could not be executed. On the other hand, Decree 632/2018 suspended the hiring of new personnel throughout the national public administration until the end of the presidential term, which substantially conditioned the human resources policy that INDEC was developing.

26. However, despite the limitations that arose, many advances were achieved. The following is a description of the main actions carried out by INDEC towards institutional strengthening, improving the production and dissemination of statistics, and reintegration into the international statistical community.

3.2.1. Institutional strengthening

Building, ICT and logistics infrastructure

27. The disarray in INDEC was reflected in the state of its offices. Work spaces were dilapidated and poorly maintained. The building did not meet health and safety standards: elevators were malfunctioning, bathrooms and common spaces had been neglected for decades, and the electrical system was outdated and failed daily (Vázquez, 2019).

28. A first dilemma faced by the new INDEC authorities was either to acquire a new building or improve the existing one. A new building was not only going to be an advance in terms of building modernization but would also contribute as a symbolic element to the new INDEC. It was also an opportunity to move to a more convenient location away from the central administration offices, generating a physical distancing effect from political power¹⁷. But the acquisition of a new building encountered some obstacles that aborted the mission, mainly because priority was given to restoring statistical production. Therefore, the decision was to continue in the historic ten-storey building in the centre of the City of Buenos Aires and face a complete renovation in all structural, functional and aesthetic aspects.

29. Between 2017 and 2019, INDEC reached an unprecedented level of investments in improvements in the building infrastructure of its headquarters and the almost complete renovation of computer equipment, furniture and the vehicle fleet. In 2017, USD 480,000 was invested in the renovation of elevators, bathrooms and electrical installations, and another USD 500,000 was used to purchase vehicles, furniture, lighting and medical equipment. (OECD, 2019). ANNEX I includes the detail of the acquisitions as it appears in Vázquez (2019).

30. More than half of the budget funds allocated to investment (approximately USD 1.5 million annually during 2017 and 2018), was used in the renewal of all computer equipment and, above all, in the regularization of software licenses. By 2015, the Institute did not have

¹⁷ In the case of the national statistical office of Mexico, INEGI, the move to Aguascalientes, a city 400km from the capital, also brought advantages in terms of retaining qualified human resources

licenses for most of the more than 100 software, applications, and development tools it used. Much of the software in use were illegal versions installed on the personal computers of the IT staff. Likewise, the Institute was lagging behind in updating its operating systems, network services and the virtual and physical security of the data. Regarding the latter, the old data centre had very limited storage capacity and was located in a single site, without adequate backup or ventilation, and had suffered 20 power failures in 2017 (OECD, 2019). The measures adopted included the modernization of the data network, installing new wiring and equipment, and the migration of the Institute's information to servers and devices with greater capacity and security, especially after contracting the certified data centre Tier III of ARSAT, the Argentine state satellite company.

31. With these improvements, together with an initial acquisition of 400 tablets (later 3,500 more would be added), INDEC was able to start facing the process of replacing paper questionnaires and make the data collection more efficient through mobile devices. This complex task also involved changes in the organizational culture and required specific training to develop skills in these new data collection methods. This process did not went without difficulties, especially with regard to connectivity at a national level. INDEC only started the process in 2016, while some other NSOs of similar capacities had gone through this process earlier. The National Victimization Survey carried out in March 2017 was the first operation collecting data through mobile devices. The technological change allowed substantial improvements in the processing speed and consistency in data capture, as well as lower operating costs (INDEC, 2019).

Human resources policies

32. The lack of skilled and trained human resources, and the practice of having staff fulfil functions in areas beyond their expertise, were the main human resources problems INDEC was facing. This had its origin mainly in the organizational culture created after almost a decade in which the Institute operated under a mission, vision and values far distant from those that an NSO usually adopts. "We found an institution aligned to values and objectives different from those set and, therefore, also a bureaucracy that adapts to these changed values" (Gil, 2019). In this framework, the Institute had also lost many competent technical staff due to arbitrary decision-making, conflicts and the lack of professional development perspectives.

33. The relationship with the labour unions was an additional challenge. For the first two years after the declaration of emergency, INDEC's management faced a high degree of conflict with the main union, which had been an important actor during the earlier political interventions, and which included a large share of those who had mistreated employees in the past¹⁸ (Vazquez, 2019). A very useful program to reform this work environment and intercede before the unions was the so-called "INDEC Listens". It was a space created for psychologists to listen to those who wanted to talk about their experience, problems and personal and professional needs.

34. One of the first actions taken in the reform process involved making a diagnosis of the structure of the available personnel and determining the optimal composition of the staff. Based on this study, a large-scale restructuring plan involving entire areas was prepared, and employees were relocated to positions more suitable to their profile. In this sense, the human resources department detected that more than a third of the professionals were assigned to

¹⁸ See <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/economia/el-sobrino-de-guillermo-moreno-y-el-domador-de-caballos-del-lider-de-upcn-entre-los-despedidos-el-indec-nid1924709>

various departments that did not correspond to their areas of expertise. It was also necessary to dismiss those who did not comply with the necessary suitability conditions or could not adapt to the new labour guidelines in terms of attendance, punctuality and objectives¹⁹. At the beginning of 2017, only 61% of staff worked at least 7 hours a day on average in a month. At the end of 2018, it increased up to 89%²⁰ (Gil, 2019).

35. Simultaneously, a significant number of qualified new personnel were sought out and recruited. The new hiring policy was publicized, which incorporated open competition, psychometric tests, training courses for incoming employees and scouting for interns in relevant faculties of universities. About 80% of these new employees had a college degree. This is not a minor fact, since only 32% of staff were professionals in 2015, well below normal for an NSO; this increased to 47% by 2019 (60% if survey interviewers are excluded) (OECD, 2019).

36. In turn, the human resources policies included several incentives, such as the study scholarship plan and trips for training in international organizations, with the aim of retaining the suitable personnel and compensating for the poor salaries. By 2019, 5% of the Institute's staff was receiving a study scholarship to complete university degrees or pursue postgraduate degrees. This was very useful especially as from the year 2018, when by Decree No. 632/2018²¹ it was not possible to make new staff hires in the National Public Administration, though it remained possible to recruit staff from other agencies through an internal mobility program.

37. However, the hiring and retention of qualified technical personnel was one of the greatest difficulties faced by INDEC, mainly due to the low salaries of the public sector in Argentina. The problem is especially acute in the areas of computer science and data science, because of the boom in demand from private firms and the impossibility of matching private sector wages. For these cases, a special contracting system was established for "independent contractors" within the framework of Decree 1109/2017, but without the possibility of guaranteeing employment stability.

38. The lack of administrative autonomy does not allow the Institute to design its own career streams and establish salary scales different from the rest of the public administration to reflect the technical and professional capacities it requires (OECD, 2019). A new regulatory framework would be essential to empower INDEC to regulate its staffing establishment.

New organic and functional structure

39. Modifying the organisational structure of the Institute was a key action to make it more efficient. INDEC's structure was outdated and not suitable to meet the requirement of a modern national statistical office. In the past, some specific changes had been made, but never a comprehensive modification like the one carried out during the reform process.

40. A new basic organizational structure was approved by Administrative Decision 305/2017 in May 2017. This established four directorates reporting directly to the Director General, a Technical Directorate, a Management Directorate and two other strategic directorates with institutional roles. These directorates oversee new entities focused on transversal management

¹⁹ See <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/politica/el-indec-despedira-a-80-empleados-con-altos-niveles-de-inasistencia-nid2003540>

²⁰ More than 200 employees voluntarily resigned due to not being able to comply with the hours and attendance conditions.

²¹ Decree No 632/2018 Link http://www.infoleg.gob.ar/?page_id=112

and territorial coordination at national and sub-national levels (see Box 1), with renewed functions and reporting mechanisms²². Coordination activities have thus been considerably strengthened. The changes also included the creation of a Planning Directorate and a National Directorate of the National Statistical System, which includes six new regional offices to allow technical and administrative interaction with provincial statistics offices, and an upgrading of the Methodology Directorate and the Statistical Dissemination Directorate.

Box 1 Executive decentralization in a federal government system.

The Argentine NSS was based on the principles of normative centralization through INDEC, and executive decentralization, meaning that INDEC played only a coordinating role for the statistical collection activities of the federal and provincial administration. Executive decentralization in practice configured a soft coordination scheme, especially regarding the activities carried out by the Provincial Statistics Directorates (DPEs in their Spanish acronym), which have most of the field staff. Decades ago, this became the main pattern for major national statistical operations, such as the Permanent Household Survey, and so it continues today.

However, the coordination of the system at the national level presents several problems, given that the DPEs are within the provincial government structures and their officials therefore report to the respective provincial governors. As a result, INDEC's statistical production can become hostage to provincial-federal political disputes. For example, conflicts can arise when governors disagree with INDEC's published indicator data on their jurisdictions, and the DPEs must mediate²³. Such experiences have also led to some DPEs refusing to participate in specific operations; in these cases INDEC has had to look for another partner in the province (generally a university) to take on that role.

On the other hand, during 2007-15, some DPEs played a very useful role in producing alternative information, especially on the CPI, which was used as a reference in the absence of reliable national indicators. But among the provinces there are substantial heterogeneities in terms of statistical capacities. Some DPEs have managed to form institutes with their own buildings, while others continue as administrative units in the same government building as the rest of the provincial administration. Likewise, those DPEs with fewer resources only have the funds sent by INDEC for their operation, while those in the larger provinces manage to produce their own information disaggregated locally.

The creation of the regional offices of INDEC was conceived as a means to improve the relationship with the DPEs, facilitate interaction and eventually provide an operational support if a province encounters difficulty in undertaking a statistical activity.

