B.1. Metadata: an overview of basic concepts and definitions

8.11. In statistics, metadata are data that describe statistical data, including the data sources and tools that were used (e.g., statistical standards and classifications, business registers and frames, statistical methods, procedures and software)[1]. The importance of metadata has been recognized by UNWTO since 2005 with the issuance of the publication entitled Tourism Statistics Metadata Project: General Guidelines for Documenting Tourism Statistics. In its Regional Capacity Building Programmes, UNWTO has consistently emphasized the importance of documenting existing national statistical processes, with three objectives in mind:

(a) To help each country develop good quality knowledge and evaluate the available data as a necessary step towards decision making related to setting up new observation processes;

(b) To provide users with information on the available tourism statistics and on the processes through which they have been obtained;

(c) To generate the information that is required to make international comparisons possible and meaningful.

Box VIII.2

The Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) standard

In 2008, at its thirtyninth session, the Statistical Commission reviewed the concepts and definitions compiled as part of the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) project and recognized and supported SDMX as the preferred standard for the exchange and sharing of data and metadata and encouraged its further implementation by national and international statistical organizations. See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2008, Supplement No. 4 (E/2008/24), chap. I, sect. B, decision 39/112. Pursuant to the Commission’s decision, the description of statistics metadata in general and of tourism statistics metadata in particular provided in this section is based on concepts and definitions found in the SDMX standard.

The definitions of many of the metadata related concepts referred to in this chapter can be found in SDMX content-oriented guidelines (2009), annex 4, entitled “Metadata common vocabulary”.

Source: Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX).

8.12. Metadata play a crucial role in the process of statistical production as they enable and facilitate the setting up of the process of statistical observation. Additionally, they promote the use, sharing, querying and understanding of statistical data over the different stages of collection, compilation and dissemination, and at their various levels of aggregation, thus ensuring that common standards and definitions are followed to the extent possible throughout the different stages of the production process in all related statistical domains. In this connection, countries are advised to treat the compilation of metadata, and their subsequent dissemination, as an integral part of the statistical process in any field of statistical work and promotes the standardization of compilation and dissemination of metadata. This advice is especially important when several organizations are involved in the process of statistical production, as is normally the case in tourism statistics.