



**How can the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics strengthen the National Statistical Offices and statisticians in their practical work?
An illustration based on case studies and scenarios**

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Abstract

Professional and ethical frameworks, like the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (UN FPOS) and the International Statistical Institute Declaration on Professional Ethics (ISI DPE), are essential in order to give guidance to National Statistical Offices (NSOs) and statisticians from all over the world. Both have become an integral part and a common reference in the global and national statistical systems.

But what if infringements occur? A closer look at concrete case studies/scenarios enables a discussion of possible solutions based on the UN FPOS implementation guidelines. More specifically the paper will focus on case studies/scenarios regarding principle 4 of the UN FPOS “Prevention of misuse” and the cross-cutting issue of “Independence” (referring to principles 1, 2 and part II of the UN FPOS implementation guidelines). These two issues have been chosen, because they are both covered by the frameworks mentioned above and they reflect the current discussion at international level.

The UN Statistical Commission established an international Friends of the Chair group in 2011 which among other things developed the UN FPOS implementation guidelines from 2013 to 2015. These contain concrete recommendations of activities that enhance the practical implementation of the UN FPOS and ensure independence of national statistical systems. Concrete examples and experiences for implementation from UN Member States and a collection of statistical laws are integrated in this work. The Friends of the Chair group dealt among other things with the question of how to address perceived violations. Both of these main tasks of the Friends of the Chair group will be presented in this paper.

Key words: UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics Implementation guidelines, ISI Declaration on Professional Ethics, prevention of misuse, independence

1. Introduction

This paper focuses on the following two key questions: How can the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics strengthen the National Statistical Offices and statisticians in their practical work? Furthermore, how to address perceived violations is an important question to be embraced in this paper in order to ensure effective implementation. It has been triggered by the elevated status of the Principles due to endorsement by the General Assembly as well as by growing demands on official statistics in national, regional and international contexts (United Nations Economic and Social Council (2014c)).



Therefore, this paper focuses on presentations of case studies/scenarios where concrete violations of the UN FPOS and the ISI Declaration on Professional Ethics (ISI DPE) are described. A special focus is on the presentation of the UN FPOS implementation guidelines, which propose practice-oriented activities, methods and tools in order to strengthen the practical implementation of the UN FPOS: based on the UN FPOS implementation guidelines, solutions to avoid violations are discussed. Where appropriate, the ISI DPE is considered in this paper.

Why to discuss these two key questions now? Statistics become increasingly important for evidence-based decision-making. At the same time NSOs have to cope with budgetary pressures. There is a window of opportunity, due to political developments such as the economic and financial crisis or the discussion on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), statistics are in the center of political attention. Especially the debate on the monitoring of the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals is an opportunity to increase the awareness for and importance of reliable statistical data of high quality for evidence based political decisions as mentioned in the preamble of the UN FPOS: “(...) highlighting the fundamental importance of official statistics for the national and global development agenda (...)” (United Nations General Assembly (2014)). But to be in the focus of political attention might also lead to political interference. That is why binding codes and standards become more and more important. They form the basis for an institutional framework ensuring among other things independence and prevention of misuse.

Before answering the questions raised above, it is important to explain what the UN FPOS and the ISI DPE are and how they interrelate.

2. What are the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the ISI Declaration on Professional Ethics? And how do they interrelate?

The UN FPOS provide some general guidelines for the functioning of statistical systems as well as for the production and dissemination of official statistics. They represent the core values of official statistics against which the work of the statistical agencies can be judged (for example in the framework of the UN's Global Review¹).

They are sort of the “humus soil”, that is to say the UN FPOS build the very foundation for many other, more elaborate codes like the European Statistics Code of Practice, the Code of Good Practice in Statistics for Latin America and the Caribbean as well as the ASEAN Community Statistical System Code of Practice and the African Charter on Statistics. Moreover, the UN FPOS have shaped the formulation of the statistical laws in many countries (United Nations Economic and Social Council (2011) and (2014b); European Commission (2014))².

