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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
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Forum on Human Resources Management and Training (HRMT)

Skopje, 3-5 September 2008

REPORT

The Forum on Human Resources Management and Training was held in Skopje, capital city of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 3-5 September 2008. It was attended by participants from: Armenia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, United Kingdom and United States of America. Also the European Commission (Eurostat), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) attended.

The Forum was organised as a follow-up to the Seminar on Human Resources and Training on the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) in Paris, June 2006. The Forum was prepared by an Organising Committee with members from national statistical offices (NSOs) in the Czech Republic, Canada, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Finland, IMF and UNECE. The Organising Committee was co-chaired by the Czech Statistical office and Statistics Canada.

The agenda was agreed upon by the Forum. Ms. Eve Simpson (Canada) chaired session 1, Mr. Charles Enoch (IMF) chaired session 2 and Mr. Jan Fischer (Czech Republic) chaired session 3 of the meeting. The following participants acted as session organisers: Ms. Eve Simpson (Canada) for session 1, Ms. Riikka Osterberg (Finland) and Mr. Charles Enoch (IMF) for session 2, Ms. Hana Slegrova, Ms. Marcela Provaznikova and Ms. Dana Kramova (Czech Republic) for session 3.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The proceedings of the Forum, including this report, are available on the UNECE website www.unece.org/stats/documents/2008.09.hrm.htm.

Session 1: Human Resources Management in Official Statistics

The session was chaired by Ms. Eve Simpson, Statistics Canada. It was divided into three modules.

Session 1 - Module 1

Module 1 was based on invited papers from Australia, Finland, Sweden and Lithuania. Mr. Enrico Giovannini, OECD, acted as discussant for the module. The module revolved around the issues of what competencies are needed in NSOs now and in the future and how to attract and retain qualified staff. During the discussion, the following points were made:

A main challenge for the future will be to attract and recruit high-qualified new staff. They will have to be recruited from the new “digital” generation, in competition with other public and private institutions. Issues that are given more weight by the new generation include:

- a more challenging and dynamic work environment;
- flexibility;
- responsibility; and
- career opportunities

When planning and organising future workplaces, NSOs need to consider the ever more common attitude of the younger generation: it is more important *what* you do, not at what time of day or how long it takes. The possibility of international work was also mentioned as a factor that NSOs might use more actively in their recruitment.

NSOs need to learn how to communicate better with the next generation in order to attract the best candidates. It is also possible to target the communication and recruitment to specific groups -- university students, for example. The NSO’s public image also plays a role in recruitment, i.e. whether the institution appears to be an open workplace engaged in knowledge-building or a closed, “technical” institution.

To support building the future workplace, relevant competencies should lend more weight to *behavioural* competencies, such as knowledge transfer/builder skills, media/public relations, communications and values and ethics. The identification of future competencies enables NSOs to plan recruitment and training activities, and it was suggested to consider establishing an inventory of competencies based on NSO input.

The NSOs need to offer new roles and responsibilities. The new generation may be more demanding in terms of attention and recognition. NSOs need to put more focus on well-being. Carefully planned orientation courses and training of the new generation are of critical importance, although it was stressed that NSOs should also be open to learn from the new generation and allow them to influence and change the institution. As an example, Statistics Sweden reported that they created “agents of change” that have empowered them to facilitate change. At the same time focus has been put on improved documentation for knowledge transfer with the aid of new tools. In order to plan useful training programs it is important to understand first and foremost how people learn.

It was recommended to establish transparent recruitment procedures where all posts are advertised, both internal and external. Performance agreements and a regular, open appraisal system were suggested, as well as reward mechanisms linked to performance and efforts. Mobility opportunities need be established and may be linked to career development. Staff surveys are useful and should be conducted regularly.

Leaders and managers do not necessarily need to be experts in statistics; their primary role is to lead and motivate staff. Smaller NSOs may have difficulties in implementing full-scale programs for training of leaders or managers; in some instances the most experienced are selected and offered management training afterwards.

