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Forty-eighth session
7 – 10 March 2017
Item 3(b) of the provisional agenda
Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics

Background document
Available in English

English version

**Report of the Western Balkans and Turkey conference
on the transformative agenda for official statistics**

Prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division

**Western Balkans and Turkey Conference:
Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics**

12 October 2016

PGSC meeting, Zadar, Croatia

Co-organized by:

United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)
Statistical Office of the European Union (Eurostat)

With the support of:

European Free Trade Association (EFTA)
Croatian Bureau of Statistics

Final Report

Introduction and background information

The Western Balkans and Turkey (EU enlargement countries) Conference on a Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics (the Conference) was held on 12 October 2016 in Zadar, Croatia, in conjunction with the Eurostat *Policy Group on Statistical Cooperation* (PGSC) meeting (13-14 October 2016). This one-day event was part of a series of regional conferences on a Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other regional and national development policies and initiatives. It follows on from the outcome of the High-Level Global Conference organized by UNSD and Eurostat in January 2015 in New York and the recognition by the 46th and 47th sessions of the United Nations Statistical Commission¹ of the emerging demands for high-quality statistics and the need for modernization of national, regional, sub-regional and international statistical systems.

The Conference, organised jointly by Eurostat and UNSD with the support of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, aimed at taking stock of various regional and national ongoing and planned initiatives in relation to the five thematic areas of the Transformative Agenda: i) coordination; ii) communication and advocacy; iii) integration; iv) innovation; and v) capacity building and training. The Conference targeted chief statisticians and senior managers of national statistical offices from the Western Balkan countries and Turkey and other regional and bilateral partner organisations. Substantial time was assigned to group discussions and plenary interventions.

After an opening session that included presentations of the ESS Vision 2020 by Eurostat and of the Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics by UNSD, the Conference benefitted from contributions from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey. These presentations enlightened participants on regional and national challenges and good practices related to the modernisation of national statistical systems, and stimulated the deliberations in the breakout session. For the latter, the discussions were based around the following topics: i) Measuring and communicating the value of statistics in support of the modernisation and transformation of official statistics; ii) Mainstreaming technological development in data collection, processing and dissemination: good practices and challenges; iii) Developing a collective vision for advancing the transformation of statistics at regional and national level. The outcome and conclusions of the breakout sessions were discussed in plenary, commented by selected panellists, and moderated by Mr Marko Kristof, Director of the Croatian Bureau of Statistics.

Participants acknowledged the necessity to modernize and strengthen official statistics in order to respond more effectively and efficiently to existing and emerging user needs and in particular to gradually comply with European Union (EU) requirements and to address the data demand in relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It was noted however that statistical systems in the Western Balkans and Turkey have already begun their transformation process in the framework of the EU enlargement process and negotiations, and have benefitted from substantial financial and technical support from Eurostat, EFTA and other multilateral and bilateral partner organisations through various capacity building programmes and instruments. Countries in the region have undergone comprehensive global assessments and/or peer reviews of their respective national statistical system. These assessments and reviews were conducted to analyse the institutional, organisational and technical capacity of national statistical systems to produce high-quality statistics in compliance with international and European principles, guidelines and methodology, and in particular with the European statistics Code of Practice. Major issues and challenges were identified and recommendations for improvement were formulated and incorporated into national development plans and strategies.

Despite recent achievements in strengthening national statistical capacity in the region, in particular from an institutional perspective, participants reflected on how to formulate and implement at national and regional levels, strategies for the modernisation of official statistics based on efficient and robust

¹ <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/47th-session/documents/2016-4-Transformative-agenda-for-official-statistics-E.pdf>

statistical production processes using to the maximum extent, the potential of administrative data and other existing data sources, such as Big Data, aiming at improving quality, standardisation and interoperability. It was recognized that the transformation of national statistical systems in the region should rely on the ESS vision 2020² initiative, complemented by the outcome and tools proposed by the ECE High-level Group on the Modernisation of Official Statistics (HLG-MOS) and the Generic Law on Official Statistics (GLOS) recently endorsed by the Conference of European Statisticians. However, it was also emphasized that any modernisation strategies and related undertaking should duly take into account the level of maturity and readiness of national statistical systems in the region.

The drivers and opportunities for the transformation of official statistics are not fundamentally different from those identified in other regions, in particular Europe, but more specifically the following challenges and related actions were highlighted during the concluding session:

Value of statistics, communication and advocacy

- A large consensus emerged that official statistics is a public good and as such does not need extensive branding in the sense of marketing, but rather to build on partnership and trust based on principles of professionalism and transparency.
- It was acknowledged that users should be put in the centre of any modernisation and transformation initiatives. The segmentation of the demand for statistical information calls for diversification of dissemination and communication channels, in particular for the younger generations, using social media extensively through mobile communication technologies.
- It was mentioned that the value of official statistics must be assessed through the lens of our “clients” and therefore value is strongly correlated with quality and trust. For this reason, communication that goes beyond traditional dissemination and openness are fundamental to better anticipate user needs and address their quality requirements.
- Effective communication strategies from producers of official statistics must also be extended through public and private dialogue to key partners such as the policy makers, the media, the academy and researchers, the civil society, business associations and professional societies. In that respect, it was stated that there is still a need to improve statistical literacy among the different user communities.
- Participants considered that in the medium and long run, the implementation of a sound communication strategy could secure, if not increase, the allocation of national resources for the production of official statistics.
- It was proposed to explore the possibility to develop common communication guidelines and tools across the region regarding the comparative advantages of official statistics in the framework of the European integration process and for the monitoring of global (2030 Agenda), regional and national development policies.