A milestone in the history of the global statistical system was reached when, on 29 January 2014, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution concerning the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, which have been applied worldwide since 1994. It is the first time the UN FPOS have received such high recognition at global political level since their inception almost twenty years ago. The endorsement by the General Assembly increases the visibility and enhances the understanding as well as the awareness of the UN FPOS by bringing them to the attention of politicians, statisticians, users of official statistics and data providers (United Nations Statistics Division (2013); United Nations Economic and Social Council (2013) and (2014a); Statistisches Bundesamt (2014)).

¹ Global Reviews assess periodically the implementation of the Fundamental Principles within the UN Member States, detecting best and least implemented Principles, see <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/dnss/gp/globreview.aspx> .

At the forty-fifth session of the UN Statistical Commission the quinquennial review of the implementation of the Principles mandated by the Commission was agreed upon (United Nations Economic and Social Council (2014a)).

² For example the Law on Official Statistics of the Republic of Azerbaijan reflects in many respects the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.



The UN Statistical Commission established an international Friends of the Chair group in 2011 which among other things developed the UN FPOS implementation guidelines from 2013 to 2015. The UN FPOS implementation guidelines are an important instrument to strengthen the practical implementation of the UN FPOS and to generate a positive impact on implementation. They translate rather general principles into concrete guidelines and provide practice-oriented activities, methods and tools for implementation. That is why when it comes to solutions the international statistical community is likely to refer to these guidelines. Of course, it depends on all of us whether this document will become a reference document at global level. Due to the importance of these guidelines for implementation, this paper will often refer to them.

The ISI Declaration on Professional Ethics was published on 20 October 2010 (which was the first World Statistics Day). The 2010 Declaration succeeded the first ISI Declaration on Professional Ethics of 1985. The ISI DPE consists of a statement of shared professional values and a set of ethical principles that derive from these values. By disseminating shared values and principles and by identifying factors that hamper their implementation, it can help statisticians in making ethical judgments and decisions (ISI (2015a)). In other words, the ISI DPE is sort of an ethical shield in protecting statisticians as it provides a proper framework or guidance for daily work³. The principles of the statistical profession of the ISI DPE lay the foundation for statistical ethical behavior. It represents a personal and ethical obligation.

These values and principles have been very helpful for official statisticians as well as other specialists engaged in statistics. Furthermore, the ISI also provides support or makes interventions in specific cases of violations of professional ethics as appropriate: the ISI set up an Advisory Board on Ethics in order to advise on compliance with the 2010 Declaration. The ISI considers submissions on ethical issues and issues statements⁴, and works with other organizations to raise and maintain ethical standards within the statistics profession (ISI (2015b)). Besides, many of the issues brought to the attention of the ISI leadership in recent years are violations of the UN FPOS rather than issues dealing with individuals.

Whereas the UN FPOS rather target institutions and NSOs, the ISI DPE rather targets individuals and statisticians. On the one hand, it is essential to enshrine core values of official statistics institutionally. On the other hand, it is important to sensitize each statistician for shared professional values and ethical principles. Therefore, the ISI DPE and UN FPOS complement each other or rather are mutually dependent.

3. Case study of Suriname: Independence of NSO

The Director of the General Bureau of Statistics (GBS), Iwan Sno, impressively demonstrated how NSOs might be influenced in a direct or indirect way by politics and how to react to this interference.

Scenario 1: Direct interference

In the late nineties, newspaper headlines stated “Iwan Sno has to go”, because the inflation data and the timing of the release of inflation data were not in the best interest of the Government. But the GBS made good use of the press, defending itself by referring inter alia to UN FPOS, and clarified that, although it came under a ministry administratively, it was independent as regards technical decisions (Sno (2014)).

³ “(...) the definition of who is a statistician goes well beyond those with formal degrees in the field, to include a wide array of creators and users of statistical data and tools.”, see <http://www.isi-web.org/about-isi/professional-ethics/43-about/about/296-declarationprofessionalethics-2010uk>

⁴ For current statements and letters see ISI (2015c).



