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**“The role of quality declarations in quality management system”**

The Global Assessment of the National System of Official Statistics of the Republic of Armenia was jointly undertaken by the consultants of the European Commission (Eurostat), European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in January 2009.

The quality management system was found to be area for improvement.

The Global Assessment recommended using the Twinning instrument for the cooperation with EU.

Since 2009, after the Global Assessment the quality activity has been initiated, when by the Order of the President of the National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia (NSSRA) the working group on assurance of the completeness of statistical work and quality monitoring has been established, but the progress in this field has been made thanks to Twinning project.

In January 2011 the NSSRA has started the implementation of EU Twinning project “Forwarding Armenian Statistics through Twinning”. It was a 2-year (implementation period January 2011- February 2013) co-operation between the NSSRA and Statistics Denmark (main partner), as well as five other national statistical agencies within the European Union: Germany (junior partner), Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Sweden.

The General Objective was to harmonize Armenian statistics with EU standards.

The EU Twinning project focused on introducing EU methodologies for a number of important statistical areas, thereby bringing Armenian statistics in compliance with international standards.

The Twinning project was consisting of the following six components:

* Quality Management
* Improvement of Business Statistics, Respondent Burden
* Improvement of the Exhaustiveness of GDP
* Agricultural Census
* Harmonized Consumer Price Index
* ICT Society.

One result of the EU Twinning project “Forwarding Armenian Statistics through Twinning” aimed at enhancing the quality and role of statistics in Armenia.

**Quality management**

The objective of the “Quality management” component was documentation, metadata and quality indicators for all major collections of the NSSRA that are collected, systematized, published on the NSSRA`s website at www.armstat. am.

The Working Group on Quality Management has been established in 2011. The working group members represent different subject-matter units, including business-register, classifications and sampling, international statistical co-operation, statistical information dissemination and relations with users, information technologies. The group focuses on sharing good practice and shows the commitment from members to become quality management experts.

A complete list of NSSRA`s statistical products has been developed. During 2011 and 2012 quality declarations have been developed for each of the statistical products of the NSSRA in harmonized way according to the principles of the European Statistics Code of Practice and Quality declaration of the European statistical system, currently 136 products which are organized under 17 statistical domains: Economy and finance, Population and social processes, Industry, construction, trade and services, Transport and tourism, Foreign trade, Agriculture, forestry and fishing, Food Security, Environment and energy.

Quality declarations describe the regulatory background of statistics and the purpose, history, and explain to all statistical information users the statistics methodologies, data sources and statistical techniques, and its dissemination, how statistics is produced and how it should be interpreted and used, and other important information for users.

The “Documentation” webpage has been launched at the NSSRA`s website. The quality declarations for all statistical products are published on the NSSRA`s website at [www.armstat.am](http://www.armstat.am).

In order to integrate the developed quality reporting system in the data dissemination system, the PC Axis/PX Web dissemination tool has been installed and ARMSTATBANK.AM has been created that gives users fast and easy access to statistical information, and allows to download data in MS Excel, xml or other formats, as well as to create graphs and tables designed according to their needs. The NSSRA was the first statistical office in the world to use the new 2012 version of PX Web. The ARMSTATBANK.AM provides the link to Quality Declarations.

**The Role of Quality Declarations for Users and Producers**

Quality declarations play a key role in the quality management system, because of quality is a central concern of any NSO, in particular, for transition countries.

The Quality of official statistics is a broad concept and not only directed to the task of meeting users and stakeholders needs, but also addressing respondent concerns regarding the reporting burden and confidentiality, sound methodology, professional independence and resources.

The NSSRA provides information on the main quality characteristics of each product in a user-friendly and accessible form, so users are able to assess product quality. Quality declarations give a possibility to enhance user awareness of the strengths and limitations of the produced statistics, and promote a user-producer dialogue and perception between them. The use of the same quality declaration template with a limited set of standard indicators for different products supports clarity and users understanding, and brings to an increase of the usability of statistics.

The NSSRA`s quality work is appreciated and strongly supported by statistical information users, and the NSSRA is continuing to get a positive feedback from users. The feedback received gives the possibility to measure the user perception of the statistical product, to get information on the expectations and satisfaction of users with the statistical product, to discuss and identify the potential sources to further improve the documentation, making easier for absorption.

Quality declarations give better transparency and reinforce the image of the NSSRA. In the long run, a good quality is intended to an increase of trust in official statistics. The lack of trust in official statistics is also stipulated by objective reasons and that is why a continual improvement of quality activity should be a permanent objective of NSOs.

