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**QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE CONFIDENTIALITY OF STATISTICAL INFORMATION
AT THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL SERVICE OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA**

Contributed paper

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Introduction

The confidentiality of statistical information at the National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia (hereafter: the NSS) is governed by a series of legislative and regulatory acts and technical programming measures which guarantee the security of the statistical information system described earlier [1].

The basic principle is that published statistical data must not cause injury (damage) to information providers: hence the existence of a series of methodological measures covering the processing of statistical data. The measures prevent the identity of any individual unit being disclosed, either directly or indirectly, in published data.

In complex cases, where non-publication could compromise the integrity of statistical information and the information provider has not given approval for publication, the final decision on whether or not to publish is taken by the State Council on Statistics of the Republic of Armenia [2], which adopts regulatory acts having legal force in the statistical field.

In order to arrive at its decision, the State Council has to weigh the fact that incomplete statistical data can impinge on important socio-economic development programmes against the interests of the information provider and the principle of confidentiality, which is one of the fundamental principles of official statistics ratified by the UN.

Current status

Although the confidentiality of statistical information is guaranteed under the Law on State Statistics of 10 May 2000, matters relating to the harmonisation of that Law with other legislative acts require constant attention.

In an addendum to the Law, the State Council drafted and adopted the Statistical Secrecy Order, pursuant to which the NSS has set up a Committee on Confidentiality Issues. The Committee devises appropriate checks on work involving confidential statistical information.

The following documents have been drafted and adopted (or are currently being drafted) by the Committee:

- a list of categories of access to confidential statistical information by NSS officials;
- instructions concerning the limits placed on NSS officials' access to confidential statistical information;
- the obligation on NSS officials not to disclose confidential statistical information;
- users' obligations with regard to the NSS computer network;
- instructions for work involving confidential statistical information;
- instructions for the safe-keeping and use of passwords;

- instructions for creating back-ups and storing them in electronic archives;
- the responsibilities of the network manager;
- the responsibilities of database administrators;
- the uses which are made of data output (on any medium);
- monitoring of the computing environment at the NSS;
- measures for protecting confidential data during the collection, processing, storage and transmission of statistical information;
- training and instruction for all NSS officials involved in work with confidential statistical information.

The issues involved in the confidentiality of statistical information are dealt with in the recently adopted “Blueprint for a Single Statistical Information System for the National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia”.

The intention is to devise and implement a series of measures for protecting electronic information in the NSS's statistical information system and to resolve questions relating to the reliability of the information system, with a view to preventing the unauthorised copying of information.

In order to create a reliable and secure system, particular significance attaches to the level of training of network and database administrators.

Their training should preferably be tackled as part of a single international programme, which will contribute to finding a common approach to these questions.

Conclusion

Confidentiality is one of the underlying principles of official statistics. It strengthens information providers' confidence in the system and is conducive to improvements in the quality of statistical information.

The training and instruction of NSS officials on questions relating to the confidentiality of statistical information is crucial to achieving those aims.

Literature

[1] An approach to the confidentiality of statistical information at the NSS: Joint ECE/Eurostat meeting on the confidentiality of statistical data. Working document no. 33, Skopje, 14-16 March 2001.

[2] Confidentiality and harmonisation of the law: the Armenian Experience: 7th TACIS Seminar for the leaders of statistical departments in the New Independent States and Mongolia. Document HLS/2002/04. Baku, 16-17 May 2002.