Scenario 2: Indirect interference

When a minister of Planning and Development Cooperation was dissatisfied with the per capita income of Suriname (data produced by the NSO), he instructed his Deputy Permanent Secretary, in charge of the Ministry's Finances, not to release any funds to the GBS to publicize its latest product (Sno (2014)).

What can be learned from these examples? How can UN FPOS and ISI DPE be useful in such conflicts?

What was Iwan Sno's approach?

Scenario 1 is an example that in the case of political interference, the most targeted series are unemployment figures, inflation figures, GDP estimates and other National Accounts aggregates, and population and vital statistics (Sno/Soedhwa (2000): page 4). In Scenario 1 Iwan Sno demonstrated integrity and resisted political pressure, which is also a question of personality. Furthermore, the GBS used the publicity given by the press in order to defend itself and referred to the UN FPOS. It stated that the GBS was independent as regards technical decisions. This example reveals that the press can be a valuable ally. In addition, Iwan Sno stated that he would seek national, regional and international support: "I made it clear that should I be fired for incompetence or improper behaviour I would silently move, but not so if I had to move for political reasons as I would nationally, regionally and internationally let it [be] known what the reasons for my dismissal were, thus chances were that a partisan successor would not be able to manipulate." (Sno (2014))

The political interference in scenario 2 is not as explicit as in scenario 1, as the pressure put on the GBS was exerted indirectly via budget cuts. Even if the pressure is "only" indirect, however, the independence of the NSO as a whole is in danger. Again the GBS referred to the UN FPOS and decided to work with the press as an ally: whenever there has been a new publication, the press has been invited, the most important issues of the publication have been presented and free copies been distributed to the press. By handing a new publication over to the press, a multiplier effect would lead to the dissemination of the statistical results even if the relevant budget was not granted.

Which UN FPOS and ISI DPE values and principles were violated?

The example illustrates how a Director of an NSO could be subject to political pressure or be made to serve specific interests. Apparently the release of inflation data was not in the best interest of the government. Therefore independence was violated in the above example. But what is independence? "The independence of statistics is crucial for the quality, the credibility and the integrity of official statistics. Therefore, statistical institutions at inter-, supra- and national level have to ensure that the statistics developed, produced and disseminated have been produced in an independent way. That is to say, statistics should not be subject to political pressure and should not serve specific interests. Statistical systems are rather to be governed by approaches that guarantee neutrality, objectivity, equal access, high quality and confidentiality. If this is the case, respondents, users, media, politicians and citizens can trust the statistics provided." (United Nations January (2015): Part II).

Independence is covered in the UN FPOS, namely in principle 1 "Relevance, Impartiality, and Equal Access" and principle 2 "Professional Standards, Scientific Principles, and Professional Ethics". Furthermore, when speaking of perceived violations of independence, we also have to bear in mind



part II of the UN FPOS implementation guidelines on “How to ensure independence”, which covers the cross-cutting issue of independence in a separate overarching chapter.⁵

This case study also shows that we have different dimensions: pressure can be put on an institution/the NSO but also on a person/the Head of an NSO. As stated above, it is possible to refer to the UN FPOS (targeting institutions) and to the ISI DPE (targeting statisticians). A look at the ISI DPE reveals that independence is also covered there. The following values/principles were violated in the above example: value 3 “Truthfulness and Integrity” (among the “shared professional values”), principle 1 “Pursuing Objectivity”, principle 3 “Assessing Alternatives Impartially”, principle 4 “Conflicting Interests” and principle 5 “Avoiding Preempted Outcomes” (among the “ethical principles”).

What lessons can be learned from the UN FPOS implementation guidelines?

The UN FPOS implementation guidelines list several actions, methods and tools which a National Statistical Office is advised to take into account in order to ensure the full independence of national statistical systems.

