

# The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics

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Have you ever looked at facts or figures in the media and wondered whether you could trust the information? Or how these figures were produced?

Thirty years ago, the most senior statisticians in countries across Europe, Central Asia and North America created a set of 10 principles governing the production of official statistics. These principles were devised at a time of immense change and upheaval across the region. As centrally planned economies transitioned to market economies in many member States, statisticians realized a shared framework to define the principles that guide what they do was needed more than ever. The core aim of the framework is to ensure that statistics published by member countries are reliable and trustworthy as they have been produced in accordance with internationally agreed methods, standards, and ethics. Such a framework helps to secure the trust and credibility upon which effective statistics depend. While there are many differences across countries in how their statistical production is organized, what data they gather or what needs they fulfil, these agreed central principles underpinned by independently produced information are universal. These Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, as they became

known, were adopted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in 1992, and in later years were recognized as a global standard around the world.

Since then, the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics have supported statistical agencies in compiling official statistics in accordance with strict professional considerations, including scientific principles and professional ethics. They have also been used as inspiration for other international quality standards of OECD or European Union.

The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics are an indispensable element in the information system of a democratic society, providing valuable insights into the economic, demographic, social and environmental situation within and between countries and regions.

# Celebrating 30 years of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics

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As we mark 30 years of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, we take the opportunity to reflect on the value to our societies of free access to independent, ethically produced information. International adherence to these principles provides a source of reliable, trustworthy information in an era of global information sharing when it can be difficult to assess the source and reliability of what is being shared.

To celebrate 30 years of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics the member States of UNECE's Conference of European Statisticians (CES) have led an awareness campaign to explain the purpose of each of these internationally agreed principles and why they matter.

From January to June of this year CES countries have been highlighting the importance of the Fundamental Principles as the shared foundation of an informed society, underpinning the provision of trustworthy, reliable statistics produced in accordance with internationally agreed methods, standards, and ethics. Countries have been putting the spotlight on individual principles, showing how they are put into action in the everyday work of statistical offices, and how this impacts users and society. Several countries have led the way in focusing on each principle in turn, with the entire community of member countries and international organizations sharing their experiences and practices along the way.

*Ireland and Poland lead the celebration of Principle 10: International cooperation in official statistics*

Principle 10 states that:

*Bilateral and multilateral co-operation in statistics contributes to the improvement of systems of official statistics in all countries.*

**Ireland** currently holds the chair of the Conference of European Statisticians, UNECE's highest decision-making body comprising the national chief statisticians of more than 60 countries as well as international organizations including OECD, Eurostat, IMF, World Bank, CIS-Stat, EFTA, the European Central Bank, and several UN agencies. **Poland** is the country which first proposed creating a shared 'Statistical Convention' for the region and led the working group which eventually resulted in the Fundamental Principles.

Principle 10 makes clear that when it comes to official statistics, no country can go it alone.

Many of the statistics on which decision-makers depend can only be interpreted by making international comparisons. When we see a figure on GDP, employment, even population size, we rightly expect that these numbers are calculated on the same basis across different countries. While Principle 9, on international standards, focuses specifically on why it's important for countries to adhere to shared methods and definitions, Principle 10 is concerned more with how they are arrived at, as well as the many other ways in which countries work together to develop and support official statistics.

Bilateral and multilateral cooperation is a key component in achieving the overall objectives of the Fundamental Principles. Members may be at varying stages of their

development, both in terms of resources and capacity. The ability to share in other's' experiences, access the lessons learned and develop common tools and strategies to meet challenges means that adherence to the scientific and professional standards contained in the Fundamental Principles is achievable for all. This spirit of international cooperation supports the wider implementation of standards rather than just for those who have the greatest resources and capacity.

Co-ordination among statistical agencies within countries is essential to achieving consistency and efficiency and

international co-operation contributes to the improvement of systems of official statistics in all countries. Official Statistics is a highly collaborative environment which recognizes that countries face similar challenges in producing official statistics and promotes best practice through shared knowledge and learning. As a result, official statistics can be relied upon as a relevant and trustworthy source of decision-making information for citizens and decision makers alike. Adherence to these standards also facilitates international comparison in relation to social, economic, demographic, and environmental indicators.

## Principle 10 in practice

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The fundamental principles were developed from a shared recognition of the challenges facing the Official Statistics community which has similar values and objectives. Principle 10 is the embodiment of that community spirit which allows countries with varying levels of capacity, experience, and resources to learn from and contribute to shared experience, knowledge bases and resources. Principle 10 provides opportunities, not only for smaller and less well-resourced community members to leverage the experience and resources of others, but also to provide a meaningful and significant contribution to the overall development of the community.

Both Ireland and Poland have played a significant role in many international projects and collaborations in recent years. Our statistical offices have contributed to shared tools and outputs while also benefitting from the experience of others and leveraging them for use in our own organisations.

As part of this internationally focused work, both countries share statistical expertise and best practices, and work co-operatively to develop international standards and statistical classifications as well as frameworks for the international and national development of official statistics.

Both countries are members of the UNECE High Level Group on the Modernisation of Official Statistics co-chair its selected groups and are actively involved in projects which cover a wide range of topics including: the development of new statistical outputs; the exploration of new data sources; the communication and dissemination of official statistics; the core values of official statistics; data sharing; internationally agreed census recommendations, and new statistical outputs and processes around subjects such as gender equality, children with disabilities, subjective poverty, measuring global production.

## How are we jointly celebrating Principle 10?

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From January to June 2022, the Conference of European Statisticians is celebrating the Fundamental Principles through a series of country-led communications campaigns telling a shared story about the importance and impact of each Fundamental Principle on society, everyday life and why they matter.

As part of these celebrations Ireland and Poland have produced this joint

paper, which highlights the importance of Principle 10 and provides examples of international cooperation and the practical tools and supports that are now available to all members because of this collaborative process. As part of the celebration campaign around Fundamental Principle 10, both countries are also undertaking a social media-based awareness campaign #FPOS30 #cesUNECE

**All countries, organizations, members of the statistical community and users of statistics are welcome to participate in this joint celebration.** Share your **experiences** and **examples** relating to the principles on your social media platforms, websites, and other outlets, using the hashtags **#FPOS30** (for the campaign overall); **#cesUNECE** (to refer to the Conference of European Statisticians) and the full words **“Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics”** in social media posts wherever possible.