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Value of official statistics**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 *Recommendations on promoting, measuring and communicating the value of official statistics*. The Secretariat carried out the electronic consultation on the recommendations in March 2017.

A total of 36 countries (40 government agencies) and 5 international organizations replied. All responding countries and organizations supported the endorsement of the recommendations. A number of countries shared best practices to be placed on the wiki platform, and several volunteered to pilot test the measurement approaches and indicators of the value of official statistics.

In view of the strong support received, the 2017 Conference of European Statisticians plenary session will be invited to endorse the *Recommendations on promoting, measuring and communicating the value of official statistics*, subject to the amendments presented in this note.

I. Introduction

1. This note summarises the comments made by members of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) on the *Recommendations on promoting, measuring and communicating the value of official statistics*. The Secretariat carried out an electronic consultation of the recommendations in March 2017.

2. The Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) reviewed the draft Recommendations in February 2017 and requested the Secretariat to send the document to all CES members for electronic consultation.

3. The Task Force on the Value of Official Statistics that developed these recommendations consisted of the United Kingdom (chair), Australia, Canada, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Switzerland, Turkey, Eurostat, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). The World Bank also notably contributed to the work.

4. The following 36 countries (40 government agencies) and 5 international organizations replied to the electronic consultation: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Australia, Belarus, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States (Bureau of Economic Analysis, Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Agricultural Statistics Service and National Center for Education Statistics), Eurasian Economic Commission, Eurostat, OECD, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and PARIS21.

II. General comments

5. All responding countries and organizations considered the recommendations ready for endorsement. Several countries commended the Task Force for developing a well-structured report that inspires statistical offices to enhance their role in society. The report provides a comprehensive and informative analysis of current practices in statistical offices and other industries, best practice examples and useful recommendations.

6. Respondents considered the recommendations flexible as they offer ideas for various paths to take, and suggest possible tools that could be used in the promotion, measurement and communication of official statistics. Some respondents stressed that positive development of the value of official statistics is only possible if new data sources will be perceived as an opportunity and other data providers be considered as partners rather than competitors. All this requires implementing the recommendations: innovation, investment in staff, true focus on users and collaboration.

7. Many respondents highlighted the importance of applying the recommendations actively worldwide. Enhancing the value of official statistics is an investment. Therefore, some countries suggested identifying global mechanisms to finance work to promote, measure and increase the value of official statistics in developing countries. Further, as Poland suggested, the Secretariat will simplify the rich vocabulary used in the recommendations when editing the text for final publication. This will support translation of the recommendations into national languages and, thus, wide implementation.

8. All respondents welcomed the creation of the Wiki platform as a valuable source of innovative practices, and 17 offices provided additional information on their recent innovative practices to be included in the wiki. The Secretariat will contact these countries to update the wiki.

9. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia strongly supported the recommended way forward, especially as the data revolution, open data and big data, among others, are changing the statistical paradigm. Statisticians need to develop methodologies to process huge amounts of unstructured data, particularly to be able to develop statistics on concerns of everyday life that are relevant for the public. Statisticians have to set statistics into their context and bring out the story behind statistics.

10. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) suggested elaborating further the value of official statistics in light of human rights norms and considerations. OHCHR has published guidance on the link between official statistics and human rights, and on a human rights-based approach to data disaggregation in the measurement of the 2030 Agenda¹. OHCHR emphasized the following points:

(a) The value of official statistics is significantly strengthened when it is viewed from a human rights perspective. Such a link is already made in the recommendations through the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. The report could further elaborate on “respect for the fundamental values and principles as the basis for any society seeking to understand itself and respect the rights of its members” and the “entitlement to public information”;

(b) As ‘post-truth’ is declared as the international word of the year by the Oxford dictionary, the work of national statistical offices (NSOs) on increasing the value of official statistics, in particular by commenting on erroneous interpretation and misuse of statistics, may be more timely than ever.

11. The Task Force made the following additions (underlined below) in the report to elaborate further on the human rights aspects of the value of official statistics:

(a) Introduction, paragraph 1, point 5) of the full report: “As just one example, reporting on progress towards the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development will require hundreds of indicators to be produced in many new partnerships. These indicators should be measured fully respecting the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and human rights.”

(b) Introduction, paragraph 9, point 1), chapter 3, section on generating value and chapter 6, recommendation 1: ...”Official statistics are produced in professional independence based on scientific methods, rigorous quality criteria, including relevance, and the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. Upholding these principles is essential to any country seeking to understand itself and respect the rights of its people.”