The following conclusions and suggestions were made:

- The recruitment of high-qualified staff is a key future challenge for NSOs; they need to attract the best candidates as it is costly (in time and money) to recruit persons of the wrong fit.
- The NSOs' public image influences their capability to attract high-qualified candidates, and NSOs need to act on this.
- NSOs need to learn how to communicate better with the future generation, in their own language. This may include targeting communication and recruitment activities with specific groups of candidates.
- NSOs need to offer to the new generation more challenging work and career opportunities, balanced with more work flexibility.
- Competencies should reflect future NSO needs and include behavioural and communication skills and building-and-transfer-of-knowledge skills.
- Establish an inventory of competencies including a set of common or minimum competencies in official statistics.
- Exchange of staff survey questionnaires among NSOs to learn from other's experiences.

Session 1 - Module 2

Module 2 was based on papers submitted by the OECD, the Federal Statistical Office of Germany and Statistics Canada. Mr. Luigi Biggeri (ISTAT) served as discussant. The module focused on issues related to the organization of HRMT, resources, and evaluation of HRM activities. During the discussion, the following points emerged:

Positions may be grouped into "job families" to facilitate better and more generic job descriptions. While it is often difficult to distinguish between various groups – such as an economist and a statistician – it was nevertheless felt that the move towards more generic descriptions would help facilitate recruitment and career planning.

The role of a flexible versus a rigid contractual framework for recruiting of adequate personnel was raised as an important issue. A "holistic" approach was proposed, i.e., treat legal and contractual issues as an integral part of overall HR policy, not in isolation.

It is a major challenge to keep older employees motivated and open to change. The younger generation, on the other hand, embraces the dynamics of change (based on recent OECD focus group meetings).

The Federal Statistical Office of Germany reported on the establishment of an *Assessment Centre* responsible for learning. As one activity, the Centre assesses the leadership potential of staff on a pre-established scale, to facilitate selection of leader candidates. Strong social competences are important for the integration of new staff.

Mapping of competencies and gaps is an important task. While it requires cooperation, it has proved to be a useful tool for staff recruitment and training, and places the supervisor in a better position to recommend options for the employee to best apply his or her strengths.

Statistics Canada highlighted the use of its *Labour Management Committee*, chaired by the Chief Statistician. The Committee resolves HR issues before they escalate. There is continuous dialogue with local union representatives including an effective dispute resolution mechanism co-developed with the unions. Involvement of top management had proven to be useful and has led to more focus on HR management issues. The importance of keeping some flexibility in the system was underlined: procedures and mandates should not be too rigid.

Consolidation of job descriptions in Statistics Canada was accomplished by creating generic work descriptions for a number of staff groups at different levels. Generic job descriptions facilitate collective staffing, making it possible to staff a large number of positions at the same time. The move to generic descriptions allows career paths to be established and has made job requirements more visible and transparent for the employees.

Another important issue identified was the timing of HR development activities and resources in relation to the strategic plan.

The question of how to measure the effects of HRMT activities was raised. For some concrete activities it is possible to measure the direct or immediate effects. However, it is often difficult to measure indirect and longer-term effects, for example the relationship between a positive work environment and general well-being among staff. It is not possible to point out a single measure that applies to all cases, but a number of measures were suggested, such as staff surveys, rates of separation, the number of applicants responding to job advertisements, and attendance rates.

The introduction of “functional organisation” in some NSOs has posed additional challenges for HR management.

The following conclusions and suggestions were made:

- NSOs were advised to establish frameworks for capability development and career planning, linked to the business plan.
- More knowledge on how to measure the effects of HRMT is needed. Exchange of good practices and experiences on how to measure the effects of HRMT was encouraged. The measurement of HRMT effects was also suggested as an issue for further international work.