Taking into account the above mentioned and being guided by the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and European Statistics Code of Practice, the NSSRA has developed a number of documents for users of official statistics and posted on the NSSRA`s website at [www.armstat.am](http://www.armstat.am/): The mission of official statistics, fundamental principles of organization, peculiarities of accounting and information systems in the country by statistical and administrative purposes, What is an Administrative Register?, Objective reasons of the lack of trust in official statistics. Those user-oriented documents are helpful to cover the lack of understanding of quality matters by users.

Quality declarations are important to get external and internal users views. Being widely used outside and inside the NSSRA, they are valuable for the producers and the top management, as they provide appropriate information for different purposes, such as programming, monitoring and decision making. Their level of detail, standard structure and form make easier to find the relevant information, and facilitate comparability over time and among products.

As a comprehensive description of statistical products, they give the possibility to strengthen the accountability of the NSSRA by demonstrating sources and methods used, and standards and classifications applied, and guaranteeing users’ access to metadata, describing the quality of statistical outputs.

Quality declarations provide the systematic standard mechanism of quality management for the NSSRA that obliges staff to come together from different areas to discuss, identify quality issues and solve quality problems, to intensify the interaction and communication between staff across the NSSRA, to promote the team work that is a key factor for the quality management, to increase the coordination within the statistical system of the country.

They provide a good basis for promoting the staff perception of the quality issues, creating and maintaining a quality culture. Quality declarations are a good tool for new staff to learn about the work done at NSSRA, to develop the competence of all staff and are used as valuable source of information for training and other purposes.

Although, at the initial stage the introduction of the tool of quality declarations required time and significant efforts of the staff, at present they don't put additional burden on NSSRA and allow to easily map quality dimensions, based on a common template, and implement updates, if necessary. The NSSRA`s main goal is continuous quality improvement to promote users satisfaction, commitment to change and develop.

**Future perspectives and recommendations**

As a result of the Twinning project implementation, for each of the project’s components, the future perspectives were outlined and recommendations provided, in particular for the quality management:

* The sampling of NSSRA should be further developed, according to a so-called two-stage allocation. A specific sampling software, developed within NSSRA, could be further developed and constitute a major asset of NSSRA.
* The established working group on quality issues should continue its coordinating work.
* The methodological work should be upgraded, preferably with a separate unit offering advice to the subject matter divisions on sampling issues, etc.
* The quality declarations should be updated by the staff of the subject-matter divisions as part of the working processes.
* Release of first figures electronically, in ARMSTATBANK.AM, as the main release.
* In order to avoid overlapping work processes, a joint databank should be developed to “feed” the dissemination data banks, i.e. ARMSTATBANK.AM, DevInfo and others.
* Further work and analysis should be made regarding the use of administrative registers in the production of statistics.
* Organizational matters: internal staff rotation and methods of knowledge transfer should be improved, and the down-sizing of the regional statistical agencies should be considered.
* Establishment of Quality Assurance Framework to support implementation of new activities related to data collection and the whole statistical production process; Eurostat’s QAF is a recommendable source of inspiration.
* A long term vision for the national statistical system should be defined, and steps towards co-ordination of official statistics should be taken, involving enhanced co-operation with data users and other partners.

The Light Peer Review (LPR) of the NSSRA was undertaken by Eurostat from 10 -14 February 2014, and recommended the following improvement actions:

* Developing a plan for a quality management system and for the design of an associated quality assurance framework.
* Making quality commitment public.
* Implementing training on quality issues.
* Implementing the quality management system and the related quality assurance framework.

By the recommendation of the LPR in order to improve and ensure the quality in respect of the coherence and comparability the NSSRA has developed the Statistical Glossary and posted on its website that is currently available in Armenian, English and Russian. From many talks with users inside and outside the NSSRA, it is obvious that the Statistical Glossary of standard terms is promoting the use of common concepts and definitions and increasing their visibility, and helping to look up the meanings of statistical terms and increase a statistical literacy.

To meet quality requirements the special role is given to the ISI’s Declaration on Professional Ethics that is based on the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and European Statistics Code of Practice, Professional Values and Ethical Principles, and provides those frameworks of statisticians daily work that are describing the peculiarity of the profession of statistician to act exceptionally according to the international statistical standards in official statistics. Guided by this, the NSSRA has translated the Declaration into Armenian and posted on its website, approved by the Resolution of the State Council on Statistics of RA to apply it in the activity of NSSRA and to suggest to others dealing with the statistical activity to follow the Declaration.