

A shower of colorful confetti in shades of red, orange, green, blue, and white is scattered across the top of the page.

30 Fundamental Principles
of **Official
Statistics**
YEARS | 1992–2022

MARKING THE
ANNIVERSARY



THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF
OFFICIAL STATISTICS:
MARKING THE ANNIVERSARY



United Nations
Geneva, 2022

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This publication is issued in English only.

This publication is available in an electronic interactive form at <https://w3.unece.org/fpos30/>

United Nations publication issued by the Economic Commission for Europe

ECE/CES/STAT/2022/3

FOREWORD

Evidence, in the form of data and statistics, is essential for formulating and monitoring policies. But we don't just need any old evidence. If we are to be sure that we are making sound decisions, we need to be able to have faith in the soundness of the figures we rely on. This is where the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics come in.

I am immensely proud to say that these Principles, now a General Assembly-endorsed global standard, were created right here in our region by a UNECE body.

For those of us tasked with guiding and monitoring the progress of countries as they tackle the big challenges of our time—climate change, population ageing, sustainable urbanization, transitioning to a green economy—the value of comprehensive and trustworthy information cannot be overstated. I, like many others, depend every day on information produced under the umbrella of the Fundamental Principles to understand what is happening across the region as we all strive to attain the Sustainable Development Goals. It is for this reason that supporting our member States to improve their statistical systems is one of the central, powerful goals of the organization I lead.

I firmly believe, therefore, that the Fundamental Principles must and will remain at the heart of official statistics for another 30 years and beyond, as the shared foundation of an informed society.

I invite all countries to respect and uphold the Principles, and to strengthen and support official statistics producers so that they are empowered to fulfil the Principles to the maximum extent.



Olga Algayerová

Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations
Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

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HISTORY

In 1992, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) adopted the [Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics in the UNECE region](#). They were adopted two years later at the global level by the United Nations Statistical Commission, taking them from a regional to a global standard.

Later, in 2013, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) endorsed the Principles. And [in January 2014 they were adopted by United Nations General Assembly](#) – a truly remarkable recognition at the highest political level of their importance for evidence-based decision-making.

The Fundamental Principles were devised at a time of immense change and upheaval across the region. As centrally-planned economies transitioned to market economies in many member States, statisticians in these newly democratic countries realized more than ever that they needed a [shared framework](#) to define the principles that guide what they do.

Codes of practice and ethics for statisticians were not new – the profession of statistics as a whole had its own guidelines, while some countries had codified the expectations of official statistics in legislation or in the guidelines of professional associations. But [this was the first appearance of an internationally-agreed set of fundamental principles, common to all and endorsed by all](#). Since their creation, the principles have served to guide official statisticians in their work as well as in communicating the nature of that work to the world.

30TH ANNIVERSARY

2022 marks **30 years since the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics were first developed and adopted at UNECE**. The United Nations Statistical Commission adopted these principles in 1994 at the global level. The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) endorsed the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics at policy level in 2013; and in January 2014, they were adopted by the General Assembly.



The principles underlie everything that the producers of official statistics do: from the methods for collecting, processing and storing data to the ways that statistical offices disseminate statistics and communicate with those who use them. By marking this anniversary, statistical offices across the region are recognizing the continued and increasing importance of the Principles in guiding what they do. **Thirty years on, they remain a collective manifesto for serving society with impartial, relevant and accurate information to guide decisions.**

From January to June 2022, the Conference of European Statisticians has celebrated the Fundamental Principles through a series of country-led communications campaigns telling **a shared story about the importance and impact of each Fundamental Principle on society and everyday life and why they matter.**

We bring together here many of the materials, experiences and examples that countries, organizations, members of the statistical community and users of statistics prepared as part of this joint celebration.

PRINCIPLE 1: RELEVANCE, IMPARTIALITY AND EQUAL ACCESS



“ Official statistics provide an **indispensable element in the information system of a democratic society**, serving the government, the economy and the public with data about the economic, demographic, social and environmental situation. To this end, official statistics that meet the test of practical utility are to be compiled and made available on an impartial basis by official statistical agencies to honour citizens' entitlement to public information. ”

WHY DOES PRINCIPLE 1 MATTER?

So much is enshrined in just a few words!

The producers of official statistics must strive to serve society with the information people need and want. Only if statistics **meet the test of practical utility** can they be considered **relevant**. Utility can be frustrated by many barriers—figures that come too late to be useful, are published in lengthy books or hard-to-read graphs, are hard to locate on websites, or that lack the necessary explanations to help users know what they mean.

Ensuring relevance entails reaching out to current and potential users to **find out about their needs**: on what topics do they need statistics? in which formats? when do they need them? Needs change over time, so NSOs maintain constant contact with stakeholders. When the Covid-19 pandemic struck, NSOs consulted widely to find out about and respond to rapidly changing demands for data. NSOs conduct user surveys and track usage of their products to keep tabs on their continued relevance.

Remaining **impartial** and safeguarding **equal access** are at the heart of official statistics. It is essential for statistical offices to be independent from governments, and free from political influence. Without these protections, citizens might be hesitant about participating in surveys or allowing their data to be used. If they perceive statistics to be linked to a government in whom their trust is limited, this might also undermine their trust in the figures. Official statistics respond to the needs of all types of users, not only those in authority; the data needs of the general public are just as legitimate as the data needs of governments, banks and businesses. This applies both to the choice of what statistics to produce, and the timing of release of statistics. **No-one gets privileged access to figures**, and no-one can tell the NSO to withhold them from public access.

Impartial official statistics don't only help to build trust in the NSOs themselves—they contribute to a wider social goal of fostering transparency and accountability, building an open relationship between society and states. If we can trust that NSOs are telling us the whole, real story, for example, about progress towards the SDGs—even in cases where that real story demonstrates poor progress or unsuccessful policies—we are better equipped to hold our policymakers to account.

Statistics Canada

CANADA: CONTINUED IMPORTANCE OF THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

Video from the Chief Statistician of Canada, Anil Arora, along with various Canadian leaders, about the first principle in English and French

“Whether at home or abroad, the value and reach of data are clear. They show us where we’ve been, where we stand now and what our path forward must look like.”

Leslie Norton, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations in Geneva

“We are proud to celebrate the 30th anniversary of these principles. At no time in the past have they been tested more and served as guide posts, as we have stepped up to serve our citizens and policy makers in making good decisions based on timely and high-quality statistics and insights.”

Anil Arora, Chief Statistician of Canada

“The key to having a vibrant society and a successful digital economy is to have high-quality data and statistics.”

Howard Ramos, Professor and Chair of the Department of Sociology, Western University, Chairperson, Canadian Statistics Advisory Council

“This has never been more true. Overcoming COVID-19 and pursuing a sustainable, people-centred and inclusive recovery relies on data-driven, evidence-based decisions.”

Ailish Campbell, Ambassador to the European Union

“By working together on data sharing pilot projects and regular data consultations in municipalities of all sizes, we’re building knowledge to improve decision making not only at the local level but at a national level too.”

Carole Saab, Chief Executive Officer, Federation of Canadian Municipalities

“The same values and core ideals that inspired the fundamental principles from thirty years ago still hold true.”

Nathalie Drouin, Deputy Clerk of the Privy Council and Associate Secretary to the Cabinet

“To have equal access to information.”

Howard Ramos, Professor and Chair of the Department of Sociology, Western University, Chairperson, Canadian Statistics Advisory Council

“Accessible data to make decisions that will improve communities across the country.”

Carole Saab, Chief Executive Officer, Federation of Canadian Municipalities

“Equality, impartiality, independence, accountability and transparency.”

Nathalie Drouin, Deputy Clerk of the Privy Council and Associate Secretary

“These principles remain at the heart of what we do and how we lead.”

Anil Arora, Chief Statistician of Canada

“An important step in Canada is also to produce detailed statistical information on the experiences of specific groups such as women, indigenous peoples, racialized populations and people living with disabilities. All with the goal of leading to a better understood society and thus a fairer and more inclusive one.”

Ailish Campbell, Ambassador to the European Union

“Statistics and data that are relevant, accessible, owned by and controlled by Inuit are a critical component of self-determination and evidence-based decision making that supports optimal outcomes for Inuit in Canada but also the relationship between indigenous peoples and nation states. Nakurmiik.”

Natan Obed, President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK)

“As new methods, technologies, partnerships and data sources continue to emerge and evolve, innovation and change have become the new norm.”

Anil Arora, Chief Statistician of Canada

“Clear and accurate statistics, presented free of bias and available to all, are central for sustainable economic, environmental and social development. All areas where Canada is among leaders internationally.

Congratulations to Statistics Canada and its fellow national statistical offices on adopting these principles and continuing to embody their spirit while providing timely data and insights. Congratulations.”

Leslie Norton, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations in Geneva

PRINCIPLE 2. PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND ETHICS

2

“ To retain trust in official statistics, the statistical agencies need to decide according to **strictly professional considerations, including scientific principles and professional ethics**, on the methods and procedures for the collection, processing, storage and presentation of statistical data. ”

WHY DOES PRINCIPLE 2 MATTER?

The work of official statistics is not just collecting data and crunching numbers. There is a whole chain of processes, from deciding what statistics are needed, hiring staff, designing surveys and identifying data sources, through gathering and processing data, to publishing and explaining the statistics.

Every link in this chain involves making decisions from among a range of options. In official statistics, these choices must be driven purely by **professional motivations**—never by political ones. While accountability to the taxpayer and value for money are also key considerations (as will be seen in Principle 3), this does not mean that cheapest is necessarily best. **Scientific excellence**, above all else, determines the methods official statisticians select to conduct their work. This includes statistical methods as well as those from the fields to which the statistics relate, such as economics, demography, and climate science, as well as ICT tools and modern communication techniques. Indeed, in fulfilling this principle, official statisticians strive not only to *follow* the best available scientific methods, but to work tirelessly to *develop* these methods.

As in any profession, applying professional ethics at every level from the individual staff members to the organization as a whole is essential to maintain the good reputation of the industry. Nowhere is this more true than for official statistics, where safeguarding this good image is crucial for **maintaining public trust**—which is essential both in order for respondents to continue providing the data needed for statistics, and in order that statistics are believed and used to their full potential.

Statistics New Zealand

NEW ZEALAND: A LIFE IN SERVICE OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS – GARY DUNNET

Article originally posted on LinkedIn at <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/gary-dunnet-life-service-official-statistics-statistics-new-zealand> on 23 February 2022

Meet Gary Dunnet, Deputy Chief Methodologist at Stats NZ.

For over 34 years, Gary has lived and breathed statistics as an applied mathematician by trade and a world-leading official statistician.

“Starting at Stats NZ was a bit of an accident, as it was the first job I got out of university!”, Gary says.

Despite having worked in National Statistics Offices (NSOs) around the world, Gary reflects the best thing about his work at Stats NZ has been the chance to get involved in a wide range of projects.

“A highlight of my career was documenting the processes used in the production of Stats NZ’s official statistics. This was later adopted by the UN as the Generic Statistical Business Process Model and has since informed international best-practise for NSOs producing official statistics around the world.”

