



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
General

ECE/CES/2006/SP/13
17 May 2006

ENGLISH ONLY

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

STATISTICAL COMMISSION

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Fifty-fourth plenary session
Paris, 13-15 June 2006
Item 8 of the provisional agenda

**SEMINAR ON HUMAN RESOURCES AND TRAINING
SESSION II**

The role the Statistical Office has to play in educating the public in preparing future producers and users of statistics

Submitted by the Central Statistical Office of Poland

1. The Statistical Office, apart from promoting statistical data and information, also has to fulfill an educational role, concentrated on teaching society how to use the resources of official statistics. This task is particularly important due to the increasing number of significant decisions that every educated person has to make in everyday life.
2. The Polish statistics has gained a lot of experience in this area over many years. However, we still continue our efforts in extending the educational role of statistics and a number of things still remains to be done.
3. This paper discusses the achievements and problems to be solved within the educational activities of the Central Statistical Office, addressed to:
 - (a) a wide circle of statistics-users;
 - (b) children and the youth.

I. INTERNET

4. All new basic figures, indicators, and preliminary results are published on the Internet site of the Central Statistical Office (www.stat.gov.pl) at 2.00 p.m. during the working day and on the day when press conferences are held such data are published at 10.00 a.m. Due to the growing popularity of the Internet, the Central Statistical Office annually extends the scope of publications placed on its Internet site¹. Plans are made to launch in the third quarter of 2006 a site operating with the Content Management System (CMS) with an automatic assistance system for translating into English. The site will contain an educational model, assisting in quick access to information (including an efficient search-engine), linking numerical data with meta-information, methodological information and a special module for children.²

II. PRESS CONFERENCES

5. Apart from information placed on the Internet, important elements of information services provided to mass media are regular monthly press conferences.

6. The date of the conference depends on the publication date of the “Information about Socio-Economic Situation of the Country.” As a rule this is done on the 16th or 17th working day of a given month. The time when the conference starts (10.00 a.m.) is also fixed in advance. This approach has been successfully applied for a number of years.

7. A consistent application of clear, predictable and unchangeable rules has convinced the media that the Central Statistical Office complies with the principle of publishing all results of statistical surveys which are in the domain of public accessibility in a rigorous and loyal manner, and that the CSO observes the principle of answering the queries “on the spot”, fulfilling in this way its educational role.

8. The conferences are always chaired by the President or the Vice-Presidents of the CSO. An important feature distinguishing our conferences from other conferences organised by the central offices is the fact that they are generally accessible. It means that no accreditation is required for the journalists. The conferences are regularly attended by approximately 40 representatives of newspapers, radio, television, and press agencies. On some occasions it happens that the conferences are attended by 70-80 representatives of the media.

9. After entering the conference room, all conference participants receive materials related to the topic of the conference. Additional materials are also prepared which refer to the most recent results of statistical surveys. At the moment when the conference starts, the complete set of materials is also sent to the regular recipients of the information by fax and e-mail.

10. Despite the fact that the data are available on the Internet site, the conferences are popular among journalists as they give them an opportunity to pose additional questions. In a way they also play an educational role.

11. In the first part of the conference a member of the CSO Management Board chairing the conference presents the socio-economic situation of the country in a given period. The information is richly illustrated with graphical information. In the second part of the conference

the journalists can ask questions. The answers are provided by the person chairing the conference, other members of the CSO Management Board and experts, whose participation in the conferences is mandatory. They are also available to the journalists after the conference, answering further questions and explaining the statistical methodology and other issues posed by the journalists. After the conference, there are radio and television interviews with the CSO Management Board and the CSO experts.

12. Information about the CSO press conferences is published and commented upon in press and many radio and television news programmes.

13. The CSO monitors the media reactions to information from the conferences, analyses the statements and in cases of misinterpretation of statistics, undertakes activities to rectify the information.

14. It can be stated that the press conferences organised by the CSO are one of the most appreciated information activities carried out by the public administration. The participants in those events particularly emphasise the openness, educational role of the conferences and good contact with the media. The fact that the CSO makes use of the experience of other statistical systems, adapting it to the Polish environment and the needs of the national users undoubtedly increases the positive reaction to the activities of the Polish official statistics. All those elements contribute to improving and promoting statistical knowledge among the journalists and consequently of the society as a whole.

Problems to be solved

15. Too many mistakes made in the journalistic publications in which the CSO data are used constitute a problem. It is necessary to consider the possibility of organising training sessions for journalists conducted by the CSO experts.

16. For a couple of years, the CSO has been cooperating with the EDUSAT educational television, which broadcasts all press conferences of the CSO. This is an open-access educational channel, belonging to the Warsaw School of Social and Economic Studies. The materials from the conferences are supplemented with especially prepared diagrams, illustrating the issues presented during a given conference. The conferences are broadcasted several times during didactic programmes, which are addressed mainly to students of higher economic schools.

