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## **Economic Commission for Europe**

### **Conference of European Statisticians**

#### **Sixty-fourth plenary session**

Paris, 27-29 April 2016

Item 7 (d) of the provisional agenda

#### **Value of official statistics, interim report**

### **Results of the consultation on the value of official statistics**

#### **Note by the Secretariat**

##### *Summary*

This note summarizes the comments by members of the Conference of European Statisticians on the interim recommendations on the value of official statistics. The secretariat carried out the electronic consultation in February-March 2016.

A total of 30 countries and 3 international organizations replied and provided views on the priority recommendations and areas for further work. A number of countries shared information about their good practices in creating, promoting and measuring the value of official statistics. The examples of good practices as well as the more detailed comments on the recommendations will be forwarded to the Task Force.

The Task Force will continue to develop the recommendations and the measurement framework for the value of official statistics based on the feedback received from the electronic consultation and the comments received at the plenary session.

The final recommendations on the value of official statistics will be submitted to the Conference for endorsement in 2017.

## I. Introduction

1. The Secretariat carried out an electronic consultation of the recommendations in February-March 2016. This note summarizes comments by members of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) on the interim recommendations on the value of official statistics. The detailed comments will be forwarded to the Task Force for further work on the recommendations.
2. CES members were asked to structure their comments according to a set of questions on general comments, proposals for further work and national implementation plans.
3. The following 30 countries and 3 international organizations replied: Albania, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belarus, Canada, Colombia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Mongolia, Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United States (Bureau of Justice Statistics, Bureau of Economic Analysis, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Census Bureau, Internal Revenue Service (IRS)'s Statistics of Income), Eurasian Economic Commission, Bank for International Settlements and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

## II. General comments on the interim recommendations

4. **In general, the responding countries and organizations supported the interim recommendations.** Several countries commended the recommendations for being clear, comprehensive, balanced, sufficiently elaborated and well-structured.
5. Australia expressed some concerns regarding the following:
  - (a) There are lessons that can be learnt from the commercial sector, but there is quite a commercial approach in the paper when discussing customer needs, design of products and brand promotion. In contrast, most NSOs are underpinned by appropriation funding and have limited revenue streams. The ABS receives public funding and uses a prioritisation described in its Forward Work Program to respond to user needs, rather than dictating to what uses our statistics should be deployed.
  - (b) The two concepts value of use and quality should be clarified as distinct but related for the user perspective. There should be greater recognition that NSOs are a trusted source, often legislation enabled and apolitical. These valuable characteristics give comparative advantage and this is part of the utility as well. NSOs are often the custodians of a set of enduring national assets. But this message is a different message to 'branding' as is discussed in the paper.
  - (c) 'Getting at the centre of decision making' is perhaps the most critical recommendation. NSOs are usually part of a government framework and as such are highly dependent on resource allocation for survival. Strategic partnerships with other government agencies are critical around the value of NSO output to both government and the wider community. The development of such partnerships by the ABS has generated advocacy which has resulted in a \$250 million injection of funds to transform the way we do business.
6. Germany draws attention to avoiding any conflict with recommendations 1 (exploit the comparative advantage) and 5 (go further with strategic partnerships) to ensure that

partnerships with strategic partners cannot compromise or raise questions about professional independence of official statistics.

7. Hungary supports the recommendations, and points out that the scientific community is a key group for official statistics, and therefore, proposes mentioning the scientific community as a partner.

8. Israel supports the recommendations, but commented that the terminology used for users of official statistics could be misleading in calling all users of official statistics “customers” – some pay, most receive the products free of charge. This influences not only their attitude to quality but also the ability of the NSO to extract monetary value for quality, and to invest in innovation. Therefore, the analogy to businesses is not that helpful.

9. Italy notes that the media and “open data advocates” should be mentioned among stakeholders when talking about increasing and communicating the value of official statistics in line with the Fundamental Principle 4. Open data advocates produce international openness rankings, such as the Global Open Data Index. The idea of encouraging open access in the Report is valuable, but it is important to consider who decides which data are to be accessed free of charge, and users should be consulted in the decision making.

10. Slovakia generally supports the recommendations and considers important to highlight the fact that the trustworthiness of the NSO and its statistical products and services represents actually the highest value; creation of this value is primarily ensured by the implementation of Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

11. The United States Bureau of Economic Analysis cautions that recommendation 2 (design statistics for everyday life) could lead to an erosion of the line between an objective presentation of statistics and an inferred policy commentary that arises by placing the data into “context”. In addition, users are heterogeneous and unequal in vocalizing their preferences; often the most vocal users are those who have a policy perspective. Whether statistical offices should assist users with their statistical analysis is a question not addressed in the recommendations.

