**Coordination of National Statistical System – Experience from the Hellenic Statistical System (ELSS)**

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**Abstract**

*In the recent revision of the European Statistical Code of Practice (CoP) a new Principle for “Coordination and Cooperation”, is to be added, in line with the amended Regulation 223/2009. The new Principle consists another step towards the enhancement of cooperation in National Statistical Systems.*

*The National Statistical Systems (NSSs) have not the same degree of centralization. Consequently, there is a challenge faced by most National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) about the amount of European Statistics produced by Other National Authorities (ONAs). Thus, it is essential for NSIs to have a strong position in the NSSs stipulated in the national statistical legislation and recognized by ONAs.*

*In this paper, the experience from the coordination role of ELSTAT in the Hellenic Statistical System, which has a certain degree of decentralization, is described. Furthermore, the ONA’s experience from the certification process of “official” statistics is presented. The key role of Statistical Head in the cooperation mechanism within the ELSS for the implementation and maintenance of high quality standards in the development, production and dissemination of statistics by ONAs is also described. Opportunities for better cooperation at national level as well as the further consolidation of citizens’ confidence in the production process of statistical products, are analyzed through the case study of the Ministry of Interior, which has recently established a relevant organizational structure for the Statistical Head.*

**Keywords:** Coordination, certification process of official statistics, ONA, Hellenic Statistical System

1. **Introduction**

One of the strongest motivation for producing data and information is its usefulness in evidence based decision making [1]. Without high-quality data providing the right information on the right things at the right time; designing, monitoring and evaluating effective policies becomes almost impossible. [2]

According to the Quality Declaration of the European Statistical System[[1]](#footnote-1) (ESS), the mission of ESS is to provide independent high quality statistical information at European, national and regional levels and to make this information available to everyone for decision-making, research and debate, operated under a strict legal regime [3],[4] supplemented by a robust, world-class and self-regulatory quality framework, the backbone of which is the European Statistics Code of Practice (CoP) [5].

One of the objectives of the amendment of Regulation (EC) 223/2009 by Regulation (EU) 2015/759 [4] was to reinforce the professional independence and the coordinating role of the National Statistical Institutes (NSI). Based on this amendment, in the recent revision of the CoP [5], a new Principle has been added on Coordination and Cooperation aspects, which strengthens, inter alia, the coordination role of NSIs within the National Statistical System (NSS) in order to ensure quality in the development, production and dissemination of European statistics.

1. **Coordination of the Hellenic Statistical System** (**ELSS)**

The statistical Law (3832/2010) [6] establishes the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT), in its current form, as well as the (ELSS) as comprising agencies that have the responsibility or obligation to collect statistical data. The Hellenic Statistical System (ELSS), is composed of ELSTAT and twenty (20) other Agencies[[2]](#footnote-2). Eight (8) out of these are National Authorities (ONAs)[[3]](#footnote-3) responsible for the development, production and dissemination of European Statistics within the frame of ELSS. The total share of European statistics produced by other National Authorities (ONAs) of ELSS is approximately 25%. Main contribution to this percentage have the following ONAs: Ministry of Environment and Energy (7.13%), Ministry of Rural Development and Food (6.18%), Bank of Greece (BoC) (5.93%) and National Hellenic Research Foundation (NHRF)/National Documentation Centre (NDC) (3.37%).

ELSTAT has a coordination role in the ELSS. It coordinates all the activities of the other agencies in ELSS that concern the development, production and dissemination of the official statistics of Greece and certifies as “official” statistics produced by the ELSS agencies.

