

Statistics Finland
Guidelines on Professional Ethics

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

page

1.1 Why an ethical code for statisticians?	4
1.2 Who are statisticians?	
4	
1.3 Who are customers?	
4	
1.4 What are professional ethics?	
4	
1.5 What are the sources of ethical problems?	
5	
1.6 Law and ethics	5

2 OBLIGATIONS TO SOCIETY

2.1 Main principles of official statistics	
6	
2.2 Impartial statistics for the benefit of society	
7	
2.3 Statistics must be published	7
2.4 Quality and reliability are crucial	
8	
2.5 Official statistics must be relevant	
8	
2.6 Good practice on information management	
8	

3 OBLIGATIONS TO RESPONDENTS AND TO THE INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES DESCRIBED IN STATISTICS

3.1 Data collection	9
3.2 Linking data	10
3.3 Publishing data and other delivery to end-users	
10	
3.4 Release of unit data	
10	

4 OBLIGATIONS TO CUSTOMERS

4.1. High standards of customer service	
11	
4.2 Data protection may prevent an assignment	
12	
4.3 Customer rights	12

5 OBLIGATIONS TO FUNDERS AND EMPLOYER

5.1 Responsibility for performance, professional competence and quality	
13	
5.2 Responsibility for corporate image and business secrets	
13	

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Council Regulation (EC) No 322/97 on Community Statistics, Article	
10 14	

FOREWORD

Reliable statistics are founded on the conventional values of official statistics, that is, reliability, impartiality, independence and objectivity. Professional ethics have traditionally held a place of special importance in the statistical sector. Compliance with the principles of statistical ethics is the fundamental requirement for the activity of statistical authorities. Questions of ethics have attracted growing attention in recent years primarily because of the changes that have happened not only in people's values and attitudes, but also in the environment in which companies and organisations go about their daily business. Many professions, business organisations and private companies have compiled their ethical principles into codes of conduct.

Increasing attention has been given to the principles of statistical ethics in recent years, and the key ethical principles have been raised to the legislative level both nationally and in the European Community. Statistics Finland's first Code of Professional Conduct was compiled in 1993 on the basis of the Declaration on Professional Ethics adopted by the International Statistical Institute ISI in 1985. The present handbook is the second revised edition of the handbook published in 1993. The most important changes include those following from Finland's membership of the European Union, the adoption in 1994 of the basic principles of official UN statistics, changes in national legislation, and the recommendation issued by the European Commission in 2005 on the independence, integrity and accountability of the national and Community statistical authorities.

Statisticians have obligations to all individuals and communities described in statistics, to customers, funders and society at large. When compiling statistics attention has to be paid to the different end uses of statistics, questions of privacy and data protection, and the response burden on sources of basic data. Stiffening competition in the information markets and in research is also throwing up new ethical problems. Employees have to make choices in their work in order to function in accordance with the ethical principles.

This handbook is intended for Statistics Finland employees, customers and stakeholders. It is also recommended for people working in other institutions engaged in the production of statistics.

Director General

Heli Jeskanen-Sundström

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Why an ethical code for statisticians?

This is a handbook on the ethical values of Statistics Finland employees. This handbook is intended for Statistics Finland and its personnel but its principles can be applied generally in the field of statistics. These ethical principles should be useful not only to people working in this field, but also to customers and other agency stakeholders. In addition, the handbook provides useful material for the development and application of legislation and operation.

The purpose of this handbook is to explain the general principles governing Statistics Finland's operation and to help resolve ethical problems. This handbook can be consulted when in search of acceptable solutions to emerging ethical problems. With set answers to at least some ethical problems, the standard of services provided by Statistics Finland will improve. Furthermore it is hoped that the handbook will strengthen the confidence of the general public, customers and suppliers of basic data in statistics and in the people who compile them.

The agency has a separate committee that is always at hand to help resolve ethical problems. Statistics Finland's departments may consult the committee to request its opinion on how problematic cases should be resolved.