Planning and processes

41. INDEC introduced planning activities with the creation of a Planning Directorate in 2017. Until 2006, some strategic although rather symbolic planning exercises had been carried out, but the practice had been discontinued, and the 2018-2020²⁴ work programme is the first to be fully implemented. In addition, annual programs were implemented for specific activities to be carried out each year, by virtue of monitoring them and effectively achieving the proposed goals. For this purpose, a reporting and monitoring system that also serves as an internal coordination and evaluation tool was developed. The software developed entirely in-house is based on the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) of UNECE and includes

²² The complete organizational structure of INDEC appears in the [Resolution 426-E/2017](#).

²³ See <https://viapais.com.ar/corrientes/938357-el-gobierno-de-corrientes-propone-una-nueva-medicion-del-indice-de-pobreza/> (in Spanish).
<https://lmdiaro.com.ar/noticia/15011/schiaretti-todas-las-voces-dicen-que-los-datos-del-indec-son-incosistentes> (in Spanish).
<https://www.lanacion.com.ar/economia/por-diferencias-renuncio-al-indec-la-tecnica-que-media-el-desempleo-y-la-pobreza-nid2091672> (in Spanish).

²⁴ Approved by [Resolución 141/2018](#) (in Spanish).

detailed information on deadlines, managers, and human and financial resources for each statistical activity.

42. Another serious organizational deficit faced by the Institute was related to the lack of formalization of administrative processes. In this sense, an exhaustive review and redesign of all procedures was carried out, which was formalized through administrative acts. Thus, for the first time, INDEC developed procedural manuals. At the same time, the modernization of the management area also involved the digitization of all administrative files and the definitive abandonment of paper-based files.

Modernization of the regulatory framework

43. In November 2019, the President of the Nation sent a new Statistical Law proposal to Congress (see Annex II) to update the legal framework in force since 1968. The project, which incorporates the advances in statistical good practices of the last five decades, came to light at the end of the government of President Macri, after a long period of internal discussions in the Government. By the first half of 2021 it had not yet been discussed in Congress. The draft law proposes, among its most relevant innovations, the functional, legal and patrimonial independence of INDEC; transferring responsibility from the Ministry of Finance to the Head of the Cabinet of Ministers; explicit professional independence in the production and dissemination of official statistics, including explicit reference to the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics; a mechanism for appointing the Director General with parliamentary agreement and for a fixed term of 5 years renewable only once; the creation of a cross-sectoral advisory council; a parliamentary monitoring committee; and unrestricted access to data sources for statistical purposes.

44. The draft law was in line with the recommendations of the OECD review of the Argentinian statistical system and official statistics, which stated that "the project represents a considerable improvement of the legal and institutional basis for the production of official statistics in Argentina" (OECD, 2019), and with the OECD Council Recommendation. Likewise, following good practices in this regard, the text was submitted for consideration through a public consultation that gathered comments from several national and international actors²⁵.

3.2.2. Improvements in statistical production and dissemination

45. The statistical infrastructure necessary for the production of quality indicators was outdated; therefore, the initial restoration of the statistical service had to face great methodological challenges. Difficulties lay in the lack of updated and adequate sampling frames for household, agricultural and economic surveys, as well as primary data for making base-year changes in indicators such as the CPI or the National accounts. As an example, the improvements made to the CPI had to use ad hoc mechanisms to adjust the weights derived from a household expenditure survey that was more than ten years old. It is important to highlight that the decade in question was marked by high inflation and frequent changes in relative and regulated prices.

46. Therefore, one of the great challenges for INDEC was the need to carry out in less than five years all the operations considered critical to consolidate the statistical infrastructure. This implied carrying out a number of major data collection activities, including a National Census

²⁵ See: https://www.indec.gob.ar/ftp/documentos/aportes_consulta_publica_ley_estadistica.pdf

on Mining Activity in 2016, a National Household Expenditures Survey in 2017, and a National Agricultural Census in 2018 (see Box 2); as well as launching the preparation of the National Economic Census and the National Population Census, planned to be carried out between 2020 and 2021. Two fundamental operations were performed in order to carry out the Population Census, as well as to complete the sampling frame of the periodic surveys: INDEC updated the urban housing sampling frame and carried out an exhaustive territorial sweep, so that for the first time a dwelling register (*archivo de domicilios*) was made available. In addition, the initial development stages of the first statistical business register began in 2019. Another (late) innovation which added challenges to the task was the use of mobile devices in statistical operations.

Box 2 2018 National Census of Agriculture (NCA). A litmus test for the new INDEC.

The NCA put INDEC's new structure to the test. It was the first major paperless operation, with 3,500 tablets and interviewers in the field to cover more than 190 million hectares engaged in agricultural production in Argentina. In total, more than 320,000 agricultural establishments were surveyed. Several challenges appeared throughout the operation, in relation to connectivity at national level, in-house software development, digital mapping and a perhaps too ambitious questionnaire that attempted to capture some of the 3,800 variables. Finally, the operation was successful, with a very high response rate, and a processing and publication of the data carried out in a record time of eight months.

The lessons learned from the NCA were shared with ten countries of the region, which were part of a technical mission of observation organized by INDEC in the framework of the working group on agricultural statistics of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC. In the technical mission, the support of FAO, which sent a team led by the Director of its Statistics Division, José Rosero, was vital.

The NCA's challenge was not small, since INDEC had two failed experiences in the past. In 2008, a census was carried out during a conflict between the agricultural sector and the National Government over a rise in export taxes, and a high level of mistrust in INDEC as political interference had begun. The operation was unsuccessful in the most relevant productive areas due to a very low response rate of the producers. In 2014, another Agricultural Census was programmed but was not even started, though part of the budgeted funds were used. The lack of a recent complete operation meant that the last firm base on which to build a survey system and obtain quality information on the area was more than sixteen years old, something unusual in a country with a large agricultural sector (Todesca, 2019). In fact, the results of the NCA18 showed significant differences with the estimates that the Ministry of Agro-Industry used for its sectoral policies and a quite different picture from what was believed about the Argentine countryside.

One of the key aspects of the NCA18 was the inter-institutional work and a great success, in this sense, was to put in charge of the operation to a recognised economist in the area, easing his contacts with the chambers and associations of producers. Again, the human factor was decisive for the actions to be effective. The success of the operation and its technical accuracy helped to consolidate INDEC's credibility.

47. As regards regular statistical operations, after the initial exhaustive review during the administrative emergency state, INDEC launched a program with the aim to strengthen and expand in almost all its products. Firstly, the primary surveys of economic statistics were strengthened, with new surveys, coverage extensions and the introduction of web questionnaires in the surveys of companies. The production of macroeconomic statistics also included new products such as the quarterly publication of the Generation of Income Account, the annual publication of the National Saving and the Culture Satellite Accounts, and methodological adjustments of the international accounts, as well as the incorporation of the Standard Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX) in several areas (INDEC, 2019). As regards

the CPI, a year after the indicator for the traditional Greater Buenos Aires (GBA) area was restored, a new CPI was launched with national coverage and disaggregated data for the six statistical regions of the country (see Box 3).

Box 3 The National Consumer Price Index. A history of twists and turns.

The CPI has a central role in the set of statistical products of INDEC²⁶, in particular since Argentina experienced recurrent high inflation periods. The CPI historically covered the Greater Buenos Aires (GBA) area, which consists of the City of Buenos Aires and 24 districts in the Buenos Aires suburbs. This area was considered for a long time as representative of the country as a whole in terms of price variations.

The construction of a CPI of national coverage is a project with twists and turns that began in the late 90s. In 2006, the team led by Graciela Bevacqua, the Director of the CPI who would become an important figure in the fight for the recovery of INDEC, made progress in the development of a National CPI. The indicator by then had achieved coverage in seven of the 24 provinces of the country. In 2007, the abandonment of the project and the displacement of Bevacqua formed the epicentre of the political intervention that was beginning at INDEC. This marked the beginning of a long decline in the credibility of the CPI that lasted until 2015.²⁷ In 2014, a new Minister of Economy had launched, with little preparation time, an indicator of national coverage called CPINu, which initially achieved some positive opinions. However further political problems again engulfed INDEC and the CPINu also lost credibility.

During this period, some provinces began to publish their own CPIs²⁸. INDEC lobbied for several of them to be discontinued²⁹ so that they would not contrast with the "official truth". Those who managed to continue, such as those from the City of Buenos Aires and the Provinces of Santa Fe and San Luis, became the most useful official references.

Even after INDEC was back to normal, many provinces were publishing their own CPI. The proliferation of several indicators with different methodologies covering the same phenomenon contributed to general confusion and, initially, was an obstacle to consolidating the credibility of INDEC's CPI. Therefore, the extension of the INDEC indicator to the whole nation was extremely necessary to have a comprehensive and unique official reference measurement.

48. Socioeconomic statistics also required major improvements in quality. To this end, INDEC redesigned the publications, including a greater number of indicators about living conditions, and carried out several special surveys, within the framework of cooperation agreements with other areas of the public sector. Conducting these special surveys also pursued strategic purposes, in terms of strengthening INDEC's role as the governing body over the national statistics-producing system and attracting additional resources. In this way, the Childhood Activities Survey was carried out together with the Ministry of Labour in 2016, the National Survey of Victimization with the Ministry of Security in 2017, the National Study on the Profile of People with Disabilities with the promotion of the Vice Presidency of the Nation in 2018, and the National Survey of Risk Factors together with the Ministry of Health and

²⁶ The indicator is the most widely known according to a recent survey carried out by INDEC. In this framework, also 76% of the users of economic information stated that they use the CPI.

²⁷ (OECD, 2019) describes operational-level details on the political interventions, how exactly the inflation figures were falsified, and the precise ways in which this flowed through to salaries, rents, bond yields etc. A detailed analysis of the practical social consequences of the falsifications would require modelling exercises and more further a certain amount of speculation, as reliable long time series are missing.

