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# Debate on independency of NSOs in the ESCWA Region (Introduction to Resolution writing)

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# Introduction to Resolution Writing



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- *“The statistician keeps his fingers on the pulse of humanity, and gives the necessary warning when things are not as they should be”, Quételet (1796-1974)*
- In many situations it is not the quality of statistics or their integrity that is an issue, but their very existence, *“there is nothing a politician likes so little as to be well informed; it makes decision-making so complex and difficult”, J. M. Keynes (1883-1946)*
- *“Statistics, therefore, must always have purpose, either in the pursuit of knowledge or in promotion of human welfare”, P. C. Mahalanobis (1893-1972)*

# Introduction to Resolution Writing



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## The Task involves

- Defining ‘borders’, such as those related to
  - Definition of official statistics, foundation of statistical offices and role of statistics
  - Meaning of independency and related internal/external factors
- Identifying the required legal provisions and administrative arrangements
- Recognizing associated requirements
  - good practices and professionalism

# Official Statistics (1)



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- A *paradox* is that official statistics is a key concept, but there is no clear and universally accepted definition of official statistics, apart from the agreement that '*official statistics are public goods*'
- What are the main characteristics of official statistics?
  - Should be authoritative and trusted by users?
  - Should describe socially and economically important phenomena?
  - Should meet the needs for a variety of users and the public?
  - Should follow recognized professional and ethical standards?

## Official Statistics (2)



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- Can we define *official statistics* based on characteristics of the *product* official statistics?

**OR**

should it be defined based on *activities*, namely statistics produced by the NSOs is official statistics?

- A discussion of the concept *official statistics* following both paths might be fruitful, but neither of them give a precise definition of official statistics.

# Official Statistics (3)



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- There are different definitions in literature, like
  - *“Official statistics can be defined as any set of data produced by a governmental agency”* (N. P. Ross, 2006)
  - *“Official statistics are statistics disseminated by the national statistical system, excepting those that are explicitly stated not to be official”* (OECD Glossary of Statistical Terms)

# Official Statistics (4)



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- Other *very* broad definitions:
  1. *“We have, therefore, concluded that the definition of official statistics should include all those statistics produced by the 200-plus government departments, agencies, devolved administrations and any other person acting on behalf of the Crown”* (House of Lords Debates, 18 June 2007, Lord Davies of Oldham)
  2. *“Official statistics are statistics produced by government agencies to: a) shed light on economic and social conditions; b) develop, implement and monitor policies; and c) inform decision making, debate and discussion both within government and the wider community”* (Protocols for Official Statistics, 1975, Statistics Norway)

# Official Statistics (5) and Independency



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- Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics , UN, 1994  
**Principle 1 - Relevance, impartiality and equal access**

## *Official statistics*

- *information system of a democratic society*
- *serve the government, the economy and the public*
- *data on economic, demographic, social and environmental situation*
- *meet the test of practical utility*
- *compiled and made available **on an impartial basis** by official statistical agencies*

*Impartial basis* requires **professional independence** of the Statistical Authority

# Official Statistics (6) and Independency



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European Council Regulation defines *impartiality* as

*“... an objective and independent manner of producing Community Statistics, free from any pressure from political or other interest groups particularly as regards to selection of techniques, definitions and methodologies best suited to the attainment of the objectives ...”*

# Independency (1)



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- Handbook of Statistical Organizations, UNSD, 3rd Ed., 2003
  - *A statistical agency requires independence for its credibility and unhindered functioning.*
  - *Without the credibility users may lose trust in the accuracy and objectivity of agency data,*
  - *Data providers may become less willing to cooperate with agency requests.*
  
- In essence, a statistical agency should be impartial, i.e. avoid even the appearance that
  - its collection, analysis and reporting processes might be manipulated for political purposes,
  - individually identifiable data might be turned over for administrative, regulatory or enforcement purposes.

