

# SOME ASPECTS OF STATISTICAL TRAINING IN TRANSITION COUNTRIES

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## 1. Introduction

It is very well known that statistical offices in transition countries face enormous challenges. I would like to mention only a few new tasks for official statistics in these countries:

- 1) extension of sample surveys at a broader scale, especially in the economic statistics (sample designing, designing of questionnaires, training of interviewers, etc.),
- 2) integration of data from various sources,
- 3) training of experts in the use of various international standards and classifications, extension of the methods compensating non-response (methods of weighting the results, imputations, model approach, simulation, etc.).

These new tasks generated a vast need for training and retraining of statisticians working in statistical offices in transition countries. Statistical offices in these countries have been unable to undertake such training activities alone.

In order to respond to these training needs Eurostat proposed in 1991 to some countries in transition (the Visegrad countries) to create a training programme specially tailored to their needs (Christopherson, 1994). At that time these countries did not respond positively to the Eurostat proposal and it was decided to open the *Regular TES Programme* to participants from transition countries benefiting from the Phare Programme. Consequently the Regular TES Programme became the only formal training environment offered by Eurostat to the countries in transition. From 1991 to 1999 a lot of changes and improvements of the training programmes of European Statisticians have been introduced (Eurostat, 1998a).

I have no doubt that these international training offer a unique opportunity to statisticians from transition countries both to develop their professional competencies and increase their awareness of being part of European Statistical System. However, I found that, at the beginning, it was very difficult to use these international statistical training activities efficiently. I would like to focus my attention only on some aspects of statistical training in transition countries.

## 2. Statistical training in transition countries

It is very well known that *statistical training* is the provision of knowledge, skills and experience oriented to helping employees meet the needs of their current jobs. This occurs on-the-job under the direction of supervisors, or through formal courses given by a statistical office, or where effective, by outside organisations.

For the countries in transition on-the-job training under the direction of supervisors and formal courses were limited to large extent for the sake of lack of appropriate trainers. For these reasons, external training was so important.

However, there were some problems to be solved. How to select persons from statistical staff to be trained abroad? First barrier was language. Very often persons with knowledge of English were selected. After the training they were involved in other activities not connected with the training abroad. This solution was not so effective as expected.

### 3. Building up a Training Infrastructure in Transition Countries

I think that the only solution is to build up training infrastructure inside each country. That is why attempts should be made to extend co-operation with universities in each country at much larger scale (Kordos, 1998). The changes introduced in statistics require an intensive training of statistical staff at various levels. There is a need to get acquainted with new methods of data collection, sample designing, designing of questionnaires, increasing data quality, editing, analysing and dissemination. Those tasks cannot be done by the Central Statistical Offices in transition countries alone without the international assistance. Some of them had effective co-operation with statistical offices from developed countries, such as Statistics Canada, INSEE in France, etc. For example, Statistics Canada introduced in several countries efficient training programme entitled *Survey Skills Development Course* (Statistics Canada, 1996). The programme provides professionals involved in survey taking activities with: an awareness of the principles, issues, complexities and interrelationships inherent in the design and implementation of a statistical survey; the basic skills of survey taking through practical experience; the knowledge of survey methods and procedures and an awareness of their application; an opportunity to learn how to work with others in an interdisciplinary environment. This is an important starting point for building up a system of statistical training.

### 4. Concluding remarks

Concluding these short remarks, I would like to stress that very interesting proposals were presented by Statistics Finland at the Working Party in Luxembourg last December (Eurostat, 1998b): *Professional Development Training Programme for Statisticians*. This approach might be also accepted for transition countries in long term perspectives.

Very important in transition countries is also *training of users*. I agree with Mr. J-L. Bodin (Bodin, 1997) that official statisticians have a duty to help users, who often have great difficulty expressing their needs due to their lack of knowledge of statistics and the processing of official statistics. Such training should be also undertaken in transition countries.

### REFERENCES

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### RÉSUMÉ

*Auteur discute les aspects particuliers de la formation statistique dans les pays en transition. Il discute notamment la formation spécifique concernant l'élaboration du projet des enquêtes par sondage surtout l'élaboration de l'échantillon, des questionnaires et du système de contrôle des enquêtes aux étapes successives.*