Prescribing independence in law

Independence should be laid down in law to ensure that “(...) the statistical agencies need to decide according to strictly professional considerations, including scientific principles and professional ethics, on the methods and procedures for the collection, processing, storage and presentation of statistical data” (UN FPOS, namely principle 2 “Professional Standards, Scientific Principles, and Professional Ethics”). Furthermore, the law should offer an overarching framework for accountability of the NSO (for example defining the processes for recruiting the Head of the NSO and ensuring a sufficiently high hierarchical standing of the Head of the NSO, see below).

Human resource management based on professional criteria

Highly skilled individuals should be employed, who have a profound understanding of official statistics and the relevant scientific principles. It is also very important that this highly skilled staff maintain and continuously update their knowledge through for example continuous training within the NSO, with academia and/or think-tanks or in the framework of international collaboration and capacity building, as well as through interaction or participation in specialized working groups (United Nations January (2015): Part II and Principle 2).

Transparent and clear recruitment and dismissal processes must be based only on professional criteria and should be publicly available (United Nations January (2015): Part II). These procedures must be independent of changes of government. Legislation or regulation must be transparent regarding the selection, appointment, and dismissal of the Head of the National Statistical Office (United Nations January 2015: Principle 2). It is necessary that job characteristics of the Head of the NSO are defined, such as the responsibility for methods, the budget of the NSO, and the need to offer a political stance on statistical issues (United Nations January (2015): Part II).

The Head of the National Statistical Office should be of the highest professional caliber and should have a sufficiently high hierarchical standing (United Nations January (2015): Principle 2) in order to be able to propose and negotiate the budget of the institution and to ensure senior level access to policy authorities and administrative public bodies (United Nations January (2015): Part II). Regulations should specify the role of the Head of the NSO and provide the Head of the NSO and statistical office(s) with authority over professional decisions, including: (i) scope, content, and frequency of data compiled; (ii) selection and promotion of staff; (iii) release of statistical information

⁵ It was the mission and purpose of the FOC group to stress and highlight independence by discussing it in a separate chapter. This chapter was not intended to be fully identical to what is said about independence in principles 1 and 2 –it was rather meant as a supplement.



and accompanying press materials and documentation without prior clearance regarding the statistical content of the release; (iv) direct communication about the NSO's statistics before political authorities and public bodies (United Nations January (2015): Principle 2).

Managing the budget and establishing work programs

The NSO should have the opportunity to manage the budget in an autonomous way, the Head of the NSO should be responsible for the budget management and have a right to publicly comment on the budget allocated to the NSO (United Nations January (2015): Principle 1). Clearly defined and adequate budgetary accountability and resources on an annual or a multiannual basis (not exposed to external ad-hoc changes) enable the statistical institutions to plan activities in an autonomous way in the medium term by being provided with funding and financial resources before the planning process starts. This is very important in order to be able to prioritize activities, topics and items sufficiently in advance (United Nations January (2015): Part II).

Furthermore, the NSO should have the opportunity to set up and publish statistical work programs autonomously: statistical program planning is supposed to be based on the users' needs and to respond to the demand for information placed by politicians, citizens and other stakeholders on official statistics (United Nations January (2015): Part II).

Releasing statistical information independently

Statistical releases should be clearly distinguished and issued separately from political or policy statements. A consistent and trustworthy pre-release calendar, equal access for all users as well as sound practice for pre-release access are necessary (United Nations January (2015): Part II and Principle 1). The NSO, when appropriate, has to have opportunity to comment publicly on statistical issues, including criticism and misuses of official statistics (United Nations January (2015): Principle 1).

4. Case study of Germany: Misuse and misinterpretation of statistics

External data users sometimes make inaccurate use of statistical information or may misinterpret figures. Reasons might be a lack of statistical literacy or the temptation to use statistical information for one's own interests.