Mainstreaming technological development and alternative data sources

- It was stated that technological development and alternative data sources did not get as much attention recently as the institutional aspects of modernisation and transformation. There is a need to explore at regional and national level the potential of new technologies and data sources, including administrative data, for the production of official statistics with the aim of expanding the outreach of statistics, realising cost efficiencies, improving effectiveness, securing timeliness and data quality, as well as reducing response burden.
- Participants considered the possibility to use existing strategic and technical capacity building and coordination mechanisms in the region to promote, develop and mainstream innovative

² http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/7330775/7339647/ESS+vision+2020_V2/35911206-3968-4548-adcc-882e797d9ca4

technologies and tools for the production of official statistics such as user-friendly data extraction and visualization tools, and e-data collection and processing technologies. It was also acknowledged that the standardisation of statistical business architecture across the region would arouse the development of common technologies and tools for the production and dissemination of official statistics; noting however that some differences between national systems will always remain.

- It was mentioned that a mid to long term objective could be to create one or more regional centres in charge of maintaining and lending hardware and mobile devices for temporary deployment in the framework of specific data collection and processing activities such as population, housing, agricultural and business census operations. It was also suggested to consider the development of centralised repositories of open source software (e.g. seasonal adjustment, outlier detection and visualisation) with dedicated deployment and operational support.
- Participants acknowledged that modernisation is not only about technology but that this process needs to be supported by a cultural change within and across national statistical systems and requires the acquisition and development of the relevant human resources. Some organisational changes will also have to be considered within national statistical offices to promote, implement and monitor the transformation of the overall statistical system.

The way forward - developing a collective vision and actions

- Participants recognized that the momentum was right for addressing the need for modernization of official statistics, particularly in the context of the European integration and the 2030 Agenda, and for taking this opportunity to promote and maintain at regional and national level a high level political commitment to develop and sustain sound institutional and organisational frameworks and dedicated business architecture, including human, financial and technical resources, for the production of statistics.
- It was acknowledged that national statistical systems in the region may benefit from the ESS Vision 2020. Elements of the vision should be prioritized according to the level of maturity and needs of the countries in the Western Balkans and Turkey and could become an integral part of various capacity building activities conducted by Eurostat and other partners in the region.
- It was also mentioned that some recent initiatives and tools developed under the auspices of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) may be adapted to the regional context and gradually implemented. Among others, the outcome of the High-level Group on Modernisation of Official Statistics (HLG-MOS) and the Generic Law on Official Statistics (GLOS).
- Participants emphasized that peer reviews conducted at regular intervals in the region and recommendations translated into multiyear development programmes are excellent drivers for the transformation of official statistics. These reviews could in the future focus more on issues related to modernisation and standardisation of production processes, harnessing technological development and the potential of alternative data sources.
- It was proposed to use existing strategic and technical capacity building and coordination mechanisms in the region such as the *Budva Initiative* and the yearly management seminars to promote, share and mainstream innovative technologies and tools for the production of official statistics in the Western Balkans and Turkey. However, participants insisted on the fact that these opportunities must be complemented by more operational and technical capacity building events and activities at expert level.

The Western Balkans and Turkey Conference on a Transformative Agenda was followed by the Eurostat PGSC meeting. The latter also allowed some countries in the region to present recent developments and good practices that were relevant to some of the thematic areas of the Transformative Agenda. In particular, a presentation from Croatia illustrated the innovative approach of communication and dissemination adopted by the Croatian Bureau of Statistics based on mobile phone technology and social media.

Agenda

Wednesday, 12 October 2016

Opening (09:30 – 10:20)

- *Mr. Marko Krištof, Croatia* (10')
- *Ms. Claudia Junker, Eurostat* (20')
Including outline of the ESS 2020 Vision
- *Gabriel Gamez, UNSD* (20')
Including outline of the Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics

Session 1: Modernisation and transformation of official statistics – 10:20-12:30 Good practices and challenges

Chair: *Mr. Volker Täube, EFTA*

Presentations:

- *Ms. Lidija Kostovska, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia* (20')
Communication and advocacy
- *Ms. Gordana Radojević, Montenegro* (20')
Integrated business processes – advantages and challenges for a small country

Tea/coffee break (11:00-11:30)

- *Mr. Enver Tasti, Turkey* (20')
Integrated IT solution for data collection, processing and dissemination
- *Mr. Miladin Kovačević, Serbia* (20')
Partnership with data communities (holders of administrative data and big data, research communities and academia), open data initiative and access to microdata

Questions and Answers (20')

Lunch break (12:30-14:00)

Session 2: 14:00-15:15 Breakout session

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| Group 1 | Measuring and communicating the value of statistics in support of the modernisation and transformation of official statistics |
| Group 2 | Mainstreaming technological development in data collection, processing and dissemination: good practices and challenges |
| Group 3 | Developing a collective vision for advancing the transformation of statistics at global, regional and national level |

Tea/coffee break (15:15-15:45)

Session 3:
15:45-17:15 **Report from breakout session – Discussions - Conclusions**

Moderator: *Mr. Marko Krištof, Croatia*

Panellists:

- *Rapporteurs of the 3 groups from the breakout session (countries)*
- *Ms. Claudia Junker, Eurostat*
- *Mr. Gabriel Gamez, UNSD*

Closing 17:15

List of Participants

Country	Name	Position	Organisation e-mail address
Members and invited experts			
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	Ms Jasna SAMARDZIC	Head of international cooperation	
Croatia	Mr Marko KRIŠTOF	Director General	Central Bureau of Statistics kamenskim@dzs.hr
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	Ms Maja PEKEĆ		
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