Session 1 – Module 3

Module 3 was based on papers submitted by Statistics Norway, the Hungarian Central Statistical Office and the Brazilian Statistical Institute. Ms. Tine Stets, Statistics Denmark, served as Discussant. The module focused on the role of HR management in the NSO. Two basic challenges were identified:

- How to ensure that HRMT is both systematic and strategic; and
- How to integrate HRMT into the organization and the Corporate Plan

The Hungarian Central Statistical Office informed the Forum about the implementation of their 2005 HR programme and the experiences made concerning recruitment and training. The HR programme also includes an appraisal system. A large number of staff is trained every year. The internal recruitment is related to age and education as well as participation in task forces and working groups. As part of its work the HR Unit aims to measure the capacity of all units in the NSO and to estimate the resource requirement.

The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) reported on the implementation of a TQM framework as a part of which the core competencies for professionals in statistics are now in place and in line with the central values of the IBGE. The competencies have been mapped by degree of management level which has made it possible to identify what competencies are needed and where gaps may occur; more weight has been put on communication competencies and less on “traditional” statistical work. One experience identified the necessity of having clear strategic goals in order to develop the relevant competencies. In general, there is a growing awareness of the importance of HR management and the need to integrate it in the business plan.

Statistics Norway runs a comprehensive training program for staff. The planning of the training courses is based on input from the managers on what courses they would like organized. Some courses are obligatory, but in addition to these staff may apply to attend any course – in principle they are free to all. It is the responsibility of the manager to approve the application. Training is also an integrated part of the annual performance review, where gaps in competencies are identified and a personal training plan is agreed upon.

In 2007, Statistics Norway implemented an HR strategy focusing on knowledge-sharing, on-the-job training, and training of statistical experts. Implementation of the so-called functional organization in 2008 created a need for new competencies.

The following conclusions and suggestions were made:

- The map of competencies should be based not only on current roles, but on the corporate vision: future longer-term (10-15 year) needs.
- A major future challenge for NSOs is moving from the identification of required competencies to the planning and design of training courses.
- There is a need to further consider how to develop leadership skills in official statistics.
- It is essential that statistical organizations retain the “institutional” memory by having knowledge-builders to transfer knowledge.

Session 2: Training in official statistics

The session was chaired by Mr. Charles Enoch, IMF. It was divided into two modules.

Session 2 – Module 1

Module 1 was based on invited papers from UK, Eurostat, USA and Czech Republic. Ms. Aija Zigure from Statistics Latvia served as discussant for module 1.

“Career paths as a method of organizing continuous learning in the office” was discussed, based on the paper from ONS, UK. The ONS has a four-level competence framework which helps staff with their career development. Continuous learning has been established as part of the culture in the government offices. To widen their knowledge and skills, staff is encouraged to move throughout all government departments. The staff is encouraged to take different e-learning courses or learn from colleagues. When applying for promotion staff has to provide their “learning log” to the interview panel. While staff requires general and broad knowledge to rotate to institutions outside the statistical office, the need to ensure strong statistical competencies was also recognized.

The question of whether – or to what degree – statistical experts and leading statisticians need managerial competencies was also raised. In many cases the competence framework deals only or mainly with technical statistical skills and does not include managerial competencies.

The different level of centralization of the NSOs was raised as an important issue. Some NSOs are almost completely centralized, while others are decentralized with the major part of the staff located in regional offices. This constitutes very different conditions on which to plan and conduct training activities.

Eurostat explained that its courses are organized in cooperation with member states which are asked to complete a questionnaire on their priorities and needs. In addition, participants and trainers complete evaluation questionnaires on the basis of which specific adjustments are made to the courses. Eurostat focuses on issues relevant to the European Statistical System, and aims to complement rather than compete with national training activities.

Eurostat asked member countries to submit *competence profiles*; it received profiles from 13 countries. On this basis Eurostat plans to discuss the possibility of developing a set of internationally-harmonized competence profile(s) in October 2008. The broader perspective would be to develop an internationally harmonized concept of statistician’s competencies.

Joint training on survey methodology has been established in the USA. Some 50 agencies that employ statisticians participate in the program which applies to all who hold a three-year degree and have a minimum of required specific skills. The program also includes video courses conducted among different universities.

