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## **ENHANCING INTERNATIONAL STATISTICS**

Prepared by the Draft Team

### **Background**

1. The role of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA), established in September 2002, is the coordination and improvement of the international statistical system at the level of professional statisticians working in the secretariats of international and supra-national organizations.
2. In its second meeting (Geneva, September 2003) the CCSA discussed a report “Towards a Statistical System” (written by ECE). Committee members agreed that, to improve International Statistics (i.e. statistics collected, developed and disseminated by international and supranational organizations<sup>1</sup>), there is a need to further enhance the way in which international organizations (IOs) carry out their statistical activities, as well as current international cooperation and coordination arrangements. In particular, it was agreed that the development of the international statistical system could benefit from common principles for conducting statistical activities, suggested practices to improve relationships among IOs, better statistical standards, shared technical infrastructures, training initiatives to improve statistical skills of statisticians working in IOs, etc.
3. This paper highlights some actions to be undertaken over the next few years by the community of international organisations involved in the collection, production and dissemination of statistics.

### **Good practices to improve International Statistics**

4. Statistics are essential for sustainable economic and social development and public trust in official statistics is anchored in professional independence and impartiality of statisticians, their use of scientific and transparent methods and equal access for all to official statistical information. These concepts underpin the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, which was adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission, in its Special Session of 11-15 April 1994, and the Declaration of Good Practices in Technical Cooperation in Statistics, adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission in its 30th Session of 1-5 March 1999.

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforth called “international organizations”.

5. Members of CCSA felt that similar principles and practices could be useful to international organisations when conducting their statistical activities. Moreover, statistical coordination and cooperation among international organizations would be facilitated if their statistical work follows commonly understood good practices. Consequently, the CCSA has identified some of these practices, using as reference framework some principles based on the Fundamental Principles for Official Statistics. These principles and practices are presented in Annex 1.

### **Proposed Actions by International Organizations**

6. The principles and practices described in Annex 1 are considered by the CCSA as useful for the implementation of statistical activities in international organizations. The CCSA recognizes that the mandate and governance of individual international organizations may be such that not all these principles and practices may be applicable under current circumstances, even though they can be used for future improvements. Members in their professional capacity however appreciate the value of implementing these principles and practices within their organizations, to the extent that this is possible.

7. Therefore, all international organizations, whether members of the CCSA or not, are encouraged to review their current practices in relation to these principles and practices within their legal, institutional and organizational frameworks. In particular, it would be helpful if international organizations were to lodge on their websites a statement setting out the practices they follow in their particular organizations for the information of other members, and for the international statistical community more generally.<sup>2</sup>

8. In addition, the CCSA has identified the following actions for further strengthening of cooperation and coordination of the statistical activities carried out by international organisations :

- Developing a quality assurance framework for statistical activities in international organizations. The CCSA will develop such a framework and will propose to international organizations its use and the dissemination of information about its application on a website;
- Strengthening the co-operation among international organizations in developing technical infrastructures for data and metadata collection and sharing (an example being the SDMX - Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange initiative);

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<sup>2</sup> It is noted that many important international organizations having significant statistical activities are not yet members of CCSA (examples include the European Central Bank, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and regional development banks.) These organizations are also encouraged to lodge statements of their statistical practices on their websites.

- Developing programmes to develop professional skills of statisticians working in international organizations.

9. A report on the progress of such initiatives will be presented at the 2006 meeting of the Statistical Commission.

## **Annex 1 - Principles and practices for international statistics**

### **1) High quality international statistics, accessible for all, are a fundamental element of global information systems**

Good practices include:

- Having regular consultations with key users both inside and outside the relevant organisation to ascertain that their needs are met
- Periodic review of statistical programmes to ensure their relevance
- Compiling and disseminating international statistics based on impartiality
- Providing equal access to statistics for all users
- Ensuring free public accessibility of key statistics

### **2) To maintain the trust in international statistics, their production is to be impartial and strictly based on the highest professional standards**

Good practices include:

- Using strictly professional considerations for decisions on methodology, terminology and data presentation
- Developing and using professional codes of conduct
- Making a clear distinction, in statistical publications, between statistical and analytical comments on the one hand and policy-prescriptive and advocacy comments on the other

