Joint Thirty-Ninth Meeting of the
IMF Committee on Balance of Payments Statistics
and Twenty-First Meeting of the Advisory Expert
Group on National Accounts

Inter-secretariat
Working Group on
National Accounts

Washington, D.C.
October 18–20, 2022

BOPCOM—22/17a
SNA/M4.22/27a
For discussion

BPM7 Chapter 20/ *2025 SNA* Chapter 21. Communicating and Disseminating Economic Statistics: Annotated Outline

Prepared by the Statistics Department

INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND

BPM7 Chapter 20/*2025 SNA* Chapter 21. Communicating and Disseminating Economic Statistics: Annotated Outline[1, 2]

(New SNA/BPM chapter)

I. Introduction

- This chapter aims to provide principles and guidelines for producers of macroeconomic statistics together with innovative approaches to improve the way those statistics are communicated. This helps in increasing comparability, understanding and the experience for the users of these statistics.

- The way in which macroeconomic statistics are communicated has a significant impact on users' understanding and utilization of the data. Thus, communication is a very important aspect when it comes to presenting statistical information, making sure that a wide range of users properly understand them, comprehend the full extent of their analytical usefulness and draw the right conclusions. There is an ever-growing focus on the need to improve communication and to meet the needs of a diverse range of users.

- There is also a need for presenting and communicating macroeconomic statistics in different ways to enhance the full extent of their analytical usefulness, quality, scope, comparability through time and across countries, and to ensure that policy relevance is maximized. In addition, when communicating macroeconomic statistics, the terminology and presentation of the macroeconomic aggregates and concepts should, where possible, reflect and align with the language of business, governments and the public.

- There is currently a wide disparity between countries when it comes to communicating and disseminating macroeconomic statistics. This is driven by many different factors such as government policies, resources, costs, technological capacity, applications and infrastructure. There is a need for minimum and consistent standards.

- Drawing from the ESCoE Report on understanding of macroeconomic statistics, this section will include a few paragraphs to illustrate users' lack of understanding of macroeconomic statistics and what we could do to help. It will link to ESCoE Report for further background of users understanding of macroeconomic statistics.

- For producers of macroeconomic statistics, the aim should be to develop their statistical systems, which lead to disseminating comprehensive, timely and reliable data, all of which should drive the need to establish a clear policy and data dissemination strategy. The role of dissemination should be viewed as a key component of the production chain of official statistics.

- The chapter will include seven sections covering principles and standards (Section II), communication policy and dissemination strategy (Section III), stakeholders – suppliers and users (Section IV),

---

[1] Prepared by Sanjiv Mahajan (Supporting Editor) with inputs from Kristy Howell (IMF) and Josyula Venkat (IMF) and cleared by the SNA/BPM Project Managers.

[2] This is an annotated outline for the chapter. Some links between this chapter and other *2008 SNA/BPM6* chapters are noted. In the drafting stage, there may be further adjustments to balance the content between chapters.

statistical confidentiality (Section V), taxonomies and metadata (Section VI), a framework for measuring alignment with the economic accounting statistical standards (Section VII) and examples of the use of easier to understand terminology for users (Section VIII). See the Schematic Overview for details.

II. Principles and Standards

- It is widely accepted that official statistics should be reliable, objective and are relevant for decision making. The UN has a well-established and agreed suite of *Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (2013)*—a summary of the principles is shown in the Box Z. Principle 1 is key and sets out a clear steer for dissemination.

Box Z. Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics

Principle 1

Official statistics provide an indispensable element in the information system of a democratic society, serving the Government, the economy, and the public with data about the economic, demographic, social, and environmental situation. To this end, official statistics that meet the test of practical utility are to be compiled and made available on an impartial basis by official statistical agencies to honor citizens' entitlement to public information.

Principle 2

To retain trust in official statistics, 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.

Principle 3

To facilitate a correct interpretation of the data, the statistical agencies are to present information according to scientific standards on the sources, methods, and procedures of the statistics.

Principle 4

The statistical agencies are entitled to comment on erroneous interpretation and misuse of statistics.

Principle 5

Data for statistical purposes may be drawn from all types of sources, be they statistical surveys or administrative records. Statistical agencies are to choose the source with regard to quality, timeliness, costs, and the burden on respondents.

Principle 6

Individual data collected by statistical agencies for statistical compilation, whether they refer to natural or legal persons, are to be strictly confidential and used exclusively for statistical purposes.

Principle 7

The laws, regulations, and measures under which the statistical systems operate are to be made public.

Principle 8

Coordination among statistical agencies within countries is essential to achieve consistency and efficiency in the statistical system.

- To help establish good dissemination practices, there is a range of information and good practices already available. For example, the European Commission guidance includes the European Statistics Code of Practice (revised 2017). Similarly, many countries have also developed a statistics code of practice suitable for their purposes.

- International organizations have also developed standards that countries are encouraged to follow. For example, the IMF encourages countries to use their Special or General Data Dissemination System (SDDS and SDDS Plus for countries agreeing to higher standards or e-GDDS for those agreeing to basic standards).