Official statistics are statistics developed, produced and disseminated by ELSTAT and the other ELSS agencies, provided they have been certified by ELSTAT, which serve the statistical information requirements of policy-makers in formulating government policies and national socio-economic programs, and supply the decision-makers and other users, including the general public, the research community and the European and international organizations of which Greece is a member, with a regular flow of information [7]. As such, the official statistics have the following characteristics:

* regular production provided for in the legal and institutional framework in force (Regulation, Directive, Presidential Decree, law, statute, gentleman’s agreement, Memorandum of Understanding, etc.);
* availability and provision to any interested user;
* compliance with the principles of the European Statistics Code of Practice (CoP) and of the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics[[4]](#footnote-4). This is because national legislation requires from the ELSS agencies to implement the CoP when developing, producing and disseminating all the official statistics produced by them and not only for European statistics.

To ensure compliance with the basic operation principles and the fulfillment of their statistical obligations, almost all the ELSS agencies, besides ELSTAT, have nominated a statistical head having the features and responsibilities, as provided for in the Indicators 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4 of Principle 1 of CoP.

Moreover, a Coordination Committee of ELSS was set up in April 2016 as required by the Regulation on the Statistical Obligations of the ELSS agencies [8]. Members of the Committee are the statistical heads and it is chaired by the President of ELSTAT.

1. **Current Results - Mechanism and tools for coordination at ELSS**

The certification by ELSTAT of the statistics produced by the other ELSS agencies is an important factor and a tool for enhancing the quality and reliability of ELSS statistics. ELSTAT assesses and determines whether the CoP has been complied with in relation to any statistics. The assessment of statistics of the other agencies of ELSS covers all aspects of the work leading to the statistical output and its dissemination. Certification is granted by decision of the President of ELSTAT; If ELSTAT finds that the compliance with the Code is not demonstrated, it makes recommendations for the taking of improvement actions within a specific time period in order to provide the above certification.

The terms and conditions of the certification process of statistics of ELSS agencies are determined in the Regulation on the Operation and Administration of ELSTAT [8] and further specified in the document ''Statement of the principles and procedures for the certification of ELSS statistics Version 2.0'' [7].

This statement covers the aims of ELSTAT’s certification function; the principles, which ELSTAT will adopt when certifying official statistics; an outline of the certification process; the requirements for completion of Quality Reports on each statistical process for the production of official statistics; and the written evidence for certification that will be provided at the start of the certification process.

In cooperation with the ELSS agencies, ELSTAT compiled the “List of statistics of ELSS agencies”[[5]](#footnote-5), which is a first attempt to record the statistics of ELSS agencies, apart from ELSTAT, with reference year 2017. This list contains 222 statistical products which are to be certified, as it is a prerequisite to have a list of all statistics under the certification exercise.

All the ELSS agencies, for which the basic certification stage has been conducted, have been informed by ELSTAT on the basic steps they have to take for the continuation of the certification process. ELSTAT through its ongoing cooperation with the agencies provide any possible help towards this direction. The above steps refer to horizontal actions that should be undertaken by each agency as a whole and/or to specific statistics produced by the agency. Each improvement action is linked to a requirement of the CoP. The horizontal actions which are, more or less, common for all the agencies, are summarized into the following recommendations:

* Appointment of Statistical Head (1.2, 1.3 and 1.4)
* Compilation and publication of the Annual Statistical Work Programme of the next year and Annual Report of the previous year (*1.5)*
* Compilation and publication of Quality Policy and Quality Reports. Development of a system for monitoring the quality of the statistical output (*4.1, 4.2, 4.3 & 4.4)*
* Development of internal guidelines for ensuring the quality of the produced statistics (*6.4)*
* Provision of equal and simultaneous access of all users, without exception, to Agency’s statistics. Limitation, control and publication of any privileged pre-release access of users to statistics (6.7)
* Documentation of the use of statistics and systematic recording of users’ needs (*11.1)*
* Publication of the produced statistics and relevant metadata (*15.1)*

Aiming at facilitating the practical and effective implementation of the CoP principles by the ELSS agencies, ELSTAT compiled a draft “Guide to the agencies of the Hellenic Statistical System for the implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice”, as foreseen in Article 5a of Regulation 223/2009, as amended by Regulation (EU) 2015/759 [4]. This Guide describes the obligations of: a) the agencies, b) the statistical heads of the agencies, c) the staff of the agencies involved in the production and dissemination of statistics and d) ELSTAT towards the agencies, in the framework of the compliance with the CoP. It mostly concerns the principles and the indices of the principles of the CoP which are considered by ELSTAT as likely to create challenges in their implementation. It is a tool for ensuring quality during the various stages of the statistical production by the ELSS agencies, in order to provide users with high quality statistical products and services responding to their needs. The guidelines are equally applicable to all the statistics of the ELSS.