The ethical values of statistics professionals are international. Finland's membership of the European Union has meant that international contacts and exchange are now an integral part of Statistics Finland's everyday operation. The major principles of professional ethics in the statistical sector also lie at the heart of EU statistics.

Proper implementation of these principles requires that there is a good knowledge and understanding of them at the national level, and also that they are closely adhered to in practice. It is also important that everyone involved in this international collaboration is familiar with the principles of professional ethics and contributes to their implementations.

1.2 Who are statisticians?

Statistics Finland's task is to compile statistics describing various aspects of society for people needing this information. This requires the effort and collaboration of a number of professional groups. The purpose of this handbook is to provide help and

guidance to all these groups in situations where questions arise about proper procedure.

1.3. Who are customers?

All users of Statistics Finland's services are agency customers. Customers may come into contact with the agency either indirectly by purchasing Statistics Finland publications or other products, reading its bulletins or using other media, Internet services or databases; or directly by attending negotiations, contacting the agency by phone to request information, commissioning special surveys or visiting the Library of Statistics.

1.4 What are professional ethics?

The word 'ethics' comes from the Greek 'ethos', which means making a distinction between what is good and what is bad. Ethics thus refers to good, acceptable conduct which promotes the welfare of individuals and society at large.

A profession is a body of knowledge and practical skills. Professionals exercise certain rights and powers. This means that professionals enjoy a certain measure of autonomy in relation to society's decision-making mechanisms. Professionals can make decisions within their respective spheres of expertise without always being bound to decisions by others.

The rights and powers vested in a profession need to be counterbalanced by certain duties and responsibilities. Professional ethics define rights, powers, duties and responsibilities with a view to creating as coherent a structure as possible.

Different professional groups have their own professional ethics. These are determined by their respective objectives that grow up out of their value systems and that may have to do with society, government authorities, business life or individual people.

The statistician's value-objective is to provide a comprehensive, unbiased and reliable picture of society, respecting the right of the sources of information to privacy and data protection and making sure all customers receive equal treatment.

1.5 What are the sources of ethical problems?

Access to Statistics Finland basic data must always be guaranteed, for without those data it is not possible to provide customers with reliable statistics. Awareness of data protection has grown among individuals and communities. Trust in statistics and maintaining the confidence of data providers are necessary for obtaining reliable basic data.

Statistics Finland's operating environment is changing. New ethical problems are emerging and old ethical problems are resurfacing from time to time. Statistics Finland has in its possession interesting information materials. The rapid advances in information technology and easier transfer of data have also given rise to increasing calls for improved availability of Statistics Finland's materials.

The requirements of cost efficiency may also be at variance with traditional ethical principles. Maintenance of Statistics Finland's service standards requires consideration between different quality factors, such as reliability and rapidity. The market demand is not necessarily focused on areas that are important to such factors as the continuity of statistics. The growing role of market forces has also brought insider regulations into statistics.

Over the past few years it has become customary in both Finland and the EU to bind monitoring of political decisions to concrete statistical figures, such as statistics describing public sector deficit and employment and unemployment. It is a challenge for a statistical office to retain its impartiality and independence in at times strongly politicised discussion around the results of statistics.

The ever greater complexity of modern society places new demands upon the statistical employee or accentuates old ones. It is important to get across the message of statistics in simpler and more graphic ways, but also as accurately as possible.

Statistics Finland is frequently in the public eye, and the general public are by now quite familiar with the agency. With the ever higher level of education and the continuing growth of information flows, people today are more and more critical. The same goes for the mass media. This has made the public image of organisations increasingly important and emphasised the importance of having clear ethical rules.

1.6 Law and ethics

Ethical principles are important to both the preparation and application of legislation. Ethical principles have often been incorporated into legislation. In some countries statistical legislation includes such ethical principles as impartiality and scientific independence. The Council Regulation (EC) No 322/97 on Community Statistics lays down the most important ethical principles of official statistics in the Community. In Finland, too, the Statistics Act prescribes that good statistical practice shall be observed in the handling and processing of data and information, following the international recommendations and procedures generally observed in the statistical sector. This refers specifically to the ethical principles of official statistics.

