

Work Session on Statistical Metadata
(Geneva, Switzerland, 18-20 February 1998)

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

**COMMENTS ON
"STANDARDS FOR STATISTICAL METADATA ON INTERNET"**

Submitted by Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (SORS)¹

¹ Prepared by Jozica Klep

1. The objective of this note is to raise some issues concerning the document on “Standards for statistical metadata on Internet” (Working Paper No. 2) prepared by UN/ECE Secretariat.
2. In general, document provides many useful observations and as such should form a basis for developing a final proposal.
3. We support the approach applied regarding requirements for statistical metadata, based on the UN/ECE (1995) guidelines in full range. This is specially true for chapter 3. Requirements for statistical metadata on Internet and items 3.2. Metadata supporting clients in searching for data, 3.3. Metadata for interpreting the data (metadata on contents) and 3.4 Metadata to assess the quality of data.
4. We support not only the idea for a common metadata standard on Internet, we would like to see efforts that UN/ECE guidelines (1995) would be internationally recognised and applied standard for world-wide international statistical organisations and national statistical institutes.
5. Namely, as a pre-accession country Slovenia is faced with the growing demand for comparable statistical data. It is also true that international organisation, e.g. OECD publish in their general methodological notes statements like the following:
 6. Traditionally, the statistics compiled in Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) and the New Independent States (NIS) of the former Soviet Union have differed in content, classification and methodology from similar data available in OECD member countries. Without an understanding of the basic approaches that have been used, ***analysis based on available data is likely to be misleading because they do not conform to the underlying conventions that an analyst expects when working with apparently similar data for developed market economies...*** (Short-term Economic Indicators, Transition Economies, Sources and Definitions, OECD, Paris, 1996, page 11)
 7. OECD is not the only international organisation with this kind of doubt. EUROSTAT, f.i. in Statistical Annex to Agenda 2000 says that: ***“The exact compatibility with EU standards on statistics and thus the comparability with EU figures can still not be guaranteed, particularly for those statistics that have not been supplied through Eurostat, but have been delivered directly by the countries concerned.”***
 8. Another organisation that also wants to make its own statements regarding the quality of statistical data is IMF (with Special Data Dissemination Standards).
 9. It is needless to say that the requested standards of these three organisations (to name but a few) are not the same standards and that Slovenia has to comply with all the three. This will of course be a tremendous burden for SORS. Not only that with common standards we will make it easier for the users to work with statistical data and metadata and save theirs time and energy but we would also save our own time and energy and already scarce human resources.
 10. We could repeat the statement that metadata collection is dull, expensive, and time consuming and that there are only a few countries on the world that have announced that they will build a coherent documentation system. The natural metadata providers, those who know something about the object data to which the metadata refer, are difficult to motivate. They do not themselves need the metadata. At least they do not need the metadata as a formalised part of a system, since they have the metadata in their own heads.

11. The Feasibility study on future architecture of statistical information system at SORS performed by Statistics Sweden in 1997 revealed that attention at SORS must be devoted to electronic dissemination of statistical data and metadata. This is extremely important if SORS wants to maintain good relations with its external users. Good relations are a prerequisite if SORS wants to keep its central role and authority in the Slovenian statistical system on the one hand and also if SORS wants to maintain good co-operation with international statistical organisations on the other hand.

12. All official statistics have to be available in a uniform and user-friendly way via the Internet. Ample amounts of high-quality metadata will have to be provided to the users to satisfy their demand for comparability of data (in the country and abroad). Thus, sound architecture for the documentation part will have to be build.

The interaction between production systems and dissemination systems has to be streamlined, so that the production system automatically feeds the output database, used by dissemination systems, with data and metadata.

13. The use of common tools, models and templates is foreseen in the area of dissemination, among them UN/ECE (1995) guidelines and Swedish SCB_DOK.PCDOK to cover the needs of SORS for a coherent documentation system.