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Core values of official statistics and the related behaviours

Core values of official statistics: defining the behaviours that show how we live the values

Prepared by the Conference of European Statisticians Task Team on Core Values of Official Statistics

Summary

The Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) set up a Task Team on the Core Values of Official Statistics in October 2021 to elaborate a set of Core Values to complement the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. The set of Core Values prepared by the Task Team was endorsed by the Conference in June 2022. The Conference supported the continuation of the work of the Task Team, with a focus on the behaviours that demonstrate the implementation of the Core Values and the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics in practice. This document provides a draft list of those behaviours, prepared by the Task Team.

The Conference is invited to endorse the document subject to a positive outcome of an electronic consultation with all CES members in April 2023. The feedback from the consultation will be summarised in document ECE/CES/2023/1/Add.1.



I. Introduction

1. The document identifies the main behaviours that show how the official statistics community implements or “lives” the set of Core Values of Official Statistics. The Core Values were endorsed by the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) in June 2022¹. While the Core Values are intended for audiences within and outside official statistics, the main audience for the list of behaviours is members of the official statistics community.
2. Both the Core Values and these behaviours are fully compatible with and complementary to the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. They are also aligned with similar frameworks, including the European Statistics Code of Practice and the OECD Recommendation on Good Statistical Practice. Annex 1 shows the mappings of the Core Values to these standards and frameworks.
3. These behaviours are intended to encourage official statistics organisations to act in ways that inspire the confidence and trust of users, whilst upholding strict professional and ethical standards. They are not intended as a set of rules or quality criteria. Instead, they provide practical guidance on what it means to implement the Core Values and Fundamental Principles in practice, and they can be interpreted taking account of national specificities. This list of behaviours will be illustrated by a set of practical examples from different countries, which will be maintained as a wiki knowledge base by the UNECE Secretariat.
4. The development of the list of behaviours was prompted by the increasingly varied challenges facing the official statistics community, including demands for new types of outputs, more disaggregated data, and new roles within the wider data community. The list of behaviours, the Core Values and the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics provide a framework to support managers in statistical organizations when deciding on whether to pursue new activities and opportunities.
5. The list of behaviours was elaborated by a Task Team of senior managers from eleven national statistical offices across the UNECE region and beyond. It is intended to be a living document, evolving as the nature and requirements of official statistics change over time.
6. The list draws inspiration from a range of documents (see list of sources in Annex 2). Potential behaviours identified in these sources have been consolidated and references specific to a country or region have been removed. The behaviours have then been allocated to the six Core Values on a “best fit” basis.
7. The core values and the respective behaviours are presented below.

II. Core values and the respective behaviours

A. Relevant

8. The official statistics community ensures relevance through:
 - (a) An engaged, responsive, user-centric approach, based on clear and regular communication with all stakeholders;
 - (b) A proactive, innovative and agile approach to the development of new products, services, tools, methods and sources;
 - (c) Applying appropriate standards and quality frameworks to produce accurate, timely, coherent and comparable statistics.
9. Behaviours:
 - (a) Engage regularly with users to understand their current and future needs, ensure they understand the advantages and constraints of official statistics, and manage their expectations about what can be delivered and when:

¹ ECE/CES/2022/2 - https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-07/ECE_CES_2022_2-2211176E_0.pdf

- i. Identify and categorise types of current and potential users. Design products that address their specific needs and expectations;
 - ii. Prepare multiannual and/or annual work programmes in consultation with users;
 - iii. Keep records of users and interactions with them to facilitate future contacts;
 - iv. Convene user groups to discuss statistical developments.
- (b) Conduct regular user satisfaction surveys targeting all types of users and non-users and strive to achieve high levels of participation;
 - (c) Monitor media (including social media) to:
 - i. Anticipate new demands;
 - ii. Identify and respond to erroneous use of statistics.
 - (d) Develop outputs in an agile way, seeking user feedback at relevant points in the development process to ensure that the outputs are as relevant as possible;
 - (e) Actively engage with partners to explore new data sources, tools, methods, products and services, and possible improvements to existing ones;
 - (f) Promote an innovation culture within the organization;
 - (g) Regularly review outputs to ensure they continue to meet needs and conform to international best practices;
 - (h) Apply an internationally recognized quality framework to all outputs, e.g. UN National Quality Assurance Framework, or a similar regional framework;
 - (i) Provide clear guidance on the quality of outputs so that users understand any limitations.