²⁸ See: <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/economia/las-provincias-quieren-su-propio-indice-de-inflacion-nid1012591>

²⁹ See: <https://www.infobae.com/2012/09/01/668063-ya-son-siete-las-provincias-que-dejaron-publicar-las-cifras-inflacion/>

Social Development in 2019. By 2020, progress was being made with preparations for a survey on unpaid work and time use.

49. On the other hand, INDEC made significant progress in disseminating information of its products and institutional communication. Since January 2017, when a twelve-month in advance continuous calendar was created, INDEC has strictly complied with the dates and times set for publications. The data are published at 4:00 p.m., and measures are taken to ensure simultaneous access for all users (OECD, 2019). The dissemination policy pursued the objectives of increasing transparency and a user-friendly access to statistics. To this end, new access channels were opened in social networks and for online answers, a digital statistical library was developed, progress was made in statistical literacy through the "INDEC Educa" project aimed at primary and secondary educational institutions, and a comprehensive modernization of the Institute's website was undertaken (INDEC, 2019). A key action to increase transparency was to re-establish and strengthen relations with the media and specialized users, who had gradually lost interest in statistical outputs produced by INDEC.

50. The guiding principles of INDEC's dissemination policy were formalized by Resolution 85/2019³⁰, which establishes procedures for the dissemination of statistics under the principles of impartiality, objectivity and transparency. Likewise, Resolution 86/2019 developed a "Style Manual"³¹ applicable to all the dissemination and communication of the Institute. The institutionalization of these principles and procedures was unprecedented in the history of INDEC, and contributed to strengthening the credibility of the agency.

51. The comprehensive review of the Argentinian statistical system conducted by the OECD in 2018-2019 especially highlighted the importance of the dissemination strategy in rebuilding confidence in official statistics (OECD, 2019). In this sense, the report states that "the recent progress of INDEC in the communication and dissemination of statistical information – including equal, simultaneous and free access to statistics, the new Style Manual, the advance calendar of publications, the new bilingual glossary and the creation of brochures and other educational material – has been excellent... The published data is presented objectively, focused on the movements observed in the values and avoiding any political comment. The methodologies for the statistical series are available in digital format and any changes in the methods used or in the presentation of the data are reported to the users at least 30 days in advance". In addition, the report highlights that the timeliness and periodicity criteria set out in the IMF's Special Data Disclosure Rules (SDDS) are met, and consistency and comparability were improved, although there are serious obstacles to improving the data for the period 2007-2015. Users also recognize this progress in the area of dissemination. A user satisfaction survey³², carried out by an external counterpart in 2019, shows that more than 70% of the users are satisfied with INDEC's dissemination service, and in particular with the accessibility and clarity of information.

3.2.3. The international strategy

52. By 2015, INDEC was isolated from the international statistical community. Although some of its representatives used to cover the regular agenda of international forums, they encountered condemnation from their peers of the present state of the institution. Although INDEC had a few cooperation agreements, the Institute was not actively involved in any

³⁰ See: https://www.indec.gob.ar/ftp/cuadros/publicaciones/politica_difusion_indec.pdf

³¹ See: https://www.indec.gob.ar/ftp/cuadros/publicaciones/manual_estilo_indec_03_19.pdf

³² See: https://www.indec.gob.ar/ftp/documentos/estudio_satisfaccion_indec_2019.pdf

initiatives. The interventions of its authorities had repeatedly alluded to the political nature of statistical institutions in ways that amounted to a defence of INDEC's subordination to the political project of the government at that time. By the last years of political intervention, Argentina had even stopped participating with its highest authorities in the annual meeting of the United Nations Statistical Commission, after receiving criticism from colleagues from other countries³³.

53. For these reasons, the new management team set a specific objective of earning back the respect of the international statistical community. However, international reintegration was also a strategic objective, following the premise that the transformation of INDEC could not be carried out while isolated (Todesca and Muñoz, 2017). The international statistical community was involved in every important step that the Institute took on the road to normalization and rebuilding credibility. The support received from institutions such as the IDB, the OECD, the IMF, and the United Nations, and bilateral cooperation with other NSOs were essential not only in terms of the technical assistance received, but also to leverage support for reforms by society and the government itself.

54. The role played by the IDB and the OECD has already been described above. Both organizations were strategic partners that accompanied the entire process. The IDB provided the financing and the outline of a first road map. The OECD, the comprehensive diagnosis and guidelines for future development.

55. As regards the IMF, it has provided assistance and cooperation with INDEC in the initial review of the CPI methodology and the National Accounts. Also during 2018, the IMF organized in Buenos Aires a special course on international accounts for Argentine technical staff. Likewise, the INDEC teams re-joined to the Fund's courses at its offices in Brasilia and Washington.

56. The support of the UN Statistics Division (UNSD) in the reintegration of INDEC in the international statistical community was especially important, in particular with a mission of its director Stefan Schweinfest in 2018 to Buenos Aires to reinforce the discussion on the new statistical law³⁴. At the same time, the INDEC leadership again actively participated in the various activities that arose from the United Nations system, in particular, the UNSC. The participation of Argentina in the High Level Group of Collaboration, Coordination and Capacity Building in Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was also very relevant, where INDEC co-chaired the Program Committee of the first Forum World Data. Likewise, INDEC contributed in the framework of the Friends of the Chair Group on the revision of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (FPOS), in which lessons from the Argentinian experience were discussed. The OECD highlights in its report that “Argentina's growing commitment to international processes notably raised its profile in the international statistical community” (OECD, 2019).

57. At the same time, the participation of staff in technical workshops and sectoral working groups was encouraged by the Institute's management, with the aim of updating and developing

³³ See: https://www.clarin.com/politica/crisis-INDEC-llego-Naciones-Unidas_0_SyAlAJUaPQx.html

³⁴ This was the first time that Argentina had received a visit from the highest-ranking statistical official of the UN. See: <https://www.indec.gob.ar/indec/web/Institucional-GacetillaCompleta-196>

technical capacities. With this objective, INDEC officers carried out, between 2016 and 2019, an average of 77 international missions per year.

58. INDEC's bilateral cooperation was also very intense in this period. Cooperation agreements were signed with EUROSTAT and three NSOs – the CBS from the Netherlands, ISTAT from Italy and INEGI from Mexico; and specific alliances were agreed with several other regional NSOs, such as INE from Chile and IBGE from Brazil. Likewise, INDEC's own technical assistance to other countries has resumed, such with the Republic of Honduras and the Central Bank of Ecuador. Another important point was the return to the United Nations International Comparison Program, given that Argentina had been one of the few countries that had given up participating in the previous round in 2011.

59. INDEC also re-established relationships and participated in meetings of international statistical associations such as the International Statistical Institute (ISI), the International Association for Official Statistics (IAOS) and the Inter-American Statistics Institute (IASI).

4. ANALYSIS AND EXPLANATIONS

60. The INDEC reconstruction process was very successful, despite two major hindrances: the lack of *de jure* independence, and the economic crisis that prevented a further strengthening of human and financial resources. This section analyses the results of the implemented measures and the fronts still pending and requiring further action as of 2021. The results can be seen both in terms of the recovery of credibility of the Institute, and in objective measurements such as the NSCI of the IDB.

4.1. Success factors

61. Institutional strengthening and modernization of NSOs are public policy initiatives that are often postponed; therefore, reforms must be engaged whenever there are windows of opportunity. The political economy factors that open these possibilities must be correctly detected and taken advantage of by decision-makers, whose strategic action must also seek to build legitimacy and maintain visibility so as to remain on the public agenda. Looking at the situation of Argentina, as described in the preceding sections, it appears that the reforms carried out by INDEC had three main catalysts and drivers: i) political will at the highest level of government, ii) particular characteristics of the INDEC leadership team, and iii) the role of the international statistical community. Many challenges have conditioned INDEC's path of transformation and modernization, all of which affected both effective compliance and the speed of implementation of the work program and the proposed reforms.

62. Dargent, Lotta, Mejía and Moncada (2018) identified five common political economy factors that have influenced the statistical capacity of Latin American countries in the past: i) the existence of technical areas of the State that require statistics to carry out their functions; ii) external demands on countries and international aid received by NSOs; iii) the role of presidents and their political projects; iv) the effect of economic and political crises, and v) the existence of a civil society and businesses that demand quality statistics. In the Argentine case, these factors were present and determined the success of the process.

i) State requirements

63. The new paradigm of the incoming government in 2015, based on transparency, institutional strengthening and, especially, commitment to evidence-based public policies,

presented a series of new demands for statistics produced and disseminated by INDEC. Likewise, one of the objectives of the government administration between 2015 and 2019 was reinsertion of the country in the international community through strengthened international engagement and cooperation, which, among other relevant aspects, included an application to join the OECD, the G20 presidency in 2018 and the reestablishment of relations with the IMF.

ii) The international factor

64. The promotion of international insertion among the priorities of the new government was one of the factors that allowed INDEC to channel its own strategy of reintegration into the international statistical community. Argentina's international opening gave rise to new demands from various fields, including through its involvement in the G20 data gap initiative; the reappearance of multilateral organizations, such as IMF, on the domestic scene; and the focus on the OECD and other organizations as aspirational references (see Box 4). This exchange with international organizations also facilitated the visibility of the international statistical agenda at the local level and served to build legitimacy, guarantee transparency and disseminate good practices. Thus, many of the reforms were leveraged in different ways in the international statistical community.

Box 4 OECD: Benchmark and strategic partner.

Since Argentina formalised its intention to join the OECD in June 2016, various areas of the Argentine government had voluntarily started the path towards compliance with the good practice recommendations of its 23 thematic committees and used these standards as a benchmark for their action plans, even though the country was never even invited to start the formal accession process. Given the situation of official statistics, the first approaches of the Argentinian government with the OECD involved the statistical issue and the joint work between OECD Statistics and Data Directorate and INDEC began already in the first year of the new government.