However ethical principles are generally more comprehensive in their coverage than legislation; ethics are often stricter than the law. Breaking the law is obviously not ethically acceptable, but sometimes strict abidance by the law may be unethical.

Legislation may be complemented by ethical principles. In statistics production this is done, for instance, in the case of release of information. The law allows for discretionary powers in the application of which ethical principles play a key part.

2 OBLIGATIONS TO SOCIETY

2.1 Main principles of official statistics

Geared to satisfying society's information needs, official statistics shall be based upon a clear set of principles that are aimed at maintaining the quality of statistics and at retaining the confidence of end-users and providers of information in statisticians and statistical agencies. Internationally, the key principles of official statistics have been defined by the United National Statistical Commission and for EU statistics within the Council Regulation on Community Statistics. These principles are also observed at Statistics Finland.

The United Nations Statistical Commission adopted in 1994 a set of 10 fundamental principles of official statistics. These principles may be summarised as follows:

1. Statistics provide an indispensable element in the information system of a democratic society. Statistical agencies shall compile and make available official statistics on an impartial basis.

2. All operations shall be based upon professional considerations, scientific principles and professional ethics.
3. The sources, methods and procedures of statistics shall be based upon scientific standards.
4. Erroneous interpretation and misuse of statistics shall be prevented.
5. Data sources shall be chosen with regard to quality, timeliness, costs and the burden on respondents.
6. Individual data collected by statistical agencies are to be strictly confidential and used exclusively for statistical purposes.
7. The legislation and other principles concerning official statistics shall be made public.
8. National coordination of official statistics is essential to achieve efficiency and consistency.
9. The use of international concepts, classifications and methods shall be promoted.
10. Bilateral and multilateral co-operation in statistics contributes to the improvement of official statistics in all countries.

According to Article 285 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, production of Community statistics shall conform to impartiality, reliability, objectivity, scientific independence, cost-effectiveness and statistical confidentiality. Production of statistics shall not entail excessive burdens on economic operators.

In addition to the Treaty establishing the European Community, Council Regulation (EC) No. 322/97 on Community Statistics identifies six key principles that are based upon the above UN principles and that govern official statistics internationally as well as in the European Union. These are:

- impartiality
- reliability
- relevance
- statistical confidentiality
- transparency
- cost-effectiveness.

The content of the principles is defined in detail in Article 10 of the Council Regulation (EC) No. 322/97 on Community Statistics in Appendix 1.

The Code of Practice concerning the independence, integrity and accountability of the national and Community statistical authorities consists of 15 principles that must be observed in the production of Community statistics. The purpose of the Code of Practice is to improve trust and confidence in the statistical authorities by proposing certain institutional and organisational arrangements and, on the other hand, to reinforce the quality of the statistics they produce and disseminate, by promoting the coherent application of best international statistical principles, methods and practices by all producers of official statistics in Europe (Appendix 2).

2.2 Impartial statistics for the benefit of society

Reliable and comprehensive statistics are crucially important to the effective operation of any democratic system. Citizens need statistical information to form a realistic picture of their living conditions and society, to defend effectively their interests and take part in democratic decision-making. Public administration, the

European Union, business and industry, and research also rely heavily on access to reliable official statistics.

Official statistics are an integral part of society's infrastructure. All statistics compiled by state authorities for public use are counted as official statistics. Official statistics have the quality of public goods: production of these goods is the responsibility of the public sector and shall be funded by tax revenues.

The national statistical system must be based on professional independence of the national statistical office. For purposes of decentralised planning and bargaining among interest groups, society needs access to hard facts that are equally available to all parties. The production of statistics for the EU's needs also requires the existence of independent statistical agencies. An independent statistical agency is best placed to take into account and safeguard the data protection requirements of different target groups. This is emphasised in the Commission's recommendation mentioned above.

