

**STATISTICAL COMMISSION and
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

WORKING PAPER No. 15

Work Session on Statistical Output for
Dissemination to Information Media

ENGLISH ONLY

(Voorburg, Netherlands, 25-27 September 2000)

**Romanian National Commission for Statistics relation with the media and public
as a scheduled effort which implies costs and benefits**

Paper submitted by National Commission for Statistics, Romania

Dissemination of statistical data is of major importance to the Romanian National Commission for Statistics. The importance and complexity of this process in Romania during the last years have appreciably increased as the number of users of statistical information has steadily grown. The interest in statistical data is shown not only by government agencies, whose requirements for these information the NCS satisfies in the most complete manner, but also by business, educational, scientific and financial bodies and of course, by the general public. This interest is connected to the radical transformations of socio-economic relations in the transition to a market economy and to a greater need for reliable and operational information.

For the NCS, the dissemination of statistical data to the public and to the mass-media represents a new activity. Subsequently, a great emphasis is being laid on this process which has to be seen as a co-operation between the NCS and the mass-media, together with its results.

So, the relationship between the NCS and the news media and the general public has two aims. *Firstly* – to strengthen the statistical data dissemination and to increase the level of statistical literacy among the public, and *secondly* – to inform as much as possible a larger number of potential users about the information opportunities available at the NCS. Hopefully, we will be able to create an effective system of statistical data dissemination through mass-media, using following channels: press conferences, press and news releases, press bulletins, preparation and publication of economic reviews and different papers, providing journalists with statistical data at their request and finally, offering advice on questions of methodology, collection and processing of statistical information. Knowing that a great user of our products is the entire educational system, more recently, we started to concentrate on an accurate dissemination of information through the educational system and its libraries. For the same purpose, NCS library is open for academic research, for those students who are interested in finding out more about the contemporary economic and social life and more. NCS is going to promote its co-operation with the educational system by using a flexible approach of discounts on statistical products.

To achieve more effective co-operation with the mass-media and the educational system as a part of general public, and thus to promote an increasing level of the literacy among the public, the **goals** listed below are taken into consideration:

- ◆ High standard of professionalism in dealing with the news media;
- ◆ Make user-friendly products for journalists by using journalistic judgement;
- ◆ Treating them as a special “customers” which NCS is trying to satisfy by giving them what they want;

- ◆ Transparency and availability are the key-elements in relation with the public in order to make statistical data accessible to everyone;
- ◆ To provide independent estimations and comments as the mass-media particularly appreciate the objectivity of statistical data;
- ◆ To attach particular attention to timeliness in releasing required information;
- ◆ Basic statistical information should be given to the media and public free of charge;
- ◆ To develop a flexible system of discounted prices for certain groups of users;
- ◆ Continuous marketing activity should be strengthened through supply and demand of statistical data studies. Within this process, we should pay attention to a successful advertising campaign reaching more potential users who should be informed about the range of statistical products.
- ◆ And besides all these, the *quality of data collected*, because without it no quality analyses or dissemination can follow.

These aims were formulated at the beginning of 1998 when PHARE National Programme started and the following paragraphs give an overview of the results so far.

As in other transition countries, the National Commission for Statistics of Romania is trying to complete requirements of the government authorities for statistical information. Even if the Government, the Presidency and the Parliament are considered major users of our products, we can not forget the other large groups of users, those from the business area. Our contacts with them have been recently extended considerably. However, our experience in working with this user category is not yet sufficient.

Our quarterly studies regarding the internal and external statistical data requests from various categories of public users show us that there is a large number of customers who do not have sufficient information either about the data itself or about how to access and process it. Also, there are users who experienced difficulties in analysing and processing the data they receive. In these circumstances, the mass-media is a very important channel for dissemination of information, a channel with a major role to play considering its mission – providing access to statistical products to the general public.

An important aim in strengthening this co-operation with the mass-media is the provision of statistical data to journalists at their requests. This is, in fact, the main responsibility of the Dissemination of Publications and of Statistical Information Office. There are also the other NCS directorates which provide various statistical materials. Until now, all statistical outputs have been provided to the media free-of-charge. In our new approach, the possibility of advertising the complete activity of the NCS in the media (press, radio, TV) in exchange for statistical data, have to be discussed. So, we need to rise the interest of the media for our activities, by always looking to obtain the public' confidence in the accuracy and reliability of statistical information. We see this as the only way to achieve the mutually advantageous co-operation.

It is well known that the NCS' first responsibility is to collect, analyse and disseminate quality data to a variety of target groups. Statistical figures are products by which we are judged; thus the collection of data is, perhaps, our most important function. Statistical data is a public good and, consequently, NCS is going to demonstrate its function as an important, competent and reliable information provider. Data collection, processing and dissemination will be even better tailored to clients in an output-oriented manner. For instance, we will try to open up new sales opportunities and new markets by anticipating customers wishes.

