



International Newsletter from the Swiss Federal Statistical Office

On the “*Road to Bern*” to the UN World Data Forum

The third edition of the United Nations World Data Forum (UNWDF) will start on Sunday, 18 October 2020, in Bern, Switzerland. The preparation of the UNWDF is underway. The Swiss Federal Statistical Office (FSO) and its partners are working closely with the UN Statistics Division as well as the programme committee to prepare the Forum. When FSO decided to send in a bid to host the UNWDF, it not only wanted to organise an environmentally sustainable event, but also wanted to make the discussions, the exchange, the outcomes and finally the commitments of the UNWDF sustainable. The Road to Bern starts on 1 January 2020 and runs until the opening ceremony of the UNWDF. It will support the exchange on topics that will be discussed at the UNWDF 2020 and foster the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Switzerland.

Dear readers,

It is my pleasure to introduce the content of this issue of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office's international newsletter. As in the previous one, we have a strong focus on the programme preparing the UNWDF 2020: “Road to Bern”.

Regarding the UNWDF 2020, the first official action was started on 2 December 2019: The Call for Sessions. The call is open until 31 January 2020. It is time to apply! (<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/undataforum/call-for-session-proposals-for-united-nations-world-data-forum-2020/>). The final programme will be published on 1 June 2020 and the registration process starts on 15 June 2020.

Road to Bern, the programme of the Swiss Confederation, will take advantage of existing conferences to discuss the topics of the UNWDF as well as organize side-events or stand-alone events. To stay updated on Road to Bern and the UNWDF check out regularly our webpage www.roadtobern.ch.

It is my pleasure to present a number of distinguished guest writers in this issue. First, it is a great honour to have an article written by Pinelopi “Penny” Koujianou Goldberg, the Chief Economist of



the World Bank Group. Her article focusses on the developing countries needs for more and better financing for data and statistics and how the coming activities will be reflected in the World Development Report 2020.

Second, we have an input by Ambassador Jean-Pierre Reymond of the Swiss Mission in Geneva who leads and coordinates the “Road to Bern via Geneva” dialogues. Together with eight Geneva based international organisations, such as WHO, CERN or WEF, four interactive dialogues will be organised between February and June 2020. Ambassador J.-P. Reymond presents the concept of the four events and how they contribute to the UNWDF.

“Road to Bern” will have a strong focus on gender statistics. Issues related to data, statistics and gender will be raised in several international conferences. This element is described in the article by Sylvie Durrer, the director general of the Swiss Federal Office for Gender Equality. Last, but not least, Ambassador Thomas Gass, Vice-Director and Head of the South Cooperation Department of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) is our fourth guest author. He brings an insight on social accountability and data, and how data can support the social contract between the states and their population.

Even if the UNWDF 2020 and Road to Bern represent the top priorities of FSO at international level, many other important activities run in parallel. You will find interesting contributions describing other events and achievements.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues, I hope you enjoy our newsletter. I take this opportunity to extend to you all the season's greetings and look forward to crossing your way on the "Road to Bern" or at the UNWDF 2020.

Georges-Simon Ulrich
Director General, FSO

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Country-led priorities, new commitments, and enhanced international coordination

Toward more and better financing for data and statistics

Members of the international development and national statistics communities have joined forces in an effort to address the challenging reality that national data and statistical systems are chronically under-funded. These efforts have taken several forms in recent years and have generated important calls for action. Advocacy and increased coordination among key global partners have recently intensified, including through global platforms such as the UN World Data Forum and the World Bank Annual Meetings. Together with partners in the Bern Network and the broader international development community, the World Bank is working to spearhead new collaborations for more and better financing, as well as more comprehensive technical support, for national statistical systems in low- and middle-income countries.

Developing Countries Need More and Better Financing for Data and Statistics

It is increasingly recognized that national data and statistical systems are chronically under-funded.ⁱ Overall donor financing for data collection and statistical capacity building in developing countries has decreased significantly in the last several years.ⁱⁱ This under-investment in statistical systems has caused significant gaps in high-quality data in low- and middle-income countries around the world. The gaps in development data threaten the effectiveness of the full spectrum of social and economic development initiatives, from human capital investments to digital economic reforms to the achievement of most of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)ⁱⁱⁱ. Moreover, it is impossible to fathom the country-level policy failures, ineffective service delivery, allocative inefficiencies, and the extent to which poor and historically underserved populations have been further marginalized or driven deeper into poverty occasioned by these data gaps.

As the severity of this problem and its damaging implications are becoming more salient, members of the international development and national statistics communities have joined forces in an effort to address it. Their efforts have taken several forms in recent years and have generated calls for action. Advocacy and increased coordination among key global partners have recently intensified, including through global platforms such as the UN World Data Forum and the World Bank Annual Meetings.

In the lead up to the 2020 United Nations World Data Forum, to be hosted by the Government of Switzerland in Bern, Switzerland, a multi-stakeholder community of data and statistics-focused development practitioners, technical experts, and advocates has formed, designated as “The Bern Network on Financing Data for Development”.^{iv} The primary objective of this group is to promote not just more, but better financing for data in low- and middle-income countries, including through improved responsiveness to country demands and needs, better donor coordination, and advocacy to achieve better complementarity between existing (and future) domestic and external financial support for data and statistics in developing countries. World Bank representatives from our Development Data Group are members of this important network.