Statistics Finland seeks to cover with its statistics all key sectors of society. In addition to statistics produced with funding from Statistics Finland's regular budget, the agency also undertakes surveys commissioned by customers.

2.3 Statistics must be published

Official statistics must be published, for it is only when they are published that official statistics can equally benefit society and its citizens. Publication must be effective. General social statistics must be made universally available, and they shall be widely disseminated. In the publication of statistics concerning society, Statistics Finland shall give no user group preferential treatment over others.

The Internet has significantly increased opportunities for the effective dissemination of information. Statistical tables intended for general use shall be compiled with a view to their general interest value, impartiality and cost-effectiveness. Statistical tables shall not be produced in large quantities just in case for potential users, but only when commissioned to meet specific customer needs. Advance information on the dates of publication of key statistics is provided through Statistics Finland's release calendars.

Statistics must be made accessible to all users at the same time. The Statistics Act prescribes that all statistics shall be published as soon as possible upon completion. It is also prescribed that statistics which may influence the operation of financial markets (so-called statistics subject to insider rules) must not be released to anyone prior to the official date of publication, but all users must receive the information at one and the same time, at the exact time indicated in advance. The same principle is primarily used at Statistics Finland for publishing monthly and quarterly statistics.

According to the guidelines issued by Statistics Finland, information can also be provided in certain exceptional cases in advance on other statistics and some pre-determined monthly and quarterly statistics by permission of the Director in Charge, provided that the recipient does not publish it ahead of the agreed date.

Statistics shall be presented in a clear, readily understandable form. Statistics intended for the broader public must be easily intelligible to all. Statistics Finland's eCourse in Statistics is designed to provide all users with instructions about how to make the best possible use of statistics by describing their contents and different uses.

2.4 Quality and reliability are crucial

The statisticians must ensure that all products and services supplied meet the highest possible quality standards. Product and service quality is evaluated both by producers and end-users, but also by scientific and international organisations.

In order that the reliability of statistics can be assessed, all the methods used in compiling the statistics shall be public and generally accepted. Quality descriptions shall be attached to each statistical product so that users can establish the reliability of the information presented as well as any risks of inaccuracies. The aim is to promote the proper use and interpretation of statistics.

Other aspects of quality include the timely completion of statistics, flexibility, the ability of staff members to work closely with customers, and a strong orientation to customer needs.

Statistics Finland is working to develop its operation in line with the European Quality Award standard EFQM. The agency's quality manual provides more detailed guidelines on high quality operations and quality development.

2.5 Official statistics must be relevant

Statisticians at Statistics Finland are responsible not only for the quality of statistical products, but also for the relevance of social statistics. Official statistics must be available as comprehensively as possible on all sectors of society that are relevant to user groups. New, important social phenomena and problems shall be incorporated in official statistics as soon as possible.

As well as engaging in the task of producing statistics, Statistics Finland is expected to work closely with other state authorities in a joint effort to develop official government statistics. In order that the statistics produced should be relevant and consistent, it is essential that there is good co-operation between the different authorities that compile statistics and effective coordination of official statistics.

2.6. 2.6 Good practice on information management

The Act on the Openness of Government Activities (621/1999) requires that all public officials observe the principles of good practice on information management. Good practice on information management is also part and parcel of good statistical practice as set out in the Statistics Act. Good practice on information management involves among other things that the procedures followed in handling data and information and the contents of information systems are clearly described and that appropriate measures have been taken to safeguard data protection. Following the stage of active data processing it is also important that steps are taken for the appropriate filing or destruction of the documents in keeping with the National Archives Act and Statistics Finland's archiving guidelines.

3 OBLIGATIONS TO RESPONDENTS AND TO THE INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES DESCRIBED IN STATISTICS

Statistics Finland employees shall respect and protect the privacy and interests of target persons as well as the business and professional secrets of target communities.