For the NCS future marketing and dissemination strategy we think that it is necessary to draw upon the similar model already applied by the other statistical offices. This model was firstly presented in 1996 by the Swiss Federal Office of Statistics and further developed later in several seminars having as a main issue the “marketing – dissemination policy and practice”.

This model was built up paying special attention to the information supply which has to be customer demand – oriented. It covers three important levels. Every level core is a strategic objective. These three levels are, as follows:

basic information which has to be provided free of charge to everyone who require it (1st level);

standard information which has to be adapted to certain demands and target groups (2nd level);

specific data tailored to individual needs (3rd level).

The principle that rules the model is that request for information by customers determines the NCS to act.

I. How these levels have to be accomplished by the National Commission For Statistics

Basic information provided freely

At the moment NCS ensure a basic provision of information as an aim mainly corresponding to its statutory function which is / has to be the same for all the NSOs. This major aim is to continuously collect, compile, process, present, analyse and disseminate official data on macroeconomic phenomena by offering these information for everyone who is interested. Using the experience of developed countries NSOs these “data for everyone from the general public” represent a statistical infrastructure, a public good which may be used by anyone. This level containing basic provision satisfies the needs of the general public for information and thus is *free of charge*.

The basic information includes the news and press releases, leaflets which are distributed during the press conferences, small brochures, the catalogue of publications and of statistical services, use of statistical library, participation in fairs and exhibitions, etc.

The most important way of dissemination of the data to the general public is the media. Thereafter the others, specific target groups, schools or educational institution, unions, associations, banks, Romanian and foreign enterprises have their role.

Standard information to be prepared to demand and target groups

This second level includes all statistical products and services beyond the range of the first level. It satisfies recurrent users needs for information that may be put into a standardised form. Such a kind of standard product and service can be prepared in advance and comprise printed publications (such as: the “Romanian Statistical Yearbook”, “Romanian Foreign Trade Yearbook”, “Monthly Statistical Bulletin”, “Prices Statistical Bulletin” etc. which are bilingual) and theirs electronic versions. These standardised products and services are sold at market prices according to our catalogue.

The NCS has been working since its establishment in 1859 under the principle that statistical data should always be available, be accurate and reliable, consistent and timely delivered to every user especially to all categories of the mass media. Thereupon, one of the goals of the NCS is to improve dissemination and accessibility of the statistics to the media and the public. Actually, the dissemination process is mostly carried out by the *Dissemination of Publications and of Statistical Information Office* within the Department of Publications Editing and of Statistical Information Dissemination. Thus, the Dissemination of Publications and of Statistical Information Office is responsible for the dissemination of the statistical data to the public.

The two major functions of the Dissemination Office are as follows:

- ◆ to better meet most types of statistical requests for some Romanian macroeconomic and social indicators (these requests are internal or from abroad);
- ◆ to print publications according to our general offer.

In order to accomplish these duties with the objective to be competitive on the market as a sole official statistical data authority in Romania, standardised products and services must meet the following requirements:

- relevance, target-group orientation;
- must present up-to-date information;
- transparency and availability, quick access to them;
- price lists and offers always available;
- continuity of the offer – without delays especially at the end of an year;
- efficient distribution for all interested groups;
- easy use and easy access.

In this case, the market analyses will serve for continuous adjustments of the standardised products and services and to develop them further to reflect changing customer requirements.

Specific data tailored to individuals needs

This last level comprises specific products and services oriented towards the specific needs of the customers. So, this kind of statistical production is individually developed for each client upon his/her demand, in every case where the requirements can not be met by standard offers.

This level includes answers to complex internal and external enquiries, data series questionnaires, parts of big projects and etc. For such orders, specific solutions are given by the NCS and customers are charged for the **costs** involved.

In this third level we must focus on contacts with individual customers. Here, the competence of the experts in the concerned domains is of the vital importance. What the Dissemination Office has to do is to offer a high quality consultations and customer-oriented services at a high level too. Prices and delivery times must be transparent and reliable for clients so that the good and lasting relationships could be established. High-quality dissemination services should have as a result a positive impact on the image of the official statistics.

Based on this marketing model and after its adaptation to the NCS conditions, the statistical products and services can be classified according to the different categories of users or groups of customers. Also, a coherent marketing and pricing system can be developed in a strategic approach.