Pinelopi «Penny» Koujianou Goldberg,
Chief Economist
World Bank Group

On the Road to Bern

Together with partners in the Bern Network and the broader international development community, the World Bank is working to spearhead new collaborations for more and better financing, as well as more comprehensive technical support, for national statistical systems in low- and middle-income countries. The World Bank recently announced several exciting new initiatives, which collectively comprise a step-change in support for data and statistics around the world. These initiatives will be rolled out “on the road to Bern”, in the coming year, through October 2020 and beyond. They include:

- (1) **New commitments to support data and statistics in low-income countries under IDA19.** The World Bank's latest IDA replenishment process is currently being finalized. By way of brief background, the IDA process is the World Bank's primary funding mechanism for low-income countries, and mobilizes support from across World Bank member countries in three-year disbursement cycles.^v I was delighted to announce at the World Bank's recent Annual Meetings^{vi} that The

World Bank's current IDA replenishment (IDA19) includes a series of new commitments to provide more comprehensive, collaborative support for data and statistics in low-income countries across regions. These commitments include:

- **'Data for Policy'** – this is the World Bank's first ever horizontal policy commitment for 30 IDA countries, and focuses on closing data gaps and improving periodicity for surveys and censuses required for monitoring and evaluation of public policies and programs.
- **'GovTech'** – this is a commitment for at least 12 IDA countries and focuses on (i) AI and machine learning to strengthen public service delivery; (ii) improving access to data to boost the digital economy/create jobs; and (iii) enabling citizen participation in government decisions through real-time data exchanges.
- **'Public Participation'** – this is a commitment for at least 38 IDA countries, and includes an explicit focus on open government data initiatives.
- **'Geospatial capacity'** – this commitment is for at least 16 IDA countries to strengthen country capacity on geo-tagged data collection and use across Fragile States.
- **'Improving skills and employability for young women/men'** – this commitment is for at least 15 IDA countries, and explicitly supports improvements in data collection skills, digital literacy, and strengthening other forms of statistical capacity among young people.

- (2) **New World Bank Umbrella Trust Fund for Data and Statistics.** The World Bank recently embarked on a trust fund reform agenda – called Umbrella 2.0 Trust Funds – to ensure that the Trust Fund instrument evolves with the shifting client needs and most importantly, delivers more transformative solutions for our clients while providing the best value for our donors through increased efficiency and improved strategic alignment among donors and partners.

In response to a call from the UN Statistical Commission's High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, for the establishment of more innovative funding mechanisms to strengthen the capacity of national data and statistical systems, the World Bank is now establishing a global Umbrella Trust Fund for Data. The sole focus of this Umbrella Trust Fund for Data will be client countries' demands and priorities.

The Umbrella will serve as a mechanism to mobilize and coordinate donor support for data and statistics and – importantly – leverage World Bank IDA/IBRD financing, including resources being brought to bear under the above IDA19 commitments. Moreover, it will also focus on catalyzing domestic investments as the

cornerstone of continual engagement from a client country perspective. This way, the Umbrella will ensure a flexible and adaptive approach which allows for a variety of entry points in countries and different levels of dialogue or engagement with country partners and partner practitioners supporting data and statistics using country-led investment blueprints.

This Umbrella will be formally launched in early 2020, with the objective of announcing initial financing at the 2020 UN World Data Forum.

- (3) **The World Bank's 2021 *World Development Report* will focus on 'Data for Development'.** The World Bank's flagship report is the *World Development Report*.^{vii} The report has become a highly influential publication that is used by many multilateral and bilateral international organizations, national governments, scholars, civil society networks and groups, and other global thought leaders to support their decision-making processes. Each report provides in-depth analysis and policy recommendations on a specific, important aspect of development, often at an inflection point in the state of the world, and substantially informs the World Bank's entire portfolio of country support.

The next *World Development Report* is now formally underway, and focusing on data for development. The report will launch extensive external review with clients, key partners, and other stakeholders in early 2020. The team, under my supervision as World Bank Group's Chief Economist, is greatly looking forward to a collaborative process and key insights to ensure this report becomes a lodestar for global support for data and statistics for years to come.

The final report will be published in early 2021, with a special preview for partners during the 2020 UN World Data Forum.

Conclusion

For years, an increasing number of bilateral agencies, multilateral institutions, foundations, and NGOs have invested millions of dollars and expended considerable political capital and staff time in implementing data and statistics projects around the world. That this support (and future support to come) must be demand-driven, collaborative, and coordinated seems intuitive, but serious efforts to achieve these objectives have started only recently and are ongoing. The World Bank is committed to help lead the charge, on the Road to Bern, and beyond.