B. Impartial

10. The official statistics community:
 - (a) Is objective, in all aspects of our work, acting with fairness and integrity to serve the public good;
 - (b) Ensures equal access for all users through all relevant channels;
 - (c) Produces inclusive statistics reflecting all parts of society.
11. Behaviours:
 - (a) Ensure that statistical releases are objective and impartial by compiling them in line with international standards and classifications;
 - (b) Ensure that statistical releases (preferably for the whole national statistical system) conform to a pre-announced release calendar;
 - (c) Announce as far in advance as possible any deviations from the release calendar and provide justifications;
 - (d) Ensure that all users have equal access to statistical releases at the same time, and that any pre-release access to any user or group of users is limited, controlled and publicised;
 - (e) Provide official statistics free for all users on the national statistical office web site and other channels as appropriate;
 - (f) Ensure that all sub-groups of society are accurately reflected in official statistics;
 - (g) Consider how to improve accessibility to products and services across all sub-groups of society;

(h) Engage with key hard-to-reach groups and others at risk of being marginalised to ensure that they are properly reflected in official statistics.

C. Transparent

12. Official statistics, methods, processes, products and quality reports are communicated to the public through appropriate channels and are open to scrutiny.

13. Behaviours:

(a) Document statistical production processes and methods using standard frameworks such as the Generic Statistical Business Process Model, and publish at least summary versions of this documentation;

(b) Publish and promote links to relevant metadata and quality reports alongside statistical products and services;

(c) Engage with users to explain changes to standards, methods or processes that might affect comparability of data over time or between outputs, including analyzing the impacts of the changes;

(d) Publish and implement a policy on revisions and the correction of errors affecting previously released statistics:

i. Indicate in the release calendar those releases that may be subject to revisions;

ii. Publish indicators on the extent of revisions affecting core statistical products.

(e) Publish and promote information about any supplementary products or services that might be offered on demand, including any fees and other conditions;

(f) Provide prominent links to all relevant legislation, policies and guidelines through all appropriate communication channels;

(g) Publish and promote statistical work programmes and reports on their implementation, as well as any evaluation or audit reports of activities of statistical organizations.

D. Professionally independent

14. Credible, trustworthy and authoritative official statistics are based on:

(a) Freedom from external interference;

(b) The application of professional expertise and scientific principles;

(c) Countering misuse and misinterpretation of official statistics.

15. Behaviours:

(a) Ensure that the principle of professional independence is respected in practice, enshrined in statistical legislation, and communicated to users;

(b) Ensure transparent procedures for the recruitment and dismissal of the head and staff of the national statistical office are in place and are independent of changes of government;

(c) Ensure that recruitment and promotion of staff responsible for the development, production and dissemination of official statistics is transparent and based on aptitude and expertise;

(d) Put in place transparent review mechanisms to ensure that statistics are compiled on the basis of common professional standards, and international best practices;

(e) Ensure that the choice of data sources, production methods and dissemination practices are determined by statistical considerations and guided by scientific principles;

(f) Actively monitor media, including social media, for coverage of official statistics to ensure adequate and accurate reporting;

(g) Comment publicly, when appropriate, on statistical issues, including criticism, and take the most appropriate course of action to address the misuse and misinterpretation of official statistics;

(h) Apply measures to reduce the risk of the misuse and misinterpretation of official statistics through guidance to users and activities to increase statistical literacy, so that users can become allies against misinformation;

(i) Promote the importance of secure, sustainable and reliable funding for official statistics.

E. Respects confidentiality

16. The official statistics community:

(a) Protects privacy by ensuring that data collection is limited to what is necessary and proportionate;

(b) Upholds the confidentiality of data on individual people, households and businesses;

(c) Acts in an ethical way, following professional ethics standards.

17. Behaviours:

(a) Ensure that the principle of statistical confidentiality is enshrined in statistical legislation;

(b) Publish a policy setting out principles, processes and commitments related to statistical confidentiality, and ensure all staff are aware of the contents;

(c) Ensure that staff sign a confidentiality commitment on appointment and receive on-going guidance on information security, confidentiality, professional ethics and data ethics;

(d) Inform respondents about the purposes for which their data can be used and refer them to the confidentiality policy;

(e) Establish a policy and transparent procedures on the use of statistical microdata for research purposes;

(f) Apply state of the art statistical disclosure control methods to all data releases;

(g) Establish a data security policy that conforms to international standards for the protection of personal data, including guidelines on the security and integrity of data storage, access and transfer;

(h) Put in place regular and systematic data security audits, monitor information security risks, and ensure that processes are in place to address those risks;

(i) Conduct regular reviews to ensure data collected from any source is ethical, necessary and proportionate to user needs.

F. Collaborative

18. Official statistics are strengthened by sharing ideas and experiences within the international statistical community and with other stakeholders.