Scenario 1: Unintended misinterpretation

The tabloid newspaper "Bild" stated on 17 November 2009 that due to the European economic crisis 1.2 million jobs in the German industrial sector had been lost from January to September 2009. The relevant press release of the Federal Statistical Office of Germany (FSO) was unintentionally misinterpreted as a result of a serious calculation error by journalists. In fact, only 128,000 jobs had been lost during that period. Because of the high circulation of this newspaper in Germany, the wrong data were repeated by other leading media, so that the mistake was multiplied.

Scenario 2: Intentional misinterpretation

In an article of 28 October 2012, the Sunday newspaper "Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung" created the impression that the FSO severely underestimated life expectancy because its projection ignored the medical and technical progress that prolongs life. Furthermore, the newspaper indicated that, according to this projection, the life expectancy of newborn girls was 83 years. Both statements were intentional misinterpretations in order to underline the main argument of the article. The journalists did not ask the FSO for assistance when exploring the topic. This scenario shows that the journalists ignored the methodological references in the press release which explained how the FSO generally calculates life expectancy and how the figures are to be interpreted in the right way.



Scenario 3: Serious misuse - politically tinged

In February 2009, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth quoted that the number of childbirths in Germany had slightly increased from January to September 2008 and that, as an additional effect of its successful family policies, an overall growth of up to 690,000 childbirths was expected for the year as a whole.

These figures were based on preliminary monthly results of the FSO regarding childbirths until September 2008 as well as a press release of January 2009 of the FSO. However the headline of this press release explicitly stated the following: "Further population decrease expected for 2008." Furthermore, the press release indicated that, according to preliminary calculations, the number of childbirths in 2008 (again approximately 680,000 up to 690,000) had hardly changed in comparison to 2007, whereas the number of deaths had slightly increased.

The Federal Ministry might have ignored the estimated range of childbirths that was almost constant compared to 2007, and it gave the impression that the number of childbirths of 690,000 was a rather fixed figure.

What can be learned from these examples? How can UN FPOS and ISI DPE be useful in such conflicts?

What was the approach of the Federal Statistical Office of Germany?

First of all, the FSO's regular press monitoring is aimed at detecting misuse and misinterpretation of data in the media. The next step is to identify countermeasures according to a two-level scheme, which includes actions below and above a 'threshold of public perception'. Whether a possible reaction to misuse and misinterpretation is made public by the FSO depends on the character (e.g. false report, unintended or intentional misinterpretation), seriousness (e.g. formal error or serious misuse endangering the corporate image) and extent of misuse (e.g. public scandal). Furthermore, possible reactions depend on the time of detection.

Actions below the threshold:

1. Call (e-mail) to editorial journalist (e.g. false report or unintended misinterpretation – formal or marginal error – limited publicity)
2. Official letter to editorship (e.g. unintended or intentional misinterpretation – serious misuse – limited publicity)

Actions above the threshold:

1. Public letter to the editor (e.g. false report or intentional misinterpretation – serious misuse – limited publicity)
2. Press release (e.g. false report or intentional misinterpretation – serious misuse – high publicity)
3. Counterstatement (e.g. false report or intentional misinterpretation – serious misuse or danger to the corporate image – high publicity)
4. Press conference or other public statement (e.g. false report or intentional misinterpretation – danger to the corporate image – scandal)



In scenario 1 a press release was published by the FSO on the same day which explicitly pointed out in the title that the newspaper had used false figures. The journalists reacted to this press release by publishing a correction on page 1 of the newspaper the day after the misinterpretation.

In scenario 2 the responsible Head of Department of the FSO wrote a public letter to the editor of the newspaper in which the wrong content was quoted and corrected. The Head of Department of the FSO highlighted that the quoted figures were not part of the projection of life expectancy, because they described the actual state (that is the current mortality rate). Considering the development trends and thus the medical and technical progress influencing life expectancy, newborn girls had a life expectancy of 91 years. The newspaper published this letter.

In scenario 3 a serious misuse that was politically tinged was described. As a consequence, the FSO established guidelines on how to react to the misuse of data as described above in the framework of the two-level scheme.