Pinelopi "Penny" Koujianou Goldberg,
Chief Economist of the World Bank Group

Links

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/about/unit/unit-dec>

<https://data.worldbank.org/>

<http://ida.worldbank.org/replenishments/ida19-replenishment>

ⁱ In 2017, the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group published an evaluation of the World Bank's support for client countries' data and statistics entitled, "Data for Development – An Evaluation of World Bank Support for Data and Statistical Capacity". The report presented an extensive description of lessons learned from the World Bank's work in supporting countries to produce, share, and use data – as well as the Bank's own work – to curate, disseminate, and analyze development data. The evaluation recognized the Bank's global reputation and effectiveness in development data activities as well as its leading role in global data partnerships, but found that the Bank must intensify efforts to mobilize and deliver long-term funding and technical support in collaboration with countries, to implement a more comprehensive model of statistical capacity. For the full report, see World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group, *Data for Development – An Evaluation of World Bank Support for Data and Statistical Capacity*, available at:

<http://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/evaluations/data-for-development>

ⁱⁱ The NGO PARIS21 has found that the total share of Official Development Assistance (ODA) dedicated to data/statistics has stagnated at 0.3% (or approximately USD \$600 million) per year, despite record ODA highs in recent years. They calculate that the cost for more comprehensive support for data and statistical systems will be approximately USD \$5.6 billion per year between 2019 to 2030 for 75 low and low-middle-income and 69 upper middle-income countries, of which an estimated USD 4.3 billion (77%) of costs would be covered by domestic resources. They continue that, should current levels of ODA remain the same, this will leave a financing gap of USD 1.3 billion (23%) per year for *other* financing, such as external assistance from multilateral and bilaterals, as well other domestic sources. PARIS21 qualifies that these calculations speak to the full implementation of the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable

Foot Notes

Development Data, which was informally launched at the first UN World Data Forum on 15 January 2017 in Cape Town South Africa, and adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission at its 48th Session in March 2017. The Action Plan elaborates the scope of support needed to support national statistical systems, and address gaps in national statistics and statistical coordination to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

ⁱⁱⁱ PARIS21 reports that two-thirds of the 232 SDG indicators have no available data

^{iv} <https://paris21.org/news-center/news/bern-network-global-alliance-strengthen-development-data>

^v World Bank support for low-income (or IDA) countries comes from contributions from across World Bank member countries. World Bank leadership meets with representatives of these member countries to replenish this primary funding for low-income countries (called the 'IDA' process) in 3-year periods. The World Bank is now on its 19th iteration of 3-year replenishment, hence the 'IDA19' designation. Discussions with members also include specific commitments by the Bank to focus resources on certain shared priorities (or 'special themes'). The scope of these commitments will be finalized by the end of December 2019, but at a high level, they are: (i) Fragility, Conflict & Violence-affected states; (ii) Governance and Institutions; (iii) Climate Change; (iv) Gender; and (v) Jobs & Economic Transformation. The World Bank's commitments to support data and statistics fall under several of these special themes. For more information, see World Bank IDA19 Replenishment, available at:

<http://ida.worldbank.org/replenishments/ida19-replenishment>

^{vi} World Bank, 2019 Annual Meeting, available here:

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/meetings/splash>

^{vii} <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr/wdr-archive>



Road to Bern

The Geneva contribution for the UN World Data Forum

Geneva's vibrant ecosystem of international organisations, the private sector, and NGOs, already plays an important role in creating data for users worldwide.

For instance, CERN is the biggest data-processing facility on earth and source of scientific data as global commons. Similarly, the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) provides climate and meteorological data as a global public good. Nowadays it is hard to find an international organisation in Geneva that does not attribute an increasingly central role to data. As the main operational hub of the United Nations and the multilateral system, Geneva's ecosystem can contribute substantially to identifying and fulfilling some of the most pressing data demands of the 2030 Agenda.



World Meteorological Organisation in Geneva

International Geneva can see the 2020 UN World Data Forum as a unique opportunity to stock-take the progress made on the 2030 Agenda, to identify missing gaps in data development, and to mobilise the resources needed to bridge these gaps. The World Data Forum can also foster the implementation of the recommendations made by UN High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation and in particular the creation of 'a broad, multi-stakeholder alliance, involving the UN, platform for sharing digital public goods, engaging talent and pooling data sets, in a manner that respects privacy, in areas related to attaining the SDGs.'

In preparation for this event and as a way to enhance International Geneva digital cooperation, the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN and the Geneva Internet Platform are planning a series of 'Road to Bern via Geneva' dialogues on improving digital cooperation in order to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. By addressing in four successive dialogues the main requisites to enhance progress for sharing digital public goods, the 'Road to Bern via Geneva', to be held in the first semester of 2020, will deliver an important contribution to UN World Data Forum. The multi stake-holders dialogues will be held in cooperation with key Geneva based international organizations and will allow cross sectoral discussions. The first dialogue will address the collection of disaggregated data in order to leave no one behind. The second one will discuss different ways to better share data and further develop data as a global commons. The third dialogue will debate how cross-cutting issues such as privacy, data protection, security, and trade-offs can be dealt with. Finally the fourth dialogue will provide ways to help decision-makers to improve their use of data. The cross-sectoral partners will involve eminent actors of key institutions and of central relevance for SDGs such as climate, health, humanitarian dimension, intellectual property, science, trade, system interoperability and communication. Members States of the United Nations, academia, private sector and civil society actors will also be associated with these discussions on the improvement of digital cooperation. A summary report of the cross-sectoral dialogues, including a set of specific proposals, will be brought to the attention of UN World Data Forum as the Geneva contribution.

