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**The UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics:
Experience of Thirty Years
Actions to Strengthen Implementation**

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Background: The lecturer



- Hallgrímur Snorrason, born 1947, Icelandic
- Educated in Iceland, Scotland and Sweden – economics and statistics
- Director General of Statistics Iceland 1985-2007
- Active participant in international statistical cooperation – Nordic, EFTA, CES (UNECE), UN Statistical Commission, European Union (European Statistical System), IAOS (President 1993-1995), ISI (Vice-President 2009-2013)
- Consultant/lecturer in official statistics (e.g. in Baltic, Balkan, African and Arab countries, Ukraine, Greece; work for EFTA, Eurostat, World Bank, IMF, Nordic NSIs, GCC-Stat, UNSD)
- Team leader (Slovenia, Spain, UK, Poland, Romania) in the 2014-2015 Eurostat round of Peer Reviews of NSIs of the ESS

Milestones of the Fundamental Principles



- 1990-1991 – developed by a group of European statisticians and the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) of the UN Economic Commission of Europe
- 1991 – adopted by the CES
- 1992 – adopted at the ministerial level by the UNECE
- 1994 – adopted by the UN Statistical Commission (principles unchanged, revised preamble)
- 2013 – resolution by the UN Economic and Social Commission endorsing the Principles and recommending them to the GA
- 2014 – resolution by the UN General Assembly endorsing the FPOS

Reasons for the Fundamental Principles



- Turning point in Europe around 1990 – break-down of the Soviet Union, emergence of new independent states
- Two international statistical systems in Europe at that time
 - The system organised around market economic systems
 - The system organised around centrally planned economic and social systems of the Soviet Union and similar countries
- The break-down of the centrally planned government systems of Eastern Europe led to the break-down of their statistical systems and eroded trust their official statistics
- Basic task – to recreate trust in official statistics by establishing basic international principles for official statistical operations

What are the 10 Principles – their content



1. Obligation of government (official statistical agencies) to compile official statistics and make them available to the public
2. Statistical agencies (NSOs) shall determine their methods and procedures according to strictly professional considerations, including scientific principles and professional ethics
3. Statistical agencies need to present their information according to scientific standards on the sources, methods, and procedures
4. Statistical agencies are entitled to comment on erroneous interpretation and misuse of statistics
5. Data for statistical purposes may be drawn from all kinds of sources, be they surveys or administrative records

What are the 10 Principles – their content



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.
7. The laws, regulations and measures under which the statistical systems operate are to be made public.
8. Coordination among statistical agencies within countries is essential.
9. Importance of using international concepts, methods, classifications etc.
10. Importance of bilateral and multilateral coordination in statistics.

Whom do the FPOS address?



- The Fundamental Principles contain messages for four different parties:
 - Authorities – as they contain stipulations on the basis and working conditions for official statistical activities
 - Statisticians/statistical staff – the FPOS give effective and decisive guidance on professionalism and impartiality in statistical work
 - Respondents/data providers – as they stipulate that data is only collected and utilised for good statistical purposes
 - Users of official statistics – the FPOS form a regulatory framework which is useful for assessment of official statistical activities and outputs (quality, purpose, practices and other issues)

Application of the Principles



- The UN Fundamental Principles are comprehensive and indisputable, as a whole and individually
- Initial implementation may present problems but once implemented they are not difficult to follow and respect – are effective guidelines
- Professional autonomy of the NSI is of paramount importance
- Perhaps the main principle: Confidentiality – statistical source data is used solely for statistical purposes
- Applying the Fundamental Principles is not sufficient – their application must be publicly proclaimed
- Important to apply international standards, methods and best practices in order to ensure quality, usefulness and development

Implementation of the Principles



- The Principles were implemented quite quickly in most of the new „democracies“ – were written into their statistical laws. Became guidelines for the reorganised NSOs.
- Many other countries quickly realised their significance and applicability. When NSOs started to develop websites around 1995, the Principles were among the first items posted in many countries.
- The FPOS greatly influenced, became the backbone of laws, codes and charters, e.g. Data Dissemination Standards of the IMF, the European statistical legislation (1997), the ESS CoP (2005), the African Charter on Statistics (2009), and the Principles Governing International Statistical Activities (2005).
- The Principles have been written into statistical laws of many countries.

Current challenges related to the FPOS



- The FPOS have yet to be implemented in several countries – urgent need to identify non- and partial implementation and propose measures to encourage and support implementation
- In some countries, the FPOS have been introduced in laws and regulations but are not respected or are being breached – these cases need to be identified and corrective measures proposed
- The feasibility of applying the FPOS as basis for utilisation of non-traditional data sources should be pursued (SDG indic.)
- The suitability/feasibility of extending the application of some of the FPOS to non-official statistics might be examined

30th/10th Anniversaries of the FPOS in 2024



- The UN plans to use this occasion to revive the discussion on the importance of sound official statistics and the FPOS
- No real discussion of changing the FPOS – they are forceful, well-focused, have proved invaluable
- Implementation is not universal and, although implemented and embedded in law, is weak or non-existent in several countries
- Main point of discussion, main task – how to strengthen understanding, observation and implementation
- Also some interest in investigating if some of the Principles can be extended to privately produced statistics, private producers

Proposed activities in 2023-2024 (1)



- Activities to map and support implementation & compliance:
 1. UNSD and regional commissions take stock of implementation and compliance
 2. The collected information be used to increase awareness and advocate implementation
 3. UNSD with regional commissions and other partners be encouraged to prepare and organize country-specific actions to promote full implementation and compliance
 4. Findings and outcomes of the stock-taking and related activities to be reported to the UNSC

Proposed activities in 2023-2024 (2)



- Activities to increase awareness and strengthen implementation:
 1. Conducting webinars and workshops (making use of the model of the ECE in 2022)
 2. Identifying international and regional statistical conferences where the issue of the FPOS might be discussed – e.g. focusing on their applicability and importance, as a whole or in different settings or processes of the statistical process
 3. Reviewing and revising the available Implementation Guidelines for the FPOS to enhance their focus, relevance and applicability as well as usefulness for awareness and training

Proposed activities in 2023-2024 (3)



- Establishing a Board on implementation and compliance:
 - Should be independent but report to the UNSC
 - Should advise the UNSC and countries
 - The Board should cooperate with the UNSD and regional commissions – might also cooperate with related international partners
 - The Board should be mandated to investigate and take supportive measures
 - Might be composed of (max) 10-12 independent experts in official statistics, such as former heads of NSOs and regional bodies, observing appropriate regional balance

Commemoration of anniversaries in 2024



- Activities linked to the 55th Session of the UNSC in 2024:
 - Workshops on different aspects of the FPOS
 - Experience of applying the FPOS by NSOs and other producers of official statistics
 - Applicability of the FPOS in various contexts and settings (such as using different data sources, comp. SDC indicators)
 - Implementation and compliance issues
 - Special commemorative session with appropriate speeches by key producers and users
- Commemorative programme to include a special event during the 2024 session of the General Assembly

Suggested points for discussion



- Your experience of implementing and applying the Principles – what challenges remain?
- Proposed activities to map/support implementation/compliance
 - Stock-taking, advocacy actions, country-specific actions
- Proposed activities to increase awareness and strengthen implementation
 - Webinars and workshops, revising the implementation guidelines
- Proposed Board on implementation and compliance
 - Its role to advise the UNSC and relevant countries, its mandate to take investigative and supporting actions, its composition
- Commemoration of anniversaries in 2024

Coherence through coordinating the NSS



Thank you for your attention