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Could professional autonomy undermine the relevance of statistics?

Conference of European Statisticians, 8-10 June 2009



Following the outbreak of the global financial crisis, statisticians have faced an unprecedented increase in demand for high-quality statistics. At its plenary session in Geneva (8-10 June) the Conference of European Statisticians discussed how to address emerging areas, new developments and user demands, while ensuring professional autonomy and accountability of statistical organizations.

Trust and credibility

Ensuring professional autonomy, while remaining relevant to the needs of policymakers and society, is a key concern of official statisticians. Accountability to government, parliament and the general public for making good use of the public funds allocated for the production of official statistics is also a priority. Discussions helped to improve understanding of boundaries between official and unofficial statistics and the challenges in building trust and credibility.

Along with increased demand for information, statisticians noted pressure from policymakers on what should be measured and how data should be presented. However, maintaining professional independence and impartiality is crucial for ensuring the credibility of statistical organizations. All these issues make it challenging for statistical organizations to maintain their reputation of efficient and timely providers of high-quality data.

Economic measurement

The other main topic of the Conference dealt with issues in business statistics. Increased public attention on economic measurement can provide an opportunity



Sharing good practices in promotion of knowledge-based development

Policymakers, academics and business representatives participated in the International Conference on Knowledge-based Development*, held in Minsk, Belarus on 10-12 June. It provided a singular mix of high-level policy dialogue, practical exchange of experiences and networking opportunities across a broad range of topics relevant for the innovative performance of modern economies.

The Conference was structured around four main sessions, which included innovation policies, financing issues, intellectual property rights and public-private partnerships.

Across this broad range of topics, the discussion of conceptual frameworks presented by international experts was combined with presentations of the national experiences by practitioners from different countries who focused on policy initiatives and achievements in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus region.

The wide geographical representation made this Conference a unique event, which was a pioneering initiative aiming to bring together stakeholders dealing with innovation and competitiveness in this region.

Participants had the opportunity to visit the Belarusian High Technologies Park, which is an interesting case of creative national policies in support of technological development. This concluding activity provided a fitting end



to a Conference where the practical aspects of implementing innovation policies figured prominently in the discussions.

The proceedings of the Conference, to be published by SCST and BellSA, will allow further dissemination of the varied interventions made at the Conference while strengthening the links between participants and contributing to the emergence of "communities of practice" on innovation issues in this region. ■

For more information contact José Palacín (jose.palacin@unece.org).

**Jointly organized by UNECE and the Belarus State Committee for Science and Technology (SCST), in cooperation with the Secretariat of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the UNDP Office in Belarus and the Belarusian Institute of System Analysis and Information Support of the Scientific and Technical Sphere (BellSA).*

Information Service
UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)
CH - 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Tel: +41 (0) 22 917 44 44
Fax: +41 (0) 22 917 05 05

E-mail: info.ece@unece.org
Website: <http://www.unece.org>

Not an official record - For information only

Russia implements UNECE standard for seed potatoes

UNECE's international agricultural quality standards are used by governments, traders and growers. Although as such they are not obligatory, they do, however, become mandatory when they are referred to in European Commission regulations or when they're transposed into national legislation.

In December 2008, the Russian Federation's Federal Agency for Technical Regulation and Metrology adopted a new standard for seed potatoes based on the UNECE standard (ГОСТ Р 53136-2008 «Картофель семенной. Технические условия»). UNECE had contributed to developing the standard by organizing an International Workshop on Seed Potatoes in Kislovodsk, in the Northern Caucasus region last year. The event was held in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and the seed-potato-producing enterprise "Meristime cultures".