Which UN FPOS and ISI DPE values and principles were violated?

Misuse of statistics occurs when for example false reports are made or when reports are misinterpreted (unintendedly or intentionally). In some cases, the misuse might be accidental and in some other cases, it is purposeful and for the gain of the perpetrator. Types of misuse include for example discarding unfavorable data, overgeneralizations, misreporting or misunderstanding of statistical figures and statements and making false causality (United Nations January (2015): Principle 4).

In this case study of Germany the UN FPOS, namely principle 4 “Prevention of misuse”, was violated. Regarding the ISI DPE, value 1 “Respect” (among the “shared professional values”) and ethical principle 1 “Pursuing Objectivity” as well as ethical principle 8 “Maintaining Confidence in Statistics” (among the “ethical principles”) were violated.

What lessons can be learned from the UN FPOS implementation guidelines?

The UN FPOS implementation guidelines in combination with the Global Review list several actions to prevent misuse and misinterpretation of statistics which an NSO is advised to take into account when aiming at improving the implementation of this principle or when developing this principle further.

Defining clear provisions to be laid down for example in national and supranational policies and frameworks or in statistical laws

These clear provisions should make reference to the right of the Head of the National Statistical Office or Head of a regional body to comment publicly on the misuse or misinterpretation of official statistics.

Embedding the principle into statistical practice and publicly commenting on misuse in a timely, unambiguous and transparent way

While statistics can be used and interpreted in many different and acceptable ways, it is important that trust in official statistics is maintained and that the latter are accepted as being credible. Hence good practices include that statistical agencies should draw attention to, and if necessary comment on, obvious public incorrect use or interpretation. Clear provisions facilitate embedding this principle into statistical practice. Responses should be timely, unambiguous and transparent, for example by submitting letters to editors, holding press conferences, issuing press releases or commenting on misuse and erroneous interpretations on one’s own website.



Releasing training programs for users and improving the metadata documentation

In order to increase the users' awareness and knowledge of official statistics several actions can be taken:

- furthering “literacy on statistics” and deepening the general public’s understanding of statistics and their importance by publishing manuals, guides, and booklets and giving courses or seminars to the users,
- explaining statistics and their methods in user-producer dialogues or workshops,
- designing user-friendly websites with specific pages (“corners”) for certain user groups and with a different degree of explanation,
- using social media to inform users about statistics.

Formulating a transparent publications policy (for example ‘error policy’)

Misinterpretation of statistics can be caused by errors in published data, which cannot always and entirely be avoided although all staff members of an NSO take great care in doing their job. To maintain confidence in official statistics in such a case, it is important that the NSO reacts reasonably and in a uniform and transparent way. Errors detected in published statistics should be corrected at the earliest possible date and the whole procedure should be publicized (for example by means of an error policy informing users about errors in the same manner and to a comparable extent).

Using “Open Copyright” as an incentive for users to refer to official statistics

Dissemination and duplication of official statistics will be allowed free of charge if the source is mentioned correctly (as long as the rights of third parties remain unaffected). Free access is an incentive for users to refer to official statistics.

5. How to address perceived violations?

The above case studies illustrate concrete examples of perceived violations of the UN FPOS and the ISI DPE. Furthermore, possible solutions are described. However, an outstanding question is how perceived violations can successfully be addressed.

“International support, particularly in terms of United Nations documents, the work of the United Nations Statistical Commission and the regional statistical conferences, and the professional contacts fostered by the International Statistical Institute [have] had a definite supporting role for statisticians working even in repressive and undemocratic societies (Seltzer (1994): page 20).” Furthermore, it is the aim of the recently elaborated UN FPOS implementation guidelines to play another supporting role in strengthening the practical implementation of the UN FPOS and in regard to how to ensure independence of national statistical institutes. The “lively character” of the UN FPOS implementation guidelines ensures an adjustable and flexible use in different institutional and regional settings (centralized versus decentralized statistical systems) and therefore meets the diversity and specific characteristics of all different UN Member States. The UN FPOS implementation guidelines are a guiding tool to improve the practical implementation of certain principles. This in turn can help the international community to better address perceived violations.