During his extensive career, Gary has been internationally recognised for his work and sits on a number of groups as part of the UN high-level group for the modernisation of official statistics, Executive Committee for the International Association for Official Statistics, External Advisory Board for Statistics Singapore’s strategic direction and other methodological review groups.

The UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics are integral to Gary and his work as a statistician.

“I’ve been around so long that the Principles have seeped into me and my values”, reflects Gary.

In the 30 years since the Fundamental Principles were created, Gary has seen and strongly supported a shift to make statistics open, transparent and accessible for all.

“For example, putting out notifications on Stats NZ’s releases means that people can depend on us to release information when we say we will, and using technology has allowed for more equitable access in Stats NZ’s release process.”

“Stats NZ now allows for early access to be given to data for experts to provide insights and commentary, such as in our environmental reporting measures. This means our statistics can tell a clearer story about the world around us.”

“Building trust and credibility is absolutely critical. Trust takes such a long time to build but seconds to lose.”

For Gary, adhering to the Fundamental Principles means good-quality statistics that benefit everyday people.

“Statistics play a crucial role in our daily lives and measure what matters most to us: population estimates help us decide where to build schools, measures of fresh water tell us where we can swim, and inflation measures impact the cost of everyday products and services.”

“If you want a well-functioning democracy and public services, you need good information. And we’re in the information game”.

Stats NZ is leading Aotearoa New Zealand’s celebration of 30 years of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, in particular, Principle 2.

Principle 2 is about trust and ensuring everyday people have confidence in official statistics. This Principle guides statisticians to live up to professionalism, scientific principles and ethics in the way they collect, process, store and present statistics.

PRINCIPLE 3. ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

3

“ To facilitate a correct interpretation of the data, the statistical agencies are to present information according to scientific standards on the **sources, methods and procedures of the statistics. ”**

WHY DOES PRINCIPLE 3 MATTER?

Good governance in any organization calls for accountability and transparency. These words are so widely used that we might not even pay them much attention. But they are absolutely crucial for official statistics. Why?

Unless the processes and products of official statistics are totally **transparent**, they risk being useless – or worse, dangerous. Without knowledge of how they were made, people could accidentally or deliberately **misinterpret** them. To be able to interpret and apply statistics correctly, users need to know some key facts about them, called **metadata**—how were they gathered? When? Among what group of people? What were they asked? How were the raw data processed into the published statistics? As well as guiding correct interpretation, transparency fosters **trust** which, as we saw in Principle 2, is essential for statistics to be believable and useful. Producers of statistics want users to trust their numbers, but they don't expect this to be blind trust – they know that they must earn it.

Statistics is often called the science of probability. Official statistics must therefore also be transparent about the probability attached to the figures they publish. How big and representative were the samples, and how confident can we be in the estimates? By publishing **confidence intervals** and **quality assessments** along with details of the methods used, producers of official statistics enable users to select appropriate statistics for their purposes and provide them with information on how to use and interpret them.

Being **accountable** to society goes far beyond publishing metadata. It entails being transparent and efficient in **how public money is spent**; ensuring a high level of **professional capability** among staff so that correct statistical methods are followed; and **communicating with the public** about the timing of statistical releases, revisions and correction of errors, and plans to start new statistical products or to change or discontinue existing ones.

Statistics Finland

HOW ON EARTH TO IDENTIFY RELIABLE DATA?

Article by Outi Ahti-Miettinen originally posted on Statistics Finland's blog at <https://www.stat.fi/tietotrendit/blogit/2022/how-on-earth-to-identify-reliable-data> on 28 February 2022

These days, a huge array of answers can be found on the web to satisfy just about any data need. While the amount of data available has actually exploded, intentional dissemination of incorrect information has also grown immensely. So how can one know which data can be trusted?

Critical reading skills of data and the use of source criticism are offered to help in identifying reliable data. But what do they mean in practice and what should be taken into account when assessing the reliability of data? And how to assess the responsibility and openness of the producer of the data source?

Answers to this can be found in the UN's Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics that have their 30th anniversary this year. There are a total of ten principles that guide statistical authorities. It is instructed in the principles that "to facilitate a correct interpretation of the data, the statistical agencies are to present information according to scientific standards on the sources, methods and procedures of the statistics."

In practice, this means that detailed information should be given on statistics about how they have been compiled. In accordance with this principle, statistical authorities have for decades produced reliable data describing the methods and data source used. The principle can also be used to assess the reliability of other data generated in society.

GOOD DESCRIPTION MAKES THE USE OF DATA EASIER

A responsible producer of data can be identified from the fact that the producer attaches a description of the method to the disseminated data. By means of a clear description, users can assess the quality of data.

The quality and reliability of data consist of many parts. Firstly, it must be known how the data have been collected.

From where have the source data been obtained and how were they selected? Have the data been produced by random sampling or is the data source, for example, exhaustive register data? It is also good to know who maintains the register, how and when the data were obtained from it or how the sample was designed.

When we know where the data come from, we need to know how the data were compiled. How were the data processed and what methods were used to obtain the

results? It is important to know the grounds for the selected methods and procedures.

A responsible data producer also gives information about limitations related to the use of data and possible errors contained in the data. For example, the data produced with a sample survey always include sampling error and a responsible data producer gives users an estimate of this, for example, in the form of a margin of error.

Another important part of data quality is how the data meet users' needs. Users should know how and when the data are released and where the descriptions of the data compilation are available.

CHECK WITH THE HELP OF A LIST WHETHER THE DATA ARE RELIABLE

The requirements described above can be summarised as a checklist. When selecting/looking for data on the web for a survey, thesis or report, please note the following:

- Who is the producer of the data?
- Are the data accompanied by a description of the data sources used, such as data collection or registers?
- Do the data describe the phenomenon as a whole or have data been collected from random respondents as a sampling?
- Is the processing of data described in more detail? For example, have missing data been replaced or have duplicate data been removed?
- Have mathematical models or other scientific methods been used in the processing and analysis of data?
- How are the data distributed to users? Are the prepared tables, reports and indicators clear and easy to use?

If you get clear answers to the questions above, the use of data is reliable.

The author works in Statistics Finland's Partnership and Ecosystem Relations service area.

PRINCIPLE 4. PREVENTION OF MISUSE



“ The statistical agencies are entitled to comment on erroneous interpretation and misuse of statistics. ”

WHY DOES PRINCIPLE 4 MATTER?

Statistics don't have a great reputation in popular culture. Mark Twain famously said that the three kinds of falsehoods are "lies, damned lies, and statistics". Against this common perception, the field of official statistics has its work cut out to build and maintain trust, making clear that far from lies, statistics offer the best and fairest insights into truth about our world and its people.

Doing this entails **publicly correcting errors** in the use and interpretation of statistics, **whether deliberate or accidental**. There are many kinds of errors, some of which are very common among journalists, politicians and others whose words hold much sway in public discourse. Figures might be chosen selectively, or '**cherry-picked**', with those that illustrate the speaker's point being emphasized while those that contradict it are set aside. Statistics designed to apply to a specific population group might be **over-generalized** and interpreted as applying to a whole population. Estimates surrounded by **confidence intervals** might be misinterpreted as absolutely precise figures. A short-term trend might be **falsely extrapolated** into the long term. All of these errors have been seen repeatedly in the past two years as statistics related to the Covid-19 pandemic suddenly entered daily conversation, with mainstream media and governments making use of statistics far more than they were used to doing before.

Principle 4 protects the right of statistical agencies to speak up when they see errors being made. This means that even when statistics are deliberately or accidentally misused by someone in a powerful position in government, **official statisticians can set them straight without fear of reprisal**.

In the eyes of many NSOs this principle is not merely a right, but also a duty. And for many, preventing misuse means not only reacting to actual misuse but being proactive to **minimize potential future misuse**. Hence, supporting the **development of statistical literacy** becomes an important tool in the NSO's toolkit to tackle misuse. This is done through targeted training courses, offering statistical teaching support in schools and universities, partnering with or seconding experts to work with journalists, and producing guides and manuals for using, understanding and presenting statistics.

United Kingdom's Office for Statistics Regulation

IMPROVING REPORTING AND REDUCING MISUSE OF ETHNICITY STATISTICS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Article by Richard Laux originally posted as a guest blog on the website of the at <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/guest-blog-improving-reporting-and-reducing-misuse-of-ethnicity-statistics/> on 18 March 2022

Richard Laux, Deputy Director, Data and Analysis, at the Equality Hub discusses his team's work in improving reporting and reducing the misuse of ethnicity statistics in our latest guest blog, as part of the 30th anniversary of the United Nations' Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

In my role as the Head of Analysis for the Cabinet Office's [Equality Hub](#) I am in the privileged position of leading the team that analyses disparities in outcomes between different ethnic groups in the UK.

The reasons for disparities between ethnic groups are complex, and include factors such as history, relative levels of deprivation, the different age profile of some ethnic groups as well as many other factors. Despite the complexity of the issues, my team and I do all we can to [prevent misuse of the data](#) and help ensure that [robust and clearly explained data are furthering the debate](#) on race and ethnicity, which is an emotive topic for many people in this country.

My team's responsibility for this is firmly rooted in the UN Principle 4 of preventing the misuse of statistics. We do this in a number of ways that align with this principle.

One way we do this is through bringing several analyses together to paint a broad-based picture of a topic of interest. For example, when supporting the Minister of State for Equalities on her [reports on progress to address COVID-19 health inequalities](#) we synthesised a large body of research describing the impact of the pandemic on ethnic minority groups. Much of this work involved my team [reconciling and reporting on different sources and drawing robust conclusions](#) from different analyses that didn't always entirely agree.

A second way we try to prevent misuse of data is through the [clear presentation of statistics](#), an example being [Ethnicity facts and figures](#). This website was launched in October 2017 and since then it has been a vital resource to inform the debate about ethnicity in the UK. It gathers together government data about the different experiences of the UK's ethnic groups and is built around well-established principles, standards and practices for working with data like the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

We try to make the content on the website clear and meaningful for people who are not experts in statistics and data. It also contains detailed background information about how each item of data was collected and analysed to help those users with more interest or expertise in statistics draw appropriate conclusions.

The [Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities report](#) recommended that RDU lead work to further improve both the understanding of ethnicity data and the responsible reporting of it (and thereby helping to prevent its misuse). As part of this work, we will consult on how to improve the Ethnicity facts and figures website, including whether we increase the amount of analysis on the site to help users better understand disparities between ethnic groups. Some of this might be in a similar vein to Office for National Statistics (ONS) work during the pandemic on ethnic [contrasts in deaths involving the COVID-19](#). This modelling work showed that location, measures of disadvantage, occupation, living arrangements, pre-existing health conditions and vaccination status accounted for a large proportion of the excess rate of death involving COVID-19 in most ethnic minority groups.