The willingness of the Argentinian government to join the OECD helped to leverage change in INDEC and reach consensus in the government on a path of concrete and necessary reforms. Thus, the OECD played a strategic role in the transformation of INDEC, both through a thorough assessment of the legal and institutional system and a dialogue with the Argentinian government on the implementation of the recommendations from the review, in particular as regards the draft statistical law and its compliance with the Recommendation of the OECD on Good Statistical Practice. In turn, INDEC invoked these recommendations whenever discussion of reforms became stalled by conflicts of opinions among officials.

iii) The role of top decision makers

65. The human factor played a major role in the reconstruction of statistical capacities in Argentina. Personal attributes have decisively influenced the process. On the one hand, there was a strong commitment of the INDEC management team, which was made up largely of professionals who had identified themselves with the defence of official statistics during the period of political intervention. On the other hand, the return of qualified technical personnel allowed a quick recovery of technical and institutional capacities.

66. Underpinning these changes was the political project of the new administration to grant full professional independence to the agency, as well as to support budgetary efforts required for its implementation. This was reflected in the election of a Director General with the required high profile to lead this process and empowered to take almost all decisions necessary to ensure that the process was implemented. The leadership of the Director General became one of the

decisive elements in the success of the process (see Box 5). Finally, the reconstruction of the organization was strongly underpinned by the prestige and commitment of many staff members hired after the normalization of the Institute. All in all, leadership qualities were a decisive element in the transformation and modernization of INDEC's statistical capacities.

Box 5 Change management. Jorge A. Todesca, Director General of INDEC (2015-19)

In times of emergency, the proper exercise of authority is essential to establish priorities and align efforts. The construction of legitimacy is, therefore, a constant exercise that requires specific and qualified leaders. The election of a career politician with extensive experience and prestige to lead the reconstruction of INDEC was one of the most decisive aspects for the effectiveness of the process. According to IAOS President John Pullinger, interviewed for this paper, a Director General of an NSO must possess three key characteristics. *First, you must know about statistics. Second, you must know how the State works, since you will pilot an organization that sails in the sea of public administration, with its rules, procedures and specificities. Finally, you must have political skills, because you will lead a group of people, and also move in the political arena for your task to be effective.* The Director General of INDEC between 2015 and 2019 met these three conditions.



Jorge Todesca was an economist that had opposed the political intervention at INDEC, and even been fined by the previous government for publishing an alternative CPI through his consulting company. But his resume as public servant was much more extensive. He had held important positions at different times in Argentine politics, being Secretary of State on two occasions, in the 1980s and early 2000s. In the latter case, he had a prominent role as vice minister of economy during the 2001 crisis, one of the most traumatic in the history of Argentina. All in all, both his professional training and his previous experience of both normality and crisis made him the right person to lead the reconstruction of INDEC.

iv) The effect of the crisis

67. Crises also played a decisive role in INDEC's statistical capacity building process. On the one hand, the wide media coverage of the crisis in statistics gave the issue a prominent place on the public agenda/debate and encouraged strong support for the institutional strengthening of the organization. The institutional crisis, therefore, created a window of opportunity to introduce reforms that would not have been possible in another context. On the other hand, the economic crisis that began in Argentina in 2018 limited the execution of several of the actions planned in pursuit of institutional transformation.

v) A high demand for high-quality statistics

68. The demand for quality statistics emerges as a determining factor for NSO capacity building. Various actors demand quality statistics (public sector, companies, academia, civil society organizations or the media, international organisations) and if the NSO establishes a fluid relationship with them they can become allies that increase its legitimacy and constitute a barrier against governments that try to interfere, or reduce its statistical capacity (Dargent, Lotta, Mejía and Moncada, 2018). Throughout its history, INDEC had strengthened links with a large variety of users to strengthen its *de facto* independence. In fact, the existence of a large and influential group of these users, especially in the media, was a determining factor in reporting and making visible the political intervention in the past. It has also been one of the strategic tools used by the Institute's management during the normalization of recent years. Demands for better official statistics were therefore an essential element in supporting the implementation of the reforms.

4.2. Recovery of credibility

69. The recovery of INDEC's credibility was widely recognized. Official statistics of Argentina were again accepted and used without limitations by users. At the local level, both in the political discussion and in the news notes and academic references, the veracity of the figures has not been questioned again. The OECD reports this situation in its review of the Argentinian NSS and states that "the new statistical information produced since May 2016, in a wide variety of domains, is credible and has been well received by the public and internationally" (OECD, 2019).

70. In this regard, an institutional image study³⁵ commissioned by INDEC from an external consultancy firm in 2019, also underlined this phenomenon. More than 80% of the interviewees, on a random sampling, consider that the INDEC meets the credibility attribute in a medium to high degree. However, according to the same study, 27% of those interviewed even in 2019 considered that the Institute's independence from political power was low. The impossibility of achieving progress towards *de jure* independence and the fact that fixing the damages of the political intervention required further political intervention were no doubt important in this regard. Indeed, while the initial intervention forced out competent staff, a fresh intervention was required to force out the less competent or honest staff that replaced them. Secondly, attempts to suppress rival CPI series during the first political intervention aimed at hiding the truth, but suppression of the same rival series now helps to avoid confusion, since a reliable national measure has been re-established. It will be difficult to breaking this cycle of executive interventions is only possible with a modernisation of the statistical law, which would guarantee the professional independence of INDEC, and provide the institute with the managerial autonomy needed to create a strong institutional culture of professional competence and probity. Despite all the progress made in Argentina since 2015, these institutional pillars are still missing and it is thus to be feared that, once the lessons of the loss of credibility over 2007-15 fade, the way may be open to another round of politically-inspired statistical distortions.

71. Another interesting result of this study is the high degree of knowledge of INDEC. The Institute was identified by the interviewees as one of the four best-known public bodies in Argentina, along with the tax agency, the social services administration and the central bank. More than 82% of the population knows INDEC. The knowledge indicator is high in relation to the NSOs in general. It is very likely that this is due to the visibility of its institutional crisis, which helped the agency to position itself on the public agenda and introduce reforms.

72. Finally, the recovery of INDEC's credibility was recognised by all users, including political parties, as members of the ruling party and the opposition both used official statistics again in the political debate. The new president elected in late 2019 and leading a coalition government composed of the same political parties that had intervened in the INDEC in 2007, publicly praised the improvements occurred in the INDEC,³⁶ guaranteed the retention of staff, and appointed a new director with a technical-political profile, who publicly criticised the political intervention.

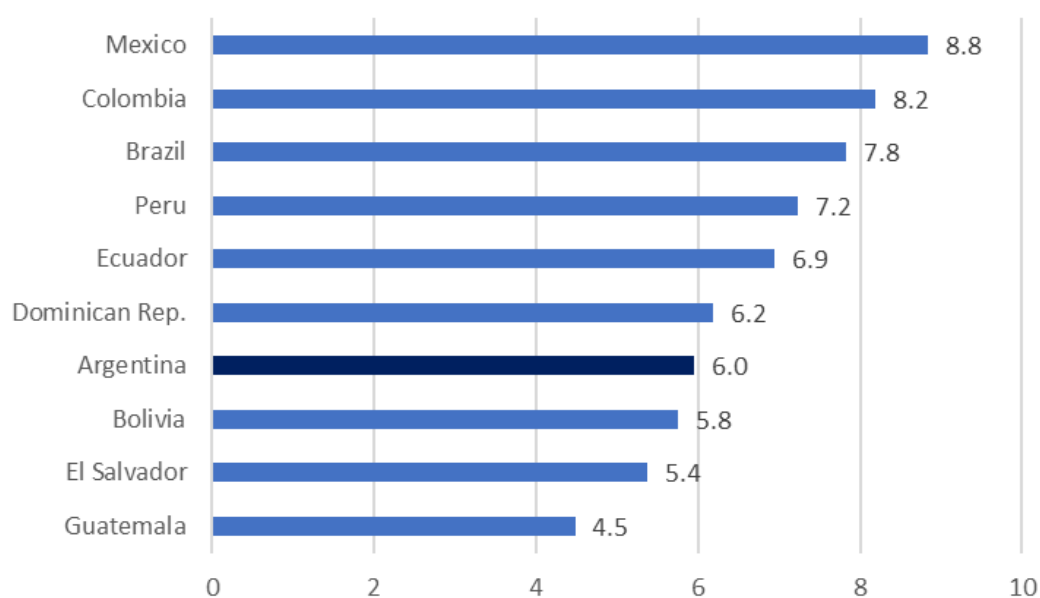
³⁵ See: https://www.indec.gob.ar/ftp/documentos/estudio_imagen_indec_2019.pdf

³⁶ See: <https://www.infobae.com/politica/2020/02/22/elogiosa-despedida-de-alberto-fernandez-al-fallecido-ex-titular-del-indec-jorge-todesca/>

4.3. Increase of Statistical Capacity

73. Statistical capacity can be measured by synthetic indicators that bring together several combinations of the technical-operational dimensions. However, as Beccaria (2017) points out, some tools available for capacity measurement often lack a comprehensive perspective. .

