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Setting the Scope of Social Statistics**

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Development of social statistics and statistical capacity building *

by

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I. Introduction

1. Like modern social and economic societies, Slovenia as a young state has two principal objectives: to have happy and satisfied citizens and to provide such economic and social conditions that shall bring the satisfaction. Therefore, the rights and obligations have to be properly distributed; phenomena and circumstances relating to individuals and businesses have to be measured; rules have to be determined – at least in a statistical way. Policies that are linked to these objectives shall have solid foundations and shall be monitored by the domestic and the international democratic measurements in which national statistics plays an important role.

2. National statistics is supposed to be independent, professional and consistent. The policies have to be continuously monitored and compared internationally. National statistics shall enable professionally correct and democratic decision-making in the country and shall support development planning and as well actions initiated either by residents, by domestic or foreign investors or those businesses that are interested in or concerned about the development of Slovenia. The language and methods of statistics shall facilitate businesses and others in understanding competition in a global environment.

3. Slovenian national statistics' mission has been determined. It concentrates on satisfying the needs of all users and on maintaining trust and confidence in the work of the producers of official statistics. SORS¹ and all authorised producers are fully aware of their responsibilities. This is especially important in dynamic times, as Slovenia is in the process of being incorporated into the European Community, which has already accepted statistics as a tool and source for governing the societies. SORS realize that almost each statistical calculation or indicator serves as the basis for concrete actions: for determining the rights and obligations at the level of businesses or of a person. Therefore, the Statistical Office and other producers of official statistics continuously strive to improve

¹ The Statistical Office of the Republic Slovenia

the quality of their work, to improve the procedures and to shorten the data dissemination deadlines – all in accordance with the agreed international statistical principles².

4. The above stated text clearly shows SORS' awareness of the importance and responsibility of statistics in a democratic and market economy for equal distribution of rights and obligations in society. Responsibility lies in the first place in providing the high quality data and safeguarding the independent status of the institution and maintenance of a high level of professionalism of the staff. It is valid for all fields of statistics. However, social statistics has some specific issues, which have to be taken into account:

- A part of social statistics is in many offices at least partly produced outside of NSI's, which implies problems of neutrality, comparability and overall quality authorisation;
- Social statistics has been considered as a lower priority in ESS³ and consequently in acceding countries like Slovenia. The reason lies in the political preference for monetary and economic issues. However, the latest policy documents, like the Lisbon Strategy, are putting more emphasis on social indicators.

II. Social statistics and their linkage to policy needs

5. SORS main mission is to respond to emerging user needs in a timely manner with relevant statistics. Therefore the methodology of mid-term and yearly programming was revised in 1999. In the Yearly Programme of Statistical Surveys for 2000-2003, besides the wide consultation process in Statistical Council and Statistical Advisory Committees, statistical implications were estimated, through the study of the policy documents (Strategy for economic development, National programme of the adoption of EU legislation and related documents). The same applies for the current mid-term statistical programme 2003-2007. Linking national social statistics to national development plans, which are in the case of Slovenia strongly oriented towards EU integration, is a very demanding job for subject-matter statisticians. It requires in-depth knowledge of strategic policy documents and anticipation of user needs well in advance. Furthermore it also

² Text taken from introduction message form Director General Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia in presenting the Slovenian Statistical System, <http://www.stat.si/sursnf/o-surs-e.htm> and adapted by the author.

requires active participation of the statisticians in the drafting phase of those documents in order to be able to propose the suitable monitoring tools as well as statistical indicators to be produced for estimating the success of the policy being applied. Good co-operation with the government and other public authorities in preparation of legislation is of great importance. SORS has a legal obligation and opportunity to give an opinion on statistical issues. The Director General of SORS, being a member of governmental committees, has the complete overview on all documents prepared within the government.