Jean-Pierre Reymond – Chargé de mission, Head of Cooperation Partnership

Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations Office in Geneva

Evidence-based data: a prerequisite for achieving gender equality

The importance of Gender Statistics in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5)

Gender statistics are a prominent topic of the “Road to Bern” and at the UNWDF. Switzerland will organize different events in the course of 2020 with the aim to highlight the importance of gender statistics in the implementation of the Agenda 2030.

What are gender statistics? According to the United Nations gender statistics are defined “as statistics that adequately reflect differences and inequalities in the situation of women and men in all areas of life”. They are the sum of the following characteristics:

- data are collected and presented disaggregated by sex;
 - data reflect gender issues;
 - data are based on concepts and definitions that adequately reflect the diversity of women and men and capture all aspects of their lives;
 - data collection methods take into account stereotypes and social and cultural factors that may induce gender biases.
- In addition, gender statistics consist also of indicators which are necessary to monitor gender equality.

Gender statistics consist not only of sex-disaggregated data but also of indicators which are necessary to monitor gender equality. With this, gender statistics are an important tool to inform the public and media, to provide them with a better understanding of women’s and men’s situation in today’s society and to encourage public debate. Equally important or even more so, gender statistics form a basis for effectively combating discrimination and, ultimately, for promoting change in society. They provide policy-makers, authorities and other stakeholders with evidence-based data for adopting and implementing effective gender equality policies.

To achieve this, as well as to define and improve statistics and indicators, dialogue and collaboration between statisticians and gender experts from different fields - administration, science, associations and politics - is necessary. For example, it is feminist NGOs that have introduced such essential concepts as unpaid care work or domestic violence into the world of statistics.

Putting gender statistics in the context of the SDG and SDG 5 in particular, it becomes clear that they play a key role in measuring progress towards achieving the targets set out in the Agenda 2030. It is therefore only logical that gender statistics are one of the five outcomes of the 2020 Road to Bern and one of six key topics of the UN World Data Forum.

Between January and October 2020, high-level international events are planned, including a meeting organized by Switzerland

at the Commission on the Status of Women in March or the Eight Global Forum on Gender Statistics in October. Each event will



highlight a particular aspect of the topic, from pay and pension gaps to unpaid care work and domestic violence. The aim is to give the participants the opportunity to exchange good practices on data collection and analysis, learn from each other’s experiences and foster dialogue between the different stakeholders. We hope that the “Road to Bern” and the UNWDF will help policy makers, experts, the private sector as well as a wider public better understand the central role of gender statistics in achieving SDG 5 and in developing policy measures and practices that promote a new gender balance within the family, at the workplace and in decision-making positions.

Sylvie Durrer
Director General / Federal Office for Gender Equality

Andrea Binder
Head of the Legal Unit / Federal Office for Gender Equality

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

Social accountability and data

Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals can only be achieved, if they become a social contract between the states and their populations. Data is essential to this endeavor. The third edition of the World Data Forum must reach out to important external stakeholders that can help bring about an urgent dialogue between states and society on the basis of accessible and understandable data about sustainable development. Official data needs to be combined with unofficial information to advance peoples' understanding of public goods and what is required to achieve the sustainable development goals. While there has been a focus on transparency around data to establish accountability, this is not enough and there is a need to go from data availability to data use for better service delivery and empowering citizens, in particular the ones most left behind, to use data in order to hold decision-makers accountable.

However, to achieve social accountability through data, a number of questions and challenges arise: How is data quality ensured? How is data made easily understandable for citizens? What is the role of civil society organizations, researchers, and the media? How can data be translated in "actionable" information? How to guard against simplistic interpretations or comparisons? How to motivate governments to respond to citizen pressure? How to support the most vulnerable to be part of this discourse? New technologies like social media platforms, text messaging, cloud services, tablets, mobile apps, web interfaces offer new possibilities for social accountability. While these technologies allow to process large amounts of different kinds of data sets, these same advantages of scale, complexity and autonomous learning lead to concerns about these systems being "opaque" to the people that use them. This lack of transparency risks undermining opportunities for accountability particularly when these systems are used to allocate services and resources (i.e. health, schooling or social services). Just to make data available and transparent alone is rarely sufficient to stimulate collective action or pressure response from service providers.

All parties have a responsibility to go beyond mere data production and publication to make data truly accessible, usable and used. In situations where citizens are not able to understand, process and act on data, other actors like media, CSOs, and researchers might act as translators and communicators of information so that it is more "actionable" for citizens. These 'infomediaries' play an important role when the use of technology to disseminate or gather information creates a digital divide.