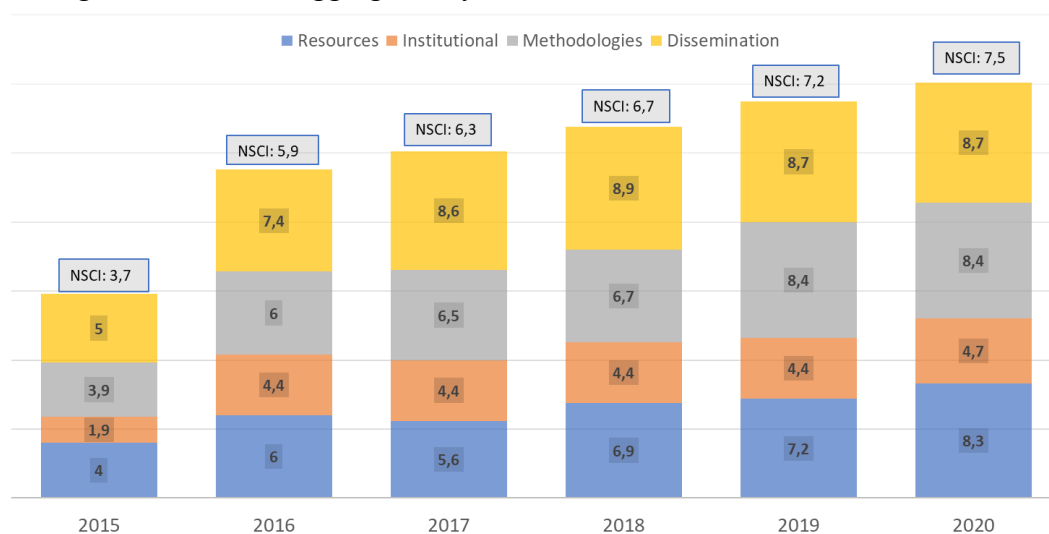
74. The National Statistical Capacity Index (NSCI) developed by the IDB for the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region includes the institutional dimension together with the technical-operational one and is a synthetic indicator, which ranges between 1 and 10, derived from a set of 89 individual indicators. In the framework of a series of IDB studies on the political economy of the statistical capacities in LAC (Dargent Lotta, Mejía and Moncada, 2018), the NSCI for Argentina was computed at the beginning of the reconstruction process in 2016, with a result of 5.95. As can be seen in Figure 2, Argentina was in the group of the most backward countries in the region in terms of statistical capacities.



Source: Dargent, Lotta, Mejía and Moncada (2018).

75. In order to analyse the evolution of the Argentine NSCI throughout the period, this the measurement is replicated for the period from 2015 to 2020. The results are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Argentine NSCI disaggregated by dimensions. Years 2015 to 2020.



Source: prepared by the authors based on the information provided by INDEC, except 2016 which corresponds to Dargent, Lotta, Mejia and Moncada (2018).

76. Argentina's NSCI doubled between 2015 and 2020, going from a value of 3.7 to 7.5. The current level places Argentina again among the countries with the best-established capacities in the region. The statistical capacity of the country has grown in all the dimensions considered in the NSCI, especially in resources, methodologies, and dissemination. The greatest advances relate to the budget, the building and computer infrastructure, the qualifications of staff, the implementation of user surveys, improvements to the website, and compliance with the advance dissemination schedule. On the other hand, less progress has been made on the institutional dimension, because many of the variables considered by the NSCI refer to institutional arrangements that would require on a new regulatory framework; such as, for example, the specification of selection criteria of the Director General.

77. The modernisation of the Argentinian legal framework for official statistics is one of the main pending issues that directly affects several dimensions of statistical capacity, in particular human resources. The lack of administrative autonomy, which inhibits the development of professional career paths and of staffing classifications that reflect the professional and technical profiles required by an NSO, limits the growth of INDEC's capabilities. The OECD review recommended this modernisation of the law on statistics, but also highlighted other aspects in which the institution still faces major challenges for the future, including the need to complete the strengthening of the statistical infrastructure, to update the base years of several indicators and to implement a comprehensive statistical quality management framework.

4.4. The new statistical law. An elusive objective.

78. The presidential decree that appointed Todesca as Director General in 2015 ordered him to propose the reforms that he deemed appropriate to the NSS's regulatory framework. Therefore, a committee of INDEC experts started the preparation of a draft law that was presented to the Executive Branch in late 2017, after having been reviewed by the OECD, IMF, and the UN. The main principles and definitions in this draft were consistent with the principles of the UNECE Generic Law on Official Statistics (GLOS) and the OECD Council Recommendation, which served as a starting point for the development of an own text adapted to national circumstances, but also to guide discussions at the highest levels of government.

These instruments, among others developed by international organisations, provide assistance to countries when they need to modernise their statistical legislation. They both contribute to develop solid legal basis for the functioning of the national statistical system and the production of high quality official statistics. To this end, they strongly support internationally recognised principles (e.g. the professional independence of the producers of official statistics, public procedures for the appointment of the Chief Statistician, etc.) but also recommend fundamental provisions for an efficient production of high quality official statistics, such as the implementation of an efficient quality management system, access to administrative data for statistical purposes, statistical confidentiality, coordination of the NSS, frequency of population censuses, etc. INDEC adapted the UNECE Generic Law to national circumstances but the initial draft was broadly aligned with the model. Some parts of the draft were directly extracted from the GLOS and were very helpful in legitimizing internal discussion, especially in those cases where other agencies might have veto power. For example, the wording in GLOS Article 17 on access to administrative data was copied verbatim to address the lifting of secrets (see Article 29 in Annex II), one of the main current issues for INDEC to improve its statistical production. In that perspective, the GLOS helped in providing access to administrative sources for statistical purposes by providing a clear mandate for data collection, an obligation for the owners of administrative data to provide data to the producers of official statistics, and an explicit reference to the secrecy provisions in other legislation that “cannot be invoked unless the legislation explicitly excludes the use of data for statistical purposes” (GLOS, Article 17). The secrecy being frequently argued as a limitation to use administrative sources in several statistical systems in Latin America, this wording demonstrated its usefulness in several cases.

79. The OECD Council Recommendation had been very clear regarding the need for a new statistical law that would strengthen INDEC’s authority over the NSS and elevate its institutional status to that of an autonomous body with its own legal status and control of its assets and its financial, human and technical resources. The statistical law should also strengthen the access to administrative data for statistical purposes, and apply specific technological, administrative, and organizational standards to protect the security and integrity of statistical databases. Lastly, the law should include provisions that guarantee impartiality, objectivity and transparency in the development and presentation of official Argentinian statistics (OECD, 2017).

80. Nevertheless, progress towards the new law turned out to be slower and more difficult than expected. In January 2018, within the framework of the 50th anniversary of INDEC, the main leaders of the international statistical community were present at an event held in Buenos Aires, where the desirable features of a new regulatory framework for Argentina were discussed (see Box 6). Less than two months later, a public controversy arose with the Ministry of Finance, which had a vision different from the project prepared by INDEC. The differences with the Ministry of Finance became public in April 2018, when a draft statistical law prepared by that Ministry³⁷, and which presented strong contrasts with the INDEC text, was leaked to the press. After this incident, an OECD mission met in Buenos Aires with the highest level of government, to clarify that the project that was going to be finally presented would meet the recommendations that had been made.

81. The definition of the project was brought to a standstill by the economic crisis that began in the second quarter of 2018, with constant changes of the representatives of the Ministry of Finance. Four different vice-ministers of Finance oversaw the matter, each with a particular

³⁷ See: <https://www.ambito.com/edicion-impres/hacienda-proyecta-la-disolucion-del-indec-n4016338>

vision on important issues including the nature of the future relationship with the Ministry, the role of the Advisory Council and the selection process for the Director General. The INDEC management believed that the Institute should functionally report to an organism that promotes a broad vision of public policies, such as the Head of the Cabinet of Ministers³⁸. On the other hand, the Ministry proposed the creation of an Executive Council, chaired by the Deputy Minister of Finance, who would henceforth take the lead of the NSS. As regards the election of the Director General, the Ministry of Finance was inflexible on the fact that it should be made by public tender, which implied the impossibility of Todesca to continue as the head of the body since he was already older than the age foreseen for participating in public tenders. Both projects not only expressed conceptual differences about INDEC's role, but also personal differences in the relationship of the Minister with Director General Todesca. That is the reason why it required the arrival of a new Minister in August 2019 to move forward to a definitive version of the project and send it to Congress. The submitted project respected the original spirit of the text proposed by INDEC and the recommendations made by the OECD.

Box 6 INDEC's 50th Anniversary. An event, a message.

On January 31st, 2018, the main leaders of the international statistical community participated in an event to celebrate the 50th anniversary of INDEC, opened by the President of the Nation, Mauricio Macri, together with Director General Jorge Todesca. The gathering, which was attended by more than 600 people, was the largest statistical event ever held in Buenos Aires, both in terms of the importance of the participants and the size of the audience. Panels focused on the need for a new regulatory framework for the Argentine statistical system³⁹. Among other guests, there were the Director of the UNSD, Stefan Schweinfest, the OECD Chief Statistician and Director of the OECD Statistics and Data Directorate, Martine Durand and the Director of the Statistics Department of the IMF, Louis Marc Ducharme, as well as authorities of Eurostat, the IDB, the Bank for International Settlements, ISTAT and the directors of the National Statistical Offices of the MERCOSUR countries. The event was held jointly with a thematic workshop concerning the Data Breach initiative of the G20.

Buenos Aires is not a very accessible city for international events, due to the distance and air connections. However, the international participants emphasized that they wanted to show their support for Argentina in the process it was carrying out. During the event, international leaders held meetings with the press and members of the Legislative and Executive Power to raise awareness of the importance of strengthening INDEC and the characteristics that the new law should have. The Director of the OECD also formally announced the beginning of a comprehensive review of the Argentine Statistical System by that organization. Thus, the international factor once again played a determining role in supporting the development of statistical capacities and credibility.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1. Main findings

82. The managerial starting point for the reconstruction and modernization of INDEC had been particularly difficult. The situation as of December 2015 had serious deficiencies in all the dimensions related to the statistical capacity of the Institute, especially those related to professional independence, human and physical resources, and respect for statistical methodologies and good practices.

³⁸ See: Todesca, J. and Muñoz, H. (2019). "Functional dependence of a National Statistical Office within its respective Executive Branch. Advantages and disadvantages", ISI 62nd Congress, Kuala Lumpur.

