UNITED NATIONS STATISTICAL COMMISSION and ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE (ECE) CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

EUROPEAN COMMISSION STATISTICAL OFFICE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (EUROSTAT)

ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT (OECD) STATISTICS DIRECTORATE

Joint ECE/Eurostat/OECD Meeting on the Management of Statistical Information Systems (MSIS)
(Bratislava, Slovakia, 18-20 April 2005)

Topic (iv): Review and follow-up to the activities of the Conference of European Statisticians

INTERNATIONAL SURVEY ON THE ROLE OF NATIONAL STATISTICAL OFFICES IN e-SERVICES

Note by the UNECE Secretariat[1]

Summary

I.   SHORT SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS

1.   In May 2004, the Joint UNECE-Eurostat-OECD Meeting on the Management of Statistical Information Systems reviewed a draft questionnaire of 16 pages prepared by Statistics Canada. It was agreed to conduct a pilot survey and collect comments for possible improvement of the questionnaire. 15 countries (Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey, United Kingdom) and 3 international organizations (OECD, Eurostat and UNECE) participated in the pilot survey. A summary of this exercise is provided below.

2.   The survey focused on the role of statistical agencies in e-services (e-Government), and was structured according to the following topics: (i) the role of NSOs in e-Government; (ii) survey data collection; (iii) dissemination; (iv) stakeholder relations; and (v) technology management.

3.   The respondents emphasized that the answers provided in the pilot survey express only the views of the central statistical agencies, and not of the national statistical systems as a whole. This was due to the complexity of the questionnaire and the short deadline that had been agreed. The participating international organizations answered only the questions relevant to them, such as questions on dissemination, relations with stakeholders and technology management.

4.   **The role of NSOs in e-Government**: In about half of the countries participating in the pilot survey, the agencies are expected to make available online all their products, programs and services within the time period 2005-2008. The most important motivations in using the Internet for communications and services are: (i) improving citizen satisfaction with government services; (ii) improving accessibility to government programs; (iii) improving timeliness or responsiveness of services and (iv) pressure to reduce programme delivery costs.

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5.   The increasing availability of products and services online has diverse effects. There was general agreement among respondents that **the public will expect more timely data free-of-charge**. There will also be an increased demand for online response. A subset of respondents also expects increased confidence in statistics and improvement in privacy protection and confidentiality.

6.   **Survey data collection**: Online response options are most common for business surveys (85% of NSOs), less for social surveys (40%) and censuses (28%). The motivations for offering the online option vary for different countries. The greatest importance could be observed for: (i) improving the quality of the data collected; (ii) improving the timeliness of the data collected; (iii) reducing the costs of data collection activities and (iv) improving overall response rates – this factor was also ranked quite high, but surprisingly not as high as the three preceding factors. However, detailed analysis showed that in the case of business surveys, the NSOs hope that the online option will improve the response rates. The survey did not permit to identify a common approach. Each country implements its data collection in its own way.

7.   **Dissemination**: All responding agencies (NSOs and international organizations) have implemented online electronic dissemination. All of them plan to provide database assisted navigation and data browsing, while 67% have already implemented this service. About one third of responding agencies have already implemented e-commerce tools for data dissemination, and according to plans this would rise to 87%.

8.   The most important motivating factors for implementing electronic online dissemination are (in order of importance): (i) responding to clients' needs and expectations; (ii) increasing access to (and quantity of) free-of-charge data and (iii) reducing publishing costs. The least important motivating factor seems to be increasing revenues from "for-fee" data.

9.   The survey did not show a common trend in the implementation of different methods of electronic dissemination despite the significant trend towards implementing the e-commerce features (see the table above).

10.   Surprisingly, only 50% of the responding agencies agreed that the web is their primary distribution channel, suggesting that other types of products are still important. The situation may change over the coming few years, and most of the agencies reported activities aiming at improved electronic dissemination.

11.   **Stakeholder relations**: **E-mail** is by far the most common means of communication with the advisory community. **List-servers** (automated broadcasting of e-mail messages) have some importance for some of the responding NSOs. Only the international organizations seem to be interested in **audio, video** and **internet conferencing** as a means of communication with their advisory and governing bodies.

12.   **Technology management**: The pilot survey focused on the proportion of in-house and outsourced provision of the technological facilities. Most of the agencies use a mixture of providers with the focus on in-house facilities (65%) and using government (20%) and commercial (15%) suppliers. About half of the responding agencies significantly consolidated IT services under common management, while 13% agencies managed them separately for each service.

II.   SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT MADE BY THE AGENCIES PARTICIPATING IN THE PILOT SURVEY

13.   In general, the respondents found the questionnaire too complex. **If a full-scale survey is organized for all countries, the questionnaire needs to be simplified.**

14.   Not all information is easily available within the national statistical office. The reasons are that (i) the information needed for the completion of the questionnaire resides with different units of the NSO, and (ii) to obtain a full picture of the national statistics role in e-services (e-Government) it would be necessary to include

also agencies of the national statistical systems other than just the NSO (in the case of a decentralized structure of statistical systems). **A complete coverage of national statistical systems rather than NSOs should be considered for a full-scale survey**.

15.   While the survey focuses on policy and management issues, it cannot avoid using technical terms. **Therefore, more detailed explanatory notes would be needed**.

16.   Some NSOs of the CIS countries were willing to respond to the pilot survey but found it too difficult to fill in the questionnaire in English. Therefore, **in the event of a full-scale survey, it would be desirable to make a Russian translation available**. This is very important since the present situation and future development in the CIS countries would be of great interest to such a survey.

17.   Respondents also expressed concerns of a more technical nature. For example, the present electronic version of the questionnaire (MS Excel) did not facilitate the provision of footnotes and other comments.