(c) Chapter 2, section on users, paragraph 25 “Statistics need to be developed with users in mind. User needs differ depending on circumstances. Some users will not express their data needs, and some requests could be mal-intentioned. Statistical offices have a responsibility to consider the relevance of statistics to society and to the rights of its members.”

(d) Chapter 6, recommendation 6, paragraph 193, point 1): “Official statistics have intrinsic value for democratic societies and for human rights in terms of the equal right to information and accountability of decision making through the measurement of

¹ www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Indicators/Pages/HRIndicatorsIndex.aspx

economic, social and environmental development. International human rights mechanisms are increasingly calling for the use of relevant statistics and the involvement of national statistical offices in human rights reporting.”

(e) Annex II, page 55: “They allow citizens to hold public and other bodies to account. They enable understanding society by providing relevant information while respecting the rights of people described in statistics.”

(f) Annex II, page 58: “Comparable and harmonized official statistics are a powerful tool. International policy frameworks are increasingly evidence based and come with a measurement framework. This is true for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, human rights reporting under international human rights treaties, the Paris Climate Change Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and many others.”

12. The Task Force added references to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow-up.

III. Comments on specific chapters of the recommendations

13. Respondents found the outcomes of the Task Force work useful for their work, especially the recommendations, the measurement framework and the wiki on best practices. Respondents made the following specific comments:

14. Introduction:

(a) Colombia noted that it would be useful to add to the introduction some clarification about whether these recommendations apply to or are useful for other producers of official statistics in addition to NSOs. The Task Force added explicit references to other producers of official statistics as the target audience of these recommendations;

(b) Slovakia commented that inflexible or out-dated legal frameworks may present a barrier to releasing the competitive advantage of statistical offices. Therefore, the following underlined sentence was added to paragraph 2 of the report: “It is not over-dramatic to conclude that official statistics are at cross roads. Responding to these developments will require modernisation of statistical work and its legal and institutional frameworks”;

(c) Latvia underlined that statistical producers need to turn risks to opportunities and become a gateway to new data sources and a major partner for other data providers;

(d) The United States National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) noted that the introduction makes a strong case about why more promotion of official statistics is particularly relevant now, but the wording could be even stronger. There are expanding volumes of poorly referenced and authenticated information, sometimes from big data sources. At the same time, there is a growing need to persuade busy people about the importance of responding to official statistics surveys. The Task Force strengthened the wording by adding the underlined text: “Indeed, the world is awash with data. There is a growing confusion between official statistics and less reliable data. This may give more weight to opinions and impressions. Official statistics need to stand out as a trustworthy source of information. This is also crucial for persuading respondents about the importance of replying to statistical surveys.”

15. Chapter 2 – The current position:

(a) Respondents underlined the need to address misunderstandings and misuse of statistics, as noted in the chapter. The chapter also emphasizes confidentiality of individual data and equal access to information as fundamental elements of high-quality statistics;

(b) Countries welcomed the new section on users of statistics, and emphasized that the cornerstone of future success is in a change of attitude towards users. Some of the users use statistics as self-service, some need guidance and tailored services, and some should be treated as partners rather than customers, for instance users with research interest.

(c) Israel suggested clarifying the interpretation of the pyramid of user segments (Figure 1). The Task Force, therefore, added in paragraph 27: “Figure 1 describes how detailed or aggregated the data needs of different groups are. It generalizes the user segments for illustrative purposes: the wider the box for the user segment, the more detailed are the data needs of those users”;

(d) Respondents noted that the chapter would be good reading for non-statisticians and users who are not fully informed about the production of official statistics.

16. Chapter 3 – Existing practices to generate, promote and measure value:

(a) Several respondents mentioned the particular usefulness of the analysis of other industries to value generation and promotion. Some noted that the examples from the commercial sector are inspirational, even if not directly applicable to statistical offices. The examples from meteorological services are particularly useful;

(b) The chapter highlights many innovative practices of NSOs, such as visual analytics. Respondents noted that the case studies give a clear picture of practices for mutual learning amongst statistical offices;

(c) The sections on generating value and promoting value are very useful. They could be even further expanded to consider ways in which high levels of quality can contribute to the increase in the value of official statistics.

17. Chapter 4 – Building value through partnerships:

(a) Governmental and private information system providers are becoming key partners of statistical offices in building new web services, facilitating microdata access and managing hardware and software requirements;

(b) Statistical offices need to move towards mutually gainful partnerships to increase the value of statistics. The section on partnerships to leverage Big Data is particularly interesting in this regard;

(c) In general, advising policy makers of the value of official statistics is likely to be an issue of growing importance in the future.