# Independency (2)



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- For a statistical agency to operate from a strong position of independence, it is necessary to know how its objectives and priorities are fixed
- In fact, its objectives are fixed by law, and its priorities must be decided by the chief statistician
- A statistical agency is a service agency, so its independence is related to its methods and results, not to its objectives
- Besides fixing the objectives, the law should vest the statistical system with the authority of functioning independently



## Legal Provisions Required for Professional Independence - 1

1. Authority for professional decisions
  - over scope, content, and frequency of data compiled, analyzed or published,
  - for selection and promotion of professional, technical and operational staff
2. Recognition of its authority to release statistical information without prior clearance by policy officials
3. Authority for the chief statistician and qualified staff to speak about the agency's statistics before the Government and public bodies.



## Legal Provisions Required for Professional Independence - 2

4. Adherence to predetermined schedules in public release of important economic or other indicator data to prevent even the appearance of manipulation
5. Maintenance of a clear distinction between the release of statistical information and policy interpretations
6. Dissemination policies that foster regular, frequent release of major findings to the public via the media, the Internet and other means

# Independency (5)



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- European Statistics Code of Practice, 2005, European Commission

## Principle 1: Professional Independence

*The professional independence from other Government agencies, as well as from private sector operators, ensures the credibility of European statistics*

### ■ Indicators of independence

1. The independence from political and other external interference specified in law
2. The head of the statistical authority of the highest professional calibre,
  1. Responsible for ensuring that European statistics are produced and disseminated in an independent manner,
  2. Solely responsible for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases
3. The statistical work programmes are published, and periodic reports describe progress made.
4. Statistical releases are clearly distinguished and issued separately from political/policy statements

# Independency (6)



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## Relation between centralization/decentralization and independency?

- Legal Provisions vesting Professional Independence to authorities in a decentralized system often lead to overlapping functions and question of precedence.
- Sharing of authority between agencies are most often fixed by administrative decisions



## Obligations towards Sources of Financing

### ISI Declaration on Professional Ethics:

Statisticians should not accept contractual conditions that are contingent upon a particular outcome from a proposed statistical inquiry

Statistician should consider the available methods and procedures for addressing a proposed inquiry and should provide the funder or employer with an impartial assessment of the respective merits and demerits of alternatives

# Independency (8)



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- Elements of Official Statistics
  - Scope and Classes of official Statistics
  - How statistics are paid for
  - Initiation of new obligations on survey respondents
  - Authority to obtain information, and Compulsory obligation to provide information
  - Capacity to link records, Guarantee from disclosure
  - Obligation for impartiality and Objectivity
  - Integration, Relevance, and Resourcing and Priority Setting
  - Balancing the needs of government and the community
  - Provision of special advice for some uses in collaboration with others
  - Accessibility of statistical results and statistical sources
  - Quality standards expected of official statistics, and Quality measurement

# Independency (9)



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- From the above list, the most critical areas for legislation to advance confidence in the integrity and independence of official statistics in the UK are the following three:
  - guarantee from disclosure
  - obligation for impartiality
  - objectivity in methods



- Principles Governing International Statistical Activities, CCSA, 2005

*Principle 2. To maintain the trust in international statistics, their production is to be impartial and strictly based on the highest professional standards*

- Good practices include
  1. Using strictly professional considerations for decisions on methodology, terminology and data presentation
  2. Developing and using professional codes of conduct
  3. Making a clear distinction, in statistical publications, between statistical and analytical comments on the one hand and policy-perspective and advocacy comments on the other
  4. *‘National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from political interference’* (from ONS press releases)

# Professionalism (1)



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- Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics , UN, 1994  
**Principle 2 - Professionalism**

*To retain trust in official statistics, the statistical agencies need to decide according to strictly professional considerations, including scientific principles and professional ethics, on the methods and procedures for the collection, processing, storage and presentation of statistical data*

# Professionalism (2)



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- Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics , UN, 1994  
**Principle 2 – Professionalism (contd.)**  
extends the impartiality element of Principle 1 to
- Sound statistical methodology based on the use of frameworks and statistical standards
- Correct application of statistical methods and objectivity in production and presentation of statistics
- Such methodology should be chosen by the statistical agency,
  - free from political interference and
  - in accordance with professional ethics and current best practices