

Adapted Global Assessment of the national Statistical System of Tunisia

Executive Summary

May 2014

Prepared by:

Jean-Francois Divay

Rogério Reis

Vera Herrmann

Nino Platteel

Rosemary Montgomery

The full report of the adapted global assessment of the national statistical system of Tunisia is available in French at:

<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/european-neighbourhood-policy/publications/reports>

Foreword

The adapted Global Assessment (AGA) of the national system of official statistics in Tunisia was undertaken in the framework of the EU-funded project 'Global assessments of statistical systems of candidate and potential candidate countries as well as ENP countries'. The company, GOPA, under contract with Eurostat, was responsible for organising all activities relating to the AGA.

The assessment process was initiated by Eurostat in response to a request made by the Tunisian National Statistical Institute in February 2013.

The evaluation was carried out by five experts: Mr. Jean-François Divay (GOPA, ex INSEE), leading expert, Ms. Rosemary Montgomery (Eurostat), Ms. Vera Hermann (BFS-CH), Mr. Rogerio Reis (GOPA via INE-PT) and Mr. Nino Platteel (GOPA, ex CBS-NL).

The AGA had the following main objectives:

- to assess the administrative and technical capacity of the Tunisian statistical system;
- to assess the statistical law and other legal acts and their respect of European and international recommendations and principles;
- to assess the statistical production in key areas against the *acquis communautaire*;
- to prepare recommendations for improvement of Tunisian statistics.

On all these aspects, the assessment team examined the relevant laws and regulations, and other documents from the National Statistical Council (NSC) and the National Statistical Institute (NSI). To understand present practices, the team also met NSC and NSI officials, many NSI staff members, and representatives of several Public Statistical Structures (PSS) and of users. The large number of PSS (48 at present) did not allow the team to meet all PSS nor to analyse their performance. In most cases, it is the activity of the NSI that has been assessed as regards statistical production.

Executive Summary

Main conclusions of the assessment

The assessment team considers that the National Statistical System (NSS) of Tunisia has a solid base but that a profound reform is needed to reach the three essential objectives of effectiveness, quality, and respect of the fundamental principles of official statistics.

Regarding effectiveness of the NSS

The 13 April 1999 Law “relating to the National Statistical System” (hereafter called the Law) created a complex decentralised statistical system, with the NSC, the NSI, PSS and statistical education institutions. The assessment team considers that the NSS governance is neither effective nor efficient.

The distribution of the NSS management and coordination responsibilities between the NSC and the NSI does not establish an explicit hierarchy, and as a result the Law does not ensure a clear and consistent leadership for the NSS. The assessment team recommends that the Law be revised to reform the NSS structure and governance by assigning the NSS leadership to a single institution and by reviewing the respective roles and relations of the NSC and the NSI.

The assessment team considers that the number of PSS (48 at present) is excessive, with two consequences: it is difficult to actually coordinate the system, and most PSS do not have the financial and human resources they would need to perform properly. The assessment team recommends that the number of PSS be reduced; that the perimeter of official statistics be defined more restrictively; and that an administrative regulation specify the criteria a public body or administrative unit should satisfy to be considered a PSS.

Regarding the quality of NSS production

According to the Law, the NSI is the “central executive body of the NSS, in charge of technical coordination of statistical activities”, and responsible for the quality of NSS production. However, because of the way the Law distributes responsibilities, the assessment team considers that the NSI does not have the necessary administrative prerogative. Moreover, at present the NSI has neither the organisation nor the human resources needed to carry out its mission effectively.

Therefore the assessment team recommends that, in addition to revising the Law, the NSS composition, management and coordination mechanism should be revised, and the technical and methodological capacities of the NSI reinforced to allow the quality of NSS outputs to be effectively monitored.

Regarding the respect of the fundamental principles of official statistics

The statistical Law mentions the main fundamental principles, and includes measures aimed at ensuring they are respected. Various other regulations do the same. The Law gives the NSC, chaired by a non-statistician, and not the NSI, the responsibility of monitoring “the respect of the ethical rules of the profession and of the principles of

statistical work". However some respect for all principles is not fully guaranteed, especially the professional independence of statisticians. Therefore the assessment team recommends that the Law be revised to strengthen the measures which guarantee the respect of the fundamental principles.

Main recommendations

Regarding the legal framework

Statistical Law

The assessment team recommends revising the statistical Law in order to:

- review the composition of the NSS by reducing the number of PSS and by defining the border of official statistics;
- modify the governance of the NSS, by attributing its management and coordination to a single institution and by reviewing the respective roles and relations of the NSC and the NSI, and possibly their administrative status;
- strengthen legislative measures which guarantee that the fundamental principles of official statistics are respected, especially the professional independence of statisticians;
- formalise the procedure allowing researchers access to micro-data, for research purposes, while guaranteeing statistical confidentiality;
- formalise the procedure to develop the statistics programme and for its validation at political level.

The team recommends that the NSI continues preparing a revision of the Law to be submitted to the NSC, then to the political authorities.

Other legislative and regulation texts

A Decision of 2 June 2010 sets out the modalities for transmitting administrative data to the NSI for exclusively statistical purposes. The assessment team recommends that the Decision be modified to prevent a ministry from opposing the transmission of such information to the NSI, unless the data are protected by a specific law.

The team also recommends that the concept of confidentiality of personal data be made consistent between various legislative and regulation texts: the statistical Law, the 'organic' law on the protection of personal data, the decree-law on access to the administrative documents of public bodies.