III. Statistical co-ordination among various producers of social statistics.

6. When we are discussing statistical co-ordination we have to keep in mind that it takes place at different interconnected levels:

- At national level the co-ordination between different producers of statistics is provided by the national statistical office based on the National Statistics Act and the statistical programming tools such as the mid-term and yearly programmes of statistical surveys.
- At international level the tools like Integrated Presentation of Statistical Programmes as well as some methodological frameworks like national accounts proved to be a good co-ordination tool between different international institutions. At least it helps a lot to make the work of different institutions transparent to data producers and users.
- At supranational level, like in the ESS, the co-ordination tools are based on legislation besides the programming documents and gentlemen's agreements. The regulations have direct applicability into the national statistical systems. The SPC⁴ has a comitology role. The task forces and working groups are important for professional discussion and preparation of proposals.

7. In Slovenia besides SORS there are other authorised producers of official statistics. The co-ordination of the statistical system is one of the tasks of SORS defined by the National Statistics Act, http://www.stat.si/surnsf/drz_stat-e.htm. Authorised producers are defined by the Mid-term Statistical Programme. In the current MPSS⁵ 2003-2007, the

³ European Statistical System

⁴ The Statistical Programme Committee

⁵ Mid-term Programme of Statistical Surveys

part of social statistics is composed of social and demographic statistics, labour market statistics, level of living statistics, statistics on public services (education, R&D, culture, social benefits and transfers) which are under responsibility of SORS and health statistics by Institute of Public Health, statistics on pensions by the Pension Fund, Statistics on social security by Office for Social Security, part of labour market statistics by Office for Unemployment. It can be concluded that with the exception of health statistics the core of social statistics is conducted by SORS.

8. SORS has been playing the co-ordination role mainly through putting into place standard classifications e.g. Standard Classification of Activities based on NACE-Rev.1, Standard Classification of Occupations based on ISCO-88⁶, Standard Classification of Territorial Units based on NUTS⁷. SORS is currently leading development work on the System of Educational Classifications based on ISCED⁸.

IV. Complementary use of different sources of data

9. SORS and other authorised producers of official statistics, based on legislation, make use of identifiable individual data from various official and other administrative data collections in the public and private sector free of charge. Due to differences between the various national registration systems, the use of administrative records for statistical purposes has to be backed with very good knowledge on the sources used. This is particularly important when we use survey data in combination with administrative data. In the project STAT 2000⁹, SORS has experienced the so-called synthetic and statistical matching that reduced the burden of very demanding structural earnings survey data. Use of administrative sources in the processes of statistical editing improves the quality of the results and reduces the costs of all parties involved.

⁶ International Standard Classification on Occupations

⁷ Nomenclature Universelle Territoriale de Statistique

⁸ International Standard Classification on Education

⁹ EU funded project covering amongst others the research for the Survey on Structure of Earnings

V. Harmonisation of concepts, definitions and classifications within and among fields

10. Harmonisation of concepts, definitions and classifications has been one of the most important objectives of the Slovenian statistical system in its integration process with EU National standard classifications in Slovenia. It is important to mention that the National Statistics Act stipulates that the classifications to be used as national standards be laid down by Governmental decrees and be used in statistical as well as in administrative data collections. The use of national standards in administrative data collections makes them a better source for statistical purposes.

VI. Producer-user collaboration.

11. Producer-user collaboration has a long tradition in SORS. It goes back to the eighties when the so-called statistical advisory committees were established for different fields of statistics. The National Statistics Act in 1995 established the Statistical advisory committees¹⁰ as a legal part of Slovenian statistical system. The National Statistics Act also established the Statistical Council¹¹ as the highest professional advisory body in the national statistical system. Even though its role is of an advisory nature, it is highly respected due to the authority of the members of the council. The current president of the council is a member of Slovenian Parliament. The members are representatives of: Parliament, Slovenian Government, Bank of Slovenia, employers and workers organisations, judiciary, statistical experts from academia and SORS. The Director General of SORS cannot be the president of the Statistical Council. The Statistical Council meets several times a year, particularly last year when the proposal for the mid-term programme 2003-2007 was prepared.