III. STATISTICAL INFORMATION CENTRES AND STATISTICAL YEARBOOK

17. One of the forms of educational activity of the Central Statistical Office is the Central Statistical Information Centre and information centres at the regional statistical offices, which provide direct services for the statistical data users and telephone information services, also in the form of pre-prepared telephone recorded information.

18. **The Central Statistical Information Centre** provides statistical information to all the users both domestic and foreign ones. In its activity it uses the following forms of communicating with the data users:

- (a) providing statistical information on the phone or by electronic mail;
- (b) providing information on the site by means of:
 - making the statistical data available;
 - providing explanations with respect to the subject matter and the scope of the statistical data, deadlines, frequency of their publication and forms of making them available (published – not published);
 - offering methodological consultations with respect to generating data and applied classifications;
 - offering advice and guidelines with respect to applying individual statistical indexes, places of publishing them (CSO Internet site, Monitor Polski, Official Journal of the CSO);
 - offering advice on how and where to search for the published materials and how to order them (Statistical Publishing Establishment).

19. The most numerous group of the users who makes use of the resources of statistical information available at the Central Statistical Information Centre are students and organizations carrying out business activities. For the former group, making use of the statistical data is not an easy task. Thanks to the educational support of the employees of the Centre, the students can be sure that the selection of data (with respect to subject matter and methodology) and their subsequent interpretation will be carried out correctly. In the case of economic entities, direct consultation with persons dealing with statistical data on the results of statistical surveys provides an opportunity to carry out more complex analyses and to make sure that they receive information that is relevant for their specific needs.

20. Apart from the knowledge and skills of the employees of the Information Centre, the users have at their disposal a reference library containing the CSO publications and materials comprising data from the transformation period and the most recent years, as well as current publications of Eurostat. All the indices, announcements and communications of the President of the CSO are also made available (also by means of recorded automatic telephone service) and news releases prepared by the Eurostat Press Office. In addition, an access to the free-of-charge database of foreign trade is also provided. The statistical data presented there refer to commercial exchange between Poland and other countries and comprise the data starting from 1994.

21. The employees in statistics provide assistance to the data users in finding the materials that are relevant for them. If required copies are made or selected materials are sent by e-mail.

22. The Central Statistical Information Centre is also a place where the CSO Spokesman meets with the journalists on the day when the “Current Information – Preliminary Results” and communications of the President of the Central Statistical Office are published.

23. Apart from having access to the statistical data on the site, the users of the Information Centre have the possibility to provide themselves with free-of-charge promotional materials on the official statistics such as:

- (a) the publication offer of the CSO and regional offices (Editorial Plan of the Publications);
- (b) folders (e.g. Women at the Job Market, Poland in Numbers);

- (c) topical reports (monthly information about economic situation, communications about socio-economic situation in individual voivodships);
- (d) information leaflets (e.g. about regional databases, how to order data);
- (e) folders issued by Eurostat (e.g. basic social and economic data about the EU member states).

The promotional activities of the Central Statistical Information Centre include also regular receiving of visits of students of secondary schools and universities.

Problems to be solved

24. The current way of making those data available on the Internet site of the CSO is gradually becoming insufficient due to the increased demand for in statistical data, also in the electronic form. Due to this, the modernisation of the Central Statistical Information Centre is planned to make use of the modern technological solutions, which could contribute to providing more efficient information service to the users.

25. **The Statistical Information Bulletin** has been published for almost fifteen years. It is an important source of information, providing the users with knowledge on official statistics, services of official statistics and organisational structure of the CSO, the role of the Statistics Council, and the consultative and advisory bodies to the CSO President. The Bulletin presents the publishing and information system and provides a list of publications issued in a given year. An extensive part of the Bulletin is devoted to the presentation of most important statistical activities and surveys included in the programme of statistical surveys of official statistics for a given year, system of classifications and nomenclatures which are applied in statistics, registers used, supporting documents, methodology applied and information systems of administrations. The Bulletin includes also the information on the dissemination system and the principles of making the statistical data available and the ways in which for assistance in obtaining statistical information is provided.

IV. PROMOTING STATISTICAL PUBLICATIONS – BOOK FAIRS

26. The Central Statistical Office has been participating in the *EDUKACJA XXI* Educational Book Fair for a number of years, and in the last two years it also participated in the *ATENA* National Academic Book Fair and the Book Fair of Economic Publications.

27. The *EDUKACJA XXI* Educational Book Fair is the biggest showroom and fair undertaking in Poland of educational character and it is considered an important meeting place for Polish and foreign book publishers. The main objective of the Fair is the presentation of a full and wide-ranging publishing offer that serves educational purposes in all its forms, for every age and level of education of the interested population.