With a view to developing a medium term statistical programme associated with a new economic and social development Plan for Tunisia, it is recommended to modify the decree on the composition of the NSC so as to better represent civil society and other stakeholders.

Regarding the NSS

NSS reform

The assessment team recommends that in the revision of the statistical Law, the number of PSS is reduced and the border of official statistics is made more restrictive. It also recommends that the NSC continue the work of its “NSS reform commission”, closely associating the NSI and the most important PSS, so as to define a medium term vision for the NSS.

A new Economic and Social Development Plan for Tunisia will be developed after the next elections. With this in mind, the assessment team recommends that a National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) is developed, according to PARIS21 or similar principles, so as to integrate the NSS issues and concerns into the preparation of the Development Plan, to identify statistical needs, to evaluate the resources needed, and to programme the work over the same period as the Plan.

Human resources education, training and management

The team recommends that:

- the statistical education institutions be more integrated into the functioning of the NSS;
- the NSS medium term strategy include a multi-annual programme of the human resources and training needed by the whole NSS and an estimate of the budget required;
- a system of mobility of personnel be set up, covering the whole of the NSS.

Coordination

While waiting for the revision of the Law, the assessment team recommends that the NSC:

- intensify its coordination activities by setting up permanent working groups for each major statistical domain;
- support the NSI in a proactive policy towards the PSS in order to exercise its technical coordination and quality management responsibilities;
- define a strategic plan for the improvement and monitoring of the quality of all the NSS statistical operations;
- set up a Quality committee, led by the NSI, to implement this plan and to keep users informed via a web site devoted to quality issues.

Programming

The assessment team recommends reviewing the composition of the NSC and the procedure for preparing the statistical programme in the framework of the revision of the Law. In the short run, it recommends that the NSC:

- develop its contacts with users and representatives of civil society and other stakeholders;
- resume the development and monitoring of an interim statistical programme for 2014;

- set up a procedure to develop the 2015 statistical programme with the view of having it adopted in the framework of the 2015 budget;
- formalise the procedure for the adoption of the statistical programme at the political level.

Regarding the NSI

The assessment team considers that strengthening the technical capacities of the NSI is a priority that would allow it to assume its role of central executive body of the NSS and its responsibility for the technical coordination of the NSS.

Organization

The team recommends:

- setting up a methodology and quality directorate to provide assistance to other NSI units and the PSS with data collection, processing and analysis;
- setting up a unit responsible for relations with the PSS, to facilitate such assistance;
- initiating a reflection on the organization of the NSI at regional and local level with a view to developing regional statistics;
- setting up project teams and steering committees for the most important projects and developing internal communication in order to combat compartmentalization between NSI directorates;
- setting up a working database, common to all directorates, and creating a coordination unit to ensure consistency of statistical products.

Mission

The assessment team recommends that the NSI:

- implement, with the support of the NSC, a proactive policy toward the PSS to harmonise nomenclatures, definitions, concepts and methodologies used;
- make an inventory of all the administrative files apt to be used for statistical purposes, identify possible obstacles to their use, and initiate the signature of data exchange agreements in the framework of the Decision of 2 June 2010;
- launch an assessment of the work of economic analysis and the position of the “*Observatoire de la conjoncture économique*” within the NSI.

To facilitate the use of administrative data in future, a regulation or administrative decision should give the NSI the same harmonization role for all administrative information systems as for PSS.

Methodological issues and quality management

Setting up a methodology directorate would answer the double concern for harmonisation and the quality of methodologies used, first in the NSI, then in the whole NSS, as part of the NSI's role of technical coordination.

The assessment team recommends:

- setting up a quality unit within the methodology directorate;
- setting up a quality network in the NSI units and the PSS;

- developing an action plan to implement a fully integrated global system of quality management, such as the TQM (Total Quality Management);
- adopting a code of good practice and ensuring the code is disseminated and understood through courses provided by the NSI Continuous Training Centre to NSI and PSS staff.

Information system

The NSI information system needs recasting and streamlining around a working database common to all units, in the framework of the harmonization of all software tools. The use of free software should be envisaged to reduce maintenance costs.

It is also recommended to consider concentrating all data produced by the NSS in a single NSI database for analysis and dissemination through a web portal, and relations with international institutions.

Financial and human resources

The assessment team recommends using the NSDS as a framework to develop the NSI medium term work programme, including the evaluation of the financial and human resources needed and their budgeting for the period covered by the Plan.

It recommends that the NSI:

- programme its long term recruitment needs and regularly recruit new staff;
- envisage redeploying expert staff from the central office toward the regions;
- reflect on the feasibility of seconding NSI staff to the PSS and, in the longer term, creating an inter-ministerial core of statisticians;
- formalise and develop its relations with the education institutions;
- set up the Continuous Training Centre quickly by gathering necessary funds and organising training for trainers for NSI managers;
- inject some dynamism in the management of human resources to avoid the loss of younger staff, by giving them more motivating career perspectives, create a specific unit devoted to career management, and set up a management system with both collective objectives, managed as part of the work programme, and individual objectives as part of career management.

Dissemination, communication and relations with users

The assessment team recommends that the NSI:

- continue developing and improving its dissemination and communication on issues regarding statistics, their use and analysis;
- ensure better respect of the release calendar for the most important statistics and inform users of the problems encountered in case of delay;
- develop its contacts with users in the framework of the NSC and directly, to target better its outputs, in terms of content and medium.