The example of SDC's supported program in Laos shows that this is not a mere technical exercise, but involves diving deep into processes and discourses of the societal fabric:

Lao Decide Info Project

Swiss Development Cooperation through the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) of the University of Bern supports the National Institute for Economic Research (NIER) and the Institute for Legislative Studies (ILS). NIER is the Government's primary think tank with a mandate to provide knowledge in support of the monitoring and implementation of the country's development plan and towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). ILS is tasked to conduct policy-relevant research and to prepare evidence and information to inform National Assembly's members. Key is the strategic engagement with decision makers, involving them in the identification of key policy issues, development of knowledge products, and incorporation of the knowledge products into national policies.

The Lao Decide Info Project aims at inclusive demand-driven policy analysis, formulation and monitoring to achieve cross-sectoral and vertical integration of national information from a broad range of thematic sectors and to develop and feed new knowledge products into the nation's policy dialogue that informs key strategic decisions and policies.

Through the program, sectoral line ministries and selected sub-national offices share key national databases and information on a common platform to integrate relevant and up-to-date information from across thematic sectors. And assembly members and research institutions jointly identify strategically important knowledge gaps for policy- and decision-making.



To overcome these challenges, **we need to create dialogues and spaces for all potential data users to question the data available, give and receive feedback.** It is on that basis that data can be turned into actionable information and be available and used by citizens to strengthen social accountability and development outcomes for all.

Ambassador Thomas Gass

Vice-Director and Head of the South Cooperation Department of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

Links

Open Government Partnership:

<https://www.opengovpartnership.org/>

Photo

Stakeholders engage in participatory mapping of land concessions in Laos' Khammouan Province.

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European Affairs

5th meeting of the Swiss-EU Statistical Committee

The Swiss-EU Statistical Committee held its 5th meeting in Luxembourg on 2 December 2019 under EU Chair. The most important point of the meeting was the Committee's decision revising Annex A of the bilateral agreement on cooperation in the field of statistics between Switzerland and the EU. That decision will allow the close cooperation in the statistical field to continue on a solid and updated basis, while ensuring the comparability and consistency of statistics also in the future. The new Annex A came into force immediately and will be published in the Official journals of both Switzerland and the EU.

The bilateral agreement on cooperation in the field of statistics between the Swiss Confederation and the EU was signed on 26 October 2004 and came into force on 1 January 2007. It ensures that Switzerland and the EU develop, produce and disseminate harmonized statistics, i.e. statistics that are consistent and comparable with one another, in areas of common interest, in particular those covered by the various bilateral agreements.

The agreement has been in place for a little over ten years and cooperation between Switzerland and the EU is working well. It ensures the dissemination by Eurostat of harmonized statistics from Switzerland alongside statistics from the EU and the EFTA/EEA Member States (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway). That cooperation with Switzerland's main economic partner rounds off the cooperation in international organisations of which Switzerland is member, such as the OECD, the UN, the IMF and the World Bank.

The agreement's basis for cooperation between Switzerland and the EU is EU statistical legislation, mentioned in Annex A of the agreement. The EU legal acts mentioned in Annex A, with the adaptations and derogations provided for, are binding for Switzerland. It is necessary to revise Annex A periodically to take into account changes in EU statistical legislation and to maintain and even develop harmonization of statistics between Switzerland and the EU.

The most important changes brought about by the current revision to Annex A concern the inclusion of EU legal acts governing the development, production and dissemination of statistics on social protection, population and housing censuses, demographic statistics, the environmental economic accounts and the European system of national and regional accounts 2010 (SEC 2010), with in certain cases, adaptations and derogations for Switzerland. The inclusion of those European statistics in Annex A establishes the cooperation with the EU in those fields on a solid



Gallo Gueye, Deputy Director General Eurostat, and Georges-Simon Ulrich, Director General FSO

contractual basis, determining the Parties' rights and duties. That will improve the international comparability of Swiss statistics,

not only with statistics from the EU but also with those of international organisations of which Switzerland is a Member State (OECD, UN, IMF, World Bank).

The decision of the Switzerland-EU Statistical Committee concerning the revision of Annex A was drafted by the Federal Statistical Office (FSO) in consultation with the other authorities in Switzerland responsible for developing, producing and disseminating European statistics. The FSO thus played its part as coordinator of the Swiss statistical system and led the negotiations with Eurostat. The result of those negotiations was approved by the Federal Council (Swiss government) on 22 May 2019, which also authorised the Director-General of the FSO Mr Georges-Simon Ulrich to sign on Switzerland's behalf and with the Deputy Director-General of Eurostat Mr Gallo Gueye, the decision revising Annex A.

Annex A will have to be revised again shortly so that Switzerland can incorporate recent developments in EU statistical legislation concerning, in particular, the statistics on individuals and households (IESS), business statistics (FRIBS) and farm statistics.

Furthermore, the Switzerland-EU Statistical Committee meeting was also an opportunity for the FSO and Eurostat to hold constructive discussions on the state of cooperation in the area of statistics between Switzerland and the EU as well as on EU work concerning the implementation of the recently adopted IESS and

FRIBS regulations and about integrated farm statistics. The drafting and implementation by the EU of the European statistical programme 2021-2027, in which Switzerland will participate, was also discussed.