1. **The role of Statistical Head for enhancing the quality – Building the network**

**4.1 Legal framework**

As it was mentioned above, almost all the ELSS agencies, besides ELSTAT, have nominated a statistical head having the features and responsibilities, as provided for in the Indicators 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4 of Principle 1 of CoP.

With the prevailing practice, the Statistical Head is chosen from the staffing capacity of each organization. He / she must be distinguished for his / her high professional qualifications and proficiency and have high hierarchical standing. His/her responsibilities include: a) the responsibility for ensuring that statistics are developed, produced and disseminated in an independent manner; and b) the sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases. His / her features and competences are in line with CoP principle 1, emphasizing the professional independence and the quality assurance of statistics. It is worth mentioning that according to the provisions of the Regulation on the Statistical Obligations of the ELSS agencies a Working Group may be set up to support the work of the Statistical Head.

**4.2 Benefits – Opportunities within the decentralization provided by the network**

Establishing the Statistical Head to all ELSS agencies, combined with a membership in the ELSS Coordination Committee is consistent with the establishment of a decentralized administrative structure. This scheme offers significant advantages and opportunities for implementing the CoP principles but also presents the points that can be improved with the implementation of specific policies.

The Statistical Head belongs to the relevant agency and is therefore in a position to be aware of the abilities, particularities and weaknesses of the agency, on which particular attention should be paid. He / she can also highlight its strong points and emphasize on elements of particular value. His / her service relationship with the agency he / she belongs provides the opportunity for better coordination in order to implement the CoP principles and other horizontal actions for developing, producing and disseminating all the official statistics produced by the agency. He / she can also recognize and cope with cases of overlapping responsibilities, discrepancies between similar produced statistics that refer to the same variable within the same organization and other malfunctions.

At the same time he / she can further promote and develop the communication and cooperation network between ELSTAT and other agencies of ELSS involved. The Statistical Head can play the role of a two-way contact point, both by transferring policies and instructions to the units involved, and by providing ELSTAT with information on any policy implementation problems on a case-by-case basis. The development of the internal communication network in each agency can help to guide the uniform implementation of horizontal actions within the agency required by certification processes of official statistics and promote more effective cooperation between the units.

Among the most important opportunities for the Statistical Head is the institutional representation of the agency belonging to the Coordination Committee of ELSS. The Committee offers significant advantages and opportunities to discuss the priorities for the production of ELSS statistics on the basis of the developments at national and international level, but also presents the points that can be improved with the implementation of specific actions. The Committee establishes an official network that effectively supports the horizontal implementation of European and national policies and actions across all ELSS agencies in a uniform manner, to the benefit of the quality and reliability of statistics. Moreover, through this network, the best practices of the agencies can be highlighted and shared, and experiences can be exchanged in order to deal with similar problems. Finally, it is possible to optimally solve problems that arise, for example from any overlapping responsibilities between the agencies, from the use of common datasets from different agencies, or address potential discrepancies between similar statistics and promote coherence and comparability of statistics produced by the ELSS agencies.

The scientific training and professional competence combined with the continuous training of the Statistical Head can guarantee the application of scientific methods at all stages in the production of statistics as well as the validity and impartiality of the results for the benefit of the quality of the statistics disseminated to the users.

