Economic Commission for Europe
Conference of European Statisticians
Seventy-second plenary session
Geneva, 20 and 21 June 2024
Item 11 (a) of the provisional agenda
Programme of work of the Statistics subprogramme
of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe:
Reports on the work of the Conference of European Statisticians,
its Bureau and Teams of Specialists

Report of the European Free Trade Association /
United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Workshop
on the Generic Law on Official Statistics

Prepared by the Secretariat

Summary

This document provides the report of the European Free Trade Association / United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Workshop on the Generic Law on Official Statistics which was held in Yerevan, Armenia on 4 and 5 July 2023. The Conference is invited to take note of its contents, and to provide any guidance as appropriate.
I. Background

1. Improving the governance of statistical production and the legal framework is fundamental to producing high-quality statistics. The Conference of European Statisticians (CES) has been supporting its members in this area by developing and endorsing together with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and Eurostat the *Generic Law on Official Statistics* (2016) and the *Guidance on Modernizing Statistical Legislation* (2019). Aligning with the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, the documents provide guidance on developing the statistical legislation needed to support the modernization of statistical systems and unleash the full value of official statistics. The *Generic Law on Official Statistics* (GLOS) has since been used by countries around the world and adapted to regional needs by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. In 2021, the Expert Meeting on Modernizing Statistical Legislation concluded that the GLOS should be reviewed, taking into account the experiences of countries that used or implemented it and new developments in institutional standards relating to ethics, principles, values and quality; data stewardship function of national statistical offices (NSOs); access to secondary data sources; and the data privacy and confidentiality laws.

2. The Workshop was organized jointly by the EFTA Statistical Office, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia (Armstat), in consultation with the Conference of European Statisticians’ Steering Group on Statistical Legislation, which includes Albania, Armenia, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Eurostat, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD).

II. Attendance

3. The workshop was attended by participants from Albania, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Norway, Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Uzbekistan, EFTA, UNECE, and UNSD. Steven Vale participated as an independent expert.

III. Organization of the meeting

4. In addition to opening and closing, the workshop included two substantive sessions:
   - Session 1: Drafting national statistical legislation chaired by EFTA
   - Session 2: Implementing and enforcing statistical legislation chaired by UNECE

5. Both sessions included country presentations and breakout group discussions.

IV. Summary and conclusions of the workshop

Opening session

Documentation: Background, content and purpose of the workshop (UNECE and UNSD), Emerging issues and recent developments relevant for statistical legislation (UNECE)

6. Armstat, EFTA and UNECE welcomed the participants. UNSD and UNECE presented the origin of the GLOS, the subsequent development of the *CES Guidance on Modernizing Statistical Legislation* and the overview of their implementation internationally, as well as recalled that the objectives of the workshop were to:
   - Share the national experiences of using the GLOS, revising and implementing national statistical legislation
   - Collect inputs regarding needed updates or extensions to existing guidance and
• Initiate the review process.

**Session 1: Drafting national statistical legislation**

Presentations: Experience of Georgia, Experience of Kazakhstan, Experience of Serbia, Experience of Norway – The Norwegian Statistics Act: from review to implementation, Experience of Uzbekistan

7. Session 1 included presentations from Georgia, Kazakhstan, Norway, Serbia and Uzbekistan of their national experiences of revising statistical legislation. The following points were made in the discussion:

- Difficult issues include personal data protection, chief statistician appointment, embedding independence in the law and including other producers in national statistical system (NSS), including the central bank.

- Including provisions about quality requirements as condition of becoming an official producer can be basis for audits and assessments of compliance with international standards. In some countries, it was more difficult than in others to determine who the official producers to be included in the programme are. In some countries, data suppliers are also included.

- Professional and institutional independence are important – e.g., whether an NSO reports to an executive or legislative body. Independence is the freedom to choose whom you depend on;

- It would be useful to collect changes made in the model by different countries and share with the participants.

8. The breakout groups discussed how the GLOS and the Guidance can be improved and what provisions should be changed, added or deleted. The following proposals were made:

- Improve the provisions about other producers of statistics by simplifying the language and elaborating on the motivations. Improving the brand/reputation through official statistics label is not sufficient to get access to data. More tangible benefits, e.g., getting access to international data is more interesting for them.

- Provision for the right to access to privately held data, e.g., on price data or electricity metres and a mechanism to penalize non-compliance with data sharing provisions should be added.

- Provisions for coordination among other producers, data holders and between data collections should be extended. NSOs should take more active role in setting up and maintaining administrative sources.

- There is a need to increase awareness of confidentiality principle and communicate it better. Current definition of confidentiality is too complex for the public.

- There is no mention of audits and how to accredit producers of official statistics. NSOs should have a right to conduct audits in other organizations which are parts of NSS – legal and methodological.