The 5th meeting of the Switzerland-EU Statistical Committee was held in the presence of observers from Greece, Latvia, the United Kingdom, and of the EFTA Statistical Office. The date of the next Committee meeting will be decided upon by Switzerland and the EU depending on requirements.

Michel A. Di Pietro
Head of FSO European Affairs



Signing a decision can also be fun

Links

Bilateral Agreement with the EU:

<https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/fso/international-statistics/european-statistical-system/bilateral-agreement.html>

62nd ISI World Statistics Congress

Introducing Experimental Statistics at FSO



The 62nd ISI World Statistics Congress was held from 18 to 23 August 2019 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. A Swiss delegation participated in this event, actively contributing to its success. Some fellow Swiss colleagues chaired a session dedicated to the future of official statistics and introduced some experimental statistical statistics developed at the FSO by contributing a paper and a poster.

The FSO seized the opportunity of the 62nd ISI World Statistics Congress to publicly present its latest developments in experimental statistics to a global audience. Daniel Kilchmann, Deputy Head of the Statistical Methods unit, gave a presentation entitled “Experimental statistics: a hub for data innovation in official statistics”.

Experimental statistics: a hub for data innovation in official statistics?

Innovation has always been an area of key interest in official statistics and has become more and more important during the last decade due to increased political and financial pressure. However, the implementation of innovation often takes a long time in official statistics due to the need for a thorough validation process guaranteeing the publication of reliable and valuable results based on sound methodology. Like some other national statistical institutes and Eurostat, the FSO has decided to promote data innovation through a website dedicated to experimental statistics. The <http://www.experimental.bfs.admin.ch> microsite was launched in August 2018 and presents small area estimation for the activity rate as well as FSO's five data innovation projects in the fields of small area estimation, machine learning and deep learning. The contribution provided an overview of the content of

the FSO's microsite and offered an insight into the challenges of experimental statistics in terms of data innovation.

Furthermore, the main ideas of the FSO's data innovation strategy 1.0 and an outline of its pilot projects were also presented. The methods and limitations of the “Area Statistics Deep Learning” (ADELE), “Machine Learning in the social security system” (ML_SoSi) and “Small Area Estimation methods for the Job Statistics” (JOBSTAT) pilot projects were further detailed. The presentation ended with the topic of promoting experimental statistics, making it possible to cover a wider scope of innovation and making it easier to establish contact with users and partners more quickly. However, a thorough validation is still needed to meet the quality requirements of official statistics.

Using machine learning technologies for coding economic activities of businesses – the NOGAuto system

Claude Macchi, Head of the Business Registers Data Unit at the FSO, presented a pilot project aiming to automate the coding of the economic activity of enterprises using machine learning methods applied to data already available within the FSO (data from surveys, descriptions in the commercial register, keywords, explanatory notes for classifications, etc.).

Classifications are the basic element of statistical production. The coding quality of the observed units has a direct impact on all data production processes, on credibility and on the quality of the statistical results. This is even more important in the context of registers and administrative data, which are the starting point for many different statistics and the basis of survey frameworks and data analyses.

To constantly improve the coding quality of units in the Business and Enterprise Register (SBER) and to reduce the burden on businesses in terms of their obligation to supply information to the FSO, the Business Registers Data Section (URD) launched a project – as part of the FSO's data innovation strategy programme – aiming to automate the allocation of economic activity codes to businesses.

The coding procedures are currently fairly standardised. Coders analyse and interpret information on the activities of the businesses, such as data supplied by the businesses themselves, information from surveys, and descriptions from the company register and various administrative data. On this basis, they define keywords which are compared with a list of keywords and concepts linked to each of the classification positions and to their explanatory notes, and in this way the coders decide which code to allocate to the business in question.



Using innovative methods, the URD Section plans to develop a machine learning system to automate the manual coding procedure. This system (“NOGAuto”) performs the steps of reading and interpreting the descriptions of economic activities (preparation phase) and automatically links the business to a classification code (modelling phase). This involves learning based on an existing data set that has already been assigned a code manually. The scope of the system can subsequently be expanded by searching directly online for other sources of information on the business to be classified.

The results obtained in the initial phase of the project are highly promising.

It is also important to emphasise that the effort invested in implementing NOGAuto is not only limited to classification of the economic activities of businesses, but that a slight adaptation of the system would also enable it to be used to assign codes to professions, diseases, causes of death, products, etc.

What are experimental statistics?

The FSO characterises experimental statistics as those “... produced using new methods and/or new data sources...” which strive to “... better meet users’ needs in terms of efficiency, quality and speed.” Furthermore, “...these statistics still have the potential to evolve, especially regarding their methodology, which is still being assessed”. Experimental statistics do not have the same level of maturity as official statistics and are easily recognisable with a specific logo.

Complementary analysis methods used within the scope of NOGAuto:

- for the preparation phase, i.e. the phase comprising reading, comprehension and text mining, we implemented natural language processing (NLP) technologies based, for example, on the naïve Bayes methods for compact language detection;
- for the modelling phase culminating in the allocation of a NOGA code to the business to be classified, the system used various architectures of artificial neural networks and random forests.

