

High Level Forum on Official Statistics

Data stewardship – a solution for official statistics’ predicament?

Monday, 2 March 2019, 3:00 – 6:00 pm

Venue: Conference Room 4, Conference Building

Concept note and agenda

(updated 24 February 2020)

Concept note

Official statistics’ role as predominant producer of statistics and provider of information for policy making is being challenged in the new data ecosystem as new data actors emerge and data demands increase. New technologies allow an unprecedented level of recording, integration and analysis of data about human behaviors and overall societal trends. Data is the key component of many business models and has provided the basis for the creation of many of the most valuable companies on earths, which have been building huge and ever-increasing databases of individual data. Thus, there is now a fully established and rapidly growing marketplace for individual data.

Moreover, the increased need for timely and disaggregated data to respond to the data demands of the 2030 agenda has exposed the gaps in statistics from official statistical sources. New sources have the potential of filling these gaps and provide real time data on individual behavior and the environment that can drive targeted policy making for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

While the new data ecosystem provides opportunities for filling many of the data gaps, it also challenges the authority and leadership role of governments and statistical offices on data. Moreover, national statistical offices are often tied down by an underinvestment in and outdated use of technology, outdated legal frameworks and rules of data access and privacy restrictions. The urgent need has emerged to update the vision, strategy and role of statistical offices.

Statistical authorities have been responding to this challenge by stressing the value of official statistics as a trusted source of quality information, modernizing, re-tooling and integrating the data and statistics production processes, and expanding the provision of data, analysis and information to improve the impact of data. They have also launched numerous initiatives and new partnerships to integrate new data solutions and tools with traditional data sources. At the same time, leaders of national statistical offices are rethinking the overall role of official statistics in the new data ecosystem, addressing the challenges but also leveraging the new opportunities to utilize their offices’ competencies to make themselves not less but more relevant in the new data ecosystem and to obtain new mandates and an expanded role. Digital strategies for the national statistical office and national statistical system are being developed, envisioning the role of the statistical office as curator of official statistics, as a repository and custodian of government data and as able to utilize and integrate the new private data sources. Increasingly,

statistical offices appear to be well placed to take on the role as government data steward: The government data steward would be tasked with setting standards and guidelines for the collection, management and use of government data and with ensuring that government agencies adopt common capabilities. This will foster the development of a comprehensive and integrated government data system. Such system would facilitate the use of government data for public and private purposes while safeguarding confidentiality and data security.

The efforts of statistical offices are to be seen in connection with and are related to the overall efforts of governments to utilize data as the new “oil” in an information and technology-based economy and society. Many governments are rethinking data governance, most visibly in legal efforts to protect individual data and privacy but also with the objective to better utilize government and private data for policy making, policy execution and the delivery of government services. Governments are developing data and e-government strategies and are rethinking their institutional setup. Some have been or are considering creating a new government positions of chief data officer, chief data scientists or chief data steward. Other countries assign the responsibilities associated with these positions to existing structures within government.

This high-level forum provides an opportunity to discuss the new emerging data ecosystem and the possible roles of national statistical offices in this system, with the proposal of taking on the role as government data steward as a point of orientation. The keynote address will introduce the concept and emerging practice of data stewardship. Session 1 will present different approaches across countries. The concluding session 2 will discuss the future role of statistical offices in the new data ecosystem.

Agenda

Keynote: “Data stewardship in theory and practice in the overall context of digital government”, Mr. Mark Sowden, Government Statistician, New Zealand

Session 1: The evolving role of statistical offices: Data stewards and other approaches

(Round-table discussion)

Moderator:

- Jenna Slotin, Senior Director of Policy, Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data

Discussants:

- Yusuf Murangwa, Director General, National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda
- Gogita Todradze, Executive Director, National Statistics Office of Georgia
- Lisa Bersales, Professor at the University of the Philippines, Member of the Thematic Research Network on Data and Statistics (TReNDS)
- Mariana Kotzeva, Director-General of Eurostat

Session 2: Charting the way into the future: Different strategies or a clear path - Are national statistical offices ready?

(Guided panel discussion building on the discussion in session 1 and the keynote)

Chair:

- Maria-Francesca Spatolisano, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Special intervention: “A government view on data”, Lukas Bruhin, General Secretary of the Federal Department of Home Affairs, Switzerland

Panelists:

- Lukas Bruhin, General Secretary of the Federal Department of Home Affairs, Switzerland
- Anil Arora, Chief Statistician of Canada, CES Bureau
- Kaie Koskaru-Nelk, Deputy Director, Statistics Estonia
- Stefaan Verhulst, Co-Founder and Chief Research and Development Officer of the Governance Laboratory @NYU
