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SESSION II

Direction of youth in using official statistics following the example of School Corner¹

Submitted by the Statistical Office of Estonia

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Statistical Office of Estonia considers schools an essential target group, because students are future consumers of statistics. Educational institutions account for 15% of the clients of the Statistical Office.

II. USER SURVEYS

2. Since 1996, several user surveys, ordered by the Statistical Office, have been conducted in educational establishments to find out the needs of data users for statistical information, and their vision of products and services provided by the Statistical Office.

3. In the surveys, much attention was paid to customer satisfaction - the presentation of data, its comprehensibility and simplicity. The surveys conducted revealed that the need for electronic access to statistical data is growing. In 1998, 88% of survey respondents preferred to obtain

¹ This paper has been prepared at the invitation of the secretariat.

statistical data through printed publications and 58% preferred the Internet, while, according to the results of the 2003 survey, 80% of respondents used electronic channels to find statistical information. The most frequently mentioned reasons for preferring data presented on the website were convenience, availability and promptness. The non-users of electronic channels pointed out problems such as profusion of data and lack of personal contact. The result reveals that some users cannot handle the information since they have no practice in using statistical data. They cannot interpret the data; it appears simply as a line of numbers. Therefore, attention has to be given to encouraging people to use data.

4. Based on the information obtained through the consumer surveys, best practices of other countries and the need to direct young people towards statistics, making it easier for them to understand statistical data and to use it in the future, the Statistical Office decided to create a School Corner.

5. It should also be noted that many students enter introductory statistics courses with low confidence and motivation, which also impacts the type of assessments that will be effective and informative to both the students and the instructors. Students are generally anxious when first attending statistics courses, so the Statistical Office wanted to make statistics more accessible and less daunting.

6. In autumn 2003, the Statistical Office started cooperation with Junior Achievement (the main activity of JA Estonia has been the training of economics teachers). The idea of a School Corner was introduced to them, and they were offered an opportunity to cooperate with the Statistical Office. As the next step, meetings with the economics teachers were organised, and the programme for the future activities was worked out:

- (a) to provide schools with statistical data, and not only the economics teachers but also teachers of economic geography, civics, mathematics, etc.;
- (b) a target group was selected – students of basic and middle level, and their teachers.

7. Some basic problems were pointed out, e.g. difficulties in finding the most recent information concerning the economic situation of Estonia and comparable statistics of other countries. There were also difficulties concerning terms and definitions in the field of statistics and economy. After consulting with teachers of economics and mathematics at secondary schools, the School Corner was opened in 2004.

8. The School Corner is on the web site of the Statistical Office at: www.stat.ee KOOLINURK (School Corner). School Corner is presented only in Estonian.

III. THE CONCEPT OF THE SCHOOL CORNER

9. The aim of School Corner is to introduce statistics in a simpler form, as well as the possibilities of using it, mainly to pupils of secondary schools, but also to teachers. School Corner helps to understand the essence of statistical indicators, principal methods and concepts of statistics, providing fresh statistics and guides for students in using statistics.

10. The presented data are just a selection of those being constantly updated. Most relevant annual data have been presented on the country as a whole and by counties. On the basis of nine indicators, one county can be compared to similar indicators for the whole country. Thematic maps on different indicators allow a visual comparison between counties. School Corner provides an overview of the socio-economic life of European countries. Statistics discussing youth aged 15-24 have been presented separately, providing information on studying, employment, crime, etc.

11. An overview of the 2000 Population and Housing Census is available under the heading "About the Census". The layered analysis of the results of the last census has been presented in text, tables and diagrams using plain terms. Answers are provided to questions about the population size of Estonia, which ethnic nationalities live here, which foreign languages the Estonian population speaks, etc. Historical background of the censuses and the main facts about the organization of the last census are also given. Accounting of statistical indicators relating to social and economic life, their legal or historical background, organizational aspects or problems are explained under the heading "Help to understand statistics". It is easier to understand, interpret and analyse information displayed in tabular or graphical forms. Students need to recognise how information may be displayed in a misleading manner resulting in false conclusions. The skill of using statistics and interpreting the data is very useful for secondary school students in their school life and while choosing their future profession. The glossary includes definitions of the main statistical indicators.

12. The Statistical Office tries to bring statistics closer to students and to develop School Corner in cooperation with schools.

13. Useful comments received from teachers and students will be taken into account in updating the website. The Statistical Office of Estonia cooperates with the national library, where training sessions are carried out once or twice a year.

IV. THE STAGES INVOLVED IN INTRODUCING THE SCHOOL CORNER

14. Here is a sample of how the School Corner was marketed:

- (a) news release on opening the School Corner;
- (b) information sheets introducing the School Corner were sent to schools by e-mail;
- (c) the fair - Key to Future 2004. Target group - the graduates of the secondary school and first- and second-year students of universities. The aim was to introduce the School Corner of the Statistical Office and to introduce statistical publications. Visitors to the fair participated in a statistics quiz where they could use the School Corner to find the answers to the quiz questions. Those who gave correct answers were presented with publications of the Statistical Office;
- (d) interview introducing the School Corner in the Teachers' Gazette;
- (e) organising of an annual day of statistics in Suuremõisa Technical School. The main idea was to introduce the products and services of the Statistical Office, including the School Corner, lectures on statistical data and the ways the data can be used;
- (f) cooperation with Junior Achievement - in-service training for economics teachers at gymnasiums;
- (g) an information day for librarians where the availability of the products and services of

- the Statistical Office was introduced. The main focus was on the availability and use of electronic data, so that the employees of libraries can supervise pupils who come to the library to research statistical information;
- (h) information day for school librarians. The purpose was to introduce the products and services of the Statistical Office;
- (i) lectures in Tallinn University where the Statistical Office was introduced, an overview of the products and services was given, as well as the ways in which statistical data can be used.



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15. There is a link to the School Corner on the web sites of several schools, on the education portal www.koolielu.ee and on the home page of the Ministry of Education and Research.
16. The number of visitors has increased after introductory sessions, and decreased in the summer months while students are on summer holidays.

V. FUTURE PROSPECTS

- (a) Conducting of the survey at schools each 3–4 years to specify the needs of teachers and students and to improve the product.
- (b) Continuous introduction of the School Corner and products and services of the Statistical Office at schools and on information days for teachers. The training of teachers plays a key role in this, because educational institutions raise future users of statistics, decision-makers and data providers as well as producers of statistics.
- (c) Continuous updating of the School Corner using the feedback from users.
- (d) Uploading the School Corner links onto the homepages of educational institutions.

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