12. Statistical advisory committees are established by SORS. The members are composed of users (academia, public and government users, businesses and others). Currently there are 24 statistical advisory committees for different fields of statistics with around 420 members, of which 78 are representatives of SORS. The Secretary of the advisory

¹⁰ The rules of procedure and minutes of the meetings on http://www.stat.si/sursnf/drz_stat-s.htm

¹¹ Rules of procedure and minutes of the meetings available in Slovene on http://www.stat.si/sursnf/drz_stat-s.htm

committee is a member from SORS but the President is always from another institution. The meetings take place at least once a year when the proposal for the annual statistical programme is discussed. There are also working groups to solve special issues.

13. In the field of social statistics there are statistical advisory committees for: labour market, crime, level of living, population, education and training, R&D and culture statistics. There are also several others dealing with cross-cutting issues related to social spheres such as: tax, infrastructure registers and territorial aspects of statistical information.

14. SORS has been organising the yearly meeting of users, producers and academia called “Statistical days in Radenci (Slovenia)” for 12 years. During the past several years there were participants from more than 30 different countries and international organisations. This year, the 13th “Statistical Days” will be held from 24-26 November and the title is to be “Statistics as a tool and source for users’ knowledge creation”.

VII. Strategies for promoting and maximizing the use of statistics for policy planning.

15. Openness of the institution towards the users and data providers (primary and secondary sources) plays a vital role in creating a users demand for good quality statistics on one hand and the trust and resource support from all stakeholders on the other hand. Several issues can be discussed:

- sound statistical legislation as a precondition for independence of institutional arrangement of statistics as well as their professional integrity;
- proactive role in the preparation of legislation and policy documents which includes co-operation with the public and governmental institution, and in governmental and parliamentary procedures;
- segmentation of users in order to treat them according to their needs and expectations;
- training of users, especially analytical policy groups who are helping legislators to prepare the good legislation and bring it into force;
- participation of users in programming processes of statistical activities to be able to anticipate the users needs;

- participation of users in working groups and task forces creating multi-knowledge and multi-institutional groups thus helping to build professional integrity of all parties involved as well as the development of professional and social networks;
- yearly meetings of users and producers;
- defining priorities in relationship to the rising demands and shrinking resources;
- partnerships between institutions in public sector as well with businesses;
- culture of evaluation within the institution leading to quality improvements;
- the role of the NSI's in importing international standards to the national administrative and statistical environment;
- how to get access to administrative data;
- capacity building (management, legislation), to deal with the international technical assistance provided.

VIII. Conclusions

16. Statistics is an important tool of democracy. Therefore in a democracy there should be a substantial interest for high quality of statistics. However, in certain countries the lack of data or the poor quality of data is caused by the disinterest of the stakeholders. The statistical community should constantly monitor the quality of statistics (including the gaps) and support the local statisticians in their effort to improve this quality. They can achieve this by increasing the awareness of the stakeholders about the importance of good statistics.

17. Studying the gaps and the quality of data provided throughout the world community have to be subject to continuous discussion at the highest level of statistical authorities such as the Statistical Commission of the UN. The message concerning the importance of the quality of statistical information for political dialog at all levels should be sent to politicians.

18. New EU members such as Slovenia showed the community that it takes a long-term effort to achieve EU comparable statistics. Statistics was not a subject of negotiations but a prerequisite for the accession. Institutional strengthening and capacity building have

been preconditions for the quality of data produced. Especially good management of NSI's is a very important issue.

19. For the last ten years the emphasis in ESS was on economic statistics. But with the enlargement process in EU, the social structure becomes more complex. Together with the Lisbon Strategy that states that the EU will be a knowledge based and the most dynamic and competitive society, this raises the importance of social statistics.

20. Phenomena in the present global society are interlinked. Instead of discussing the scope of social or any other part of the statistics we may focus on the cross-sectional approach. User needs are becoming more complex every day as a consequence of living in a knowledge based society. It will also require re-thinking the traditional division between the social, economic and environmental statistics.