19. Behaviours:

(a) Ensure that the national statistical office is the focal point for coordinating official statistics within the country;

- (b) Establish mechanisms for collaboration and sharing best practices between the organizations that comprise the national statistical system;
- (c) Build partnerships where appropriate with universities and researchers on the development of statistical products, methods and tools, including quality improvements;
- (d) Ensure official statistics are a recognized part of the national data ecosystem and seek opportunities to influence the development of that ecosystem;
- (e) Create a function within the national statistical office responsible for coordinating international cooperation and any development assistance;
- (f) Actively participate in international statistical forums at management and expert levels to share and keep up to date with new developments in official statistics;
- (g) Contribute to the development and application of international standards, methods and classifications;
- (h) Develop new statistical methods and tools in a way that facilitates sharing with the international statistical community;
- (i) Show collective leadership across the international statistical community to deal with existing and emerging challenges in a collaborative and coherent way.

Annex 1

Mapping the Core Values to Relevant Standards

Core Values	Fundamental Principles	UN National Quality Assurance Framework Principles	ESS Code of Practice Principles	OECD Recommendation on Good Statistical Practice	ISI Declaration on Professional Ethics (Values and Principles)
Relevant	1. Relevance, impartiality and equal access 9. Use of international standards 4. Prevention of misuse	14. Assuring relevance 15. Assuring accuracy and reliability 16. Assuring timeliness and punctuality 17. Assuring accessibility and clarity 18. Assuring coherence and comparability 2. Managing relationships with data users, data providers and other stakeholders 3. Managing statistical standards 8. Assuring commitment to quality 12. Assuring appropriate statistical procedures	11. Relevance 12. Accuracy and reliability 13. Timeliness and punctuality 14. Coherence and comparability 15. Accessibility and clarity 4. Commitment to quality 8. Appropriate statistical procedures	8. Commit to the quality of statistical outputs and processes 9. Ensure user-friendly data access and dissemination 12. Encourage exploring innovative methods as well as new and alternative data sources as inputs for official statistics	V1. Respect §. 2 V2. Professionalism §. 1, 3, 4, 5, 9 V3. Truthfulness and Integrity §. 8
Impartial	1. Relevance, impartiality and equal access	5. Assuring impartiality and objectivity	6. Impartiality and objectivity	6. Impartiality, objectivity and transparency	V2. Professionalism §. 1, 4, 5, 10 V3. Truthfulness and integrity §. 1, 2, 4, 5 P1. Pursuing objectivity P3. Assessing Alternatives Impartially
Transparent	3. Accountability and transparency 7. Legislation	6. Assuring transparency 17. Assuring accessibility and clarity	15. Accessibility and clarity 6. Impartiality and objectivity	6. Impartiality, objectivity and transparency 9. Ensure user-friendly data access and dissemination	V3. Truthfulness and integrity §. 3, 5 P9. Exposing and reviewing methods and findings
Professionally independent	2. Professional standards and ethics 5. Sources of official statistics	4. Assuring professional independence 10. Assuring methodological soundness	1. Professional independence 7. Sound methodology	2. Ensure professional independence of National Statistical Authorities 7. Employ sound methodology and commit to professional standards	V2. Professionalism §. 10 V3. Truthfulness and Integrity §. 1, 2, 6 P8. Maintaining Confidence in Statistics

Respects confidentiality	6. Confidentiality 2. Professional standards and ethics	7. Assuring statistical confidentiality and data security 13. Managing the respondent burden	5. Statistical confidentiality and data protection 9. Non-excessive burden on respondents	4. Protect the privacy of data providers	V1. Respect §. 1, 2 P6. Guarding privileged information P12. Protecting the interests of subjects
Collaborative	10. International cooperation 8. National coordination	1. Coordinating the national statistical system 2. Managing relationships with data users, data providers and other stakeholders	1bis. Coordination and cooperation	10. Establish responsibilities for co-ordination of statistical activities within the NSS 11. Commit to international co-operation	V2. Professionalism §. 2, 8

Annex 2

Sources used to identify behaviours

The sources used are listed below. Hyperlinks are provided to those that are publicly available.

- (1) ABS Methodology Division: Vision, Stakeholder Charter and Culture & Behaviours
 - (2) Draft Implementation Guidelines for UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/dnss/gp/impguide.aspx>)
 - (3) Ethical aspects, the French experience
 - (4) Core Values – Statistics Poland
 - (5) List of core values used in Statistics Lithuania
 - (6) Demonstrating the Core Values of the statistical community using a Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics Maturity Model (Australia / New Zealand)
 - (7) UN National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF) <https://desapublications.un.org/publications/united-nations-quality-assurance-frameworks-manual>
 - (8) European Statistics Code of Practice (ES CoP) / Quality Assurance Framework <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/quality/european-quality-standards/european-statistics-code-of-practice>
 - (9) OECD Recommendation of the Council on Good Statistical Practice <https://www.oecd.org/statistics/good-practice-toolkit/>
 - (10) ISI Declaration on Professional Ethics <https://www.isi-web.org/about/policies/professional-ethics/isi-declaration>
 - (11) Documents relating to behaviours that demonstrate the implementation of the core values and the FPOS in practice (Norway)
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