As stated above, the ISI Advisory Board on Ethics advises on compliance with the 2010 Declaration. The ISI considers submissions on ethical issues and issues statements⁶, and works with other organizations to raise and maintain ethical standards within the statistics profession. The ISI Executive Committee also approved a strategy for ISI actions on Professional Ethics, which includes inter alia writing letters of support to the statisticians that have been affected (ISI (2015b)). A “Trust Board” to deal with perceived violations of the UN FPOS could be considered as well, which might be contacted in cases of violations of the UN FPOS in order to receive concrete assistance. In 2017 the question on

⁶ For current statements and letters see ISI (2015c).



how to address non-compliance with the UN FPOS will be re-discussed at the UN Statistical Commission level.

In the meanwhile, the Report of the Friends of the Chair on the Implementation of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (United Nations Economic and Social Council (2014c)) has been well received at the level of the UN Statistical Commission. It names different tools and instruments to address violations of the UN FPOS (see pages 9-17 of the Report) and balances pros and cons of these instruments: self-assessment, peer reviews, certification, technical assistance and coordination of monitoring efforts.

The main message of the Report is that the EU, IMF and ISI and many others have similar quality-related principles building to a large degree on the UN FPOS. These organizations have assessment mechanisms detecting non-compliance with their own quality assurance frameworks and, by extension, with the UN FPOS. It is advisable to share these monitoring/assessment frameworks with each other. Clear mappings between the UN FPOS and other, similar frameworks could be the starting point of such coordination (United Nations Economic and Social Council (2014c): pages 11-12).⁷

6. Conclusion

Establishing and preserving trust in official statistics is one of the main intentions of NSOs worldwide. The UN FPOS and the ISI DPE form reliable (ethical) codes of practices providing uniform quality, professional and scientific standards as well as ethical values and principles. Furthermore, they complement each other in an enriching way. The advantage of the UN FPOS is that they are further concretized by the UN FPOS implementation guidelines, which provide concrete actions or activities aiming to improve the practical implementation of the UN FPOS. The UN FPOS implementation guidelines are a unique example, based on good practices worldwide. They should be relied on for instance to prevent misuse and ensure independence. These guidelines follow an approach referred to as ‘helping others to help themselves’. Even though the ISI DPE is not accompanied by similar implementation guidelines, the advantage lies in the existence of the ISI Advisory Board on Ethics - a committee which can be contacted whenever assistance is needed.

Nevertheless these (ethical) codes of practices (as well as the UN FPOS implementation guidelines) must be filled with life and should find widespread application – otherwise they would be nothing more than documents of a theoretical nature. To strengthen the impact of these (ethical) codes of practices “[n]ational, regional, international and supranational organizations with an established procedure on how to address non-compliance with their respective codes/frameworks could play a leading role. In doing so, they should, when publicly addressing non-compliance with their own code, also make reference to a possible non-compliance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, a universally agreed upon document (United Nations Economic and Social Council (2014c): page 16).”

In this context the different organizations at national, supranational/regional and global level could take over different functions: the national level would be supposed to implement and directly apply the relevant codes of practices (for example the UN FPOS), the supranational/regional level to monitor compliance with the codes of practices and the global level to report on compliance and on violations in order to make infringements and good practices transparent, and to discuss them in depth.

⁷ An article dealing with significant overlaps between the UN FPOS, the European Code of Practice and the Fundamental Responsibilities of Federal Statistical Agencies and Recognized Statistical Units of the United States White House Office of Management and Budget Office can be found in the Statistical Journal of the IAOS (Pierson (2015): pages 21-23). A detailed mapping showing the correspondence to several existing quality frameworks (like the European Statistics Code of Practice and the Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Code of Good Statistical Practice) is available on the website of the UN Statistics Division (2014).



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