

**CODE OF ETHICS
OF
OFFICIAL STATISTICS
PRODUCERS**

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I - INTRODUCTION

The times are long gone when *Power* deviated from the economic and, especially, the social reality. With the rising of a *law-based democratic State* governments are increasingly held accountable, which requires a permanent quantitative appraisal of intervention requirements and of the progress attained in the different public policies pursued, in which the National Statistical Systems play a key role.

The incontrovertible need for National Statistical Systems in modern societies, which cannot be over-emphasised, arises from the prerequisite to have available reliable, timely and accessible official statistics, essential for decision making at all levels. In this respect, statistics producing entities assume the role of **rationality centres** in the development and modernisation process.

Moreover, statistics produced and disseminated by official statistics producers, in their capacity as public office holders, are also essential to shape informed public opinion from an objective basis, strengthening the national and cultural identity and the democratic process itself;

In democratic societies, it is unquestionable that the probity of public office holders is essential, and very few countries manage to avoid news in the media denouncing criticisable behaviours on their part.

In fact, public office holders have powers that can sometimes be discretionary at different levels, either the management of public resources and the relationships with the respective citizens when providing services, or the influence they have on the formulation and implementation of public policies. In order to avoid or at least reduce the arbitrary use of those powers the *ethical rules of business conduct* strike a fundamental counterbalance.

Although most individuals, either in society in general or in private life in particular, follow strict ethical rules, the procedures adopted to maintain and implement them reveal some flaws. It can be concluded that individuals in public life often lack a sufficiently accurate vision on the boundaries of an acceptable business conduct. This is certainly a reason for concern for the public in general.

Nowadays, public office holders operate within a context of permanent and swift developments, in particular when management techniques used (risk management, technical and management autonomy, valuation of results rather than of rules and regulations) are imported from the public sector. Actually, they are more subject to monitoring by society, which requires the supply of quality services adjusted to their needs, all the more in a context of gradually decreasing resources.

Public office holders are therefore more and more pressed to assume new functions and responsibilities influenced by a number of factors, namely increased decentralisation and technical and management autonomy, recourse to business practices, new relationships between the public sector and the private sector and changes in reporting systems.

Therefore, potential tensions are already emerging between the classical notions of general government (to work according to the rules) and the new public management practices (to obtain results thanks to innovation and risk management). In the business ethics area, these may even become more apparent.

In the absence of an *ethical and deontological filter*, it is difficult (virtually impossible) to appraise the development of the relative frequency of episodes of unacceptable conduct by public office holders. It is a fact that the latter are exposed to the temptation of taking personal advantage of their positions. But more than the individuals, the systems are at stake here, as these can be more harmful to society.

In turn, it would not be logical to connect a strict ethics infra-structure (focused exclusively on observing the respective rules) to result-oriented decentralised management systems, since recent developments in the business ethics management domain (relative deviation from detailed rules towards broad guidelines, definition of values, dissemination of codes of conduct and more transparency) lead to the opinion that the objective is to reach more consistency, and that business ethics should be faced as an integral part of management systems.

In view of the above, the *Conselho Superior de Estatística* (Statistical Council) (hereinafter referred to as the Council), in its capacity as the high entity of the State that monitors and coordinates the *Sistema Estatístico Nacional* (National Statistical System), adopts the present *Code of Ethics of Official Statistics Producers*, as an integral part of the management exercise of official statistics producing entities that are part of the System.

Moreover, according to the Council, the *Business Ethics Principles* enshrined in this Code should be considered part of an ethic infra-structure that, when considered at wide-country level, shall include the following:

- **Political commitment**
 - Political leaders should stress the importance of ethics, give an example and maintain good conduct with appropriate resources.
- **Effective legal framework**
 - Laws and regulations establishing and ensuring respect for rules of conduct.
- **Sufficiently effective accountability mechanisms**
 - Administrative proceedings, audits, performance evaluation of services, consultation mechanisms and supervision.
- **Codes of conduct:**
 - List of values of an organisation, its role, responsibilities and obligations of its employees, and restrictions on the respective activities.
- **Business socialisation mechanisms**
 - Education and training.
- **Good employment conditions**
 - Fair and equitable wages and suitable social security.
- **An entity for the coordination of ethics issues**
 - National Council of Ethics.
- **Active civil society supervising government and general government activities**
 - Including vigilant media.

II- PRINCIPLES

Considering the following basic elements of legislation:

- Guiding principles of the National Statistical System [Law No 6/89 of 15 April];
- Fundamental principles of official statistics [Resolution of the United Nations Statistical Commission at the 28th meeting, in April 1994];
- Guiding principles of Community Statistics [Regulation (EC) 322/97 of 17 February];
- Rules for the Protection of Personal Data [Law No 67/98 of 26 October];
- Code of Good Practice of Public Service [Resolution of the Council of Ministers No 18/93 of 17 March];
- Declaration on Business Ethics of Statistics Producers [Resolution of the General Meeting of the International Statistical Institute of 21 August 1985].

The following **Business Ethics Principles of Official Statistics Producers** shall apply:

1. To act with integrity, i.e. to behave with honesty and make every effort to be guided by impartiality, objectivity and technical-scientific strictness;
2. To preserve the relevance of official statistical activities as regards national and Community data requirements;
3. To consult interested parties at both the internal and external level of the public sector, to plan the official statistical activity;
4. Not to impose an excessive statistical burden on respondent statistical units vis-à-vis the results required;
5. To scrupulously respect the confidentiality of individual statistical data collected;
6. To complement official statistics produced and disseminated with methodological notes and interpretative analyses to the benefit of users;
7. To make official statistics available to all users on an objective, impartial and equidistant basis;
8. To be open and transparent concerning all aspects related to the production and dissemination of official statistics;
9. To communicate effectively with all parties involved in the production and dissemination of official statistics: respondents, users and co-workers;
10. To assume the challenge of providing a public service to the whole society, with high quality standards, and always seeking their fulfilment;
11. To seek to improve professional competence on an ongoing basis, aligned by recognised technical-scientific and management standards;
12. To ensure, as far as possible, the consistency of utilisation of recognised cost-benefit analysis and management methodologies.

III - IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PRINCIPLES

The production and dissemination of official statistics include the following main activities:

- Planning of statistical operations;
- Collection of basic statistical data;
- Electronic data processing;
- Protection of confidentiality of individual statistical data;
- Analysis and interpretation of results;
- Dissemination of official statistics;
- Development of technical-scientific and management skills.

Official statistics producers shall carry on the above activities to the best of their ability, working for society. For that purpose, they must make the commitment to develop, at all times, their technical-scientific and management skills and to respect the Ethical Principles defined. They must also take the commitment to abide by the following **business conduct standards**:

- In the planning of statistical operations

- To identify the statistical data to be collected in order to obtain the results required, in consultation with the users and respondents, or their representatives;
- To ensure the indispensable nature of any new survey, as well as its efficiency, resorting, to the extent possible, to existing surveys or administrative sources, and to make regular reviews of the need to maintain them and of their scope;
- To select statistical methods that are consistent with the quality and quantity of data to be collected, the necessary reliability of the required results, and the projected swiftness of statistical dissemination;
- To adopt international patterns on methodologies, definitions, concepts, nomenclatures and other technical instruments of statistical coordination, ensuring as much as possible their compatibility with the satisfaction of users' requirements;
- To encourage demand for consistency and comparability among the different sets of official statistics;
- To test the questionnaires and other relevant aspects of statistical collection and of electronic treatment of information collected before their implementation;
- To act within the boundaries of technical-professional skills, seeking counselling whenever necessary;
- To maintain the continuity and comparability of the statistical series produced, avoiding the possible introduction of ruptures, or, if this is not possible, providing users with the necessary methodological information allowing for their understanding.

- In the collection of basic statistical data

- To collect data lawfully and with respect for the good faith principle, informing respondents on the legal basis of the survey and on the purpose of the data, as well as whether the survey, or part of it, is mandatory or optional, in the former case indicating the legal sanctions applicable to offenders;
- To prepare the statistical surveys, so as to avoid biased replies, with brief but clear filling-in instructions;
- To certify that survey samples, by sampling, are representative of the statistics to be compiled with, providing methodological information on the said statistics, as well as on the confidence level of the results obtained;
- To act with a view to reducing non-replies to an acceptable limit, in order to guarantee the reliability of the required results;
- To ensure that respondents may receive feedback, albeit brief, on the results of the survey(s) in which they have participated;
- To limit the burden of replies to the surveys to as little as possible, ensuring their consistency with the need to produce appropriate official statistics, regularly reviewing the questionnaires used through consultation to the respondents or to the representative associations, and resorting to administrative data whenever this is technically acceptable;
- To ensure that the statistical data collected from administrative sources qualify as quality statistics, maintaining a dialogue with the respective responsible managements, with a view to permanently improving their information content and the conditions for the respective access to be used for official statistics purposes.

- In the electronic data processing

- To check the accuracy of data collected through manual or automated validation methods, identifying all the errors for their correction, which shall be automatic whenever possible, and to ensure the control and the ensuing treatment of non-replies, whenever possible through consistent automated input methods;
- To resort to new information technologies according to efficiency and effectiveness criteria;
- To ensure that the information quality objective is pursued throughout the whole electronic processing;
- To process the information as soon as possible, with a view to the timely dissemination of the respective results.

- In the protection of confidentiality of individual statistical data

- To thoroughly meet the rules of the statistical confidentiality principle defined in Law No 6/89 of 15 April, which approved the National Statistical System's General Bases;
- To thoroughly meet the rules for the protection of personal data defined in Law No 6/89 of 15 April;
- To thoroughly meet the regulations governing the implementation of the statistical confidentiality principle of official statistics producers, approved by the Council.

- In the analysis and interpretation of results

- To be unconditionally impartial and objective, providing the users with basic information on the methodologies and techniques used;
- To evaluate the robustness of the results depending on the conventions and assumptions used in obtaining them;
- To validate the consistency of the results vis-à-vis other public but non-official statistics that may be available;
- To ensure that the analyses interpreting the results provided are relevant vis-à-vis users' requirements.

- In the dissemination of official statistics

- To make official statistics available as soon as possible after conclusion of their production process, previously publishing, on a regular basis, the foreseeable dates for the respective dissemination;
- To make official statistics available to all users simultaneously, without prejudice to prior information to sovereign entities;
- To assume responsibility for the contents of notes and press releases on the official statistical activity developed;
- To issue publications on the methodologies used in the production of the different official statistics;
- Without prejudice to providing a public service, to adopt a marketing policy of official statistical information, particularly when tailor-made to meet individual requirements;
- To timely reply to all requests for official statistical information;
- To include in statistical publications sufficient information on definitions, concepts, nomenclatures and methodologies used in the production of the respective information contained therein, as well as names, telephone, fax and email of experts that may be contacted for obtaining explanations and additional information, under conditions to be agreed in the context of the gratuity regime or business policy.

- In the development of technical-scientific and management skills

- To make efforts to raise know-how and professional profiles, maintaining an appropriate level of knowledge on most relevant scientific and technological developments;
- To promote public knowledge of the need/usefulness of official statistical information, participating with transparency in establishing appropriate institutional relationships with the media;
- To react pedagogically to erroneous interpretations of the official statistical information published, and its utilisation on an inappropriate technical basis;
- To promote the carrying out of individual and group work up to the limit of the respective potential capacity.