18. Chapter 5 – Measuring the value of official statistics:

(a) The chapter provides the first consolidation of key methodologies to measure the value of statistics and many practical solutions for measuring the value to society. Respondents noted that applying these measurements would require the same quality criteria as compiling official statistics, including clarity, transparency and coherence. Some common objective standards must underpin the subjective assumptions, in order to arrive at comparable figures among statistical offices;

(b) Countries found the dashboard of indicators and the generic user survey valuable for increasing the focus on the value of statistics in evaluating the uses of statistics. The dashboard includes many indicators related to interaction with the office’s website. However, as the report notes, users more often access statistics through other

means, e.g. Google search. Therefore, the dashboard may need to be adjusted after the pilot testing. Some asked whether self-evaluation could really help to convince our current and potential users. Opinions of other users, media and experts may influence their views more easily;

(c) The various measurement approaches included in the chapter allow for flexibility to take into account national circumstances and priorities. Some respondents found the revealed preference theory quite illustrative and helpful in understanding users' preferences when their options are limited by available budget;

(d) By measuring the monetary value of official statistics we can more credibly communicate about our work. However, monetary valuation is an ambitious task that will require sharing of experience. To make the practical implementation easier, Colombia suggested simplifying and shortening the texts on monetization during the final editing of the recommendations before publication;

(e) Australia referred to the lack of guidance on how to collect tailored feedback from users and Portugal suggested adding a reference to the ISO (10004:2012) guidance for monitoring and measuring customer satisfaction. Therefore, the following addition was made in paragraph 148 on subjective indicators: Useful guidance for defining and measuring customer satisfaction is provided for instance by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO 10004).

(f) PARIS21 provided an update on recent work related to using the revealed preference method to value data. The Task Force, thus, added the following sentence into the report, paragraph 173: This monetization method is currently being implemented in an ongoing project on school choice by the Hungarian Education Office and OECD. Previous research for the United Kingdom and the Dominican Republic has pursued similar questions.

19. **Chapter 6 – Recommendations:**

(a) Recommendation 1 supports statistical offices in defending their value and the uniqueness of the framework of official statistics that ensures the compilation of objective and independent statistics that are not influenced by any interests. In this regard, Albania refers to the usefulness of applying ISO quality management standards to statistical work;

(b) Recommendation 2 correctly emphasizes that “NSOs produce objective analysis based on data, not subjective analysis, views or speculation”. We should build the story around the data, while keeping in mind official statisticians' role in producing objective information. Data analysis must not damage the objectivity and independence of official statistics;

(c) Recommendation 3 could be implemented by developing geospatial tools using geographic information system (GIS) technology. As suggested in the recommendation, disseminating statistics by geographic areas helps to present data in a digestible format and allows getting quick answers;

(d) Recommendation 5 on strategic partnerships is crucial for being successful in addressing new trends and users' demands. Statistical offices need to focus on how to maximize the benefits of partnerships and convince partners of the value of joint work;

(e) Recommendation 6 on building a brand should be implemented in a stepwise fashion and based on the quality of statistics rather than by making large investments in marketing. As a reaction to a comment by the United States NCES, the Task Force added the following sentence to this recommendation: Statistical offices would benefit from organizing staff training on effective outreach and hiring communications professionals;

(f) Recommendation 7 should lead to real changes in the way statistical offices measure and develop their work. Respondents noted the importance of measuring the benefits from using statistics to their users to showcase the impact statistics can have. However, it would be important to pilot test the measurement frameworks first before embarking on extensive performance measurement. Sharing user feedback and promoting the results achieved by using statistics could be more convincing than a set of indicators;

(g) Recommendation 8 on sharing of experience is particularly crucial for developing the role of official statistics and increasing the value of their work. Respondents stressed the importance of active sharing and learning among NSOs.

20. Annexes 1 and 2 – Why official statistics are valuable?

(a) Respondents considered these annexes particularly useful for their work. The annexes showcase many benefits of official statistics, and could be tapped for social media outreach. The texts are well written and persuasive, and can be used in communication with stakeholders. Some countries underline that these points need to be well adjusted to national contexts to take into account the legislated role and functions of the national statistical office and its brand in the country;

(b) In line with a suggestion by Slovakia, text in Annex 2 was revised to reflect better the active role of policy makers as users of statistics. “Ask a statistician how to measure it” was reworded as follows: Consult a statistician on how to measure it. Instead of stating that “Statisticians are asked how to formulate measurable targets” the text now reads: Policy makers ask statisticians how to formulate measurable targets.