Of course, there can be some difficulties with data that might lead to its misuse: [datasets can vary greatly in size, consistency and quality](#). There are many [different ways that ethnicity is classified](#) in the datasets on Ethnicity facts and figures, and these classifications can differ widely depending on how and when the data was collected. For example, people might erroneously compare the outcomes for an ethnic group over time thinking it has remained the same whereas in fact it has changed; this might happen if someone is looking at data for the Chinese, Asian or Other groups over a long time period, as the Chinese group was combined into the 'Other' ethnic group in the 2001 version of the aggregated ethnic groups, but combined into the Asian group in the 2011 version of the aggregated ethnic groups in England and Wales.

We also try to minimise misuse and misinterpretation by [promoting the use of established concepts and methods](#) including information on the quality of ethnicity data. Our [quality improvement plan](#) and significant contribution to the [ONS implementation plan](#) in response to the Inclusive Data Taskforce set out our ambitions for [improving the quality of ethnicity data across government](#). We will also be taking forward the Commission for Race and Ethnic Disparity's recommendation that RDU should work with the ONS and the OSR to develop and publish a set of ethnicity data standards to improve the quality of reporting on ethnicity data. We will consult on these standards later this year.

Finally, we [raise awareness and knowledge of ethnicity data issues](#) through our ongoing series of published [Methods and Quality Reports and blogs](#). For example, one of [these reports](#) described how the overall relative stop and search disparity between black people and white people in England and Wales can be misleading if geographical differences are not taken into account.

We have significant and ambitious programmes of analysis and data quality work outlined for the future. I would be grateful for any views on how we might further help our users in interpreting ethnicity data and preventing misuse.

PRINCIPLE 5. SOURCES OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS

5

“ Data for statistical purposes may be drawn from **all types of sources**, be they statistical surveys or administrative records. Statistical agencies are to choose the source with regard to **quality, timeliness, costs and the burden on respondents.** ”

WHY DOES PRINCIPLE 5 MATTER?

Our world is awash with data: raw data about ourselves, the things we do, the places we go, our homes and the environment around us, our health, what we buy, the businesses in our towns and cities...

All of these data have the potential to be turned into meaningful statistics, but the **costs, benefits and risks** of doing so are different in each case; as are the **methods** needed to turn raw data into useful statistical information, the amount of **time** that transformation would take, how much involvement is needed from members of society and from statisticians; and how **accurate and reliable** the resulting statistics would be.

Principle 5 calls on statistical agencies to **weigh up all of these different considerations** when they decide what would be the best data source for any given kind of statistics. For example, it might be much quicker and cheaper to use data from one source, but less reliable or representative than data from elsewhere.

Gathering information from people in a survey might offer the benefits of greater **detail and insight** into their opinions, but ask too many questions and eventually people will tire of being asked to complete surveys, and might give incomplete or inaccurate answers.

On the flip side, when statistical agencies produce statistics from existing data sources such as tax records, electoral registers or supermarket scanners – which can be much **faster and cheaper** than conducting in-person surveys and censuses – they have to very carefully manage public perceptions. They must make sure that society knows exactly what they are doing and how, allaying any fears about how data are obtained and processed and any concerns about the quality of the figures.

Guided by this principle, **NSOs weigh up the pros and cons of every potential data source**. This is a constant process because, while continuity of statistics is one important factor, the best source today might not remain the best source forever, or for all kinds of statistics. NSOs are always moving with the times to select the right data for the job, harnessing the richness of newly-emerging sources and technologies to ensure they always **strike the right balance** between value for money, accuracy, timeliness and respondent burden.

DANE Colombia

COLOMBIA: TAKING ADVANTAGE OF ALL AVAILABLE SOURCES OF INFORMATION

*[Video originally posted on Twitter account of @DANE_Colombia on 5 April 2022
https://twitter.com/DANE_Colombia/status/1511390789326286848. In Spanish with English subtitles]*

The 10 Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics are guidelines to be followed by National Statistical Offices to ensure that they produce reliable, relevant, and quality information. Thus, these principles guide the daily work of all the people who work in DANE, which facilitates the access, use and understanding of the information we produce.

The following interventions illustrate Principle 5: Sources of Official Statistics.

Jorge Gómez – DANE’s Census and Demography Directorate:

“In 1992 the Conference of European Statisticians developed the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. It did not take long for statisticians from all over the world to recognize their relevance.

Thus, in 1994 the United Nations General Assembly adopted them. Today they are the main reference for the international community of official statistics.”

Felipe Palacios – DANE’s Directorate of Regulation, Planning, Standardization and Norms:

“Official statistics are fundamental inputs for decision-making and for contributing to sustainable development, international commerce and peace. This year marks the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the Fundamental Principles, and it is therefore necessary to join in the celebration to highlight the contribution of these principles to the fulfilment of global, regional and national development agendas.”

Isabel Navas – DANE’s Department of International Affairs:

“The fifth fundamental principle on data sources highlights the importance of obtaining official statistical information from different suppliers and sources. This makes it possible to produce quality and timely information, while at the same time improving collection cost efficiency, both in terms of logistics and reducing the burden on respondents.”

Olga Rueda – DANE’s Geostatistics Directorate:

“The 2030 Agenda recognizes the relevance of measurements to follow up on sustainable development policy goals. As this is a cross-cutting agenda, 231

indicators were agreed at the global level, to which we add the national indicators, and additionally the different disaggregations. All these add up to more than a thousand indicators, and most of them are new responsibilities in statistical production.”

Natalia Alonso – DANE’s Sustainable Development Goals Group:

“The need for more information requires the use of non-traditional sources, also known as “New Sources of Information”, which is in line with the vision of the National Statistical System that incorporates different actors from the public sector, private sector, academia and civil society organizations in statistical production. All this is also in line with a multi-stakeholder vision of the 2030 Agenda.”

Ana Cecilia Olaya – DANE’s Census and Demography Directorate:

“Each source of information has strengths and limitations for statistical use. Census operations tend to be more costly, but offer a greater disaggregation of results, while operations based on probability samples can be more continuous and represent lower costs, although their representativeness is lower. On the other hand, administrative records provide up-to-date information that must be harmonized and consolidated for statistical use.

The international recommendations, based on the 5th Principle, propose that statistical entities should take advantage of all available sources of information, propose combined methods where results from alternative sources and traditional sources of information can be compared to form statistical registers, and thus advance in the production of continuous, less costly and quality statistics. “

Adriana Quintero – DANE’s Directorate of Dissemination and Statistical Culture:

“The use of different sources of information allows us to take advantage of their qualities, as well as to understand their limitations. In this sense, by using them in statistical production, the institution achieves higher levels of accuracy and timeliness, which in the end allows us to meet the needs of our information users.”

Mateo Cardona – DANE’s Administrative Registers Group:

“For example, through the integration of the Statistical Directory of Educational Centres and the Integrated Enrolment System, both administrative records, with the National Population and Housing Census 2018, we have been able to approximate the calculation of the distance a student travels between their household and the educational centre. This allows us to provide valuable information to decision makers for the structuring of public policies related to dropout and access to the educational system in the country.”

PRINCIPLE 6. CONFIDENTIALITY

6

“ Individual data collected by statistical agencies for statistical compilation, whether they refer to natural or legal persons, are to be **strictly confidential** and used exclusively for statistical purposes. ”

WHY DOES PRINCIPLE 6 MATTER?

A fear that ‘Big Brother is watching us’ pervades 21st century society. We want information about our world, but not at the expense of our privacy and security. We are concerned when we think an organization or government knows a lot about us; our movements, finances, families. So when data are collected for statistics, either directly from respondents or automatically, people need assurances that the **data will remain confidential** and will **not be used inappropriately**: that NSOs are not Big Brother.

Such assurances come in the form of confidentiality policies and laws. They cover every aspect from the collection of data to how they are stored, processed and published. They protect the data themselves from accidental or malicious access, release or identification—known technically as **confidentiality**—and they protect the individuals who provide the data—known as **privacy**.

‘Microdata’, complete records of all the answers that people give when they complete a survey, are immensely useful to researchers. An aggregate statistic, such as average household income, can be a useful headline figure. But only microdata permit in-depth analysis of how different factors such as location, age, ethnicity or education influence the figures, to help disentangle causes. NSOs have detailed policies about **who can access microdata** and **what they may do with it**. Often they can only access it in secure computer rooms in the NSO’s premises. Names, dates of birth or other identifying features are replaced with unique numbers to anonymize the data.

Even when anonymized, an individual could be identifiable in data if they belong to a very small group. The more **disaggregated** the figures—that is, the more different characteristics used to define them—the greater the risk to confidentiality. For example, in the population of a town there might only be one 73-year-old ethnic minority woman with a master’s degree. NSOs have rules to determine how big a group must be before they can publish information about its members. Published figures might group together the women aged 70-74 to maintain their confidentiality.

Principle 6 also safeguards **proper use of confidential data**. While NSOs have access to tax files, border crossing records and census returns, there is no way for data to be used to identify tax evaders or track down undocumented migrants. NSOs follow strict rules, typically laid down in law, to ensure that data can **only be used for statistical purposes**.

INE Spain

SPAIN: STATISTICAL CONFIDENTIALITY AS THE BASIS FOR TRUST

Video from Juan Manuel Rodríguez Poo, President of the National Statistics Institute of Spain posted on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LiDWn5Zb9Bc>

“In celebration of the 30th anniversary of the formulation of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics by the United Nations, I would like to congratulate the entire statistical community that shares this code of practice. A code that is fully in force and that has made it possible to improve statistical institutions and their products.

Official statistics are a public good in the service of society. They are prepared using reliable, complete and timely information that is obtained thanks to the collaboration of people, companies and institutions.

*Principle 6 of this code states that the individual data used to compile official statistics are protected. Statistical confidentiality guarantees that the information will not be published in a way that allows the identification of any of the units studied. And this is **the basis of the trust that allows high quality official statistics to be made available**. In addition, this data can only be used for statistical purposes, in accordance with this fundamental principle and the provisions from our legal frameworks.*

*Regardless of whether the data are collected through responses to a survey questionnaire or a census, are collected from an administrative record or from a big data source, each individual record, each person or company, so that no individual can be identified, **and no particular action can be taken on the basis of the statistical files**. In addition, no data transfers are made that allow any individual processing. This is a commitment of the entire statistical community.*

In an increasingly interconnected and technologically enabled world, it is necessary to develop robust mechanisms to facilitate the statistical use of data and, at the same time, to fulfil our commitments to all our respondents. That is why several international working groups are investigating new methods to guarantee the secure use of information. Anonymization techniques, encryption, secure processing, etc., are nowadays part of the continuous training and statistical culture in all organizations.

Statistical science and the institutions of official statistics constitute a reference in the application of methods for the protection of confidential information and serve as an example for other disciplines that have to deal with these issues, such as health research, justice, etc.

*INE Spain is very grateful to UNECE for including us in this celebration. This thirtieth anniversary should be an opportunity for us to recognize our achievements, to reflect and to continue improving our **relationship with respondents, guaranteeing the protection of their data** and thus **fostering their trust in statistical institutions**".*

Juan Manuel Rodriguez Poo, President of INE Spain

PRINCIPLE 7. LEGISLATION

7

“ The laws, regulations and measures under which the statistical systems operate are to be made public. ”

WHY DOES PRINCIPLE 7 MATTER?