Within the scope of the ISI conference, the FSO also chaired a session organised by our colleagues Steven Vale (UNECE) and Volker Täube (EFTA).

Session IPS-7: Where are the boundaries of official statistics?

This session, chaired by Georges-Simon Ulrich, Director General of the FSO, considered how the definitions of official statistics and national statistical systems need to adapt to reflect a number of recent developments. Drivers for change include demand for new products and the availability of new types of data sources. In addition, national statistical organisations have to coordinate other national producers of official statistics (ONAs) within their countries, as well as the production of statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals. In many countries, statistical legislation



The speakers at the IPS-71 session “Where are the boundaries of official statistics?” from left to right: Gogita Todradze (National Statistics Office of Georgia), Steven Vale (UNECE), Georges-Simon Ulrich (FSO), Anahit Safyan (Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia), Volker Täube (EFTA), Per Nymand-Andersen (ECB)

is being reviewed or re-drafted to reflect changing realities. Defining the scope of official statistics, the boundaries of national statistical systems, and providing a clear differentiation between statistical and administrative data are important challenges for all. Upholding statistical confidentiality whilst also facilitating data sharing requires good legal definitions of who can and cannot have access to specific data. The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), in partnership with Eurostat, have developed a “Generic Law on Official Statistics” to provide guidance to countries on these topics.

However, as economies and societies continue to develop, official statistics will need to continuously adapt to new realities.

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Links

FSO Experimental Statistics:
<https://www.experimental.bfs.admin.ch/en/>

Sharing knowledge among experts

3rd Expert meeting on measuring poverty and inequality

The 3rd Expert meeting on measuring poverty and inequality, organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), took place on 5th - 6th December 2019 in the historical Council Chamber of the League of Nations at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. Around 60 participants attended the meeting, representatives of national statistical offices from Europe, but also from the US, Canada and the CIS countries, as well as of international organisations as Eurostat, the ILO and the UNECE itself. It aims to discuss the best practices and methods to measure poverty and inequality in line with the SDGs 1 “no poverty” and 10 “reduced inequalities”.

This year's meeting emphasized the need for national statistical offices to follow up on implementing the adopted methodological guidance, such as the Guide on Poverty Measurement. Main topics addressed were the disaggregation of poverty indicators, supplemental and individual poverty measures and longitudinal trends in poverty. The presentations of the participants gave insights into current country practices and pilot studies and were followed up by discussion sessions, lead by a specialist of the topic.

For example, the first day the representative of UN Women presented the need of including the category of age when analysing gender differences in poverty. In a currently published paper they found out that the global poverty gap between men and women is the highest in the age of 25-34 and diminishes in older age groups but that this is only the case on a national level. This result stressed the need for further analyses on national and regional levels.

The contribution of the Swiss FSO was a presentation of a paper on dynamics of poverty in Switzerland using the SILC longitudinal data, which stressed the advantages of using longitudinal data to shed light into analysis of persistent poverty. By breaking down the data in subgroups the results showed high entry rates into poverty for people with very low work intensity, households without employed persons and persons in bad self-evaluated health. The presentation as well as the following discussion stressed that current longitudinal poverty analyses provide improvements in studying poverty but that possibilities are by far not exhausted.

The last afternoon of the meeting dealt with the topic of machine learning, an emerging and promising issue in public statistics and in particular to measure poverty. The representative of Austria presented results of a pilot project in which machine learning was used as a generalized approach to enhance spatial

resolution of sample estimates. The approach was positively but also critically evaluated by the expert group.

The international meeting offered countries and organisations a platform to exchange practices by presenting experiences and receiving feedback from other participants. Switzerland can highly benefit from this shared experience, which makes international expert meetings highly valuable for the FSO.



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Links

The UN Sustainable Development Goals
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org>

Добро пожаловать в Невшатель – Welcome to Neuchâtel

Development and use of an indicator system for evidence-based decision making

Organised by the FSO, the course on “Development and use of an indicator system for evidence-based decision making” took place for the second time as part of (the) EFTA technical cooperation from 13 to 15 November 2019 at the FSO in Neuchâtel

Over the course of three days, 22 participants from the eleven EECCA (Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia) countries including Moldavia, Mongolia, Ukraine and Belarus considered the use of indicators in political processes, the challenges involved in developing an indicator system and relations between official statistics and stakeholders as well as the need to communicate indicator systems in a way that responds to the expectations of users and policymakers.

This course consisted of fourteen presentations and eight group exercises. Each exercise ended with a presentation of each group's thoughts and a general discussion. The course is always given in English. Due to the origins of the attendees this year, all the presentations were translated into Russian and both the speakers and participants had access to a simultaneous interpretation between English and Russian.

The participants were all expert statisticians, some of whom at a very high level (such as the Vice Director of the State Statistics Service) which encouraged lively discussions and raised interesting questions for the speakers. It should be noted that the course is partly based on the FSO's experience of working with indicators and stakeholders. As such, this cannot be directly transposed to another country or another political culture.

