

# National Statistics Office

## Reducing the Burden on Data Providers: The Way Forward

1. Section 7 (b) of the Malta Statistics Authority Act states that one of the functions of the Authority is “to regulate and to generally supervise the production of official statistics in accordance with international requirements and standards”. This regulatory and supervisory function is first and foremost to be exercised in relation to the work carried out by the National Statistics Office.
2. The primary function of the National Statistics Office is to collect, compile and release official statistics that are produced “subject to the principles of reliability, objectivity, relevance, statistical confidentiality, transparency, specificity and proportionality” (Section 10(2)(b)). Three of the key principles here are “relevance”, “specificity” and “proportionality.” In the context of the present policy paper, these principles mean that the NSO should ensure that all data collection projects are:

- (a) relevant to the objectives to be achieved;
- (b) specific to the objectives to be achieved and hence properly and clearly linked to actual requirements;
- (c) tailored in a manner that ensures a balance between actual data requirements and the data collection and compilation project.

In practice these principles make it incumbent on the NSO to adopt and maintain data collection practices that are **reasonable in the context of its actual data requirements and certainly not in excess of them.**

3. The NSO is also bound by the *Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics* in the Region of the Economic Commission for Europe as adopted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe on 15 April 1992. These principles state, among other things, that “data for statistical purposes may be drawn from all types of sources, be they statistical surveys or administrative records. Statistical agencies are to choose the source with regard to quality, timeliness, costs and the burden on respondents.”
4. In the context of the above, and ever conscious of the increasing response burdens, including significant resource allocations and costs, that are being placed on data providers, the NSO shall:
  - (a) introduce an ongoing review process of all current data collection practices in order to avoid overlap or duplication;
  - (b) critically review all data collection programmes in place so as to

validate and assess their continued relevance to actual requirements and current objectives;

(c) endeavour to limit the number of new censuses and surveys and undertake not to introduce new ones unless absolutely necessary;

(d) explore and evaluate the increased use of administrative records as alternative sources of data to censuses and surveys;

(e) undertake to create the right synergies between the different public sector data collection projects in order to ensure maximum utilisation of the outputs from such projects, thereby reducing response burdens;

(f) formulate questionnaires that are clear and concise in order to minimise response difficulties and the time spent by respondents in answering them;

(g) keep to a minimum the number of data variables to be collected in questionnaires and ensure their strict relevance and proportionality to actual information needs;

(h) introduce technologies that reduce the number of paper questionnaires, thereby rendering the data collection process more efficient and effective for both the data provider and the NSO.