The Czech Statistical Office reported on the training of statistical experts which is conducted by expert statisticians, some with training from abroad. There is no pedagogical courses for the trainers, however. Participants are selected through the annual evaluation meeting with

superiors and participation is approved by top management. Evaluation of the training activities is conducted at several levels and forms important feedback to the planning of future training courses.

The following conclusions and suggestions were made:

- Investigate what factors stimulate staff to improve training programs (for example, self-education)
- Establish or improve links between the NSO and other government departments and universities to improve training activities.
- Different levels of centralization constitute different conditions on which to plan and conduct training activities. Problems related to training in decentralized NSOs may be addressed in future HRMT work.

Session 2 – Module 2

Module 2 was based on papers submitted by Canada, Portugal and IMF. Mr. Peter Struijs, Statistics Netherlands, served as discussant.

Based on the invited papers a number of reasons for undertaking training were identified:

- enhance statistical literacy;
- increase the use of and demand for statistical data;
- improve the position of the NSO;
- ensure inflow of qualified staff;
- encourage co-operation of respondents;
- increase use of statistical standards;
- technical assistance; and
- financial benefits (some NSOs need to generate income from training for their budget).

The target groups for training courses includes statisticians within the NSO, government officials, press and other media, the general public, education (primary, secondary, post secondary) and other specific groups of data users.

A variety of means can be applied, including websites (with good metadata about concepts and data quality), e-learning, courses and workshops, training on the job, partnerships, ambassador approach, volunteer programs, and training the trainer.

Knowledge-sharing and the transfer of knowledge were mentioned as equally important as knowledge itself, and NSOs should try to institutionalize this in their HR management and organisational structure.

A number of conditions for a successful training program were noted:

- institutional stability (the importance of maintaining training programs);
- stable policy at corporate level;
- support from stakeholders;

- professional basis;
- training expertise;
- user orientation;
- regular evaluation;
- environment for successful assimilation; and
- link to the corporate strategy.

The importance of being user-oriented and demand-driven was highlighted. The need to educate trainers in pedagogical methods was also stressed, as was the need to conduct critical evaluation of training activities. Although difficult to do, the usefulness of measuring the effects and cost-benefit ratio of training activities was underlined.

The following conclusions and suggestions were made:

- Training activities should be demand-driven and incorporated in the strategic plan.
- A fluctuating training budget makes planning and organizing of training activities difficult; the preference would be a stable budget, which facilitates better planning.
- NSOs should consider training not only of its own staff but also to the outside, to increase statistical literacy and generate positive feedback.
- Establishing or strengthening partnerships with universities may help to improve the quality of the training; a variety of means exists and should be further explored.
- There is a need to develop methods to evaluate the efficiency of training activities.
- It was suggested to develop an inventory of examples of good practices in training in different NSOs, for example on how to apply e-learning.

Session 3: Panel discussion: Human resources management in periods of major changes

Mr. Jan Fischer, President, the Czech Statistical Office chaired the session. The panel members were Ms. Blagica Novkovska, Director, the State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia, Ms. Aija Zigure, President, Statistics Latvia and Ms. Thana Chrissanthaki, Head of Unit, Eurostat.

The discussion centred around two key questions posed by the chair:

- What are the typical changes that affect HR management in statistical offices, whether imposed externally or from within the statistical office?
- What are the factors or issues that are special to HR management in official statistics and what are the consequences of these on HR management in statistical offices?

In the discussion the following conclusions and suggestions were made:

In most if not all institutions, there will be some inertia and resistance to change. Open, timely and efficient communication is crucial in order to manage change. Communication also needs to address expectations (including worries) that may exist among staff. In general, it is important to perceive change as an opportunity, not as a threat to the institution. Managers also need to adapt to change rather than rely on traditional procedures.

An example of externally-imposed change is the influence from national or international legislation, e.g. the EU. Examples of internal changes included adoption to new methodologies and standards, organizational changes, and changes in IT systems. Changes may also be divided into predictable and unpredictable changes, where the former allow the NSO to prepare and plan. It was also noted that gradual changes are preferred, as they allow for better management.