Respondents or target persons refer here to natural persons or to families, households or other statistical units on which data are gathered for purposes of

compiling statistics. Target communities are corresponding statistical units that may be represented by business companies or other units engaged in economic activity, associations, agencies or other juridical persons. Basic data concerning statistical units shall be kept secret. The exceptions to this principle are mentioned under 3.4 below.

Statistics Finland may also collect unit-level information under commission from other statistical authorities, for example. In this case the respondents shall be informed of the purpose for which the information is collected and to whom it shall be released. However, assignments involving data collection shall always be weighed separately on a case by case basis. Special consideration shall be given to the end-use of the information collected and to the question of whether the data collection may interfere with Statistics Finland's own operation.

According to the Personal Data Act private persons do not have the right to check information concerning themselves in Statistics Finland's statistical registers. The justification for this is that since the information contained in these registers may not be used in administrative decisions concerning the person and thus any errors in the information cannot be considered to infringe upon his or her interests.

3.1 Data collection

Data for statistical purposes can be collected both directly from the individuals and communities that are described in the statistics, and indirectly through administrative records, such as the population data system or tax registers. The Statistics Act requires that authorities compiling statistics primarily make use of data collected in other connections. Direct data collection shall only be used if the necessary data are not available from administrative records.

Cost-effectiveness is paramount in the collection of data. Only such data shall be collected that are absolutely necessary for compiling the statistics. Data collection shall incur only minimal cost to Statistics Finland and the individuals or communities providing the data.

The objectives and purpose of the survey or the statistics and the ultimate end-use of the information shall be specified even before the data are collected. In commissioned surveys respondents shall also be told who has commissioned the survey and who has funded it. Where personal data as defined in the Personal Data Act are collected for purposes of a personal data file, it is required that a description of that file is produced before commencing data collection.

Where data are collected, it must always be made clear to the respondents whether they are required by law to supply the information or whether this is voluntary. In the former case the legal provision concerned shall be singled out. All data required for commissioned surveys shall be collected voluntarily.

In interview studies and postal questionnaires in which participation is voluntary, the concept of informed consent shall be applied, in other words the respondents shall know and understand what they are consenting to do.

It is also considered good statistical practice that feedback is given to respondents on the statistics that have been compiled on the basis of the data they provided. Indeed the Statistics Acts requires that feedback is given to all respondents who are under statutory obligation to disclose information.

3.2 Linking data

Statistics Finland may link data from different types of files. Data linking requires the use of personal identity codes or business identity codes. The Personal Data Act

allows for the use of the personal identity code for purposes of data linking because the code is essential for unequivocal identification of the individual. However, linking must not endanger the target person's privacy or the business secrets of trade practitioners or target communities. Therefore all codes shall be removed or encrypted as soon as possible after linking.

Data concerning the customer's and Statistics Finland's common target persons and target communities can be linked at Statistics Finland on a fee-for-service basis to create new statistics.

3.3 Publishing data and other delivery to end-users

The main rule is that it must not be possible from statistics published or otherwise released to deduce information concerning the characteristics of individual statistical units. However, the mere fact that there is only one unit within a given statistical category, does not always need to be kept secret. Statistical data are not regarded as identifiable if the extraction of the relevant information requires excessive investment in time, money or labour. Statistics Finland has issued separate guidelines and recommendations concerning privacy and data protection in statistical tables.

The statistician acknowledges group integrity. Statistics Finland shall not unnecessarily bring discredit on a certain group or region. This principle does not, of course, prevent the statistician from identifying in social statistics such areas or groups whose status or living conditions are poorer than others or otherwise exceptional. After all, the purpose of statistics is to help decision-makers promote equality and welfare in society.

3.4 Release of unit data

The general principle is that unit data are not released in identifiable form to outsiders. Unit-level data are thus not released for use in an investigation, surveillance, legal proceedings, administrative decision-making or other similar handling of a matter concerning an individual, enterprise, corporation or foundation.