II. Dissemination And Pricing Policy In Relation With The Media And The Large Public

The media is the most important channel of dissemination of the official statistical information to the general public. It is well known that without the media, it would not be possible for NCS to continuously fulfil one of its main functions. In these circumstances, a major goal of dissemination strategy, as a part of the general strategy, is to cooperate in an active manner. Based on regular discussions and dialogue with journalists in order to increase confidence among the public the objective is build a profile of a modern, independent, realistic, objective and reliable institution in a neutral position against the politics. In this

condition, effective co-operation with the media represents a part of the NCS' marketing policy by which we are supporting the press in its function as distributor of information and opinions.

Thus, carrying out the first level of the above-mentioned model, we will be able to meet the condition of providing statistical information free of charge to the news media. Otherwise, if we will limit the journalistic access, for instance, by a restrictive information policy or pricing we would ourselves harm the image of the NCS'.

The co-operation between NCS and the media is based on the following **principles**:

↳ all media (news agencies, press, radio and TV) *are treated in an equal manner*: equal and free of charge access to the statistical products and services – so, the first level of the marketing model is / have to be accomplished .

↳ relation between the two parties implies *services* (free of charge as well) which are functioning upon previous agreements (based on individual demands): *press releases* are sent by fax (most of them) and e-mail (to the Romanian Embassy and Consulate in Washington and New York). The usual topics are: “the situation of the main conjunctural indicators”, the consumer price indices, salaries etc.

↳ *from some time ago*, the journalists, and not only them, have the opportunity of accessing press-releases through Internet (our web page is <http://www.cns.ro>).

↳ *press events* such as, press conferences are offered once per year and anytime when an event worth writing about appears (for instance, the celebration of 140 years of official statistics in Romania).

↳ *news releases* – when certain publications are launched “ Labour Force Survey “ (AMIGO) or when for certain periods of time is necessary to make analyses on: the situation of the Romanian foreign trade (1.01-31.05.2000) for example. On the occasion of the World Population Day, our office released the appropriate news.

↳ When special enquiries occur, these are normally classified under the 3rd level – “specific data tailored to the individuals needs”. The Dissemination Office decides whether the costs should be charged for supplied data (this is the situation only for internal and external enterprises), taking into account the fact that the media further transmit the data to the large users groups.

↳ when statistical data are disseminated, the **copyright** has to be taken into account. As part of the co-operation with the media, special attention is paid that the NCS is indicated as *the source*. Full copyright applies to level 3 products, so all the rights are reserved. By the copyrights regulation for level 2 products, reproduction and dissemination for commercial purposes is not allowed but only for proved own purposes (only by mentioning the source). As far as further use of the 3rd level products is concerned, full costs are accounted for (the product total price is composed of a price estimation which is in fact, the product price including costs made on the request analysis, consulting, translations, cost per hour – PC operator, fees to be charged for certain papers selected from the issued publications or internal publications, fees for the abroad deliveries, 19% of the price – VAT (the last one only for the internal requests) etc.

↳ also in the context of the marketing model, a copyright and its appropriate law has been developed for printed materials (2nd level of standard products and services).

↳ *standardized printed products* are made available to the media free of charge (e.g. Monthly Statistical Bulletin-Romanian version) for journalistic purposes. At press conferences, printed publication namely “Buletin Statistic Lunar” are distributed free of charge as a part of the press documents (press files). For marketing reasons, important new publications are announced by press releases and/or news releases and are offered to the editorial staff for review (e.g.“Romanian Statistical Yearbook” its recent edition and “Quick Statistical Information” on demographics, labour force, tourism, agriculture a.s.o.).

Thus, in view of all mentioned above, it is evident that the relationship between the NCS and the news media is a vital one. Even if it is quite difficult to be prescriptive about the best way in dealing with media, in the following pages we will summarise the present situation and finally, offer some recommendations.

III. Present Situation - Ways of Dissemination

✉ **Direct application:** any person who needs statistical data may receive them on paper or electronic form depending on his request made directly to the NCS;

☎ **Telephone:** The NCS provides, by its Dissemination Office, an information consultancy service through phone for its users. Users are allowed to get some basic statistical indicators (CPI and inflation rate, monthly salaries etc.). This mean of dissemination is going to be *replaced by an automatic answering system* along the NCS phone station line without charging extra price, in order to make more easier work on written requests;

✉ **Mail:** It is also possible to meet statistical data request reaching the NCS by post (external and internal request). Once solved, internal requests are delivered either by normal or special post. This last way of delivery is arranged in collaboration with our County General Statistical Divisions and is found to be the faster way in this case;

☎ **Fax:** Users are also permitted to request and receive statistical data by fax. This way of dissemination is more rapid than those mentioned above. Nowadays, new technique has raised better possibilities to disseminate news much faster

📧 **Internet and E-mail:** Electronic messaging is possible together with the file transfer if our clients desire to get rapid reply. Besides the fax, messages containing statistical information are released simultaneously through the WWW. If there are still many people who prefer to have the fax sheets of paper automatically, more and more users are getting accustomed to use Internet as a tool for getting the news and e-mail for sending and receiving messages. So, it can be said that e-mail enables everyone from all over the world, to pose question and of course, to expect a prompt response.