André de Montmollin

Federal Statistical Office, Environment, Sustainable Development, Territory, Section



Created in 2015, the course on “Development and use of an indicator system for evidence-based decision making” was the result of a joint initiative between the EFTA Statistical Office (ESO) in Luxembourg, Eurostat and the FSO. The course is in line with the Lisbon Memorandum adopted in September 2015 by the ESSC (European Statistical System Committee). This document highlights the growing importance of indicators in decision-making, shows the need for active collaboration between statistical offices and stakeholders and also calls for the statistical community to develop shared terminology and to ensure that statisticians receive training in indicators and indicator systems.

The course – developed by the FSO and Eurostat – aims to provide answers to some of the elements of the Lisbon Memorandum. It is also alternatively part of the ESTP (European Statistical Training Programme) and EFTA technical cooperation programme.

AMSS course at the FSO

International AMSS course held in the scope of the ESTP programme

The Statistical Methods section (METH) has been running international courses on various topics to do with statistical methodology for several years. This year, METH, with the support of the International Affairs service (INT), held a course on Advanced Methods for Sample Surveys (AMSS), as part of the European Statistical Training Programme (ESTP). The course was held at the FSO from 4 to 8 November 2019.

Desislava Nedyalkova (METH) was in charge of the course, assisted by Rémy Mariétan (METH). Administrative support was provided by Aida Duric (INT) and Célia Maillard (INT). Taking part were statisticians from the national statistical offices of European Union member countries, from EUROSTAT and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) member countries as well as participants from other institutions or official administrations.

The course proved so popular that there were more applicants (29) than places available (24). In all, 24 participants from 20 countries were able to take part in this advanced course comprising specialised modules taught by METH experts.

On the first day of the course, participants were welcomed in a speech given by the Director General Georges-Simon Ulrich in which he highlighted the importance and the usefulness of this type of event. On Tuesday evening, participants were invited to a guided visit of the town of Neuchâtel with chocolate and absinthe tasting. After the visit, the participants and organisers shared a meal at the Taverne neuchâteloise.

The atmosphere of the course was excellent throughout the week and at the end, all of the participants were delighted by their experience at the FSO.

Course objectives

The main objective of the course was to increase the participants' expertise of advanced sampling methods. The first day of the course was dedicated to introducing the R software program, given by Diego Kuonen of Statoo consulting. This free software program is used in many national statistical offices as well as in academic circles and its flexibility enables users to be open to innovation. On Tuesday morning, Daniel Assoulin (METH) gave a module on non-response. This course shows how to reconcile the two different aspects of non-response, i.e. treating and anticipating non-response in both surveys and administrative data. Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning were dedicated to the



module on calibration given by Lionel Qualité (METH). On Thursday, Anne Massiani (METH) gave the module on variance estimation. These two modules deal with bias and accuracy of estimators. They show how, for example, the use of auxiliary data can reduce bias and increase statistical accuracy. On the last day, Desislava Nedyalkova (METH) gave a module on sample coordination techniques. For example she presented the sample coordination and selection system (SVS) developed by Lionel Qualité, which enables an equal share of the burden between enterprises and between individuals/households.

The statistical methods presented in these courses allow the sharing and transfer of knowledge acquired in this specific area of official statistics.

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Links

ESTP programme:
<https://ec.europa.eu/2019-ESTP-final-catalogue>

ESS event

Data journalism discussed in Brussels

Around twenty participants each representing a country attended an event on data journalism in Brussels on 23rd September. Organised in the scope of the European statistical system, the event was an opportunity to benefit from the experiences of Eurostat and various statistical offices via an open dialogue with journalists, something that is often difficult to establish in other contexts.

In her introduction, Susanne Taillemite, Head of Dissemination at Eurostat, explained that this event was an occasion to share experiences and improve future relations. Martin Stabe from the Financial Times then took a look at the rise of data journalism, highlighting how journalists' needs have changed along with their profession.

Eurostat's meeting with data journalists

Eurostat continued the day by discussing the results of a meeting with data journalists that was held in Luxembourg at the start of the year. This meeting was organised within the scope of a brand image study intended to determine the perception of statistics among the public.

The main results showed that data journalists do not make sufficient use of official statistics and that they sometimes forget statistics are available online. These journalists often focus on presenting statistics but many do not have any basic knowledge of how public statistics work.

Survey of data journalists by Norway

Having questioned a panel of journalists specialised in the field of data prior to redesigning its online offering, Norway reached similar conclusions. There have been times when certain media professionals have called for the development of products that actually already exist on the website.

The speakers highlighted a certain number of problems. Journalists would like to have more data, particularly at individual level even though it is not possible for statistical offices to provide this data.

Some recommendations

Eurostat encourages various measures to assist data journalists in their work. It recommends using dissemination lists to



share larger data, organising webinars and using Twitter for contact purposes or to organise meetings. The presentations were followed by a workshop.

In general, following the growth of data journalism – something which has seen some disparity in its development on the continent – seems to be important. Websites should be designed to make data available in easily readable formats. Great significance should be given to metadata and the necessary time should be taken to explain these data to the media.

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