28. The *ATENA* National Academic Book Fair has been the most important and the most prestigious review of academic and scientific literature for a number of years. The latest 12th edition of the Fair (November 2005) took place under the auspices of the Minister of National

Education and Sport and the Minister of Science and Information Society. The publishing house *Wydawnictwa Naukowo-Techniczne* was the main organiser of the fair.

29. The Academic Association *MagPress* has been organising the Fair of Economic Publications for two years; the fair takes place in the building of the Warsaw School of Economics under the honorary auspices of the Rector of the Warsaw School of Economics. The fair concentrates on economic, business, and legal issues, making the academic circles and entrepreneurs acquainted with economic publications.

30. The CSO presents statistical publications including the results of statistical surveys on living conditions, population and demographic processes, work and income of the population, agriculture, forestry and environmental protection, prices, trade and services, production, industry and construction, investments and fixed assets, company finances, and national accounts, including regional ones. In addition to the sales of books, the CSO disseminates promotional materials on the Central Statistical Office and the regional statistical offices in the form of information leaflets, folders, publishing plans, and the CSO *Yearbook*.

31. The active participation of the Central Statistical Office, participating in the fairs is not only as a form of promoting publishing activity of statistics, but also constitutes a form of educating the society about the possible uses of statistics in the process of decision-making.

V. USER DATA SUPPORT AS A NEW ACTIVITY

32. One of the new educational activities in which the Central Statistical Office participates actively is the project entitled "European Statistical Data Support", co-financed by the European Commission. The main objective of the project is educating the users about the resources and possibilities of finding statistical data on the Internet site of Eurostat. Every interested person, by means of e-mail or telephone, is able to obtain information about the selected subject. Assistance in this respect is provided by a two-person expert team that is engaged in promoting statistical information at the CSO and covers the following areas:

- (a) providing statistical information about the EU member states;
- (b) providing information about accessibility of individual statistical data in the Eurostat resources (Internet site, databases: New Cronos and Comext, publications);
- (c) providing methodological explanations for the statistical data presented on the Eurostat site;
- (d) providing technical assistance in servicing the Eurostat databases – in particular refers to the Comext database;
- (e) circulation of popularising materials on European statistics received from Eurostat.

33. The interest of the data users in this form of assistance is considerable. In the course of two quarters from launching the activity, approximately 300 queries on statistical data were received, mainly from students.

34. The Central Statistical Office has also started activities on streamlining the process of collecting reporting forms from economic entities by means of successive replacing of paper forms with their electronic versions. The new CSO portal will include electronic forms in the reporting section. It will be possible to complete such forms on the Internet and send them to the

database of the reporting portal from which the data will be disseminated to the corresponding regional statistical offices. This module will comprise all stages of activities related to reporting, including a system of notifications about reporting obligations and control of correctness when the forms are being completed.

35. In order to reach this objective, within the framework of the project, new application servers and programming environment will be purchased to generate electronic forms. At the preparatory stage necessary educational activities addressed to the respondents are scheduled, which will assist them in user-friendly use of electronic statistical reporting.

36. In addition, for all the persons interested in registering business activity in the REGON register (official register of business entities), the registration procedure has been simplified by delegating the necessary formalities related to the registration procedure to the lowest level of administration (the gmina offices). This activity was preceded by a cycle of courses for the local government employees in order to make them familiar with the procedures, including the appropriate application of the existing statistical classifications.

VI. EDUCATING CHILDREN

37. Children of primary schools have been recently made subject to the statistical education. Special publications were prepared for them, which will serve as an introduction to statistical education, and provide the pupils with information about the country and the region in which they live, and about other EU member states in an easy, accessible and understandable way. Those publications are helpful in the educational process, shaping the skills in reading statistical information and its interpretation, teaching comparisons and inspiring the pupils to search for more extensive information about the presented issues. A series of such publications for children comprises the following positions: *A ja lubię... statystykę (I like... statistics)*, *Statystyka... to lubię (Statistics...that's it)* and *Statystyka dla Smyka (Statistics for kids)*. The last book is an innovative solution for presenting statistical information as it is accompanied by a CD with a set of exercises for the pupils to carry out on their PCs.

VII. SCHOOL TRIPS

38. Visits of the young people at the Central Statistical Office became a permanent element of making school pupils and students familiar with the issue of statistics. Those are meetings with pupils and students of primary and secondary schools and universities with the CSO experts. The level of presentation and discussion during those sessions that last a few hours is adjusted to the educational level of the participants. The trip programme comprises a visit to the Central Statistical Library and the Statistical Information Centre. In the last year two meetings for handicapped and retarded children and youth were organised to help them to integrate into the society and the objective was to get them interested in statistics.