Dissemination process at this moment

In order to meet the information need and to adapt the statistical products to the users' needs, it is very important to know the nature of the demand. Therefore, to provide reliable, accurate and timely information and to allocate all publications to users, requests for statistical information from both domestic and foreign users are regularly gathered and met by the NCS Dissemination Office. Firstly, it is analysed from where the information requests can be obtained. If the required information was published, the request would be met by photocopying from the related publication. If it has not been published it would be taken from the related departments on paper format or by file transfer through internal network within the NCS. After preparing an official letter and having signed by the head of the department, required information are supplied to those who asked for them.

While requests are solved, confidentiality protection against improper use of statistics is of great importance for NCS. As the NCS relies on a solid legal basis, it has a law on confidentiality, thus the security of individual data is guaranteed. Disaggregated data on company can not be disseminated according to the same law.

Trends in Statistical Data Requests

Two main strategic changes happened. These are: the shift from paper to electronic format for most of our requests as far as the media are concerned and also, the shifting from the product oriented practice to the user oriented strategy. In large, the trend in requirements for statistical data is as follows:

- ◆ the requests for data by regions;
- ◆ rapid access and selection;
- ◆ a bigger needs for detailed information;
- ◆ seeking services like “just in time”;
- ◆ users data requirements to be delivered to their desktops rather than seeking and obtaining these information by themselves;
- ◆ international comparisons.

Further steps

For the years to come, statistical information will be a strategic resource for the public and for the private sectors due to the rapid changes and developments in communication, technology, economy and related fields. Taking into account this context and also the above mentioned trends in use of statistics, the main strategy and related objectives of the NCS dissemination policy shall be:

- ☞ providing excellent services by understanding user exact statistical needs,
- ☞ easily accessed services by means of full use of the modern technology,
- ☞ quick, competent and helpful replies to the statistical requests,
- ☞ clear and comprehensive presentation,
- ☞ accurate pricing policies,
- ☞ close relations with mass-media in order to reach the public confidence through.

With regard to this last recommendation, the media are highly selective about the material they publish or broadcast. They want this material to be *a story*. This story in their terms is something they know will interest their readers/viewers/listeners. The newspaper or programme they work for is a product they have to sell. Thus, we have to give them the right product if we want them to become our customers.

We shall consider this story, a statistical product (namely *the press-release*) which have to be recognised as user-friendly and carried out by NCS with an evident journalistic judgement.

Considering the fact that the media will not write about statistics every day, we have also to be selective about the news we are going to release. There will be data that must be issued regularly – that everyone, especially the journalists will recognise as of national importance. These might include major macro-economic indicators, such as inflation, unemployment, GDP, industrial production etc. Then, there are key social statistics – census results, births, marriages, deaths, health, the changing role of woman in society. This information must be released following the rule that “*if it is about people or activities that most of us as citizens are concerned about or have an interest in, then here are something that will attract media attention*” – Mr. John Wright, Head of News Media Relations for the United Kingdom Central Statistical Office during 1989-1992.

The best news releases are those in printed forms which, at the appointed time, will be delivered to the media or they will be picked up (at press conferences) from us. And for this, there is another rule: all the media should get it at the same time, without favourites. And this will be our approach from now on. It is also well known that on a regular basis we will invite those journalists who know about the subject area to write or broadcast about statistics.

Further work - conclusions

In our attempt to know our media we:

➔ **will try to target particular groups:** in fact, journalists who write about economics or those who cover social or health problems, for example;

E will build up personal contacts, inviting them in conferences, briefings. This will serve to build, over time, mutual understanding – we will know what they are looking for and they will learn what they can expect from us in the future.

A will not forget the local media and specialised publications – we should reconsider the local media as having the same statistical needs as those of the national media have and certain specialised publications deeply interested in knowing more about particular areas such as: health, agriculture, education, finance, etc.

➔ **will try to obtain international media coverage** – How? By cultivating relations with journalists who work for the international media. They may be the freelancers working for international newspapers or representatives of the big news agencies such as Reuters and Bloomberg. They might regularly include our key-data as part of their services to the world press. Also, we have to be sure that Romanian embassies abroad receive our releases promptly in order to have their own media contacts.

Finally, we have to have always in mind the fact that statistics play a key-role in building confidence, trust and establishing a reputation for our country through media.