³⁹ The event was called: "50 years after the creation of INDEC: Lessons for a new statistical law". See: <https://www.indec.gob.ar/indec/web/Institucional-GacetillaCompleta-198>

83. This situation has been reversed and substantial progress has been made. Thus, the capacity gap with statistical offices of equivalent potential, resources and international relevance has been narrowed. The OECD study team concluded that the overall quality of the statistical series that INDEC is currently publishing is good and that INDEC has demonstrated the willingness and ability to implement international best practice recommendations.

84. The international statistical community has been very present throughout the INDEC reconstruction and modernization process. The Argentine case constitutes important empirical evidence on the potential of the international community to effectively engage in capacity building and the most successful intervention mechanisms in this regard. The international benchmarks provided by the UNECE Generic Law on Official Statistics and the OECD Council Recommendation were very useful all along the process of modernisation of the legal basis for the production of official statistics.

85. In turn, progress towards deeper reforms in the future will require INDEC to persevere in building legitimacy in its successive stages of development and, in particular, to achieve the still elusive qualitative leap in the legal framework.

86. The new reputation of INDEC, added to the reinstated qualified staff, the characteristics of the management team, the fluid link with the international statistical community and a community of qualified loyal users, established a solid shell of *de facto* protection of INDEC's independence. Although full *de jure* independence has not yet been achieved, this augurs well for the future of INDEC's statistical capacities, as does the fact that one of the first acts of the new government that took office in Argentina at the end of 2019 was to recognize the successful work done, give continuity to the staff, especially in the technical areas, and ensure that INDEC's new leadership can work independently. The new government, politically linked to the one that produced the previous intervention, has been careful to avoid a repetition of earlier problems. So, it seems that this lesson has been learned in Argentina. However, the modernisation of the law on statistics, including explicit provisions on the professional independence is recommended by the OECD with the aim to protect the producers of official statistics from any intervention from government.

5.2. Lessons learned

87. As a conclusion, some lessons that the Argentine case leaves for the statistical community are listed below:

(a) The sets of recommendations of the international quality frameworks and good practices are a determining factor in guiding and underpinning the National Statistical Systems, especially due to the indispensable role assigned to professional independence in the production of official statistics.

(b) Efforts should not be spared in the dissemination of good practices, not only within the statistical community, but also towards policy makers and the other key actors in the network of producers and users of statistics (media, academia, private sector, civil society, etc.)

(c) The Argentinian case confirms that professional independence is one of the most important issues in official statistics and that *de jure* protection of professional independence, through the inclusion of explicit provisions in the law on statistics, is essential. The recovery after the political intervention which damaged the Argentinian statistical system required further political intervention. For example, the initial intervention forced out competent staff,

but a fresh intervention was required to force out the less competent or honest staff that replaced them. Attempts to suppress rival CPI series during the first political intervention aimed at hiding the truth, but suppression of the same rival series now helps to avoid confusion, since INDEC re-established a reliable national measure. Breaking this cycle of executive interventions will be difficult without a modern statistical law guaranteeing *de jure* independence of INDEC, as well as the managerial autonomy needed to create a strong institutional culture of professional competence and probity. Despite all the progress made in Argentina since 2015, these institutional pillars are still missing. The risk of a new political intervention is still there, once the lessons of the loss of credibility over 2007-15 fade, as *de facto* independence does not sufficiently protect the producers of official statistics, can have a delaying effect on deeper changes required to restore credibility, and put a ceiling on further capacity development.

(d) There are a number of conditions that combined can support a successful capacity building process. The existence of political will, an adequate and committed staff, and the involvement of the international statistical community can be decisive for a quick capacity recovery.

(e) Lessons are also important for the international organisations. The IMF issued a Statement of Concern in 2012 and a Declaration of Censure in 2013. At this time, articles in the international press warned about the situation and other international organisations stopped publishing official statistics of Argentina. Although this likely helped the new administration to initiate the reforms, it appears that the international statistical community has limited capacity to intervene against deviations from fundamental principles in countries, but it can play a key role in the rebuilding stage.

(f) Rebuilding trust requires a transparent and user-oriented dissemination policy, aimed at generating a critical mass willing to complain about any abnormality in the flow of information they use.

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ANNEX I. INDEC PROCUREMENT PROGRAMME (2017-2019)

INDEC procurement program. Period 2017-2019	
Computer Equipment	4585 tablets for field operations, 1170 desktop computers, 790 monitors, 136 laptops, 171 printers, 18 scanners
	8 Interactive Projectors, 10 Projectors for Meeting Rooms, 30 Mini-projectors, 15 Videoconferencing Equipment and 37 Televisions
	50 manageable switches for data network, 15 Wi-Fi access points, 100TB of storage.
	Integral Circuit of Security Cameras
	Acquisition of Software Licenses (Computer Security, Windows and MSOffice 365 comprehensive package, Development Software, Suit Adobe, SAS, Oracle, etc.)
	Fortinet edge safety equipment
Office furniture	1.029 chairs
	148 cabinets
	53 Meeting Tables
	615 desks
Vehicle fleet	4 Minibus Vehicles to Transfer Surveyors and Personnel
	4 4x4 Truck Vehicles
	1 Sedan Vehicle
Building Infrastructure	Renovation of the four elevators in the central building.
	Comprehensive renovation of the 34 toilets and the 10 common spaces of the Institute's headquarters.
	New electrical general panel, main column and central building sections panels.
	Installation of an electric generator in the central building.
	Refurbishment of 8,446m2 of offices and service spaces to optimize use through an open concept.
	General painting of all functional spaces.
	Opening of a new headquarters of 1,470 m2 of new open concept offices.
	Installation of Cardio-defibrillators in all the Venues.
	Integral change LED lighting.
	Comprehensive renovation of structured data cabling (Category 6).
Fitting out of dining and lactation rooms.	

ANNEX II. STATISTICAL LAW PROPOSAL

*Statistical Law Proposal presented by President Macri to the National Congress on 26th November 2019*⁴⁰

The Senate and the National Chamber of Deputies of Argentina, gathered in Congress, pass the following:

ORGANIC LAW OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM

TITLE I GENERAL PROVISIONS

CHAPTER I PRINCIPLES

ARTICLE 1.- Scope of application. The National Statistical System (NSS), the official statistical activities and national censuses in the national territory shall be ruled by the present Law, by the principles guiding official statistics, good practice, and by regional and international censuses and guidelines to which the Republic of Argentina formally adheres.

ARTICLE 2.- Principles. The principles guiding official statistics are as follows:

- a. Official statistics provide an indispensable element in the information system of a democratic society, serving the government, the economy and the public with data about the economic, demographic, social and environmental situation. To this end, official statistics that meet the test of practical utility are to be compiled and made available on an impartial basis by official statistical agencies to honour citizens' entitlement to public information.
- b. To retain trust in official statistics, the statistical agencies need to decide according to strictly professional considerations, including scientific principles and professional ethics, on the methods and procedures for the collection, processing, storage and presentation of statistical data.
- c. To facilitate a correct interpretation of the data, the statistical agencies are to present information according to scientific standards on the sources, methods and procedures of statistics.
- d. The statistical agencies are entitled to comment on erroneous interpretation and misuse of statistics.
- e. Data for statistical purposes may be drawn from all types of sources, be they statistical surveys or administrative records. Statistical agencies are to choose the source with regard to quality, timeliness, costs and the burden on respondents.
- f. Individual data collected by statistical agencies for statistical compilation, whether they refer to natural or legal persons, are to be strictly confidential and used exclusively for statistical purposes.
- g. The laws, regulations and measures under which the statistical systems operate are to be made public.
- h. Coordination among statistical agencies within countries is essential to achieve consistency and efficiency in the statistical system.
- i. The use by statistical agencies in each country of international concepts, classifications and methods promotes the consistency and efficiency of statistical systems at all official levels.
- j. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation in statistics contributes to the improvement of systems of official statistics in all countries.

ARTICLE 3.- Essential public service. The compilation of official statistics and national censuses performed by the NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES is an essential public service.

CHAPTER II THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM

ARTICLE 4.- Composition. The National Statistical System is composed of:

- a) The NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES.
- b) The statistical services of the National Public Sector, with the scope set forth in articles 8 and 9 of Law 24156 on Financial Administration and Control Systems of the National Public Sector.
- c) The statistical services of the municipal, provincial and Autonomous City of Buenos Aires's public sector.

ARTICLE 5.- The creation of new statistical agencies in branches of the National Public Sector shall be informed to the NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES.

ARTICLE 6.- Governing body. The NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES is the governing body and enforcement authority of the National Statistical System and shall centralise the actions of regulation, coordination, monitoring and control to guarantee the efficient operation of the System.

⁴⁰ See: <https://www4.hcdn.gob.ar/dependencias/dsecretaria/Periodo2018/PDF2018/TP2018/0007-PE-2019.pdf> (in Spanish).

TITLE II
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES (INDEC)
CHAPTER I
LEGAL STATUS AND POWERS

ARTICLE 7.- Constitution. The NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES is hereby an autonomous entity, with legal capacity and own assets, under the National Executive Power.