- The dissemination policies and strategies designed by official statistics producers will be part of, and consistent with, the vision, mission, and values laid out in corporate documents, often available on national statistical offices and national central banks' websites, and consistent with the underlying Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

III. Communication Policy and Dissemination Strategy

- The production, analysis, and dissemination of official statistics must be done in a transparent and accessible way. To aid all users, information is provided through different channels, for example websites, regular press releases, news releases, statistical reports and emails. This section will also cover:

  - links to media and users; and
  - objectives of a dissemination strategy should include meeting users' needs and providing maximum access to official statistics.

- Other aspects to reflect (pending further discussion) include:

  - communications policy and media relations.
  - publication policy including a release calendar, which helps to promote transparency.
  - Revision policy—helps to explain to users why revisions are necessary and help to improve quality of the statistics as well as lay out in advance when revisions are expected.
  - regular analysis of press coverage and feedback.
  - user satisfaction surveys to aid continuous improvement.
  - different digital formats, use of XML and/or other machine-readable formats.
  - communication narratives/terminology to target different user groups.
  - sharing of metadata via alignment frameworks.

- reference to the National Summary Data Pages (NSDPs) that most countries have in place to disseminate economic statistics.
- links to the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) and guidance on integrated economic statistics (such as the UN *Guidelines on Integrated Economic Statistics*) to draw out further the links and roles between official statistical producers, their communication/media teams, and users.

- The preparations of all official statistics publications should ensure clear, understandable headline messages which can be extracted from sound data, methods and analyses. It is the responsibility of the statistical producers(s) to ensure any message is clearly described, often in a non-technical manner, while more technical/methodological features or statistical conclusions could be provided in accompanying documents.

- Dissemination will be through various media the official statistical producers' websites as well as printed material and social media channels. With new technologies, the publishing capability should reflect the digital dimension enabling the content to be released via all digital channels. This includes setting standards and polices; introducing a common set of digital products; support for mobile devices; new commissioning processes; and making more data available in an open format.

- The section will include the results of testing of the CMTT Guidance Notes and links to relevant publications that provide guidance to statistical organisations.

IV. Stakeholders – Suppliers and Users

- Producers of official statistics need to communicate effectively with their data suppliers, who represent a unique set of stakeholders that may or may not be users of official statistics. In particular, the use of language that suppliers can understand is essential in providing data to enable the compilation of the appropriate definitions as laid out in the economic accounting statistical standards. Often it is an accountant that responds to official statistical producer's requests and is familiar with business accounting language rather than national accounting language. The data supplied will then, either directly or adjusted appropriately to meet the definitions required, feed the statistical production process.

- The need to be aware and understand who the users may be and what are their needs is extremely important. This knowledge helps to steer what message is being conveyed when statistics are released in a language understood by users (who may not have the technical expertise of the nuances of National and International Accounts or references like the SNA or BPM).

- Types of user(s). There are several distinctive users and robust persona types: expert analyst; information forager; media; and inquiring citizen. Each type has a unique set of goals, behaviors and motivators. Role and needs of each will be covered. Also, different approaches will be needed for communicating with different users.

- It is worth mentioning that the media user is an important, and specific, type of user albeit they are more of a specialist user with unique requirements which deserve special attention. The media play a key intermediary role between the official statistical producer and the inquiring citizen as well as help to amplify official statistics producers' messages.

- Likewise, there are other indirect users and often highly influential across society, for example, politicians, policymakers, and other leaders in society. They are generally informed indirectly either via an expert analyst or via the media. The important point is that as indirect users of macroeconomic statistics, in communicating the accounts their "interests" must be understood and addressed.

- Official statistics producers need to communicate effectively to users' information related to data quality, timeliness, frequency, and the reference period of the product (GN CM.3). They also must provide information about the substance of the release and sources of revisions, including whether it reflects changes in methods, coverage adjustments, source data changes, or presentational changes (GN CM.3).

V. Statistical Confidentiality

- In terms of statistical confidentiality, by law, most official statistics producers collect data from financial and non-financial businesses and households for statistical purposes only and often under some legislation. Statistics based on these data cannot be disseminated, sold, or published in a way that permits the identification of data referring to a particular business or household. Thus, it is important to ensure appropriate data confidentiality policies, anonymization techniques and disclosure checking procedures are in place as part of the process before publication of any data.

- As much as statistical confidentiality is very important, it should not be used per se as a reason not to release information. On the other hand, the goal should be to maximize the dissemination of information as a public good for the wide range of users while still ensuring confidentiality obligations are met. This section will also refer to approaches to achieve greater access (e.g., data labs, data access agreements for statistical purposes or research purposes).

- Other issues to cover:

  - Guidance on the treatment of sensitive data (not for public/users).
  - Data made available as a "matter of course freely available via regular releases" versus "bespoke analyses" requested by users (which may have to be paid for).

VI. Taxonomies and Metadata

- All statistical products should be accompanied with explicit reference to documentation on quality and methodology. This documentation makes available to users various indicators of the quality of data and descriptions of the underlying concepts and methodology allowing users to have a good understanding of the basis of the data such as coverage, precision and accuracy.