Statistical offices have among their staff and leaders many great statisticians and other kinds of experts, full of ideas and armed with wide-ranging skills. But this doesn't mean that they are simply left on their own to produce statistics as they wish. On the contrary, as public servants every aspect of their work is governed by comprehensive laws. The plans, budgets and results of their work are subject to **detailed scrutiny** by **elected officials** and **society at large**.

Laws dealing with official statistics cover a huge range of areas: what constitutes 'official statistics', and the relationship between official statistics and government; how the chief statistician is appointed and removed from office; the responsibility for the budget of the entities in the statistical system. Laws also cover some of the more specific technical aspects of statistical production, such as how and when a census is conducted; the ways in which confidentiality is maintained, as we saw when principle 6 was under the spotlight; the rights and duties of the statistical office to access data sources collected by others; and many more.

Statistical legislation is important for two main reasons: to **ensure the quality** of the statistical work, and to **maintain society's trust** in the independence and quality of the statistics. For such trust to be earned, the laws governing official statistics have to be not only strong but **transparent**. The public should be able to find out exactly what the rules are and how they are put into practice. Statistical offices publish or guide people to statistical laws via their websites. They also make available reports on compliance with the laws and annual reports that show how public money has been used. Statisticians in many countries report to public hearings, statistical councils, parliamentary or ministerial committees, to offer regular transparent access to information about how they uphold statistical legislation or to debate content when new statistical laws are developed.

The Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia

ARMENIA: A TALE OF NECESSITY, SIGNIFICANCE AND MODERNIZATION

Press release on the occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics originally published at <https://www.armstat.am/en/?nid=157&id=841>

The two brutal World Wars of the 20th century forced people and states to make the goal of peaceful coexistence a priority; and to achieve it, after World War II, to establish the United Nations, in which a Statistical Commission has been functioning since February 1947.

The mission of global statistics is unique in shaping global perceptions. It aims to reduce uncertainty, one of the main causes of confrontation. And for that, it is necessary that the situation in the whole world, in all countries, be evaluated in a single language, the language of statistics. All, by law, apply the same statistical principles, standards, the same definitions and classifications that characterize phenomena, using similar sources of information, and so on. This ensures a high degree of comparability, confidence in the accuracy of information, and a perception that the information describes an objective reality. And the objective reality must be anchored exclusively in evidence-based statistics.

A key role in achieving this has been played by the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics which have, over the past 30 years since their adoption, defined the behaviour of states and the scope of actions in the field of official statistics.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRINCIPLE OF LEGISLATION

The official statistical systems of countries (states) in the modern world (in the context of modern ideas of the state) can be formed and act exclusively by mandate given by law and regulations defined by other legal acts, other instruments, especially statistical programmes, etc., which must be public.

It is no secret that in order to make the official statistics of economic, demographic, social and environmental phenomena of any country available to the country's society and the international community, it is first necessary to create authorized bodies for producing official statistics. Then it is necessary to define clearly a range of aspects relating to these bodies: their position in the system of public administration; their mandate to collect information from state and local government bodies, economic entities, non-governmental and other organizations, households and individuals; their relations with international organizations; the nature and scope of principles, standards, and other tools that will be used in all processes of development, production, and dissemination of official statistics.

This is possible only by establishing all of these definitions in law. That is why the 7th UN Fundamental Principle of Official Statistics, on legislation, is of crucial importance.

MODEL LAWS

This is the reason why the relevant UN agencies are constantly striving to assist countries, to develop and approve the laws of the Official Statistical System. For this purpose they have developed model laws in line with the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

The most recent and best example of this is the Generic Law on Official Statistics for Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, developed jointly by UNECE the UN Statistics Division, EFTA, Eurostat and experts from several countries.

ARMENIAN LAW

On March 21, 2018, the Armenian Parliament adopted the new Law of Armenia on Official Statistics, developed based on this model law. The new Law regulates all the relations of the Official Statistical System in Armenia, anchored on the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, in contrast to the previous law, which regulated only the activities of the Statistical Service of Armenia.

The importance of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, including the principle of legislation, is specifically emphasized in the Armenian law: in particular, in the definition of official statistics set out in Article 3. "Official statistics are statistics developed, produced and disseminated in accordance with the requirements of the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, exclusively reflected in statistical programmes that are the numerical expression of the essential phenomena of public life."

The same law stipulates that the Authorized Body of Official Statistics in Armenia, Armstat, is independent in carrying out its tasks, and is governed by the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, international treaties of the Republic of Armenia, the present Law and other legal acts (Article 7, part 1).

Armstat "is a state body that is radically different from state institutions with certain political orientation. The guarantees for not involving official statistics in conflicts between political, administrative and departmental interests are defined by the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics" (Article 7, part 2), and the principles are set out in Chapter 2 of the Law.

Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom

UNITED KINGDOM: TRANSPARENT IN EVERYTHING THAT WE DO

Video from the National Statistician of the United Kingdom, Sir Ian Diamond, and the President of the Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia, Mr. Stepan Mnatsakanyan, joined by statistics producers worldwide in support of Principle 7 posted on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/706450503/a24cc93f6d>

Sir Ian Diamond, National Statistician, UK Statistics Authority:

"I'm Ian Diamond and I'm National Statistician of the UK. It gives me enormous pleasure to be part of this celebration of 30 years of UNECE's fundamental principles of official statistics. And I think it's incredibly important that we do recognise the importance of these principles. I just wanted to talk a little bit today about principle seven, which is one that we in the UK have responsibility for. But at the same time, I would like to say all are important.

Principle seven says that the laws, the regulations, and measures under which statistical systems operate need to be made public and I think that's incredibly important. Indeed, in the Office for National Statistics in the UK, our whole principle is that statistics are for the public good and if statistics are going to be for the public good, then it follows quite simply that the public need to know about them. And that's incredibly, incredibly important. That means that it is absolutely critical that we are absolutely transparent in everything that we do, that we are clear in what we publish, and that our methodology is accessible and open.

And recently the analysis function, which covers the whole of the UK government, signed up to a research integrity concordat which states very, very clearly that we will make our protocols say what we're going to do, make them public, our data will be open, and our publications will be clear and accessible to all.

We believe fundamentally, as I know all official statistics agencies do, that every citizen should have a voice in our data and every citizen should feel that their data are accessible. And those principles under which the UNECE works are, I think, absolutely fundamental to populations trusting our statistical systems and hence understanding the evidence on which governments make the most important policies that impact positively on people's lives.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this principle. Congratulations to UNECE on 30 years of these fabulous principles. Let us look forward to another 30 years. Thank you."

Stepan Mnatsakanyan, President, Armstat:

"I would like to congratulate all of us with the 30th anniversary of the UN fundamental principles of official statistics and highlight the importance of the principle seven, its crucial role for building public trust in official statistics.

The development and adoption of the model of the modern law (GLOS) aimed at the implementation of the UN fundamental principles of official statistics and the principle seven is one of the best examples of effective international cooperation. [...] At the national level, makes it possible to apply all the principles of official statistics, not only to all producers, but to the whole society; that is to the respondents and users."

Athanasios C. Thanopoulos, President, Elstat:

"Official statistics have developed in a remarkable manner, aiming to better serve the evolving needs of society for documented policies. However, this progress would be lacking relevance if it weren't supported by a solid statistical legal framework establishing the adherence to the principles of professional independence, objectivity, and confidentiality. Along with the compilation of relevant statistical information, national statistical institutes should safeguard and promote a transparent and powerful statistical legislation and dealt with the necessary foresight in order to address future challenges and demands."

Samuel Annim, Government Statistician, Ghana Statistical Service:

"In 2019 the Statistical Service Act got the assent of the President, and it really has paved the way for a holistic acceptance of the statistical products that we have within the national statistical system. As for the first time, it's mandated the Ghana Statistical Service to designate statistics as official and whereby statistics is not in favour of the expectations of policymakers due to the reliance of the law, Ghana Statistical Service is called upon to indicate that this is the national statistics that must be used."

Dominik Rozkrut, President, Statistics Poland:

"How do we ensure budget, acquire employees, found buildings and acquire equipment? These are the obvious reasons for legislation, but I think what the most important is, it sets up a system of values, whether intentionally or not, and no matter if explicitly or implicitly these values can be inferred from the legislation and it's so important to have them there because values, you know, may be shared, may generally be agreed upon, but someday someone in the particular situation might want to violate them.

It's not enough just to agree. It's essential to have them in the legislation so that in a time of crisis everybody can refer back and say, "it's not just what I mean, it's what society has agreed and decided upon. It's important no matter what."

Etienne Caruana, Director General, National Statistics Office of Malta:

“National Statistical Institutes have an important role in today’s society to provide independently produced, high quality official statistics for all types of users. In order to fulfil their obligations, NSIs require robust legal frameworks upon which they can request and process confidential information for statistical purposes. A robust legal framework ensures transparency in the NSI’s production systems and more importantly, safeguards the trust in the quality of an NSI statistical product.

It is also important that this legal framework empowers the NSI to coordinate the collection of statistics with statistical partners and empowers the NSI to assist data owners, maximise the use of administrative data for the purposes of statistics. Also, to reduce the burden on the respondents.”

Juan Daniel Oviedo, Director General, DANE Colombia:

“30 years after the adoption of the fundamental principles of official statistics, the Colombian NSO, DANE would like to highlight principle seven. We consider that the establishment of solid, consistent, and transparent legal frameworks is key in order to better align the demands and capabilities amongst data users and producers that are part of national statistical systems. Moreover, provisions regarding privacy and confidentiality are also enablers of trust, not only on official statistics, but also on our producers.”

Dr David Gruen, Australian Statistician, ABS:

“I’m very pleased to add my voice to support the 30th anniversary of the fundamental principles of official statistics, and in particular principle seven - legislation.

Well-functioning national statistical offices need independence backed by legislation. This is very similar to the situation with central banks that also operate with the legislatively supported independence.

Principle seven states that the laws, regulations and measures under which the statistical systems operate are made public. And that’s clearly a critical element of the legislative framework that supports national statistical offices.”

Oliver Chinganya, Director, UN Economic Commission for Africa:

“Robust and transparent statistical expressions are very, very important, especially nowadays where everyone wants to have data in packaging, in a manner that they are able to understand it, and it’s accessible on different platforms, including on websites.

It’s also important for the citizens to be sure that the data that they provide is properly protected and that it’s not abused by anyone, not even the government, and that we know that this information that is being provided is going to be used for their own benefit, particularly for the development of their own lives, the

improvement of the economies in the country. It becomes very, very important to provide much more transparent legislation that assures the citizen that it's for their own benefit."