ARTICLE 8.- Powers and functions. The following are powers and functions of the NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES:

- a. To lead the organisation, management, performance and supervision of the activities of the National Statistical System.
- b. To enact the regulation that governs the production and dissemination of statistics across the national territory.
- c. To draft the National Statistical Plan and publish an Annual Report with the results of each activity performed during the year, as well as an annual assessment of the operation of the National Statistical System.
- d. To publish all statistical and census information, and the methodology for its compilation, placing particular emphasis on safeguarding statistical secrecy.
- e. To establish standard guidelines, definitions and classifications to guarantee the comparability of official statistical information.
- f. To establish the standard classification for administrative records according to the needs for statistical production.
- g. To directly or indirectly, by means of third parties, audit the statistical production of the remaining bodies of the National Statistical System.
- h. To certify statistical quality concerning official statistics production processes of public and private entities.
- i. To review methodological procedures for collection, analysis, classification and dissemination of data, as well as procedures for determination of figures, measurements, rates and indices, in order to verify their compliance with the principles of this Law.
- j. To conduct statistical studies promoting the continuous update of methodology for the compilation, systematisation and dissemination of indicators of the social, economic and environmental realities.
- k. To introduce methodological modifications for the production of statistics and censuses, as well as eventual substitutions or procedural changes in collection, interpretation and evaluation of statistical and census data, and the adherence to new consensuses, guidelines or principles.
- l. To conduct economic, social, demographic and environmental studies related to the results of its statistical production.
- m. To provide appropriate and advisable technical and financial assistance to the bodies that integrate the National Statistical System.
- n. To draft the annual national statistics and censuses programme and the budget.
- o. To carry out research aimed at raising the technical and scientific level of the National Statistical System and foster scientific and technical training, in collaboration with international, national and private organisations.
- p. To send delegates to national and international conferences, conventions and meetings aimed at the treatment of statistical matters and to establish exchange and interpretation modalities for national and international statistical information.
- q. To hold national, regional and international statistical conferences, conventions and meetings.
- r. To perform other actions that shall contribute to the objectives set forth in the present Law.

ARTICLE 9.- Methodology. For the purposes established in Article 8, subsection k, non-binding preliminary discussions of methodological changes shall be promoted in national and/or international specialised fields. Once determined by INDEC's Director-General, they shall be notified in advance to the bodies of the NSS and users.

Methodological changes shall be performed in accordance with international standards and with transparent, public procedures pre-established by INDEC.

CHAPTER II
THE AUTHORITIES OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
STATISTICS AND CENSUSES

ARTICLE 10.- Director-General. The NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES shall be headed by a Director-General, with the rank and hierarchy of a secretary of State, appointed by the National Executive Power after a public background merit and competitive tender, with approval of the Honourable Senate of the Nation.

The Director-General shall serve a five-year (5) term and may be reappointed only once, without the need of a new public tender.

Until the approval of the National Senate is obtained, the National Executive Power may appoint temporarily.

ARTICLE 11.- Appointment. Once the candidates have been pre-selected, the National Executive Power shall release their names, surnames and backgrounds in the Official Bulletin and in two (2) national newspapers. Citizens, non-government organisations, schools, associations and academic entities may, during the fifteen (15) days following the release of the official contest results, present the written, well-founded, documented observations which they consider of interest to express on the pre-selected candidates to the National Executive Power.

Each candidate shall present a sworn statement of their own assets and the assets of their spouse or partner, the assets of joint property of spouses, and all others included in Article 6 of Law 25188 on the Ethics in the Exercise of Public Office and its regulation. Additionally, they shall present a sworn statement that shall include the list of civil associations and commercial companies which they integrate or have integrated in the last five (5) years; their list of clients and contractors for the last five (5) years, in accordance with the professional ethics regulation in force; the list of law firms, accounting firms or consultancy

firms they have integrated, if applicable; and any other type of commitment that may affect their impartiality due to their own activities, the activities of their spouses, of their ascendants and descendants of the first degree, to allow an objective assessment of incompatibilities and conflicts of interest. The Anti-Corruption Office shall produce a report, prior to the appointment of candidates, on existing or potential conflicts of interest based on the aforementioned statements.

ARTICLE 12.- Technical Director. The Technical Director is to be appointed by the Director-General after a public background merit and competitive tender. The Technical Director shall serve a five-year (5) term and may be reappointed only once. The Technical Director shall have the rank and hierarchy of an undersecretary of State.

ARTICLE 13.- Requirements and incompatibilities. The Director-General and the Technical Director must be Argentine citizens, hold university degrees and be suitable in matters of statistics or related fields. The exercise of the function requires exclusive dedication and is incompatible with any other public or private activity, except part-time teaching.

The following persons may not perform as Director-General or Technical Director:

- a. Persons convicted of intentional crimes.
- b. Persons sanctioned with discharge or suspension from the national, provincial, the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires's or municipal public administration.

ARTICLE 14.- Termination. The functions of the Director-General and the Technical Director shall be considered terminated by operation of law under the following circumstances:

- a. Resignation.
- b. Expiration of term.
- c. Death.
- d. Removal under the terms of Article 15.

ARTICLE 15.- Removal. The Director-General and the Technical Director may be removed for the following causes:

- a. Poor performance of duties.
- b. Supervening incapacity.
- c. Conviction of intentional crimes.
- d. Violation of incompatibility rules.

The National Statistical System Council may, by a two-thirds vote, recommend the removal of the Director-General for the causes provided in this Law and in a public proceeding to ensure the right of defence.

The recommendation shall be presented to the National Statistical System Bicameral Monitoring Commission and issued by a decision approved by the absolute majority of its members.

The National Statistical System Council may, by a two-thirds vote, recommend the removal of the Technical Director for the causes provided in this Law. The recommendation shall be presented to the Director-General.

ARTICLE 16.- Vacancy. In case of death, resignation, or any other event leading to the vacancy of office before the end of the period for which the Director-General was appointed, the Executive Power shall immediately order a new appointment process as established in Chapter II of the present Law. The appointed Director-General shall complete the term originating the vacancy, which shall be considered as a first term.

Until the approval of the National Senate is obtained, the National Executive Power may appoint temporarily.

ARTICLE 17.- Powers and responsibilities. The Director-General shall have the following powers and responsibilities:

- a. To coordinate the relationships with the bodies of the NSS.
- b. To serve as the legal representative of the NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES.
- c. To perform the general administration of the NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES, prepare the activities programme and the annual budget of the Institute.
- d. To administer the budget.
- e. To enact the interpretation and regulatory rules of this Law, except in the cases provided requiring the intervention or approval of the National Statistical System Council.
- f. To organise and regulate the internal operation of the Institute in its structural, operational and human resources aspects, including the enactment and modification of the organic and functional structure at lower levels than those approved by the National Executive Power.
- g. To draft the National Statistical Plan and the Annual Report and submit them to the approval of the National Statistical System Council.
- h. To appoint and remove the officials reporting directly to the Director-General and not subject to the public tender system.
- i. To appoint, promote, assess, remove and sanction the staff of the Institute and enact the regulation for public tender by qualification.
- j. To hire staff for the conduction of seasonal, extraordinary or special tasks that cannot be performed by permanent staff only and establish the terms of work and compensation.
- k. To order the conduction of summaries to the personnel.
- l. To hear the negotiations for labour collectives with trade union entities that represent the staff within the framework of the regulation in force.
- m. To authorise international trips to competent staff of the Institute, to fulfil missions or secondments, in accordance with regulation.
- n. To sanction for breach of obligations to provide integral and timely information for statistical and census purposes provided in the present Organic Law and its regulation.
- o. To promote the creation of specialised technical councils and committees.
- p. To regulate the processes of self-evaluation and external evaluation of the execution of the strategic plan.
- q. To conclude agreements with third parties.
- r. To foster scientific and technical training.

CHAPTER III THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM BICAMERAL MONITORING COMMISSION

ARTICLE 18.- *The National Statistical System Bicameral Monitoring Commission.* The NSS Bicameral Monitoring Commission shall be integrated by six (6) representatives of the Honourable Chamber of Deputies of the Nation and six (6) representatives of the Honourable Chamber of Senators of the Nation, appointed by each chamber's president following the proposal of the parliamentary blocs and respecting political representation shares. The chair of the Bicameral Commission shall rotate annually between chambers and shall have a second vote in the case of a tie.

ARTICLE 19.- *Functions.* The Bicameral Commission shall approve or reject, by absolute majority of its members, the recommendation for removal of INDEC's Director-General issued by the National Statistical System Council, following an audience with the interested party. Additionally, it may receive and consider the National Statistical Plan; receive and request INDEC's annual report; and analyse and issue reports with proposals, recommendations and observations on the annual report.

CHAPTER IV THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM COUNCIL

ARTICLE 20.- *The National Statistical System Council.* The National Statistical System Council, within the scope of the NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES, is hereby created as the main advisory and consultative body in matters strategic for the development of the National Statistical System.

ARTICLE 21.- *Composition.* The National Statistical System Council shall be integrated by fifteen (15) members and promote gender parity in its composition:

1. One (1) representative of the Ministry of Treasury.
2. One (1) representative of the Ministry of Health and Social Development.
3. One (1) representative of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology.
4. One (1) representative of the Ministry of Production and Labour.
5. One (1) representative of the National Administration of Social Security (ANSES).
6. One (1) representative of the Central Bank of the Republic of Argentina (BCRA).
7. One (1) representative of the Government Secretariat of Science and Technology.
8. One (1) representative of the National Inter-University Council.
9. One (1) representative selected by the Council of Heads of Private Universities.
10. One (1) representative selected by the Argentine Statistical Society.
11. One (1) representative selected by the National Economic Science Academy.
12. Four (4) experts of proven background and recognised academic prestige in statistics, economics, social sciences, law, communications or similar fields, proposed by INDEC's Director-General.

ARTICLE 22.- *Functions.* The National Statistical System Council shall have the following functions:

- a. To be involved in the removal process of the Director-General, according to the functions assigned by the present Law.
- b. To approve the National Statistical Plan and the Annual Report.
- c. To promote regular statistical quality assessments of INDEC statistics, through relevant international organisations or other established national statistical institutes.
- d. To commission statistical user satisfaction assessments.
- e. To voice opinions, by itself or upon request of the Director-General, on any matter related to modifications to the National Statistical System, demands for new operations or improvements to methodology, collection, processing or dissemination of official statistics.
- f. To evaluate the information needs and priorities of the National Public Administration in particular and society in general, in order to propose ways to satisfy them with the available resources with attention to quality, efficiency and effectiveness criteria.
- g. To develop proposals, by itself or upon request of the Director-General, for the strategic development and strengthening of the National Statistical System, following international principles and good practice.
- h. To request, to the Director-General or Technical Director, the technical assistance of the NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES.
- i. To draft its own operating regulation.