### **3) The public has a right to be informed about the mandates for the statistical work of the organisations**

Good practices include:

- Making decisions about statistical work programmes publicly available
- Making documents for and reports of statistical meetings publicly available

### **4) Concepts, definitions, classifications, sources, methods and procedures employed in the production of international statistics are chosen to meet professional scientific standards and are made transparent for the users**

Good practices include:

- Aiming continuously to introduce methodological improvements and systems to manage and improve the quality and transparency of statistics

- Enhancing the professional level of staff by encouraging them to attend training courses, to do analytical work, to publish scientific papers and to participate in seminars and conferences.
- Documenting the concepts, definitions and classifications, as well as data collection and processing procedures used and the quality assessments carried out and making this information publicly accessible
- Documenting how data are collected, processed and disseminated, including information about editing mechanisms applied to country data
- Giving credit, in the dissemination of international statistics, to the original source and using agreed quotation standards when re-using statistics originally collected by others
- Making officially agreed standards publicly available

**5) Sources and methods for data collection are appropriately chosen to ensure timeliness and other aspects of quality, to be cost-efficient and to minimise the reporting burden for data providers**

Good practices include:

- Facilitating the provision of data by countries
- Working systematically on the improvement of the timeliness of international statistics
- Periodic review of statistical programmes to minimise the burden on data providers
- Sharing collected data with other organisations and collecting data jointly where appropriate
- Contributing to an integrated presentation of statistical programmes, including data collection plans, thereby making gaps or overlaps clearly visible
- Ensuring that national statistical offices and other national organisations for official statistics are duly involved and advocating that the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics are applied when data are collected in countries

**6) Individual data collected about natural persons and legal entities, or about small aggregates that are subject to national confidentiality rules, are to be kept strictly confidential and are to be used exclusively for statistical purposes or for purposes mandated by legislations**

Good practices include:

- Putting measures in place to prevent the direct or indirect disclosure of data on persons, households, businesses and other individual respondents
- Developing a framework describing methods and procedures to provide sets of anonymous micro-data for further analysis by bona fide researchers, maintaining the requirements of confidentiality

**7) Erroneous interpretation and misuse of statistics are to be immediately appropriately addressed**

Good practices include:

- Responding to perceived erroneous interpretation and misuse of statistics
- Enhancing the use of statistics by developing educational material for important user groups

**8) Standards for national and international statistics are to be developed on the basis of sound professional criteria, while also meeting the test of practical utility and feasibility**

Good practices include:

- Systematically involving national statistical offices and other national organisations for official statistics in the development of international statistical programmes, including the development and promulgation of methods, standards and good practices
- Ensuring that decisions on such standards are free from conflicts of interest, and are perceived to be so
- Advising countries on implementation issues concerning international standards
- Monitoring the implementation of agreed standards

**9) Coordination of international statistical programmes is essential to strengthen the quality, coherence and governance of international statistics, and avoiding duplication of work**

Good practices include:

- Designating one or more statistical units to implement statistical programmes, including one unit that coordinates the statistical work of the organisation and represents the organisation in international statistical meetings
- Participating in international statistical meetings and bilateral and multilateral consultations whenever necessary
- Working systematically towards agreements about common concepts, classifications, standards and methods
- Working systematically towards agreement on which series to consider as authoritative for each important set of statistics
- Coordinating technical cooperation activities with countries between donors and between different organisations in the national statistical system to avoid duplication of effort and to encourage complementarities and synergy

**10) Bilateral and multilateral cooperation in statistics contribute to the professional growth of the statisticians involved and to the improvement of statistics in the organisations and in countries**

Good practices include:

- Cooperating and sharing knowledge among international organisations and with countries and regions to further develop national and regional statistical systems
- Basing cooperation projects on user requirements, promoting full participation of the main stakeholders, taking account of local circumstances and stage of statistical development
- Empowering recipient national statistical systems and governments to take the lead
- Advocating the implementation of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics in countries
- Setting cooperation projects within a balanced overall strategic framework for national development of official statistics