Rachael Beavan, Director, UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific:

"Strong statistical legislation is essential to ensure the numbers produced by a national statistical system are of good quality, trusted by the public and policymakers. Statistical legislation, though, is not enough. It needs to be developed in an inclusive way and to be adaptable and flexible to meet the evolving demands for official statistics. It also needs to be part of a broader system of laws and guidance which underpin the NSO's role and accompanied by enforcement mechanisms. These are essential for the public and policy makers to trust and to use the data."

COVID AND THE WAR IN UKRAINE ARE TRAGICALLY GRAPHIC ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE NEED FOR TRUSTWORTHY DATA

Article by John Pullinger originally posted on Civil Service World at <https://www.civilserviceworld.com/professions/article/uk-civil-service-key-to-global-quality-statistics> on 12 May 2022

Back in the 90s, John Pullinger was involved in creating a set of principles for the best use of statistics. Thirty years on, he shares what the foundations he helped to lay continue to mean for the production of quality statistics around the world.

Current events in Ukraine provide a chilling reminder of how things were in cold war Europe before the fall of the iron curtain in 1989. What is happening in Ukraine also provides a tragically graphic illustration of the need for trustworthy data on which to form judgements about what is really going on and make well-informed decisions.

The momentous events of 1989 provided an opportunity to develop guidance for the development of trustworthy statistics in all the countries of Europe, both long-established and emerging democracies. This was based on the collective realisation that without honest data, decision makers and influencers are flying blind when they make critical judgements that affect the lives of millions.

The culmination was the adoption in 1992 of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics by ministers across the Economic Commission for Europe region. Following adoption in Europe, other regions too appreciated the value and universal

applicability of the principles, which were debated at the United Nations Statistical Commission in 1993 and adopted at the global level at the special session of the commission in 1994. They have since been endorsed in a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly.

Thirty years on, the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics remain a collective manifesto for serving society with impartial, relevant and accurate information to guide decision making.

The Covid pandemic has tested these principles in new ways as statistical organisations across the globe stepped up to provide policymakers with timely and accurate statistics and insights. The conflict in Ukraine has further reminded us that unless there is trustworthy data that is accepted by all parties, people can be hoodwinked by illusions created by the powerful. It is fitting now to highlight and celebrate the importance and impact of each fundamental principle on society and everyday life.

There are 10 principles covering usefulness and availability of statistics, professional standards, presentation of statistics, misuse of statistics, sources of data, confidentiality, legislation, coordination within countries, international standards and international cooperation. This year, the United Kingdom is promoting all 10 principles and is playing a strong role in promoting two of them – Principle 4: Prevention of Misuse and Principle 7: Legislation.

"Recognising when data has been misused or misinterpreted is key to maintaining public confidence in official statistics and supporting policymakers and citizens in making informed, evidence-based decisions"

Recognising when data has been misused or misinterpreted is key to maintaining public confidence in official statistics and supporting policymakers and citizens in making informed, evidence-based decisions. The UK's Office for Statistics Regulation – the regulatory arm of the UK Statistics Authority – plays a unique role in addressing the misuse of official statistics. Recent, high-profile examples of interventions from OSR include trends in employment, use of statistics on child poverty, rates of Covid-19 prevalence and vaccine surveillance. The OSR has the confidence to challenge misuse of statistics without fear or favour, even if the challenge is to the prime minister.

The OSR works within a community of other regulators, organisations such as Full Fact and journalists dedicated to helping us all differentiate fact from fiction in the claims made by politicians, advertisers and others. In the current digital landscape this task becomes ever more complex and vital.

The need for trustworthy data was the driving force behind Winston Churchill's demand to establish the national statistical institute of the United Kingdom in 1941. He called for a body of statistical information that could be accepted and used without question to guide national decision making at a dark and difficult time.

However, strong legislation also matters to the integrity of statistics and public confidence in them. The UK Statistics and Registration Services Act of 2007 came about as part of wide-ranging constitutional and public services reform promoted by Conservative governments (including the citizens charter and open government) and Labour governments (including devolution of power and freedom of information). This legislation placed longstanding commitments to the fundamental principles, and the inherited philosophy of national statistics bequeathed by Churchill, on a statutory footing.

The importance of statistical legislation has become even clearer since Covid-19 first emerged with increasing demands for openly available, timely and trustworthy insights into the progress of the pandemic and changes taking place in the economy, environment and society.

Looking forward to the next 30 years, we can be confident of the demand for high-quality statistics to help decision makers make better decisions promoting peace, prosperity and a sustainable future and to enable citizens in all nations to hold governments to account for their promises. We can, I think, be equally confident that the fundamental principles will continue to provide the foundation for the development of statistical systems equipped to meet the many challenges they will face.

In 1992, John Pullinger became director of policy and planning at the Central Statistical Office and led the creation of the Office for National Statistics. He went on to serve as the UK national statistician, head of the Government Statistical Service, and chief executive of the UK Statistics Authority from July 2014 to June 2019. He is currently chair of the Electoral Commission.

PRINCIPLE 8. NATIONAL COORDINATION

A large, bold, orange number '8' is positioned on the left side of the page, serving as a visual anchor for the principle.

“ **Coordination** among statistical agencies within countries is essential to achieve **consistency** and **efficiency** in the statistical system. ”

WHY DOES PRINCIPLE 8 MATTER?

A country's official statistics often fall under the responsibility of a range of different bodies, not limited to a single statistical institution. Statistics may be produced by or with the health service, the educational system, the central bank, the justice system, a range of ministries, and so on. On top of this, some countries have one centralized national statistical office, whereas others have offices at the regional or other sub-national level or subject-specific statistical offices. The key to maintaining consistency and credibility, then, is to **ensure that all of these producers act in concert** to serve the common goals of the national statistical system.

Coordination among these various offices is not only essential to ensure **efficiency**. It's also a crucial means of **earning trust**. Discordant figures on a single topic from two different strands of the national statistical system could sow confusion and undermine users' faith in their credibility. And any appearance of duplicated effort – two different offices producing statistics on the same thing, or asking respondents for the same information – could raise questions about inefficient use of public funds. As the promise of integrating data from different sources grows, people will become ever less willing to provide the same information to different bodies if they perceive them to be linked and think that they ought to be talking to each other and sharing information.

However the statistical system is organized, a core feature of a coordinated statistical system is that **everything bearing the hallmark of 'official statistics' fulfils all the quality standards and other criteria laid out for them. The chief statistician bears the ultimate responsibility for assuring this coordination and quality.** Coordination is achieved through laws, codes of practice, supervisory committees and joint development of workplans and budgets. Depending on the country, all official statistics may be channelled through a central body, or a 'seal of approval' may be provided to statistics that meet the required standards.

National institute of Statistics and Censuses of Argentina

ARGENTINA: A CENSUS REQUIRES GREAT COORDINATION

Video (in Spanish with English subtitles) originally posted at <https://twitter.com/INDECArgentina/status/1532415183049588739>

Mariano Poledo, National Director of Planning, Institutional and International Relations:

“Here in Argentina, we want to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and especially congratulate the UNECE for promoting them 30 years ago.”

Pablo Ceballos, National Director of the National Statistical System:

“One of the Fundamental Principles is principle eight, on the coordination of National Statistical Systems within each country, that make up the whole statistical system.

In our case, we have recently carried out our population Census. We have 24 jurisdictions, each with their own Statistical Office working constantly with INDEC. Thank to this and to coordination with all province governments, we were able to have 650,000 census-takers and 80,000 tract, area, and district chiefs working in the field on the same day. This would not have been possible only with the efforts of INDEC, or any central statistics office. A census requires national mobilization of the central, provincial, and municipal governments, and of society. But, above all, it requires great coordination work between all bodies of the National Statistical System. In Argentina, the NSS is substantial, diverse, and extensive.”

PRINCIPLE 9. USE OF INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

9

“ The use by statistical agencies in each country of international concepts, classifications and methods **promotes the consistency and efficiency** of statistical systems at all official levels. ”

WHY DOES PRINCIPLE 9 MATTER?

When people use statistics to investigate a problem or support a hypothesis, they often want to make **comparisons**. They may examine changes over time, look at different parts of a country, or compare figures from different countries. To be sure that they are not comparing apples with oranges, they need to be confident that the different figures they compare are measuring the same thing in the same way.

For example, if we want to know which part of the country has the highest level of youth unemployment, we need to be sure that the statistics for each different area count people in the same condition as being employed or unemployed. And we can't compare a figure for 15-18 year-olds in one region with a figure for 16-25 year-olds in another.

The most efficient way to ensure fair comparisons is to establish **standards**, so that users don't have to look up the precise details every time they use statistics. There are standards for **concepts** (what does 'poverty' mean?); for **definitions** (which people do we count as 'living in a country?'); and for **methods** (how do we derive a final GDP figure from raw data?).

While any country could develop its own standards, it's much more **useful for end users** – and **efficient for those who produce them**—if those standards can be made and shared across all countries. When we hear reports in the news about inflation and economic growth in different countries, for instance, we can safely assume that all of the figures use the same standards which have long been established internationally. And countries don't have to spend lots of time and money figuring out how to define and calculate things for which standards already exist.

When producers of statistics use international standards, the task of ensuring **transparency** ([principle 3](#)) is made much easier, as they can point users to the standards, mitigating any risk of doubts about their approach. Without published international standards, statistical producers could be accused—rightly or wrongly—of manipulating their methods to produce favourable statistics, or simply of making accidental errors by not carefully developing concepts, definitions and methods. In the same vein, a commitment to international standards **protects official statistics producers from deliberate or inadvertent outside influence**. It might 'look better' if an indicator were calculated in a certain way, but a policy of strict adherence to internationally-agreed standards means that official statisticians can hold steadfastly to their principles and steer clear of such influence

National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova

THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: COMMON STANDARDS ARE FUNDAMENTAL FOR COMPARABLE DATA

Video produced by the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, posted on Youtube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KpAzt7qWwhl&t>

Mariana Kotzeva, Director General of Eurostat:

“International statistical standards are one of the fundamentals of official statistics across the world.

Why? Because in order to make statistics comparable, you should know how to count. You need standards: how to count people, enterprises, how to define ‘green expenditure’, how to calculate output and production.

Therefore we, statisticians from Eurostat, and from the statistical authorities in the European Statistical System, will continue working hard with all the colleagues in the statistical community to develop further international statistical standards, in order to make official statistics comparable and useable across the world.”

Nigina Abaszada, UNFPA Moldova Resident Representative:

UNFPA supports the statistical system to align with international standards and recommendations. This is an absolutely essential element, in order to ensure that no-one is left behind, and that everybody is counted in the country of Moldova.

Oleg Cara, Director General of the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova:

“The national statistical systems can be effective, efficient, and produce coherent and comparable data, if only they use the same standards in their statistical activities.

This is the meaning of Principle 9 out of the 10 Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics that were adopted and are widely promoted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

The National Bureau of Statistics, together with national and international partners, brings national statistics in line with international standards, in order to ensure the quality of statistics to meet users’ needs and expectations.

The Republic of Moldova will continue to align with these international standards, in order to contribute to the nation’s prosperity, leaving no-one behind.

Congratulation to the entire community of statisticians on the 30th anniversary of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics!"