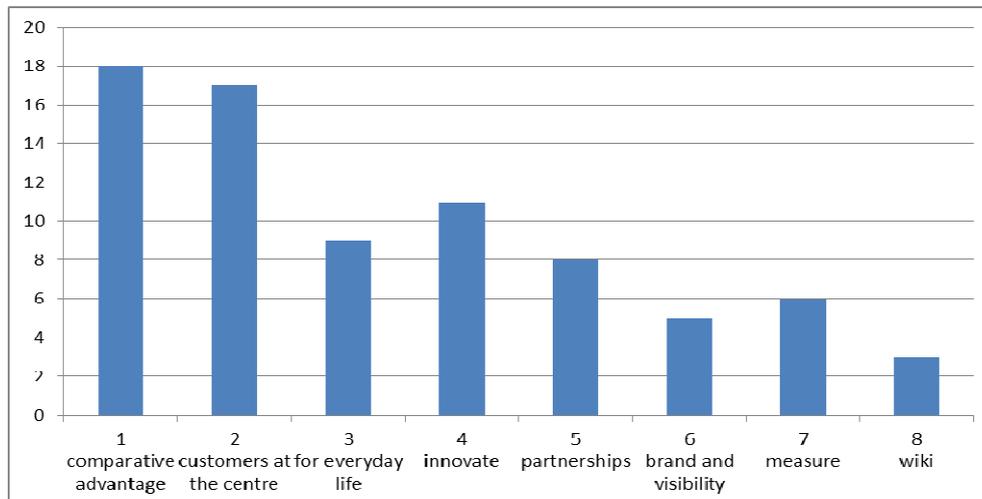
12. The United States Bureau of Justice Statistics supports the recommendations and states that there is great value in NSOs learning and applying best practices, both from other NSOs but also from other organizations. Indeed, part of the purpose of this report is to assemble such examples of good practice.

13. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics states that a wiki is a fine idea, but may risk putting too many eggs in one basket. So, the sharing of good practices could be framed more broadly. Such platforms often generate an initial surge of interest and participation but then fairly rapidly get forgotten and grow stale. They suggest the recommendation to emphasize ongoing means for keeping NSOs engaged with one another.

## **II. Priorities among the recommendations**

14. The respondents were asked which recommendations on the value of official statistics (in Section VIII of the interim report) should be highlighted as key priority. Chart 1 presents the outcome of the prioritization of the interim recommendations.

**Chart 1**  
Rating of the interim recommendations



### III. Possible recommendations to be added

15. Most countries considered the interim recommendations exhaustive or noted that they cover the most critical aspects of the value of official statistics. The following issues were mentioned as important, but are currently missing from the recommendations:

(a) Belarus would emphasize standardisation of statistical production processes based on international models.

(b) Croatia suggests that training of students be mentioned in the recommendations, such as brought up by Mexico: “INEGI uses different mechanisms like customized training programs for different users (university students, researchers, businessman, etc.). Italy continues by noting students should be trained on the role of official statistics and to increase their skills to interpret social and economic data. Germany suggests underlining the need to promote statistical literacy.

(c) Denmark proposes that the Task Force consider the following: (1) The advantages of common principles and methods in international comparisons; (2) Creating a system to share experiences on digital ways of communicating official statistics that address the dilemma of massive amounts of data produced by NSOs and the increasing focus on quick access to information. (3) Give special attention to the benefits of developing the skills of future users of statistics (students in high schools and in higher education) to use statistics and know the advantages of using official statistics.

(d) Israel welcomes the recommendations and good practices concerning arguments and processes that help convince budgetary authorities to invest in research and innovation for official statistics.

(e) Latvia notes that providing the user groups (pupils, researchers, media etc.) with targeted services could greatly raise the value of statistics in each user group. Society in general will use statistics if they are in attractive format (infographic, illustration, story), but data scientists will require raw data for their work. Each of user group will require tailored service. The report should reflect needs of specific user groups and best actions to address them.

(f) Mexico asks the Task Force to develop the idea of good integration of data as a substantive function of NSOs, in order to offer data of different sources under thematic blokes, territorial units, time series and special models to integrate data, such as through national accounts and demographic projections.

(g) Poland suggests creating a special calendar to indicate a date to celebrate official statistics and provide statistical information about statistics days in different countries.

(h) The Bank for International Settlements would like to emphasize the need to improve data sharing (at least among official organizations if possible) and try to mitigate confidentiality issues when disclosing the data as in the recommendations endorsed by the G20 in the second phase of the Data Gaps Initiative.

(i) The United States Bureau of Justice Statistics asked should there also be a recommendation on timeliness as the report includes a discussion about transparency of indicators with a reference to a release of a calendar.

(j) The United States Census Bureau noted that maintaining scientific objectivity should remain a core of all statistical operations.

(k) The United States IRS, Statistics of Income Division listed the following possible additions: Data security and confidentiality to ensure public trust; Building a culture of innovation and developing skilled and dedicated human capital; Segmenting users (internal agency users, power users, confidential data clients, public) to ensure an efficient, appropriately targeted customer-driven environment; and Developing measures on how programme changes affect data quality.

#### **IV. Examples of good practices provided in the consultation**

16. **All countries and international organizations expressed their readiness to share good practices at international expert meetings and through a dedicated wiki site, if resources allow.**

17. Australia, Belarus, Croatia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Mongolia, Poland, the Russian Federation, Spain, Switzerland and the Bank for International Settlements submitted some good practices for the Task Force's consideration.

