

**CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS**

First meeting of the 2004/2005 Bureau  
Washington, D.C. (United States), 18-19 October 2004

Item 11: Review of the work  
of various Steering Groups  
And Task Forces working  
Under the auspices of the  
CES

**INTERNATIONAL SURVEY ON THE ROLE OF  
NATIONAL STATISTICAL OFFICES IN e-SERVICES**

**Note prepared by the ECE secretariat**

**BACKGROUND**

1. In October 2002, the Bureau asked the Steering Group on Information Technology to collect information on the development of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the national statistical offices, and to present a summary of this information to the Bureau. The survey should be less technical and should focus more on policy issues.
2. The preparation of the survey was undertaken by the Steering Group on the Management of Statistical Information Systems (MSIS), and the first proposal was discussed at the February 2003 Joint UNECE-Eurostat-OECD meeting on MSIS. The participants considered the theme too broad, and recommended to narrow it down to the most current ICT issues of the official statistics, such as the provision of information and services to stakeholders, businesses and population, generally known as e-services or e-Government.
3. In May 2004, the Joint UNECE-Eurostat-OECD Meeting on the Management of Statistical Information Systems reviewed a draft questionnaire of 16 pages prepared by Statistics Canada. It was agreed to conduct a pilot survey and collect comments for possible improvement of the questionnaire. 15 countries (Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey, United Kingdom) and 3 international organizations (OECD, Eurostat and UNECE) participated in the pilot survey. A summary of this exercise is provided below.
4. Recommendations for possible follow-up actions are provided at the end of the paper.

**A SHORT SUMMARY OF RESPONSES IN THE PILOT SURVEY**

5. The survey focused on the role of statistical agencies in e-services (e-Government), and was structured according to the following topics:
  - The role of NSOs in e-Government;
  - Survey data collection;
  - Dissemination;
  - Stakeholder relations;
  - Technology management.
6. The respondents emphasized that the answers provided in the pilot survey express only the views of the central statistical agencies, and not of the national statistical systems as a whole. This was due to the complexity of the questionnaire and the short deadline that had been agreed. The participating international organizations answered only the questions relevant to them, such as questions on dissemination, relations with stakeholders and technology management.

The role of NSOs in e-Government

7. In about half of the countries participating in the pilot survey, the agencies are expected to make available online all their products, programs and services within the time period 2005-2008. The most important motivations in using the Internet for communications and services are:

- Improving citizen satisfaction with government services;
- Improving accessibility to government programs;
- Improving timeliness or responsiveness of services;
- Pressure to reduce programme delivery costs.

8. The increasing availability of products and services online has diverse effects. There was a general agreement among respondents that **the public will expect more timely data free-of-charge**. There will also be an increased demand for online response. A subset of respondents also expects increased confidence in statistics and improvement in privacy protection and confidentiality.

Survey data collection

9. The use of the online data collection for surveys and population and housing censuses by responding NSOs is summarized as follows:

Type of the survey	Census (2006-2010)	Business surveys	Social surveys
% of NSOs providing the online response option	28%	85%	40%

10. The motivations for offering the online option vary for different countries. The greatest importance could be observed for:

- Improving the quality of the data collected;
- Improving the timeliness of the data collected;
- Reducing the costs of data collection activities;
- Improving overall response rates – this factor was also ranked quite high, but surprisingly not as high as the three factors listed above.

However, detailed analysis showed that in the case of business surveys, the NSOs hope that the online option will improve the response rates. The survey did not permit to identify a common approach. Each country implements its data collection in its own way.

Dissemination

11. All responding agencies (NSOs and international organizations) have implemented online electronic dissemination. A more detailed summary of views is as follows:

Level of electronic dissemination	% of responding statistical agencies		
	1995-1999	2000-2004	2005-2009 (plan)
Online availability of information and static data tables on the Internet	100%	100%	100%
Database assisted navigation and data browsing	45%	67%	100%
e-Commerce	7%	33%	87%

12. The most important motivating factors for implementing the electronic online dissemination are (in order of importance):

- Responding to clients' needs and expectations;
- Increasing access to (and quantity of) free-of-charge data;
- Reducing publishing costs.

The least important motivating factor seems to be:

- Increasing revenues from “for-fee” data.

13. The survey did not show a common trend in the implementation of different methods of electronic dissemination despite the significant trend towards implementing the e-commerce features (see the table above).

14. Surprisingly, only 50% of the responding agencies agreed that the web is their primary distribution channel, suggesting that other types of products are still important.

#### Stakeholder relations

15. **E-mail** is by far the most common means of communication with the advisory community. **List-servers** (automated broadcasting of e-mail messages) have some importance for some of the responding NSOs. Only the international organizations seem to be interested in **audio, video** and **internet conferencing** as a means of communication with their advisory and governing bodies.

<b>Communication channel</b>	<b>% of responding agencies</b>
E-mail	100%
List servers	45%
Audio conferencing	7%
Video Conferencing	7%
Internet conferencing (chat rooms, web boards, etc.)	7%
Internet streaming (audio, video)	7%

#### Technology management

16. The pilot survey focused on the proportion of in-house and outsourced provision of the technological facilities. Most of the agencies use a mixture of providers. The following two tables list the main providers and the prevailing centralization/decentralization of the IT management:

<b>Level of outsourcing</b>	<b>% of responding agencies</b>
In-house facilities (no outsourcing)	65%
Outsourcing to another government organization	20%
Outsourcing to a commercial supplier	15%

<b>Level of centralisation</b>	<b>% of responding agencies</b>
Significantly consolidated under common management	47%
Managed separately for each service	13%

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT MADE BY THE AGENCIES PARTICIPATING IN THE PILOT SURVEY**

17. In general, the respondents found the questionnaire too complex. If a full-scale survey is organized for all countries, the questionnaire needs to be simplified.

18. Not all information is easily available within the national statistical office. The reasons are that (i) the information needed for the completion of the questionnaire resides with different units of the NSO, and (ii) to obtain a full picture of the national statistics role in e-services (e-Government) it would be necessary to also include agencies of the national statistical systems other than just the NSO (in the case of a decentralized structure of statistical systems). A complete coverage of national statistical systems rather than NSOs should be considered for a full-scale survey.

19. While the survey focuses on policy and management issues, it cannot avoid using technical terms. Therefore, more detailed explanatory notes would be needed.

20. Some NSOs of the CIS countries were willing to respond to the pilot survey but found it too difficult to fill in the questionnaire in English. Therefore, in the event of a full-scale survey, it would be

desirable to make a Russian translation available. This is very important since the present situation and future development in the CIS countries would be of great interest to such a survey.

21. Respondents also expressed concerns of a more technical nature. For example, the present electronic version of the questionnaire (MS Excel) did not facilitate the provision of footnotes and other comments.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

22. A detailed summary of the pilot survey will be presented to the 16-18 April 2005 Meeting on the Management of Statistical Information Systems (MSIS). This may help to identify the priorities and topics of interest for future discussion within the framework of MSIS activities, in particular concerning e-services and e-Government.

23. The Bureau may wish to consider whether the organization of a full-scale survey would be of interest to the Conference, and whether the topic of e-services and e-Government may be studied in depth within its future activities.

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