**4.3 Challenges**

The Statistical Head introduces a new cooperative approach in the Hellenic Public Administration. The approach is in its first steps and for this reason, it is necessary to support the institutional role of Statistical Head in the ELSS by implementing additional specific policies.

The key challenges are:

• The role of statistical head having the features and responsibilities, as provided for in the Indicators 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4 of Principle 1 of CoP must be incorporated into the existing administrative and organizational structure of the ELSS Agencies and thus become obligatory. This will result in improvement of the coordination of the agency’s units involved in the production of statistics.

* Development of a corresponding unit for monitoring the quality of the statistical output supporting its work.
* Provision of training courses organized by ELSTAT and EUROSTAT on statistical matters to the Statistical Heads and other staff of ELSS agencies.
* Ensuring adequate human, technological and financial resources in the agencies, for the implementation of their statistical work programme.

**5. ONA’s experience – The case of Ministry of Interior**

5.1. Statistical Head Office - Legal Framework

Since 2010 where the Statistical Law entered into force, the Ministry of Interior had appointed a Statistical Head, having understood the important and innovative role he/she was required to play within the agency. The lack of a specific unit in the organizational structure of the Ministry dedicated to support the Statistical Head’s work was addressed, that time, by setting up a corresponding Working Group.

Currently the Working Group consists of 17 employees of the Ministry as members who are involved in the production or management of statistics included in the list of statistics of ELSS agencies. The Working Group is chaired by the Statistical Head. Indicatively, it is noted that 22 different statistics are produced by 10 different units of the Ministry.

During the restructuring of the Ministry, in 2017, an independent Office of Statistical Head was established in the new organization of the Ministry of Interior [10].

5.2 Benefits – Opportunities through the cooperation of the services involved

The establishment of the Statistical Head’s office provides the necessary human and technical recourses to coordinate the statistical production within the agency and to monitor the quality of the statistical output. Affiliation of the Statistical Head’s office to the highest possible hierarchical level ensures the maximum possible influence on the institution, in the direction of applying the CoP principles, and also the coherence in the implementation of horizontal actions by the involved units. At the same time, the broadest possible acceptance of the role and work of the Statistical Head inside the Agency contributes to continuous improvement of the quality of statistics and mostly to ensuring that statistics are produced and disseminated in an independent manner.

The Statistical Head’s Office communicates in a more efficient way and according to the formal procedure provided by the current legislation, the guidance and instructions regarding the production of statistics of the agency. During the last months it is already observed an improvement in the acceptance of the role of the Statistical Head within the agency, as well as acceleration and better coordination of the actions for the certification of the statistics as officials.

5.3 Critical Issues

Despite the aforementioned progress, there is room for further improvement.

* Cultivating cooperative culture not only internal but also external within ELSS.
* Accelerating the development of internal guidelines and quality reports for ensuring the quality of the produced statistics.
* Promoting and implementing appropriate solutions that increase cost effectiveness and efficiency regarding the statistical production of the agency, for the benefit of both the users and the public sector.

**6. References**

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[10] Hellenic Republic (2017), Structure of Ministry of Interior (Government Gazette 180 A, 23.11.2017)

1. The European Statistical System is a partnership in which Eurostat and the national statistical authorities of each EU Member State and EFTA country cooperate. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The list of the agencies of the ELSS is posted on the website of ELSTAT at the following link: http://www.statistics.gr/documents/20181/1196143/Agencies\_HSS\_11102017\_EN.pdf/bc92d5d6-52bf-4346-b357-f548d38c64ee [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The list of the National Authorities of the ELSS is posted on the website of ELSTAT at the following link: http://www.statistics.gr/documents/20181/1196143/National\_Authorities\_HSS\_11102017\_EN.pdf/b123d773-e29c-4c8f-92b7-d4b91cea2e31 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics are available at the following link: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/dnss/gp/FP-New-E.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The “List of statistics of ELSS agencies” is available at the following link:

<http://www.statistics.gr/el/elss-agencies-list> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)