#### **V. Expectations towards the Task Force's work**

18. The CES members were asked to consider what kind of support would be helpful in increasing, promoting and measuring the value of official statistics and what they expect from the Task Force. The following areas were highlighted as main expectations to the Task Force work:

**(a) Extend the practical aspects of the recommendations and make them more specific to support implementation, for example:**

1. Take into account comments received on priority recommendations and consider suggestions for new or revised recommendations made in the electronic consultation.
2. Provide guidance on the way forward in building the brand of official statistics and gaining visibility; if possible, by learning from other countries' experience.
3. Provide insight in new technics of communicating statistics in a more attractive but yet serious, reliable and responsible way.

4. Provide guidance on how to educate users in numeracy and statistical literacy as this is topical in many NSOs.
5. Analyse the value of official statistics in the realization of human rights, the third Pillar of the United Nations Charter. See the 'data revolution report'.
6. Consider the value of official statistics in relation to SDGs, the demand for new indicators and new expectations on the role of national statistical offices.
7. Review innovative tools and ideas to make a substantial positive impact on reducing costs while maintaining efficiency and value of official statistics.
8. Define a general common strategy on creating, promoting and measuring the value of official statistics that can be easily adapted to countries' circumstances.

**(b) Develop the measurement framework and indicators on the value of official statistics, including:**

1. A review of methodologies for monetizing the value of official statistics.
2. Standard survey questions and/or questionnaires measuring public and stakeholder perceptions of the value of statistics.
3. Generally available data that allow monitoring the value of official statistics.
4. Examples of metrics and measurement of the value of official statistics.
5. A dashboard with indicators on the value of official statistics.

**(c) Develop a dedicated website to share best practices provided in the survey and the electronic consultation taking into consideration the following:**

1. This should not be a one-off exercise, but the wiki should continuously provide up-to-date information on good practices in the future.
2. Enable intuitive, structured and easy exploring of good practices of others that may be suitable for each country.
3. Sharing of experiences would be especially useful in design, innovation, product development, building the brand of official statistics and using social media.
4. Share concrete examples and problems faced by NSOs, and share information on the possible solutions, as well as information on risks and lessons learned.
5. Make key messages and principles, slogans, banners etc. available so that they could be effectively used across countries.

**(d) Continue to keep countries and international organizations updated and promote collaboration by:**

1. Informing countries and international organizations about new trends and innovations in creating and increasing the value of official statistics.
2. Seeking opportunities for collaboration between NSOs themselves, with partners and the public sector to learn from each other and exchange ideas.
3. Promoting the value of official statistics at international level, where the high-level representatives of countries are present (ministers, prime ministers, etc.).
4. Finding ways to support capacity building in countries who would like to develop their statistical capacity to improve the value of official statistics.
5. Organizing seminars and expert meetings on increasing, promoting and measuring the value of official statistics.

## VI. Additional comments

19. The respondents made the following additional comments:

(a) Croatia underlines that we must be aware that the recommendations require additional financial resources and specific skills. It is necessary to hire new people with specific knowledge, make additional education. Furthermore, it is necessary to change the awareness in society about the importance of statistics. It could be concluded that the official statistics is also at a crossroads regarding the question of resources: should we put emphasis on insufficiency of resources and take coordinated actions towards decision makers in order to elevate statistical resources to a whole different level or accept present situation and trends of decreasing resources and reconcile with lowering quality and reducing scope of official statistics.

(b) Czech Republic notes that most of the data collections are defined in national or international legislation and there is almost no space left for fulfilling other needs of national users (especially on a regional level).

(c) Denmark points out that estimating the economic value of official statistics is challenging e.g. due to different national conditions and organization of work. Denmark builds its official statistics largely on administrative registers, which are also used by the state to collect taxes etc. It is difficult to find an unambiguous way of the value of such information. Should it be compared to the alternative costs if private enterprises would conduct regular surveys which would probably not reach the same quality level?

(d) The United States IRS, Statistics of Income Division has recently completed a 5-year business plan with a best practices analysis with input from international statistical organizations. Many of the recommended best practices centre around improving the user experience and developing relationships with internal and external partners. They also face the challenge of ensuring that we are meeting the needs of our internal data users, confidential data clients, and the public. They are now working to integrate existing and proposed best practices around data security, an increasingly high-profile area. Finally, most of our counterparts ranked human capital as one of the most important components of a statistical agencies' success, so we are building best practices to train and develop staff.

(e) Montenegro suggests paying special attention to the application of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the Code of Practice, and the NSO's role in support of other producers of official statistics in their application.

## VII. Points for discussion at the CES plenary session

20. The Conference is invited to:

- Express views on the interim recommendations.
- Advise the Task Force on further activities that would best support statistical offices in convincing stakeholders of the value of official statistics.
- Share views on priorities for focusing the further work of the Task Force.

21. The Task Force will review the outcome of the consultation and will further develop the recommendations and the measurement framework for the value of official statistics.

22. The Task Force will review the proposals for further work, such as the need for sharing experiences and capacity building and will make a proposal to the CES Bureau.

23. The final recommendations on the value of official statistics will be submitted to the Conference for endorsement in 2017, as planned.