There are, however, some exceptions that are prescribed by law. Statistics Finland is the national authority charged with the responsibility for filing death certificates. In contrast to other data, information on causes of death may only be released to next of kin, insurance institutions and relevant authorities, to mention the main exceptions. Statistics Finland may release other unit-level data in identifiable form to another statistical authority for compiling statistics on its field of activity.

Data items included in the Register of Enterprises and Establishments, those specified in the Statistics Act, and data describing the activity of public authorities and the production of public services are all public information and may be released for different purposes. The possibility to release unit-level data helps to avoid overlap in data collection, reduce costs and the response burden, and to promote the use of harmonised classifications.

Unit-level data can be released for scientific studies and statistical surveys describing social conditions. The Statistics Act sets out the procedures that Statistics Finland shall follow in granting licences to use unit-level data. If such a licence is granted, sample materials may be released for research purposes without identification data. In exceptional cases data on age, gender, education and occupation may be released with identification data, but again for research purposes only. This material is always made available for a limited period of time. Any data linking shall be done at Statistics Finland. Once the time limit has expired, the research material must be destroyed or returned to Statistics Finland.

Census materials are not normally released. These materials may comprise the whole country, an entire municipality or an entire industry, occupational or educational group. The reason for this is that the risk of unit identification is too great, especially if the customer has access to materials that include the same units. Materials that are sensitive from a national defence point of view are not released. Many census materials belong to this category.

The privacy of the respondent must always be protected, and business secrets must not be divulged. To ensure privacy and data protection, any classifications that are too detailed shall be merged with other information before the data are released and the data are also processed in some other ways, where needed.

Special caution shall be exercised with sensitive data concerning natural persons. Such data shall only be released for special reasons. According to the Personnel Data Act, sensitive data are those concerning race, ethnic origin, social, political or religious affiliation or trade-union membership, a criminal act, punishment or other criminal sanction, the state of health, illness or handicap of a person or the treatment or other comparable measures directed at the person, the sexual preferences or sex life of a person, the social welfare needs of a person or the benefits, support or other social welfare assistance received by the person. A data file containing an exceptionally large amount of information on one person or group of persons may also be sensitive.

Statistics Finland runs a special research laboratory for use by the research community. At this laboratory researchers who have obtained the relevant licence may under Statistics Finland's supervision handle materials that the agency does not consider it appropriate to release for outside use because of the extent of the material or the risk that statistical units, business companies in particular, may be identifiable. Where applicable, researchers also adhere to these codes of professional ethics.

4 OBLIGATIONS TO CUSTOMERS

Statisticians have obligations to customers. The obligations they have to providers of basic data and to the individuals and communities described in statistics, may impede their ability to provide a quality service to customers.

High standards of customer service

A high quality of customer service provides important support to end-users in their decision-making and operations, increases awareness and the use of Statistics Finland's services, creates a good image for the agency and by the same token facilitates its operation. Customer feedback provides important clues for the further development of operations.

Service mindedness and flexibility are crucial to good customer service. Service to customers is centred on them and their service needs must be taken into account from the very outset in planning the production process. Customers shall also be kept up-to-date about all services available. Schedules and deadlines shall be adhered to. In case of force majeure customers shall be immediately informed.

Statistics Finland performs chargeable assignments for customers. Since assignments are only accepted in Statistics Finland's field of activity, Statistics Finland does not conduct market research or opinion polls, for instance. In unclear cases, a statement should be requested from Statistics Finland's Ethics Committee.

In its fee-based services Statistics Finland applies a business pricing policy, taking account of the agency's profitability requirements, impact objectives, as well as the equal treatment of customers. Pricing may be based upon costs, demand or going

market rates. Statistics Finland does not exploit its possible market dominance in pricing, but always bears in mind the goal of disseminating information throughout society. Information produced with funding from tax revenues comes free of charge; customers are only charged for data editing.

Statistics Finland is dedicated to a policy of impartiality with regard to its customers. All customer groups are provided the best possible service, taking account of current regulations and ethical principles.

