C. Data and metadata dissemination

8.22. The importance of the dissemination of statistical information lies in the fact that the availability of official statistics to users is one of the bases for public confidence in good government, as such statistics can inform debate and decision-making both by Governments and by the wider community. This is highlighted in the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. Pursuant to these Principles, the dissemination of data and metadata should be carried out with great care and attention to the needs of users while at the same time ensuring adequate confidentiality of data providers.

8.23. Based on the recommendations of the Statistical Commission in respect of related statistical domains and on accumulated experiences, this Compilation Guide advises countries to adopt the following general good practices:

(a) Identify the variables to be disseminated on the basis of the recommendations contained in IRTS 2008. The elaboration of data variables provided in this Guide and user needs specific to the country should be given full consideration;

(b) Set the policy on timeliness of data and periodicity of dissemination of tourism statistics following the rules adopted in the national statistical system for shortterm and annual (structural) data dissemination. For example, in order to improve timeliness, it is a good practice to publish on a regular basis the provisional estimates of selected key tourism variables soon after the end of the reference period. Such estimates, by their very nature, are based on relatively limited data content and will be replaced by more accurate, albeit less timely, figures at a later date;

(c) Ensure equal treatment of all users and adequate user access. Data should be disseminated without preference to any national or international user group and made available in a userfriendly manner. Provision of access to data (especially data available online) should be made free of charge as much as possible. However, in cases where additional costs are significant (e.g., in the preparation of printed publications and customized data sets), data can be provided on a fee basis. In order to ensure that users are, in fact, provided with adequate access, countries are advised to periodically conduct user satisfaction surveys;

(d) Publish an advance release schedule. Users will have more confidence in the integrity of tourism statistics if those statistics are disseminated according to a published advanced release schedule. For major statistical releases, it is often helpful to organize press briefing events;

(e) Give due attention to a proper metadata dissemination. Users should be informed how to access and better understand the information on concepts, variables, classifications and statistical methods applied in producing statistical results;

(f) Ensure coherence and consistency of disseminated data (see Box VIII.1 for details);

(g) Build strong working relationships with the media. This will make it easier for journalists to report on tourism statistics in an accurate, timely and informative manner, thus ensuring its improved dissemination to the broader society;

(h) Assert the integrity and credibility of tourism statistics. It should be stressed that in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (see principle 4), the body responsible for official statistics is entitled to comment on erroneous interpretation and misuse of such statistics. Countries are advised to apply this principle in respect of tourism statistics, as necessary, to help users minimize the impact of such negative occurrences and assert the integrity and credibility of tourism statistics;

(i) Ensure statistical confidentiality. Statistical confidentiality refers to the protection of information on individual statistical units and should be differentiated from other forms of confidentiality under whose requirements information is not disseminated owing to other factors, for example, national security concerns. This Guide advises application of the rules on data confidentiality adopted in the national statistical system to the dissemination of tourism statistics and the use, as applicable, of the general international guidelines developed for statistical disclosure control of microdata. For example, any information deemed confidential should be reported in full detail at the next higher level of product or industry classification that adequately protects confidentiality;

(j) Make use of various formats and means of dissemination. Both data and metadata can be disseminated in various formats and by various means. In view of the diversity of users, it is a good practice to adopt several formats and means of dissemination of tourism statistics to ensure that data and metadata are effectively delivered. For example, press releases aimed at the general public must be disseminated in ways that facilitate redissemination by mass media, while more comprehensive or detailed statistics intended for researchers should be disseminated through online databases, with hard copy or printable publications used as reference materials. This Guide advises that, as far as possible, official tourism statistics should be made available to users through the electronic databases maintained by the responsible body;

(k) Aim towards an integrated presentation of statistics on tourism demand and supply. Users expect that tourism statistics will cover both tourism demand and tourism supply and that they will be presented as a coherent data set. To meet this user expectation, it is a good practice for such an integrated presentation to be accompanied by proper metadata and additional explanations to assist users in data interpretation. Also, it is a good practice to include in such integrated presentations some summary comparison of selected tourism data with BalanceofPayments (BOP) statistics (e.g., data on totals of inbound and outbound tourism expenditure with BOP travel and passenger transportation items). In this connection, close cooperation with compilers of BOP and statistics on trade in services is important;

(l) Develop a data revision policy which is well designed, carefully managed, transparent and well coordinated with other areas of statistics and, hence, allows users to cope with revisions in a systematic manner. It is a good practice to ensure availability of a detailed description of the revision policy on the responsible body’s website including: (i) description of the timing of the revisions from year to year (this should be clearly reflected in the data release calendar), (ii) explanation of the reasons for major revisions, including information on its possible impact on the data, (iii) documentation of revisions in metadata including those provided in the statistical publications and databases. In summary, a good revision policy should balance accuracy with other quality dimensions. Also, policy implementation should be practical and the policy should itself be revised as necessary.

8.24. Regarding the dissemination of data to UNWTO and other international, supranational and regional organizations, IRTS 2008 recommends that tourism statistics be disseminated internationally as soon as they become available for national users. In this connection, countries are requested to comply with the UNWTO regular data request formats, details of which are available at the UNWTO website. It is recognized also, that countries might have different reporting obligations to other international and regional organizations.


[2] It is a good practice to ensure that such databases: (a) allow free and equal access to all users to any data record considered part of official tourism statistics; (b) contain an extensive metadata and knowledge base; (c) allow to queries to be made easily and with a user-friendly interface over the entire database, and query results to be downloaded in the commonly used electronic data formats, thus reducing the need for personalized handling of most data requests and greatly enhancing efficiency of data dissemination.