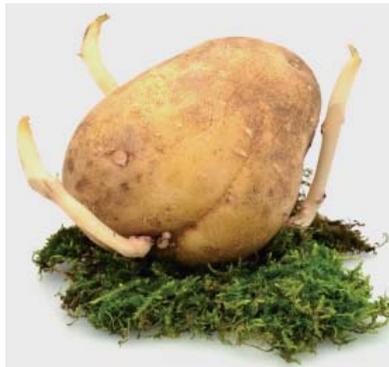
Applying the new standard will first and foremost guarantee healthy seeds. For Russia, where potatoes are called "second bread", application of this standard is expected to make a significant difference to both the quality and the yield of potatoes for consumption. ■

Download standard:

http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/standard/potatoes/pot_e.htm

For more information contact Serguei Malanichev

(agrstandards@unece.org).



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to improve business statistics to better meet policymakers' needs. It was acknowledged that it is time to reassess the relevance of business statistics, taking into account emerging issues such as measuring globalisation, research and development, and innovation, while keeping the respondent burden to a minimum.

Communication strategies

Also discussed were the challenges in the communication and dissemination of statistics. Improving their communication strategies should be a priority for statistical organizations, as good communication will strengthen their credibility. Other challenges include the need to assess the impact of new visualization tools, overcome declining participation rates in surveys and censuses, and improve statistical literacy.

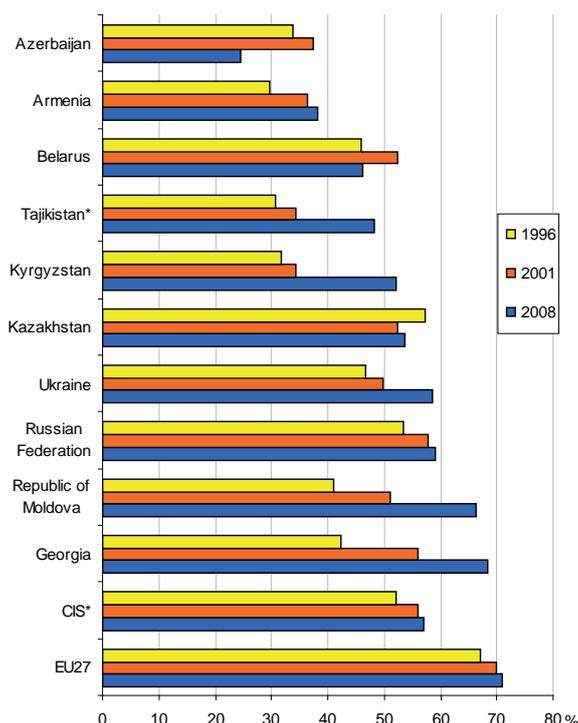
The Conference plays a major role in developing standards in official statistics and launching innovative work. This time, the Conference adopted guidelines on measuring migration, carrying out victimizations surveys and on confidentiality and privacy aspects of statistical data integration. Due to its leadership role in international official statistics, the Conference attracts participation from countries outside the UNECE region, such as Australia, Brazil, Chile, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand and Republic of Korea. ■

For more information contact: Tiina Luige
(support.stat@unece.org).

FACTS AND FIGURES

Service sector gains importance in the CIS region

Share of Services in GDP



Over the last few decades, the economy has become more service-oriented, not only in the European Union (EU27) and North America, but also in the region of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The rising importance of the service sector in the CIS region can be seen as one dimension of the shift from centrally planned to market economy. The economic and social changes in the 1990s have led to significant expansion of financial and business activities and also strengthened demand for personal and public services.

By 1996, the share of the service sector in GDP in the CIS region amounted to 52% - some 16 percentage points behind the EU average - and over the next eleven years it gained another 5 percentage points. However, the aggregate figures mask big differences among the CIS countries in development of the service sector. For instance, if during the above-mentioned period the share of services in GDP had changed rather little in Belarus, the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan; it had diminished markedly in Azerbaijan, where the boost in oil and gas production has outperformed the growth of services. At the same time, much larger shifts towards a service-based economy were recorded in the Republic of Moldova, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. ■

Source: UNECE Statistical Database (<http://www.unece.org/stats/data>).

* Data for 2008 refer to 2007. CIS aggregate includes the ten countries in the chart.

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