National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova

APPLICATION OF INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS IN OFFICIAL STATISTICS IN MOLDOVA

Article prepared by National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova as part of the anniversary campaign published on <https://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=en&id=7405&idc=30>

During 2022, the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) it is marked. On the occasion of this anniversary, an international campaign has been launched to promote the **10 Fundamental Principles** that underpin the statistical work of the world's countries:

1. Relevance, impartiality and equal access
2. Professional standards and ethics
3. Accountability and transparency
4. Prevention of misuse
5. Sources of official statistics
6. Confidentiality
7. Legislation
8. National coordination
9. Use of international standards
10. International cooperation

In this regard, several National Statistical Offices, including the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova (NBS), have responded to the invitation of the UNECE to participate in this campaign by carrying out activities on each principle consecutively. Since the beginning of the anniversary year, the first 8 principles have been promoted, during which statistical offices in countries such as Canada, New Zealand, Finland, Latvia, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Colombia, Spain and Armenia have organised various events and developed materials highlighting principles 1-8 and the importance of their application in statistics.

The **9th Principle "Use of international standards"**, which describes the need for international coordination of statistics, will be marked by our country through the NBS over the next two weeks. The use of internationally applied concepts, classifications and methods by statistical institutions in every country of the world promotes the production and dissemination of quality, internationally comparable statistics. This and other approaches to the importance of aligning national statistics

to international standards will be discussed at the [public event “The application of international standards in official statistics”](#) that NBS, together with other national and international partners, will organise as part of the campaign. NBS will also launch a series of information and promotional materials during this period that will help the local public to know and understand better these principles.

It should be noted that the Law No 93 of 2017 on Official Statistics is based on the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the European Statistics Code of Practice and was drafted in accordance with the Generic Law on Official Statistics, considering the provisions of Regulation (EC) No 223/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council on European Statistics.

NBS, as the central statistical authority that is coordinating the statistical activity in the country, is using the international statistical [concepts, classifications and methods](#), in particular those of the EU.

From this point of view:

a) The NBS uses nationally adapted international [concepts and definitions](#) in the following areas in the production of official statistics:

- Usual resident population
- Labour force
- Incomes and expenditures of the population
- Science and development
- National accounts
- International trade
- Consumer prices
- Industrial production
- Structural statistics
- Energy statistics
- Short-term statistics in industry, construction and trade
- ICT in enterprises
- Innovation statistics
- Balance of food resources
- Air emissions, etc.

b) The following national [classifications](#), fully or partially harmonized with the EU and international requirements, are used for the production and dissemination of the official statistics:

- Classification of Activities (CAEM-2)
- Statistical Classification of Products (goods and services) (CSPM)
- Nomenclature of Territorial Statistical Units (NUTS)
- Nomenclature of Industrial Products and Services (PRODMOLD)
- Classification of Individual Consumption Expenditure (COICOP)
- Combined Nomenclature of Goods

- Standard International Trade Classification
- Nomenclature of Countries and Territories
- Classification of Occupations
- Classification of Educational Programs
- Classification of Diseases etc.

c) The **methods** which NBS uses in the statistical work correspond to international standards, such as:

- Sample design
- Data editing and treatment of non-responses
- Statistical inference
- Methods to ensure data confidentiality, including statistical disclosure control
- Seasonal adjustment
- Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI)
- Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI)

In the area of **dissemination and quality management** the international standards in the following statistical activities can be mentioned:

- The Special Data Dissemination Standard of the International Monetary Fund, to which the Republic of Moldova subscribed in 2006. National partners in the SDDS are: NBS, National Bank of Moldova, Ministry of Finance, National Commission for Financial Markets.
- Regulation on access to individual data for scientific purposes, approved in 2021
- Description of reference metadata according to the ESMS standard (European SDMX Metadata Structure)
- Description of statistical processes according to the GSBPM (Generic Statistical Business Process Model) standard (in process)
- Submission of statistical information to international organisations based on questionnaires received.

The 10 Principles, under which official statistics are produced, have been approved at the global level, specifically to ensure the high quality of official statistics needed for sustainable development at national, regional and global levels. The results of the promotion campaign of the Principles will be presented at the Conference of European Statisticians (CES), of which the Republic of Moldova is also a member, which will be held in Geneva in the period 20-22 June 2022.

PRINCIPLE 10. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

10

“ Bilateral and multilateral cooperation in statistics contributes to the improvement of systems of official statistics in all countries. ”

WHY DOES PRINCIPLE 10 MATTER?

“Many hands make light work”, so the saying goes. And working together doesn’t just mean that things get done more **quickly** and **cost-effectively**; it can result in **unique impacts that are greater than the sum of their parts**.

The very existence of the United Nations is anchored in the conviction expressed in the Charter of the United Nations that we can “unite our strength” and “combine our efforts” to achieve goals beyond the capabilities of individual countries.

International cooperation in official statistics takes many forms. Countries work together to **share what they’ve learned** as they develop new ways to produce and publish statistics. With just one statistical system in each country, international exchange is crucial for statistical offices to learn, share and stay on top of their game. The hundreds of working groups convened by UNECE’s Conference of European Statisticians, the UN Statistics Division, Eurostat, OECD, regional statistical bodies in the UN and elsewhere, help countries to share what they experience and develop so others can benefit from it. This sharing happens in every aspect of statistics, from organizational management to how surveys are run, how statistics are calculated from raw data, and how results are published. Facilitated by international organizations such as UNECE, countries share everything from the code for their data editing software to the text of their statistical laws, and from the design of their census questionnaires to the job descriptions for hiring new staff.

International cooperation is not just about individual countries sharing their experiences. It’s also about **working together to design and agree on things collectively**: often cutting-edge new ideas which need the benefit of many points of view to make them work. As principle 9 showed, shared international standards are uniquely valuable. International groups working together can develop them based on the diverse views and priorities, so that the agreements they reach and the tools they develop are valuable for all.

International organizations and individual countries help one-another bilaterally too, by giving **training** to reinforce the skills and knowledge of staff in NSOs; by undertaking **study visits**; and by conducting **independent external assessments of each other’s work**.

International statistics bodies such as the Conference of European Statisticians and its global counterpart, the United Nations Statistical Commission, have formal processes for **selecting topics to work on**; establishing **groups of experts** to conduct the work; and **endorsing the results**. This formality isn’t just for show. Having been selected, consulted, revised and only finally endorsed when there is unanimous agreement, everything produced by these bodies enjoys a special status underpinned by the United Nations.

A rising tide of misinformation and disinformation can only be met by a united front of strong, independent, principle-bound providers of evidence. The Fundamental Principles themselves are the clearest illustration of **the power of the collective**—they arose as a result of countries working together. The passion they continue to spark among statisticians everywhere, witnessed during this 30th anniversary campaign, is testament to the continued truth that in statistics as in all things, nations are stronger together.

Central Statistics Office, Ireland and Statistics Poland

IRELAND AND POLAND: SPOTLIGHT ON THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS

[Article by Central Statistics Office, Ireland and Statistics Poland, originally posted at <https://www.cso.ie/en/csolaatestnews/corporatenews/fundamentalprinciplesofofficialstatisticsspotlightonprinciple10/> on 15 June 2022]

Have you ever looked at facts or figures in the media and wondered whether you could trust the information? Or how these figures were produced?

Thirty years ago, the most senior statisticians in countries across Europe, Central Asia and North America created a set of 10 principles governing the production of official statistics. These principles were devised at a time of immense change and upheaval across the region. As centrally planned economies transitioned to market economies in many member States, statisticians realised a shared framework to define the principles that guide what they do was needed more than ever. The core aim of the framework is to ensure that statistics published by member countries are reliable and trustworthy as they have been produced in accordance with internationally agreed methods, standards and ethics. Such a framework helps to secure the trust and credibility upon which effective statistics depend. While there are many differences across countries in how their statistical production is organised, what data they gather or what needs they fulfil, these agreed central principles underpinned by independently produced information are universal. These Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, as they became known, were adopted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in 1992, and in later years were recognised as a global standard around the world.

Since then, the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics have supported statistical agencies in compiling official statistics in accordance with strict professional considerations, including scientific principles and professional ethics. They have also been used as inspiration for other international quality standards of OECD and the European Union.

The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics are an indispensable element in the information system of a democratic society, providing valuable insights into the economic, demographic, social and environmental situation within and between countries and regions.

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS

As we mark 30 years of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, we take the opportunity to reflect on the value to our societies of free access to independent, ethically produced information. International adherence to these principles provides a source of reliable, trustworthy information in an era of global information sharing when it can be difficult to assess the source and reliability of what is being shared.

In order to celebrate 30 years of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics the member States of UNECE's Conference of European Statisticians (CES) have led an awareness campaign to explain the purpose of each of these internationally agreed principles and why they matter.

From January to June of this year CES countries have been highlighting the importance of the Fundamental Principles as the shared foundation of an informed society, underpinning the provision of trustworthy, reliable statistics produced in accordance with internationally agreed methods, standards and ethics. Countries have been putting the spotlight on individual principles, showing how they are put into action in the everyday work of statistical offices, and how this impacts users and society. Several countries have led the way in focusing on each principle in turn, with the entire community of member countries and international organisations sharing their experiences and practices along the way.

IRELAND AND POLAND LEAD THE CELEBRATION OF PRINCIPLE 10: INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Principle 10 states that:

“Bilateral and multilateral co-operation in statistics contributes to the improvement of systems of official statistics in all countries.”

Ireland currently holds the chair of the Conference of European Statisticians, UNECE's highest decision-making body comprising the national chief statisticians of more than 60 countries as well as international organisations including OECD, Eurostat, IMF, World Bank, CIS-Stat, EFTA, the European Central Bank, and several UN agencies. Poland is the country which first proposed creating a shared 'Statistical Convention' for the region and led the working group which eventually resulted in the Fundamental Principles.

Principle 10 makes clear that when it comes to official statistics, no country can go it alone.

Many of the statistics on which decision-makers depend can only be interpreted by making international comparisons. When we see a figure on GDP, employment, even population size, we rightly expect that these numbers are calculated on the same basis across different countries. While Principle 9, on international standards,

focuses specifically on why it's important for countries to adhere to shared methods and definitions, Principle 10 is concerned more with how they are arrived at, as well as the many other ways in which countries work together to develop and support official statistics.

Bilateral and multilateral cooperation is a key component in achieving the overall objectives of the Fundamental Principles. Members may be at varying stages of their development, both in terms of resources and capacity. The ability to share in others' experiences, access the lessons learned and develop common tools and strategies to meet challenges means that adherence to the scientific and professional standards contained in the Fundamental Principles is achievable for all. This spirit of international cooperation supports the wider implementation of standards rather than just for those who have the greatest resources and capacity.

Co-ordination among statistical agencies within countries is essential to achieving consistency and efficiency and international co-operation contributes to the improvement of systems of official statistics in all countries. Official Statistics is a highly collaborative environment which recognises that countries face similar challenges in producing official statistics and promotes best practice through shared knowledge and learning. As a result, official statistics can be relied upon as a relevant and trustworthy source of decision-making information for citizens and decision makers alike. Adherence to these standards also facilitates international comparison in relation to social, economic, demographic and environmental indicators.