- Data stewardship concept is still rather new and there was no clear opinion whether it should be covered in the revised GLOS.

- Including very specific good practices/examples may not be very useful as a lot depends on constitutional setting of the specific countries.

The session concluded that:

- The GLOS and *CES Guidance on Modernizing Statistical Legislation* have been useful in updating, revising or developing a national statistical legislation in countries.

- There is no need to completely rewrite the generic law but to add or expand/improve certain elements. No provisions should be deleted.
• The explanatory notes from the GLOS and Guidance should be merged into one document, which explains also what is needed in addition to the law, e.g., social license, cooperation and partnership with other stakeholders.

• A good balance between being generic and specific guidance needs to be sought, considering the diversity of circumstances in the countries and the need to be easy to use in practice.

• Additional resources are needed about communication along the process of revising legislation – how to explain the need and relevance of the legal provisions to the general public, parliament, other stakeholders – and bylaws: memorandums of understanding (MoUs), codes of practice etc.

• The world is changing and the role of NSOs is changing – a regular review schedule could be agreed.

Session 2: Implementing and enforcing statistical legislation

Documents: Experience of Armenia, Experience of Republic of Moldova, Experience of Kyrgyzstan, Experience of Norway – the Norwegian Statistics Act: a framework for the national statistical system, Updated Model Law – a revised GLOS shaped by practical experience and the global context (UNSD)

9. Session 2 included presentations from Armenia, Republic of Moldova, Kyrgyzstan and Norway of their national experiences with implementing and enforcing statistical legislation. The last presentation from UNSD highlighted the changes to the GLOS that were proposed when the generic law was used in countries from other regions.

10. In the discussion, the following points were made:

• The relationship with other agencies or departments producing statistics is a challenge in the implementation and is not sufficiently well covered in the guidelines.

• Position of NSOs in the administration and its implication for decisions regarding statistical programme and availability of resources should be elaborated – who provides the budget, what influence this institution has over statistical programme, who else is consulted and in what way.

• In particular, sources of funding for new work and possibility of payment by other departments for additional statistics and services should be explored.

• Quality reviews and network for methodological support can be meaningful ways of engaging between NSOs and other producers but resource limitations can be a problem.

11. In breakout groups, the participants discussed what information should be collected from countries who used GLOS to revise their legislation for the review process, what new developments should be anticipated revising the GLOS and what advice could be given to the countries using the GLOS in the future:

• Other sources, e.g., peer review reports, should have many recommendations for improvements to the national legislation and should be consulted in the review process.

• A questionnaire to countries which implemented GLOS could contain mini-self-assessment of the GLOS chapters, but should be kept simple. Examples of questions from the Global Assessment questionnaire could be looked at.

• Particular aspects to ask about:
  • How countries got support for the change in the legal act
  • Issues related to confidentiality and how they can be addressed
  • Role of statistical council, as it varies from country to country, different roles and different functions
• What motivation has been used to get national authorities on board
• How countries are tracking user satisfaction to ensure their relevance
• Access to administrative registers held by other entities

• Proposed advice to the countries that intend to use the GLOS:
  • It is not needed to copy everything but is good to have a reference to all the elements in the national system.
  • It is very useful to consult other national legal acts and ask international organizations about the best practices.
  • It may be useful to learn from countries who have similar statistical system, but getting inspiration from countries that are different can also be useful.
  • It is very important to enforce the provisions with regard to the access to data sources but it has to be a win-win situation.
  • Advise on the position of NSOs in the administrative hierarchy and more detailed statistical programme with classification of statistical operations could be proposed.
  • Best practices should be described using simple, plain language.

12. The session concluded that:
  • The GLOS helped countries introduce necessary changes in the law when the opportunity arose.
  • Implementation of the law continues to be challenging so it is important to provide a discussion like this; even in countries with different organization of the system, there are many common issues, so learning from each other is very helpful.
  • More support is needed in the area of advocacy and communication of the importance of the provisions in simple terms to users, civil society, governments; national events can be helpful in this regard.

Closing

13. In the closing of the workshop, all participants expressed their high appreciation of the opportunity to exchange experiences and requested that more workshops like this are organized in the future. An idea for the future could be to also have some events involving other stakeholders, such as ministries. The organizers thanked all participants for their active engagement, excellent contributions and a productive discussion.

14. UNECE informed that a Steering Group on Statistical Legislation was recently established and will be informed about the outcome of the workshop and the issues identified by the workshop participants. The Steering Group will oversee the GLOS review process, decide on the next steps and set up a review process of the GLOS and the Guidance. The workshop participants were invited to contact UNECE if they would like to participate actively in the review.