Customers are offered the best possible knowledge available at Statistics Finland. If the information required is not available from Statistics Finland, the employee shall try to find out the appropriate source of information.

Negotiations on schedules, costs, and quality shall be started with the customer as early as possible. All assignments shall adhere to generally accepted scientific principles and procedures. Customers shall also be informed of confidence limits and other factors with a bearing on the interpretation of the results. Statistics Finland shall only accept the assignment if it considers the quality to be adequate for the customer's purposes.

Statistics Finland's key service principles are defined and brought together in a customer service pledge.

4.2 Data protection may prevent an assignment

Sometimes it is not possible to release to customers the information they require even if that information were available at Statistics Finland, or even if it could be obtained with a questionnaire survey, for instance. The reasons for non-release usually lie in considerations of data protection. In these cases discussions shall always be held with the customer in an attempt to find an alternative solution. For instance, it is important to identify what the customer regards as the most important data items: this will usually allow for the use of less detailed variables. Another possible solution is to keep the materials at Statistics Finland and to prepare the tables required by the customer.

4.3 Customer rights

Statistics Finland shall also safeguard the customer's privacy and respect the customer's rights. No information relating to the assignment shall be divulged to outsiders; the same applies to information concerning the customer's privacy or business or professional secrets that are recorded in the assignment agreement.

Information service agreements spell out both Statistics Finland's and the customer's rights and duties. In keeping with general delivery terms, Statistics Finland has the right to publish the results of commissioned surveys. The materials, methods, software and results produced in connection with the assignment shall remain the property of Statistics Finland unless otherwise agreed in the assignment.

5 OBLIGATIONS TO FUNDERS AND EMPLOYER

The statistician works for Statistics Finland and thereby for the state and ordinary citizens. Operations are funded by the government, partners and customers. The statistician has obligations to all these parties as well. The statistician's obligations to customers were discussed above in Chapter 4.

5.1 Responsibility for performance, professional competence and quality

Both funders and the employer are entitled to expect that statisticians do their job to the best of their abilities and put all their expertise, knowledge and skills to full use.

Statistical professionals shall follow all the guidelines issued by the employer with regard to data protection, the scope of the assignment, schedules and costs. In consultation with the employer, they shall work to maintain and further improve their professional competencies.

All employees shall contribute to attaining the goals of the organisation, to promoting product development, to improving service standards, and to creating a good climate in the workplace.

It is in the common interest of the employer, funder and statistical professionals that the products and services provided are of the highest possible quality. If there are disagreements over the quality of a final product or an ongoing project, or over the use of the proper methods, the dispute shall be addressed by way of negotiation, applying generally accepted scientific and professional principles.

5.2. 5.2 Responsibility for corporate image and business secrets

Statistics Finland's good reputation hinges collectively on all employees, their actions and behaviour. It is important for agency employees to bear this in mind in all their interaction with the outside world. Close adherence to agreements and commitments is crucial in all dealings with data providers, customers, suppliers and other interest and stakeholder groups.

Statistics Finland employees shall never reveal to outsiders any agency business secrets or matters related to security.

In making public appearances, Statistics Finland employees shall always follow the ethical guidelines set out in this handbook.

Appendix 1

Council Regulation (EC) No 322/97 on Community Statistics, Article 10

In order to ensure the best possible quality in both deontological and professional aspects, Community statistics shall be governed by the principles of impartiality, reliability, relevance, cost-effectiveness, statistical confidentiality and transparency.