ARTICLE 23.- *Operation.* The Council shall appoint one of its members as Chair, by absolute majority vote. The Council Chair shall serve a one-year term and may be re-elected only once.

Additionally, the Director-General and the Technical Director may participate, with voice but not vote, in the meetings of the Council. The heads of the remaining bodies of the NSS may also request to participate exceptionally.

The Council's session shall require a minimum quorum of eight (8) members and shall make decisions by absolute majority of members present. In case of a tie, the Chair shall have a second vote.

The Council shall meet whenever called by its Chair, at the request of at least two (2) of its members and at least once every three (3) months.

ARTICLE 24.- *Duties.* The members of the Council shall formally commit, in writing, to confidentiality, impartiality and adherence to the statistical principles set forth in Article 2 of the present Law. The information obtained in the exercise of their duties shall be of a confidential nature.

CHAPTER V ON THE BUDGET OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES

ARTICLE 25.- Resources. The resources of the NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES shall comprise:

- a. The resources determined by the National General Budgetary Law.
- b. Resources arising from provision of services to third parties.
- c. Transfers of resources with or without specific allocation from jurisdictions or entities of the public sector or international organisations.
- d. Legacies and donations.
- e. Fines applied for infringement of the present Law.
- f. All other income enabled by regulation in force.

ARTICLE 26.- Application. The resources of the NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES shall be applied to:

- a) financing expenditures required for the fulfilment of the annual programme of activities;
- b) the payment of any unplanned expenditure related to the purposes of the Institute.

ARTICLE 27.- Administration. The NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES shall have broad powers to allocate and redistribute its funds for projects, programmes, tasks and activities; to establish the staff and its distribution; to assign personnel to the different units of the Institute; and to make the necessary investments for the attainment of its objectives.

ARTICLE 28.- Draft budget. On an annual basis, the Director-General of the NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES shall present for consideration of the National Executive Power the draft budget, to be incorporated in the General Budget for National Administration presented annually to the Honourable National Congress.

TITLE III ON THE RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF THE RESPONDENTS OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM CHAPTER I SUBJECTS UNDER OBLIGATION TO INFORM

ARTICLE 29.- Duty to inform. The following subjects are under obligation to gratuitously provide the information of interest for official statistics required by the Institute and the other constitutional bodies of the National Statistical System:

1. Individual persons with an address or residency in the Republic of Argentina.
2. Legal persons, public or private, with legal address in the Republic of Argentina.
3. The agencies of the National Public Sector—in accordance with Articles 8 and 9 of Law 24156 on Financial Administration and Control Systems of the National Public Sector—, provincial, municipal and of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires.

Regulations relative to confidentiality or secrecy contained in other legislation shall not be exceptionable, unless they expressly exclude the use of data for statistical purposes.

ARTICLE 30.- Notification of scope. Subjects under obligation to provide information must be duly notified of the obligatory nature of their response, its confidential treatment, their duty to respond with truthfulness and of the consequences of its falsehood.

ARTICLE 31.- Censuses. Participation and collaboration of the inhabitants of the Republic in the conduction of censuses shall be obligatory and free of charge.

ARTICLE 32.- Nonfulfillment. Nonfulfillment of the duty to provide information of interest for official statistics shall fall within the Regime of Infringements and Penalties set forth by the present Law and the regulation developed thereof.

CHAPTER II TREATMENT OF THE INFORMATION PROVIDED

ARTICLE 33.- Anonymity. The data provided shall be published exclusively as statistics. They shall under no circumstances be disseminated in a nominative or individualised manner, except with prior express consent of the respondent.

Any direct or indirect identification of subjects under obligation to inform the system is prohibited. Under no circumstances shall the lists of households, of individual or legal persons, or of establishments or other units comprising the sample or panel be provided.

The bodies of the NSS may request access to individual data collected and processed by other NSS bodies in their own jurisdictions, provided that they abide by the same regime of obligations, prohibitions and punishments to safeguard statistical secrecy. The bodies that produce the requested data shall provide them in a timely and appropriate manner, safeguarding anonymity whenever necessary.

The NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES shall enact the regulation to ensure the appropriate dissemination of and public access to information, in conformity with the present Article.

ARTICLE 34.- Advance notice. Should the persons responsible for administrative records in the public sector foresee any modification to the attainment of the data provided for the purposes of official statistics, they are to notify the Institute in advance.

ARTICLE 35.- Verification. The National INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES is hereby empowered to request accounting books or documents from persons or entities under obligation to provide statistical data, for the sole purpose of verifying the information. If the data included in the presented statements are not registered in accounting books, the original documents and background for the information provided is to be exhibited.

ARTICLE 36.- Confidentiality and security. The NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES shall enact the regulation and protocols to ensure confidentiality, proper use and custody of administrative records in order to promote their harnessing for statistical purposes.

CHAPTER III STATISTICAL CONFIDENTIALITY

ARTICLE 37.- Statistical confidentiality. The information provided in accordance with the present Law shall be protected by statistical confidentiality and only used for statistical purposes.

ARTICLE 38.- Duties. The members of the National Statistical System shall maintain statistical confidentiality and secrecy of the information provided, refraining from disclosing it to third parties, including for tax, judicial, administrative or any other purpose.

ARTICLE 39.- Scope. Any person that, by reason of task, office or function, becomes aware of statistical or census data is bound to the duty of confidentiality and statistical secrecy.

All NSS bodies shall put in place physical, technological, administrative and organisational provisions to safeguard the security and integrity of the information in their power.

Data protected by statistical confidentiality that are divulged shall not be admitted into evidence in court proceedings and are to be rejected by judges.

ARTICLE 40.- Access to public information. The following is hereby incorporated to Article 8 of Law 27275 on Right to Access Public Information as paragraph "n": "All information protected by statistical confidentiality."

ARTICLE 41.- Investigation. The NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES shall promote the investigation of all events or circumstances of infringement of the principles of confidentiality and secrecy described in the present Law.

CHAPTER IV USER'S RIGHT TO ACCESS STATISTICAL INFORMATION

ARTICLE 42.- Timeliness. Users of official statistics have the right to receive, from the bodies of the NSS, the statistical results produced, in a timely and appropriate manner and in accordance with the advance release calendar of official statistics. Delays in dissemination of statistical products are to be exceptional and must be documented. The bodies of the NSS shall notify INDEC and the public in such cases, and a new release date shall be set.

ARTICLE 43.- Dissemination. The NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES and the bodies of the NSS shall present their information with a detail on sources, methods and procedures, in a clear and understandable manner, guaranteeing impartial and simultaneous availability through the appropriate channels and in communication formats adequate to current technologies and users' access capacity.

Notwithstanding the fulfilment of the duties in Law 27275 on Access to Public Information, series, databases, tables and other official statistical products must be made available to the public in a timely manner, and with the highest level of breakdown and disaggregation possible with regard to the provisions of this Law on statistical confidentiality and the laws in force on protection of personal data. Any change to the frequency, format, distribution license or other methodological matters affecting users' access or use is to be communicated publicly in advance.

ARTICLE 44.- Objectivity and impartiality. Public dissemination of national official statistical information is to be objective, impartial and simultaneous.

ARTICLE 45.- Accessibility. The NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES is to make available to users the mechanisms for consultation and reports on statistical products and their uses.

ARTICLE 46.- Confidential information. The NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES shall regulate and establish specific security protocols for users who request, for scientific research purposes, access to statistical information, safeguarding the anonymity principles established in Article 31.

TITLE IV ON THE SYSTEM OF INFRACTIONS AND SANCTIONS FOR STATISTICAL AND CENSUS PURPOSES

ARTICLE 47.- Nonfulfillment. Opposition to or disobedience of the public duty of statistical or census functions shall be punishable under Article 239 of the Penal Code.

ARTICLE 48.- Interference. Acts or omissions preventing the normal development of surveys or processes of generation of statistical information shall be punishable under Article 239 of the Penal Code.

ARTICLE 49.- Fines. Persons under obligation to provide information for statistical or census purposes in breach of their obligation shall be liable to a fine of one (1) to fifty (50) minimum salaries for:

- a. providing information after the stipulated deadline or
- b. refusing to provide information or
- c. providing false or incomplete data or
- d. opposing to or impeding the verification inspections

ARTICLE 50.- *Diversion of information.* Any person who reveals to a third party or uses for personal gain any individual information of statistical or census nature gained during their functions, or wilfully incurs in misrepresentation, omission or adulteration of census or statistical data shall be punishable by application of the Penal Code, Volume II, Title V, Chapter III, and shall be liable to the application of the fines established in Article 49 of this Law.

ARTICLE 51.- *Violation of confidentiality.* Any person incurring in violation of statistical confidentiality shall be punishable by application of Article 157 bis of the Criminal Code.

ARTICLE 52.- *Aggravated violation of confidentiality.* Any person in exercise of public function incurring in violation of statistical confidentiality shall be punishable by application of articles 157 and 157 bis of the Criminal Code.

SUPPLEMENTARY AND TEMPORARY PROVISIONS

ARTICLE 53.- *Transfer.* All staff, goods, budget, assets and property are hereby transferred to the NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES, autonomous entity created by the present Law, which shall maintain for all legal purposes the rights and duties of the former.

ARTICLE 54.- All mentions in current legislation of the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses, decentralised body, shall be considered to refer to the NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS AND CENSUSES, constituted by the present Law, its competency or authorities, respectively.

ARTICLE 55.- *Adherence.* Provincial jurisdictions and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires are hereby invited to adhere to the principles of the present Law regarding their local statistical production.

ARTICLE 56.- The present Law is of public interest, is to be applied in the whole national territory and shall come into force once it is published in the Official Bulletin.