

An Introduction to the Global Statistical System

1. Overview

1.1 The global statistical system presents the UK with a range of important obligations, opportunities, and risks. It allows for:

- i. the development of international standards in official statistics, facilitating international comparability of UK official statistics;
- ii. sharing good practice with and learning from our international peers;
- iii. sharing resources in developing statistical architecture and methodologies;
- iv. a network of personal and institutional support from organisations that share our ethos, perspectives and challenges;
- v. promoting the use of statistics as part of the policy dialogue with national governments; and
- vi. the coordination of statistical capacity building activities in developing countries.

2. Components of the global statistical system and key strategic issues:

2.1 The United Nations (UN)

2.1.1 The UN provides the only framework for statistical cooperation between nearly all countries of the world. Its main decision making body is the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC), of which the UK is currently a member and vice-Chair. Its decisions are ratified by Member States' governments through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the General Assembly.

2.1.2 The UN is responsible for developing and helping to implement non-obligatory but authoritative global standards across the challenges in official statistics shared by all countries. Some of its most important outputs include the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (FPOS), the System of National Accounts (SNA), and, recently, the System of Environmental Economic Accounts (SEEA). Such standards may inform the development of related EU regulations. The UN also disseminates statistics about its Member States, usually from existing national sources.

2.1.3 Key current issues include:

- i. revising the pre-amble to the FPOS, seeking General Assembly approval, and assisting Member States in implementing the FPOS;
- ii. coordinating the development of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the global statistical system's response to the Rio+20 agenda on sustainable development;
- iii. providing assistance to less well-developed Member States in developing their capacity to produce reliable official statistics; and
- iv. providing a forum for all Member States to respond effectively to new global challenges in official statistics, such as measuring the knowledge economy, gender statistics, measuring well-being, and Big Data.

Conference of European Statisticians (CES)

2.1.4 The CES is organised by the UN's Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). Participation extends from all European countries to all ex-Soviet countries, North America, Australasia, and other interested countries. The CES' primary role is to guide the work of the UNECE's statistics division in developing guidelines and training materials on statistical methodology and practices, organising opportunities for statistical experts to exchange and develop knowledge, and providing technical assistance to member countries. It also aims to

coordinate a joined-up approach from ECE countries to negotiations at UNSC level, and provides a forum for the development of strong bilateral collaborative relationships between like-minded members. The CES is managed by a Bureau, of which the UK is currently a member.

2.1.5 Key current issues include:

- considering how statistical production methods should be modernised to meet future challenges
- developing strategies to respond to competition from the private sector in information services
- supporting ECE countries in responding to the main challenges at the wider UN level (see above)

2.2 The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

2.2.1 Statistical work in the OECD aims to support its goal of promoting policies to improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world, and is guided by its **Committee on Statistics (CSTAT)**, of which the UK currently holds the Chair. The UK is one of 34 Member States of the OECD drawn from a pool of developed world countries that are deemed to meet relatively high standards of governance, including in statistics. A key benefit for the UK is the dedication of OECD resources to developing methodological responses to specific statistical issues faced by more developed countries, such as measuring well-being, green growth, and global value chains. The OECD also disseminates statistics on its Member States, usually drawn from existing national sources. But our membership also obliges us to respond to data requests that support the overall policy agenda agreed by member governments.

2.2.2 Key current issues include:

- assessing candidate countries' suitability for entry into the OECD according to high standards of statistical governance and practice
- ensuring that statistical policies developed by CSTAT and official statistics perspectives are effectively integrated into the wider work of the OECD
- developing statistical responses to current political challenges, such as measuring well-being and sustainable development, and the post-financial crisis policy environment.

2.3 The European Statistical System (ESS)

2.3.1 The ESS is a partnership between the statistical systems of the EU Member States, the statistical office of the Commission (Eurostat), and the statistical systems of the EEA and EFTA countries. Its primary purpose is to cooperate in the development of EU statistical laws and other agreed policies of joint action. This framework is intended to provide reliable and comparable statistics across Member States for the benefit of national and EU-level users. The partnership also provides a convenient network for collaboration between statistical producers on matters of common interest.

2.3.2 Key current issues include the following.

- i. The reform of the 'the European Statistical Law'. This is seeking to strengthen the legal obligations on all Member States to implement the European Statistics Code of Practice (which is consistent with the UK Code of Practice for Official Statistics).
- ii. Agreeing the Vision for the ESS. Eurostat have proposed an ambitious goal of integrating key aspects of the production systems of Member States in order to maximise efficiency and the ESS' responsiveness to EU user demands. However, Member States are concerned about upfront costs, adequate programme management discipline, and the retention of enough flexibility in national systems to respond to national user needs.
- iii. Balancing available resources at Commission and national level with rapidly increasing demands for new statistics from EU policy-makers, which are leading to increasing legal obligations.

2.4 The World Bank (WB)

2.4.1 The WB offers technical assistance and financial support for statistical development to its member governments. The focus is on developing countries, and therefore it is a key stakeholder for the GSS in the Department for International Development (DFID).

2.5 The International Monetary Fund (IMF)

2.5.1 The IMF leads in providing assistance to member countries in banking statistics, balance of payments, government finance statistics, national accounts and prices. In these areas it also produces and implements standards for data dissemination, and assesses data quality and statistical capacity.

2.6 Commonwealth Statisticians Group (CSG)

2.6.1 The work of the CSG is currently on pause while a review takes place. This is looking at how the CSG can add value for its members within the global statistical system based on their shared cultural and political frameworks.

2.7 Bilateral and multilateral relations

2.7.1 The GSS also operates a number of ad hoc formal and informal arrangements with other countries. Such relations range from ad hoc knowledge-sharing with like-minded countries on strategic and technical issues; planned annual discussions with a core group of such countries; providing training to less well-developed statistical systems in specific areas; and a current Foreign Office funded project for the Authority to provide technical assistance to the Chinese National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

3 International coordination

3.1 The OECD, UN and the ESS aim to coordinate the planning of their work and avoid duplication through mutual participation in meetings and work programming activities. More broadly, the **Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA)** aims to coordinate the work of all international and supranational bodies in the field of statistics. Other ad hoc organisations have been established to coordinate work in specific areas, such as the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (**PARIS21**). The UK continues to maintain pressure on international organisations to ensure effective coordination.

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