The principles referred to in the first subparagraph are defined as follows:

‘impartiality’ is an objective and independent manner of producing Community statistics, free from any pressure from political or other interest groups, particularly as regards the selection of techniques, definitions and methodologies best suited to the attainment of the objectives as set out. It implies the availability of statistics, with a minimum delay, to all users (Community institutions, governments, social and economic operators, academic circles and the public in general);

‘reliability’ is the characteristic of Community statistics to reflect as faithfully as possible the reality which they are designed to represent. It implies that scientific criteria are used for the selection of sources, methods and procedures. Any information on the coverage, methodology, procedures and sources will also improve data reliability;

‘relevance’ shall mean that the production of Community statistics is a function of clearly defined requirements determined by the Community objectives. These requirements determine the fields, timeliness and scale of statistics, which should keep abreast of new demographic, economic, social and environmental developments at all times. Data collection should be limited to what is necessary for attaining the desired results. The production of Community statistics which has ceased to be of interest for Community objectives should be abandoned;

‘cost-effectiveness’ shall mean the optimum use of all available resources and the minimization of the burden on respondents. The amount of work and the costs which the production of statistics requires should be in proportion to the importance of the results/benefits sought;

‘statistical confidentiality’ shall mean the protection of data related to single statistical units which are obtained directly for statistical purposes or indirectly from administrative or other sources against any breach of the right to confidentiality. It implies the prevention of non-statistical utilization of the data obtained and unlawful disclosure;

‘transparency’ shall mean the right of respondents to have information on the legal basis, the purposes for which the data are required and the protective measures adopted. The authorities responsible for collecting Community statistics shall take every step to supply such information.

European Statistics Codes of Practice 25 May 2005

Principle 1: Professional independence – The professional independence of statistical authorities from other policy, regulatory or administrative departments and bodies, as well as from private sector operators, ensures the credibility of European Statistics.

Principle 2: Mandate for Data Collection – Statistical authorities must have a clear legal mandate to collect information for European statistical purposes. Administrations, enterprises and households, and the public at large may be compelled by law to allow access to or deliver data for European statistical purposes at the request of statistical authorities.

Principle 3: Adequacy of Resources – The resources available to statistical authorities must be sufficient to meet European Statistics requirements.

Principle 4: Quality Commitment – All ESS members commit themselves to work and co-operate according to the principles fixed in the Quality Declaration of the European Statistical System.

Principle 5: Statistical Confidentiality – The privacy of data providers (households, enterprises, administrations and other respondents), the confidentiality of the information they provide and its use only for statistical purposes must be absolutely guaranteed.

Principle 6: Impartiality and Objectivity – Statistical authorities must produce and disseminate European Statistics respecting scientific independence and in an objective, professional and transparent manner in which all users are treated equitably.

Principle 7: Sound Methodology – Sound methodology must underpin quality statistics. This requires adequate tools, procedures and expertise.

Principle 8: Appropriate Statistical Procedures – Appropriate statistical procedures, implemented from data collection to data validation, must underpin quality statistics.

Principle 9: Non-Excessive Burden on Respondents – The reporting burden should be proportionate to the needs of the users and should not be excessive for respondents. The statistical authority monitors the response burden and sets targets for its reduction over time.

Principle 10: Cost Effectiveness – Resources must be effectively used.

Principle 11: Relevance – European Statistics must meet the needs of users.

Principle 12: Accuracy and Reliability – European Statistics must accurately and reliably portray reality.

Principle 13: Timeliness and Punctuality – European Statistics must be disseminated in a timely and punctual manner.

Principle 14: Coherence and Comparability – European Statistics should be consistent internally, over time and comparable between regions and countries; it should be possible to combine and make joint use of related data from different sources.

Principle 15: Accessibility and Clarity – European Statistics should be presented in a clear and understandable form, disseminated in a suitable and convenient manner, available and accessible on an impartial basis with supporting metadata and guidance.

Decisions, recommendations, regulations and guidelines related to professional ethics in official statistics

International Statistical Institute: Declaration on Professional Ethics. Adopted at the ISI General Assembly in Amsterdam on 21 August 1985. 23 pages.

<http://isi.cbs.nl/ethics.htm>

Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. Adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission in April 1994. 2 pages with 10 principles.

<http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/fund.principles/efund.pdf>

The Council of Europe Committee of Ministers recommendation No. R(97) 18 concerning the Protection of personal data collected and processed for statistical purposes. 30 September 1997, 11 pages.

<http://cm.coe.int/ta/rec/1997/97r18.html>

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