PRINCIPLE 10 IN PRACTICE

The Fundamental Principles were developed from a shared recognition of the challenges facing the Official Statistics community which has similar values and objectives. Principle 10 is the embodiment of that community spirit which allows countries with varying levels of capacity, experience and resources to learn from and contribute to shared experience, knowledge bases and resources. Principle 10 provides opportunities, not only for smaller and less well resourced community members to leverage the experience and resources of others, but also to provide a meaningful and significant contribution to the overall development of the community.

Both Ireland and Poland have played a significant role in many international projects and collaborations in recent years. Our statistical offices have contributed to shared tools and outputs while also benefitting from the experience of others and leveraging them for use in our own organisations.

As part of this internationally focused work, both countries share statistical expertise and best practices, and work co-operatively to develop international standards and statistical classifications as well as frameworks for the international and national development of official statistics.

Both countries are members of the UNECE High-Level Group on the Modernisation of Official Statistics co-chair its selected groups and are actively involved in projects which cover a wide range of topics including: the development of new statistical outputs; the exploration of new data sources; the communication and dissemination of official statistics; the core values of official statistics; data sharing; internationally agreed census recommendations, and new statistical outputs and processes around subjects such as gender equality, children with disabilities, subjective poverty, measuring global production.

HOW ARE WE JOINTLY CELEBRATING PRINCIPLE 10?

From January to June 2022, the Conference of European Statisticians has been celebrating the Fundamental Principles through a series of country-led communications campaigns telling a shared story about the importance and impact of each Fundamental Principle on society, everyday life and why they matter.

As part of these celebrations Ireland and Poland have produced this joint paper, which highlights the importance of Principle 10 and provides examples of international cooperation and the practical tools and supports that are now available to all members as a result of this collaborative process.

National Institute of Statistics of Romania (NIS)

ROMANIA: FROM TWO SYSTEMS TO ONE FRAMEWORK

Interview with Mr. Ilie Dumitrescu, director of the NIS President Cabinet and one of the “founders” of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics originally published on the NIS website in three parts: <https://insse.ro/cms/ro/content/principiile-fundamentale-ale-statisticii-oficiale-30-de-ani-de-la-aadoptare-interviu-partea-i> (part 1); <https://insse.ro/cms/ro/content/principiile-fundamentale-ale-statisticii-oficiale-30-de-ani-de-la-aadoptare-interviu-partea> (part 2); the link to part 3 was not available when this document was prepared

Mr. Ilie Dumitrescu graduated from the Institute of Economics and Statistics, Romania, and since then he has built up more than 50 years of experience as a statistician working with official statistics. He has been involved in practically all fields of economic and social statistics, among which his areas of particular excellence are: institutional structures related to statistics; legal frameworks; Fundamental Principles and the European Code of practice; quality management in statistics; EU legislation in agriculture statistics and other related fields; population and social statistics; international relations.

He has been involved in various projects of technical assistance in Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia, Georgia, North Macedonia, etc., thanks to his in-depth knowledge of assessing third country legislation and institutional arrangements for compliance with EU standards. He was among the “founders” of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. He was a short term Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) expert assisting national institutes of statistics from various countries in reorganizing their agriculture statistics and implementing statistical surveys in this field. For three years he was working in Vilnius, Lithuania for the Programme Coordination Unit in charge of observing the monitoring and reporting on the PHARE Statistical Cooperation Programme.

A member of the International Statistical Institute, he is author of numerous published articles.

Question: Mr. Dumitrescu, as far as I know, you are one of the Romanian statistics representatives who have a long history of participating in the proceedings of the Conference of European Statisticians, covering both the time before the 1990s and the period subsequent to the 1990s. The characteristics of each of the two periods, beyond the political considerations, from a statistical point of view, consist of the fact that before the 1990s, in the Conference debates, two almost completely different approaches collided: one belonged to the delegations of the countries that

promoted the centrally-planned economic system, where we were also included, and the other was that of Western countries, with their market economies.

The first approach was dominated by the presentation and promotion of statistical concepts, methods and techniques that were subordinate to the material production system, whereas, with the second approach, the focus was on official statistics that are public, organized and operated based on democratic values (which are characteristic of the market economy) and that are oriented towards all categories of statistical data users.

The question we are asking you is the following: in your opinion, considering that the two systems were conceptually separated by distinct if not divergent interests, how could they function in a common framework?

Mr. Ilie Dumitrescu: *The documents that were subject to debates in the annual sessions of the Conference and in the working groups were designed and drawn up so as to avoid going into political details or taking controversial stands on principle-related issues, each side being allowed to express its points of view in accordance with its own considerations and options.*

The common elements that, nevertheless, aroused general interest, consisted almost exclusively of technical statistical approaches, statistical methods, the basic definitions of indicators, classifications etc. The field with the largest amount of discrepancies between the two systems, if we look at the phases of the statistical process, was that concerning the dissemination of the results of the work done by statisticians in the framework of official statistics. While, in general, the debates promoted by the former planned-economy countries, as they used to be called, expressed the view that statistics should almost exclusively serve the interests and purposes of government bodies (I am particularly speaking on behalf of the Romanian delegation), the ones promoted by the delegations of Western countries insisted on the need for statistics to serve the entire society, namely all the categories of statistical data users, and even to be generated by their opinions.

The final results of each session, working group etc., which were recorded in the reports on the debates, generally reflected the points all participants' positions had in common and, separately, without making critical or appreciative remarks, each of the two views of the statistical system. Therefore, it was naturally understood that opinions differed depending on the economic policy constraints upon which these views were based.

Worthy of mention is, however, the fact that a sense of cooperative relations prevailed, whose ethical component was characterized by understanding and mutual respect.

Of course, we realize the issues discussed from 1953 (when the Conference of European Statisticians was founded) to 1989 revealed numerous specific problems that you do not wish to dwell on. But ever since 1990, the issue of unifying the

statistical approaches under one common framework in compliance with the democratic principles has naturally been raised, a framework which has turned into a common paradigm both for former communist countries and for traditionally democratic countries.

Under these circumstances, how was it possible to think of a common framework and to create such a framework, which sets out general principles on the functioning of the statistical system, to be applied by all countries?

Mr. Ilie Dumitrescu: *This issue was discussed as early as 1990, a year that marked the change of political regimes in the former socialist countries through their shift to democracy. Thus, at the 38th session of the Conference of European Statisticians, a decision was adopted, where it was stated that in all countries and particularly in transition countries, Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, to be applied by all, needed to be prepared and institutionalized.*

Moreover, in the meetings that followed, the Polish delegation led by Josef Olenski proposed a detailed project, drawing up a set of principles, based on duly justified reasons and criteria. Naturally, a broad debate ensued. Not everything went smoothly, without impediments, in their attempt to reach common ground. In fact, I would say that, sometimes, heated discussions took place. Some delegations of Western countries even thought that the institutionalization of general principles and rules was not absolutely necessary, because the democratic system itself involved the functioning of these principles without restrictions, arguing that in their countries such principles were automatically observed. Obviously, such points of view revolved around the notion of “statistical independence”.

The former communist countries were the ones to insist on the implementation of the set of principles and values. This was in order not so much to convince the statisticians in their own countries, since this was fully in agreement with their interests, as to convince political authorities and make them commit to such principles as regards official statistics. This was needed considering the fact that, up to that point, as part of the bodies that existed before democracy set in, they were very determined to impose their dictatorial views, which were subordinate to political precepts, in all fields, including statistics.

I would particularly like to add that, as the purpose it was assigned to serve was to monitor and reveal the implementation of the economic development plan, statistics, at least in Romania’s case, had to adapt to the plan-based methodology in terms of concepts and even techniques and rules, and not the other way around. As statistics was oriented towards implementing the development plans and almost inherently exceeding the expected results, in the framework of improving the plan-based methodology, various activities and plan-related standards – which were supposed to be better than the old ones – were identified. This was done in an attempt to generate surplus as far as the statistical assessment of the results of economic activities was concerned.

Based on your own activity, can you mention any specific aspects that caused difficulties in the national implementation of the Fundamental Principles or, on the contrary, that facilitated the commitment of society and implicitly of decision makers to these principles?

Mr. Ilie Dumitrescu: *That is an interesting question. I have kept this to myself for many years, but I am glad I am able to talk about it today, for the first time. Not only in Romania but in many other countries as well, to the best of my knowledge, official statistics is administratively managed by the Government, the Prime Minister, a ministry etc., mainly with a view to securing the opportunities to support the interests of statistics through such representatives, particularly when it comes to ensuring resources. This mechanism was in place before 1990 and it still is. I mentioned before that the role of these leaders and even of broader (let's say public) decision-making areas was well defined, which meant that statistics was used as a political tool. Nowadays, the role of such a leader, as we all perceive it, is rather formal, with the chief aim being the provision of support and definitely not the option to interfere in the internal matters of statistics, from professional independence to the management of and involvement in the statistical methods/techniques and the mean or manners of disseminating statistical data. The generalization of principles and, particularly, the process of convincing political authorities to commit to and observe them took quite a long time. In our case, a change of mentality for some of the political leaders who were under the protective umbrella of a "facelift" was necessary.*

During the early stages of transition, such a co-ordinator of statistics with rank of minister asked the person who was the head of statistics at the time to provide him with a written presentation on the role of the statistical office of the EU, a brief description of the CV of the Eurostat Director-General and, implicitly, to the extent possible, his views of national official statistics.

The NIS president gave me the task of preparing such a document, which was to be handed over to the co-ordinator, who was going to visit Eurostat.

The co-ordinator – there is no point in mentioning his name – was shocked by the fact that Eurostat in general and its Director-General in particular, Yves Franchet, firmly believed in and acted to ensure the observance of the principles on the functioning of official statistics in the context of a democratic society (implicitly, that was also the case of our society), with the basic components of these principles being the respect for professional independence and the non-interference of politics in the main tasks of statistics.

The shock was vehemently followed by actions condemning the very essence of such "precepts", as the co-ordinator saw no reason why his influence and his direct involvement in statistical governance could not be possible. Moreover, he requested that I be downgraded from my position and moved to a territorial statistical directorate for disciplinary reasons. It was only through the intervention

of personalities from the academic world that things got back to normal. They proved that such a measure and other similar measures on the part of the coordinator mentioned above were meant to reinstate the old standards that did not fit the democratic statistics to which Romania had subscribed.

ANNIVERSARY VIDEO

Anniversary video, produced by Statistics Poland on behalf of the entire international official statistics community, shows the relevance and importance of the ten principles from the point of view of different groups of users and members of society. The video was produced collaboratively based on contributions from a multiple countries and organizations.

OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Official statistics are an indispensable element in the information system of democratic societies, serving governments, economies and the public with data that can help them understand and make decisions: about the economy, about the population, about society and the environment.

