D.3. Characteristics of effective institutional arrangements

8.41. The United Nations Statistical Commission consistently encourages countries to ensure that institutional arrangements possess certain characteristics that enhance their effectiveness. These characteristics are of a fundamental importance to tourism statistics and include the following:

(a) Coverage by the totality of the collective responsibilities of the agencies involved in a given statistical domain of all the stages of the statistical process – from the identification of user needs through the collection of raw data to data compilation and dissemination and evaluation of disseminated statistics;

(b) An unambiguous definition of the rights and responsibilities of all involved agencies in order to avert misunderstandings, duplication of work or omission of some significant work elements;

(c) The laying out in proper fashion of the working arrangements between agencies in a memorandum of understanding (MoU) or a similar document[1]. An important benefit of the MoU is that it serves as a mechanism for informing agencies in advance about changes of administrative procedures or statistical processes which could affect the quality of the data used for the production of statistics, thereby making interagency cooperation more predictable;

(d) The informal agreements between the responsible units of the involved agencies are maintained to ensure necessary flexibility;

(e) Designation of a single body, e.g., the National Tourism Administration or the Interinstitutional Platform for Tourism Statistics, with a clear mandate to monitor and coordinate various aspects of the statistics production process resulting in official tourism statistics. The existence of such a body is also essential from the users’ perspective, as it provides a clear designation of a single source of official data and a point of contact for any enquires. This raises the users’ confidence in data quality and promotes a wider and more effective data use;

(f) Inclusion of the main user groups in the institutional arrangements and their active participation in setting and monitoring the production and dissemination of statistics.

8.42. The efficiency of institutional arrangements is further enhanced if the responsible body has an appropriate mandate and executes it effectively. In this connection, it is a good practice if the responsible body: (a) adopts a strategic approach to planning its work that involves multilevel planning activities and (b) implements efficient process management, beginning with the identification of data sources, followed by data collection and processing, and ending with dissemination of outputs in various user-friendly formats (see Box VIII.4).

Box VIII.4

Efficiency through use of regularly collected data

A statistical agency should not automatically initiate a new survey in response to every demand for information. Rather, it should systematically attempt to react to new demands by exploring how they might be satisfied using regularly collected data or, failing that, by examining whether the administrative records already in the hands of Government can address the new request, at least to some degree. Whether or not, or rather to what extent administrative records can be used to replace or to supplement statistical survey information, is a very complex issue and the answer also depends very much on specific national situations. Statisticians tend to be wary of the quality of administrative information, in terms of concept and coverage.

Nevertheless, the attractive features of administrative records are that they are to be collected or have been collected anyway. It is probably true in many countries that some administrative records, such as tax records, have a very good coverage of parts of the population, and that the rate of response is substantially better than that achieved by a statistical agency. Moreover, there is always the possibility of improving on the information yielded by those records by supplementing them with data obtained from a much smaller sample of respondents.


[1] A memorandum of understanding is a legal document that outlines the terms and details of an agreement among agencies, including each party’s requirements and responsibilities. See also IRTS 2008, para. 9.30. It should be noted that the documentation of the agencies’ responsibilities relevant to tourism statistics may be a part of a broader MoU among the concerned agencies, covering other areas of cooperation and other statistical domains.