21. Annex 3 – Generic user survey questions for statistical offices:

(a) Respondents considered the common survey questions as a useful source of ideas for their user surveys. Most NSOs conduct regular user surveys through an established practice. Yet, the generic survey questions were considered interesting as practical ideas for enhancing the focus on the value of statistics;

(b) Australia noted that the survey questions should be used with a selective approach not to burden respondents;

(c) Germany underlined the importance of monitoring specific user groups according to their needs to be able to enhance the value of statistics.

IV. Follow-up activities

22. The chapter 7 of the *Recommendations on promoting, measuring and communicating the value of official statistics* make proposals for follow-up activities. All respondents supported the follow-up work proposals.

23. In the consultation, 17 offices indicated their interest in participating in the pilot testing of the measurement framework (subject to available resources). These included Andorra, Armenia, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Hungary, Israel, Mexico, Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, United Kingdom, United States Bureau of Labor Statistics and United States NCS. The Secretariat will inform these offices when launching the pilot testing. Each office will be invited to select one of the approaches to monetize the value of official statistics and/or to pilot test some of the objective or subjective indicators.

24. Respondents made the following suggestions regarding further work:

(a) Andorra noted that implementation of the strategic recommendations is very important for value generation and measurement. To enhance the value of statistics, it

would be particularly useful to focus on the development of statistical dissemination;

(b) Belarus supported the idea of sharing best practices across NSOs to allow for better efficiency in implementing the recommendations. Further work needs to be done on the relationship between official statistics and the emerging phenomenon of 'alternative facts';

(c) According to Colombia it would be interesting to collect country examples of how to evaluate the quality of statistics and what instruments are used for this purpose. These could be collected to the wiki on best practices and be considered as a basis for further work on quality management in statistics;

(d) Croatia noted the links of enhancing the value of official statistics with the overall modernization of statistical offices. If statistical offices could function in common, standardised and modern way following the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) and the Generic Activity Model for Statistical Organizations (GAMSO), it would be easier to share best practices and solutions;

(e) Lithuania noted that benchmarking current user satisfaction surveys with the generic user survey would be useful. Further work to harmonize the measurement of costs of statistical production across countries would be particularly important;

(f) Montenegro supported the proposal to organize workshops and seminars for NSOs to share innovative practices in implementing the recommendations. This would also support the maintenance of the wiki with up-to-date practices of statistical offices in value creation, measurement and promotion;

(g) Portugal suggested drafting guidance on the communication of the value of official statistics when confronted with false and alternative news, and to develop ways to counter-argue false arguments with measurable facts from official statistics;

(h) Slovakia suggested developing a communication tool for statistical offices by summarizing the persuasive points about official statistics further and developing a very short description or (info)graphics describing the unique value of official statistics;

(i) The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia notes that the generic user survey largely reflects current practices of user surveying by statistical offices. The tool could be developed further after accumulating experience through the pilot testing of the measurement tools;

(j) Turkey emphasized the active sharing of experiences to speed up the progress in the practical implementation of the recommendations. The wiki platform created by the Task Force is a valuable catalogue of best practices that should be regularly used and updated by statistical offices;

(k) The United States NCES made two suggestions regarding follow-up work. First, further work to integrate official statistics better to education programs would be important. Partnerships could be fostered to make students more aware of the scope and value of official statistics. Students often have limited knowledge of the scope of official statistics and how these data can be used to contribute to economics, business, or other projects; how these data can be used effectively in the work place; and how their value differs from other data. Second, another potential approach to measuring the value of statistics would be to look at inputs (such as budget) compared to outputs. The outputs could be measured as weighted market basket of on-time data releases, number of citations, number of downloads, retweets and other metrics such as those cited in the paper. The measure would be designed to highlight productivity and effectiveness gains.

25. Several offices suggested active promotion and updating of the wiki on best practices, and the use of this wiki as a central repository of innovative practices from other

projects that have links with the value of official statistics. They noted that the wiki is one of the most important long-term benefits of the Task Force's work, and provides very interesting information on practices in other offices.

V. Points for discussion at the CES plenary session

26. Members of the Conference are invited to:

- Endorse the *Recommendations on promoting, measuring and communicating the value of official statistics*.
 - Discuss how to implement the recommendations, presented in Chapter 6 of the *Recommendations on promoting, measuring and communicating the value of official statistics*.
 - Discuss the proposals for follow-up work, as described in Chapter 7, paragraph 202 of the *Recommendations* and in paragraphs 24 and 25 of this document).
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