In general, official statistics are statistical outputs produced by a national statistical office (NSO) or by other designated governmental bodies. Usually, official statistics describe the economy, demography, environment, social and cultural situations in a particular country, and are produced within the scope of the statistical programme which guides the work of the national statistical system. The term "official statistics" serves as a quality label, indicating that official statistics are developed, produced and disseminated in accordance with internationally agreed statistical standards and recommendations, the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the European Statistics Code of Practice.

UNECE AND CES

The [United Nations Economic Commission for Europe \(UNECE\)](#) is one of five [regional commissions of the United Nations](#). The others are the : Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

UNECE's major aim is to facilitate [greater economic integration and cooperation](#) among its member States and to promote sustainable development and economic prosperity through:

- Policy dialogue
- Negotiation of international legal instruments
- Development of regulations and norms
- Exchange and application of best practices as well as economic and technical expertise
- Technical cooperation for countries with economies in transition

UNECE includes 56 member States in Europe, North America and Asia. However, all interested United Nations member States may participate in the work of UNECE.

The [Conference of European Statisticians \(CES\)](#) is one of the [oldest statistical bodies globally](#), founded in 1953 with its roots in the League of Nations and the first Conference on Statistics in 1928.

CES provides a platform for the [coordination](#) of international statistical work in the UNECE region, for [addressing emerging issues](#) and for [developing methodological guidelines](#) and recommendations to improve national statistics and their international comparability.

The [Conference is comprised of the Heads of statistical offices](#) of the 56 member countries of UNECE, OECD member countries and some other countries outside the region, for example Brazil, China, Colombia and Mongolia.

[In June 2022, the Conference holds its seventieth plenary session.](#)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have been involved in this anniversary campaign. Special thanks go to the following for their leading roles:

- Principle 1: Statistics [Canada](#)
- Principle 2: Statistics [New Zealand](#)
- Principle 3: Statistics [Finland](#) and Central Statistical Bureau of [Latvia](#)
- Principle 4: [United Kingdom](#) Statistics Authority (UKSA)
- Principle 5: Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadísticas (DANE) (National Administrative Department of Statistics), [Colombia](#)
- Principle 6: Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE) (National Statistics Institute), [Spain](#)
- Principle 7: Statistical Committee of the Republic of [Armenia](#) and Office for National Statistics (ONS) of the [United Kingdom](#)
- Principle 8: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INDEC) (National Institute of Statistics and Censuses), [Argentina](#)
- Principle 9: Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (ISTAT) (National Institute of Statistics), [Italy](#) and the National Bureau of Statistics of the [Republic of Moldova](#)
- Principle 10: Central Statistics Office (CSO), [Ireland](#) and Statistics [Poland](#) plus the National Institute of Statistics of [Romania](#)
- Design of logo and campaign graphics: Conor O’Sullivan, Central Statistics Office of [Ireland](#)
- Translations into French, Spanish and Russian were produced by Statistics Canada, Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI), Mexico and the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-Stat).

The following individuals have contributed to making this international campaign a reality:

Pablo Ceballos, National Director of the Statistical System, National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INDEC), [Argentina](#)

Pablo Andújar, INDEC

Camila Giacchino, INDEC

Gonzalo Grandis, INDEC

Elena Hasapov, INDEC

Alejandro López Hidalgo, INDEC

Lucas Lufrano, INDEC

Priscila McCarthy, INDEC

Tamar Mozián, INDEC

María Eugenia Núñez, INDEC

Clara Peila, INDEC

Nicolás Petresky, INDEC

Mariano Poledo, INDEC

Silvina Viazzi, INDEC

Stepan Mnatsakanyan, President, Statistical Committee of the Republic of [Armenia](#) (Armstat)

Armenuhi Arushanyan, Armstat

Raisa Khachatryan, Armstat

Sona Manukyan, Armstat

Aida Martirosyan, Armstat

Narine Musheghyan, Armstat

Gohar Nshanyan, Armstat

Anahit Safyan, Armstat

Hasmik Yeghiazaryan, Armstat

David Gruen, [Australian](#) Bureau of Statistics

Anil Arora, Chief Statistician of [Canada](#)

Guillaume Bérubé, Statistics Canada

Ailish Campbell, Global Affairs Canada

Tony Colasante, Statistics Canada

Aaron Donnelly, Statistics Canada

Nathalie G. Drouin, Privy Council, Canada
 Susie Fortier, Statistics Canada
 Tamara Knighton, Statistics Canada
 Marc Lemire, Statistics Canada
 Leslie E. Norton, Global Affairs Canada
 Natan Obed, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Canada
 Howard Ramos, Canadian Statistics Advisory Council
 Carole Saab, Federation of Canadian Municipalities
 Andrey Kosarev, Deputy Chairman, [Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States](#) (CIS-Stat)
 Alexander Khrenov, CIS-Stat
 Juan Daniel Oviedo, Director General, National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) of [Colombia](#)
 Natalia Alonso, DANE
 Mateo Cardona, DANE
 Karen Chávez, DANE
 Jorge Gómez, DANE
 Camilo Méndez, DANE
 Isabel Navas, DANE
 Ana Cecilia Olaya, DANE
 Felipe Palacios, DANE
 Daniel Peñaranda, DANE
 Adriana Quintero, DANE
 Olga Rueda, DANE
 Maria Luisa Trujillo, DANE
 Outi Ahti-Miettinen, Statistics [Finland](#)
 Mia Kokkinen, Statistics Finland
 Timo Koskimäki, Statistics Finland
 Leena Storgårds, Statistics Finland
 Riikka Turunen, Statistics Finland
 Mervi Ukkonen, Statistics Finland
 Samuel Annim, Ghana Statistical Service
 Athanasios C. Thanopoulos, Hellenic Statistical Authority (Elstat), [Greece](#)
 Rebecca Fitzgerald Smith, Central Statistics Office (CSO) of [Ireland](#)
 Colette Keane, CSO
 Jonathan Kelly, CSO
 Elaine Mahoney, CSO
 Aeidín Sheppard, CSO
 Conor Sullivan, CSO
 Sofia Barletta, Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), [Italy](#)
 Tina Fera, ISTAT
 Marina Gandolfo, ISTAT
 Giulia Mottura, ISTAT
 Giulia Peci, ISTAT
 Kristīne Bērziņa, Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) of [Latvia](#)
 Jolanta Minkevica, CSB
 Gundega Kuzmina, CSB
 Ieva Zemeskalna, CSB
 Arnas Gutauskas, Host of “Trečia Lentyna” podcast, [Lithuania](#)
 Etienne Caruana, National Statistics Office of [Malta](#)
 Pilar García-Velázquez, National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) of [Mexico](#)
 Sofía Valdivia-Oseguera, INEGI
 David Clark, Minister for Statistics, [New Zealand](#)
 Meka Whaitiri, Associate Minister for Statistics, New Zealand
 Mark Sowden, Government Statistician and Chief Executive, Stats NZ
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 Valentine Callum, Stats NZ
 Julia Carter, Stats NZ
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 Karolina Banaszek, Statistics Poland
 Ewa Bandurska, Statistics Poland
 Agnieszka Chodowska, Statistics Poland
 Agnieszka Chwaleba, Statistics Poland
 Wiktoria Diduch, Statistics Poland
 Agata Franecka, Statistics Poland
 Mateusz Kaleta, Statistics Poland
 Konrad Krawczyk, Statistics Poland
 Marek Panfilow, Statistics Poland
 Marcin Piekarek, Statistics Poland
 Agnieszka Podwysocka, Statistics Poland
 Olga Świerkot-Strużewska, Statistics Poland
 Ewa Walska, Statistics Poland
 Eliza Wieczorek, Statistics Poland
 Marta Wołosik, Statistics Poland
 Katarzyna Zabkiewicz, Statistics Poland
 Beata Zawistowska, Statistics Poland
 Prof. Józef Oleński, Statistics Poland

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Eugeniu Aftene, National Bank of [Moldova](#)
- Oleg Cara, Director General, National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) Moldova, Republic of Moldova
- Iurie Mocanu, Deputy Director General, NBS
- Aurelia Spataru, Deputy Director General, NBS
- Doina Cebotari, NBS
- Inga Daghi, NBS
- Alina Jalba, NBS
- Elena Maleru, NBS
- Igor Mocanu, NBS
- Ala Paslariuc, NBS
- Lilia Racu, NBS
- Tudorel Andrei, President, National Institute of Statistics (NIS) in [Romania](#)
- Constantin Anghelache, Romanian Society of Statistics, Romania
- Petronela Dina, NIS
- Ilie Dumitrescu, NIS
- Catalin Mirlogeanu, NIS
- Constantin Mitrut, Romanian Society of Statistics of Romania
- Daniela Stefanescu, NIS
- Juan Manuel Rodríguez Póo, National Institute of Statistics (INE), [Spain](#)
- Alicia Fernández Sanz, INE
- Adolfo Gálvez Moraleda, INE
- Noelia García Leal, INE
- Petra Keller Guéguen, Swiss Federal Statistical Office, [Switzerland](#)
- Professor Sir Ian Diamond, National Statistician of the [United Kingdom](#)
- Joanna Brown, United Kingdom Statistics Authority (UKSA)
- Mary Gregory, Office for Statistics Regulation, UK
- Suzanne Halls, Office for Statistics Regulation, UK
- Ed Humpherson, Office for Statistics Regulation, UK
- Simon Jones, UKSA
- Richard Laux, Cabinet Office, UK
- Oliver Mahoney, UKSA
- Steve Milne, Office for National Statistics (ONS), UK
- Bethan Mulcahy, UKSA
- Mary Oikonomidou, ONS
- John Pullinger, Former UK National Statistician and current Chair of the Electoral Commission, UK
- Nicola Shearman, UKSA
- Ross Tivey, UKSA
- Adam Wheeler, ONS
- Stephen Wilson, ONS
- Chris Rosenlund, United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), [United States of America](#)
- Joe Carlson, BLS
- Professor David Card, University of California at Berkeley, United States of America
- Mariana Kotzeva, Director General, [Eurostat](#)
- Lukasz Augustyniak, Eurostat
- Maria Joao Santos, Eurostat
- Steve MacFeely, Director of Data and Analytics, [World Health Organization](#)
- Rodgers Chawani, [International Monetary Fund](#), Republic of Moldova
- Rachael Beavan, [United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific](#)
- Oliver Chinganya, [United Nations Economic Commission for Africa](#)
- Ambassador Lotte Knudsen, Head of the Delegation of the [European Union](#) to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva
- Nigina Abaszada, Resident Representative, [United Nations Population Fund](#) (UNFPA) Moldova
- Eduard Mihalas, UNFPA Moldova
- Lidia Bratanova, Director, Statistical Division, [United Nations Economic Commission for Europe](#) (UNECE)
- Annalisa Baruffi, UNECE
- Carsten Boldsen, UNECE
- Małgorzata Cwiek, UNECE
- Patrick Hernusi, UNECE
- Tiina Luige, UNECE
- Steven Vale, UNECE
- Fiona Willis-Núñez, UNECE