VIII. COMPETITION FOR JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS ON THE CONCISE STATISTICAL YEARBOOK

39. A National Statistical Competition for students of secondary schools has been organised since 1968 under the auspices of the President of the Central Statistical Office. During this

school year its 35th edition will take place. There was a short break in the organization of the Competition in the years 1973 and 1976. The main objective of the Competition has been developing the skills and the knowledge of the youth in statistics acquired at school during statistics, mathematics, and geography classes on the basis of “A Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland.”

40. In the years 1968-1972 and 1977-2004, the students answered questions of the Competition questionnaire on the data published in the Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland.

41. In 2004, the College Presidium of the CSO changed the Competition formula. Now it is more attractive for students and schools taking part in it. The task of the Competition in its new formula is not only to develop skills and knowledge on the basis of the “Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland”, but also to promote creativity among students, encourage their ability of thinking and making logical analyses and syntheses.

42. At present as the Competition task the students have to prepare one out of three topics on the basis of their knowledge based on the “Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland.”

43. In 2005, the following topics, prepared by the Central Statistical Library in cooperation with the Dissemination Division of the CSO, were offered:

- (a) on the basis of data included in Chapter 5 of the “Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland 2004” characterise the national job market – evaluate employment and unemployment in Poland, taking into account place of residence, education, and age and sex of the population. Compare the economic activity of Poles with the selected countries of the world;
- (b) evaluate the usefulness of the “Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland 2004” in schools. Which information do you use most often and for which classes? Are the tables, diagrams, and explanations in this publication understandable and useful?
- (c) What would you like to change in the subsequent edition of the “Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland”? What kind of information should be added and which information is unnecessary and why? Are you satisfied with the graphic design of the publication (what should be changed in it)? Which form of the Yearbook do you use most often (book, CD, Internet) and why?

44. In 2006, the students will have a choice between the following three Competition topics:

- (a) on the basis of Chapter 1 of the “Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland” characterise the status of environmental protection in Poland;
- (b) analyse the most important data regarding environmental protection included in Chapter 1 of the “Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland” and evaluate the results of the state policy with respect to environmental protection;
- (c) analyse and evaluate Chapter 1 of the “Concise Statistical Yearbook”: “Natural Conditions and Environmental Protection.” Are the data included in this Chapter and the manner of presenting them in tables and diagrams easily readable and consistent? According to you, which information is lacking and which information could be deleted?

45. According to the Competition regulations, the students have two months to prepare a paper on the selected topic. Each year, several hundreds of Competition papers are sent to the Library from more than 100 schools from all over Poland.

46. The jury appointed by the President of the Central Statistical Office evaluates the papers sent to the National Statistical Competition by the end of September.
47. The following criteria are taken into account during evaluation of Competition papers: originality in interpreting the topic, arrangement of the content, skills in analysing and synthesising the source knowledge, the degree of using the “Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland.”
48. The list of winners of the National Statistical Competition is published on the Internet site of the Central Statistical Library <http://statlibr.stat.gov.pl> at the end of September. The prizes in the Competition are: computer sets, DVD players, CD players, encyclopaedias and lexicons.
49. Awards are given to the authors of the best Competition papers, as well as schools that sent the biggest number of Competition papers.
50. It is worthwhile to mention the fact that among the Competition winners are schools and young people from all over the country. This is proof that the Competition undoubtedly promotes of statistics in schools. Some schools have been taking part in the Competition for several years without a break.
51. The National Statistical Competition is an excellent form of promoting statistics.

X. STUDENT INTERNSHIPS

52. A permanent educational element of the CSO is internships organised for senior year students of economic and social studies. The students become acquainted with legal bases, organization of the official statistics, organisational structure of the Office and the tasks of its divisions, programme of statistical surveys of official statistics, division of tasks and organization of work within the scope of providing information services for the users. In the course of three-day internships, the participants take part in the work of selected divisions of the Dissemination Division.

XI. COOPERATION WITH UNIVERSITIES

53. One of the priority tasks implemented by the official statistics is a regular cooperation with universities with respect to making the statistical data available for scientific purposes. In particular, it is possible to observe an increasing interest of the scientific circles in the access to individual unidentifiable data that are indispensable for carrying out scientific research. Meeting this demand half-way it is permitted, upon the approval of the CSO President, to make such data available within the scope of research listed in the EC Commission Regulation No. 831/2002 regarding access to confidential data for scientific purposes.

54. Apart from the traditional manner of making the data available (preparation of a study on electronic carriers), the CSO has also provided a possibility to use such data on the spot, in a room and on a computer specially adapted for this purpose. This was also a reaction to the need of this group of users for the possibility to carry out their own analyses on the basis of anonymised data generated for a specific topic.

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¹ In 2004, 41.9% of all publications were placed on the Internet, in 2005 – 59.6%, and in 2006 it is planned to place 78.9% publications online, whereas in 2007 – 100% of publications.

² Discussed later in the paper.