The present and (most likely) the future are characterized by continuous change. It was seen as a major task of both top management and the human resources management to prepare and train staff to have a positive and active approach to change and to develop and provide tools to manage change.

HR managers need to have a vision of how the statistical office will look like in 10 years and which competencies will be needed. They need to establish long-term plans in accordance with strategic goals of the office. Likewise, it is important for HR managers to establish cooperation with others (e.g. technical managers and statisticians) to ensure coherence with the business plan and success of the organization as a whole. HR managers should be involved more in the development of the strategic goals in the NSO.

It is important for the Statistical Office to be transparent both internally and externally. A good Intranet system is a very effective medium of communication with the staff.

The need for further international activities on HRMT for HR managers in statistical offices was noted. Although HR is often identified as the single most important factor for NSO development to meet future demand, the Forum was the very first of its kind.

Countries were encouraged to follow examples of good HR practices presented at the Forum and to further exchange views and experiences.

Concluding session – proposal for follow-up activities

The session was organized by Statistics Canada and the Czech Statistical Office.

Ms. Simpson, Statistics Canada, presented the results of the survey on possible follow-up activities to the Forum (see Annex 1). The survey questionnaire was prepared by the Organising Committee and distributed and collected on the first day of the Forum. The results of the survey were inconclusive, as the majority of the participants were in favour of all activities proposed by the Committee. Secondly, during the Forum participants came up with new proposals which are not reflected in the results of the survey.

After discussion the Forum agreed on the following list of possible follow-up activities:

1. Competences in official statistics

- What competencies are needed in future; statistical experts, generalists, communicators, project managers, etc.?
- (Different) competencies for expert statisticians and for managers?
- Compilation of an inventory of competencies

- Common set of competencies (minimum standards?) for staff in official statistics
- How to measure competences?

2. Training

- How to apply e-learning in training of staff in official statistics?
- The involvement of universities in the training. How to attract universities to be involved in the training of staff, different organisational set-ups?
- How to ensure training is demand driven?
- How do we measure the efficiency/cost-benefit of training activities?
- Training to the outside - of users, respondents, the public, researchers, teachers, etc.
- Training to the outside: as part of the technical cooperation activities.

3. Cross-cutting issues in HR management

- The role of HRM in the NSOs. HRM and the business plan, the strategic goals and the top management; centralised and de-centralised statistical systems
- How to move from a purely legal system to an integrated business approach?

4. How to attract and retain staff for tomorrow

- How to attract and retain the most qualified?
- How to attract and retain the 'digital' generation?
- External versus internal recruitment
- How to identify and develop/train future leaders in official statistics?
- Development of an inventory of staff survey questionnaires – or common/comparable standards?
- Career development.

Since the proceedings of the Forum are available from the web, the Forum agreed not to publish these in a printed version.

Presentation of the Statistical System of the State Statistical Office of Macedonia.

Ms. Blagica Novkovska, Director, the State Statistical Office of Macedonia, presented important milestones in the development of the statistics in Macedonia and provided an overview of the statistical system and the organisational structure of the statistical office.

The achievements included adoption of major European standards and classifications, application of the International and European standards for demographic and social surveys, improvements in the area of business statistics, national accounts, agricultural and environmental statistics, developments of IT systems, the dissemination policy and, more general, cooperation with international organisations and other NSO. Ms. Novkovska highlighted the importance of accurate and reliable statistics, and expressed willingness to further improve the statistical system.

Annex 1: Results of the questionnaire on the follow-up activities of the HRMT Forum in Skopje, September 2008.

	Yes	No	Don't know
1. Organisation of a seminar and/or production of guidelines and training materials on official statistics	32	4	6
2. Organisation of a seminar on how to attract and retain well qualified staff in the statistical office	33	6	3
3. Organisation of a seminar and/or production of handbook/guidelines on e-learning	36	4	4
4. Publication of the proceedings of the HRMT forum in Skopje, September 2008	36	5	4

Total replies: 45