- Drawing from the forthcoming outcomes of GN CM.3 and related testing, this section will provide guidelines to a coherent taxonomy to communicate the (a) releases and vintages of data; (b) release calendars; (c) revision policies; and (d) quality and types of statistical products. [3]

- This section will also include links to SDMX.

---

[3] Note that satellite accounts (which are recommended in GN CM.3 to be referred to as "supplementary accounts" or "thematic accounts") are discussed briefly in *BPM6* in Annex 2.1; this Annex will be dropped in *BPM7* since the topic will be covered in this new chapter. In the *2025 SNA,* thematic accounts will be covered in detail in Chapter 38, Thematic Accounts.

VII. A Framework for Measuring Alignment with the Economic Accounting Statistical Standards

- One important feature of the economic accounting statistical standards is their ability to facilitate the comparison of estimates across countries. For users to be confident when making these cross-country comparisons, they need some assurance that the countries they are comparing are on the same basis and implemented these standards consistently. However, for several reasons, when countries use an economic accounting statistical standard to compile macroeconomic statistics, a certain degree of choice, freedom and variation can be taken in implementing the recommendations ranging from limited resources, data availability to the needs to meet policy demands. This results in varying degrees of 'alignment' to these standards across countries.

- This section covers an alignment framework (from GN CM.1) that countries can use to assess the alignment of their national macroeconomic statistics to the economic accounting statistical standards. The alignment framework provides a relatively simple tool that statistical producers can use to self-evaluate their statistics and share this with users in an easily digestible format.

- The framework is structured around the key building blocks of the statistical standards—concepts, accounting rules, methods, classifications, and the resulting accounts and/or tables that are produced and published. The framework will be presented as a box in the chapter.

- This section will also cover the benefits of an alignment framework; describe the dashboard approach and reflect the results from the testing; cover the broader ways to assess level of compliance and data quality; and include links to where the alignment frameworks for the respective accounts will be available online. It will also explain some of the limitations of the alignment framework which is voluntary and based on self-assessment.

- This section will also acknowledge the existing frameworks and tools that can be used by statistical producers and users to assess the coverage, accessibility and quality of economic statistics including the IMF's Data Quality Assessment Framework (DQAF) and Reports on the Observance of Standards and Codes (ROSCs). The IMF's Data Quality Assessment Framework will be presented in a box (this discussion of the Data Quality Assessment Framework would be pulled from *BPM6* Chapter 2 into this new chapter).

VIII. Examples of the Use of Easier to Understand Terminology for Users *(Note this section is pending final conclusions on GN CM.2)[4]*

- The economic accounting statistical standards has a vast array of specific technical descriptions of concepts and the underlying definitions with explicit inclusions and exclusions. Often the labels used help the producers and communication across the producers' community, however they are often not user friendly or understood by users.

---

[4] Note that this chapter does not address other proposals from GN CM.2, relating to possible changes in standard terminology to introduce consistency across the domains as presented in previous AEG/BOPCOM Meetings (for example, the proposal to align all domains on the use of the terms "revenues" and "expenses" instead of "resource" and "use" or "credit" and "debit"). These proposals are being tested, and if adopted, would then be reflected throughout the manuals.

- It is important to note, without changing any of the technical definitions, this section proposes some examples of user-friendly terms that could be considered by producers when engaging with users, in particular, non-technical users (examples will be based on outcomes of GN CM.2 testing).

- This section will also include a reference to the technical glossary and a box highlighting some examples of alternative and more user-friendly terminologies for dissemination.

Other issues/developments to add that will assist official statistics producers:

- Compilers Hub
- Digitalization of the statistical manuals
- Common macroeconomic glossary
- Use of hyperlinks to the relevant sections of the manuals and glossary

Schematic Overview

I	Introduction
II	Principles and Standards Box: UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics
III	Communications Policy and Dissemination Strategy
IV	Stakeholders – Suppliers and Users
V	Statistical Confidentiality
VI	Taxonomies and Metadata

VII	A Framework for Measuring Alignment with the Economic Accounting Statistical Standards
	
	   Box: Alignment Framework
	   Box: IMF Data Quality Assessment Framework

VIII	Examples of the Use of Easier to Understand Terminology for Users Box: Examples of User-Friendly Terminology

Questions for the Advisory Expert Group on National Accounts (AEG)/IMF Committee on Balance of Payments Statistics (Committee)

1) *Does the Committee and the AEG have any suggestions on the draft outline of the chapter?*

2) *Does the Committee and the AEG agree with the proposed structure and coverage of topics in the chapter presented in this outline?*

3) *Does the Committee and AEG agree with the title of the chapter, Communicating and Disseminating Economic Statistics, to reflect the scope proposed in this annotated outline?*

References

- GNs CM.1, CM.2, CM.3
- SNA
- BPM
- GFS
- UK Economic Statistics Centre of Excellence, "Public Understanding of Economics and Economic Statistics," ESCoE Occasional Paper No. 03, November 2020

Key Stakeholders Consulted

- SNA/BPM editors
- Members of CMTT