

FOR PARTICIPANTS ONLY

REFERENCE DOCUMENT

DDR/9

9 April 2001

ENGLISH

ORIGINAL SPANISH

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ECLAC

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

First meeting of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the  
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Santiago, Chile, 9-11 May 2001

**CHALLENGES AND TRENDS IN MODERNIZATION OF  
STATISTICAL SYSTEMS**

The institutional organization of official statistics

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**This paper will examine alternative approaches to organizing official statistics institutions in any country, either now or in the future. The options described here take into account all the details that need to be implemented in each case if official statistics are to meet the demands of different users, satisfy the requirements of relevance, timeliness and acceptable quality, and ensure that data obtained from different investigations are consistent and comparable internationally.**

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## 1. Legal Framework

### 1.1 Political and administrative organization

Official statistics institutions in the countries are usually organized in ways that are consistent with overall political and administrative organization and, in fact, derive from the country's pattern of historical development.

Official statistics arise and develop to meet the government's need to have information for making political and economic decisions that affect all of society.

Countries consisting of a federation of States have a centralized Federal Government, and each Federated State has its own State Government. This means that Government decisions are made at two different levels: federal and state. Consequently, official statistics institutions need to be organized on two different fronts: **federal statistical organization** and the **organization of statistics in each Federated State**.

Statistics laws in such countries need to define responsibilities for both types of organizations, to prevent information overlaps and the wastage of resources that could occur if the same type of statistical information were produced at both levels.

Countries with a **national government** whose authority covers the entire territory make economic and political decisions at one level only; a **national statistical organization** is the most appropriate model for such a state to meet its information needs efficiently.

**In summary:** the nature of a country's political and administrative organization determines the best way to organize official statistics institutions so that every level of Government has the information it needs and appropriate institutions to perform necessary tasks.

### 1.2 Centralization vs. decentralization

In a **centralized** statistical organization, the law authorizes the federal or national official Statistics Bureau to decide **what** statistics should be produced, **how** they should be produced, **what** statistical methods should be used in each case, and **what** institution or institutions should produce them.

In a **decentralized** statistical organization, the federal or national Statistics Bureau is not authorized to decide **what** statistics should be produced, **how** they should be produced, or **which** institution or institutions should do so.

A **decentralized statistical system** usually has a high-ranking federal or national Statistics Bureau required by law to assume responsibility for statistical standards in general. Sectoral statistics offices are required to follow its methodological guidelines and statistical practices including concepts, definitions, classifications, nomenclature, statistical units, etc., so that statistical information coming from different sources will be consistent and can be merged.

In **decentralized statistical systems**, the institutions that prepare sectoral statistics decide **what** information they should produce following methodological guidelines given by the federal or national Statistics Bureau. For example, a nation's Ministry of Industry that is responsible for preparing industrial statistics has its own department that decides what statistics or indicators would be most appropriate, with what coverage and how often, in order for the ministry to perform its role better.

In **centralized statistical systems**, the federal or national Statistics Bureau sets the country's statistical policy but is not necessarily expected to **produce** all statistics.

The Statistics Bureau decides what statistics should be produced and how, but it sometimes assigns the production of some data to other institutions which are better qualified to do so, given their particular characteristics. A very common example is foreign trade statistics, obtained as a byproduct of the collection of customs duties. Although a customs document serves as the original source of information, the classifications, code numbers, units, etc. are "statistical standards" for transforming this customs data into statistical information.

Another frequent example is monetary, financial and balance-of-payments statistics, which in most countries are compiled by the Central Bank. Such situations are typical of **centralized statistical systems** that practice "**sectoral decentralization.**" In many countries, the practice is followed in many sectors, including statistics on education, agriculture, energy, environment, and the like.

In short: in a **centralized statistical organization**, the Statistics Bureau sets national statistical policy, including what statistics are to be produced, what statistical methods are to be used, and what institutions should do so. In a **decentralized statistical organization**, the Statistics Bureau sets statistical standards so that the system is coordinated and statistics are consistent; but other institutions, which vary from one country to another, make decisions on what statistics to produce and how to produce them.

### 1.3 Statistics laws

The regulation of official statistics depends on what type of State is involved in each case, how it is organized politically and administratively, and most important, when the law was enacted.

Even the field of the statistics experiences fads and fashions. For a time, statistical laws may tend to be very rigid, concise, and focused narrowly on certain matters only. As times change, more expansive laws come into use, offering detailed descriptions of the major features of every different kind of statistical research, of the institutions or Bureaux that regulate the statistical system, and all their functions. Both type of laws, whether more concise or more expansive, offer advantages and drawbacks. "Short" laws tend to have a longer life span because normal changes in society do not affect their structure. "Long" laws, with their minutely detailed descriptions of all the functions and

institutions of the system, and even specific characteristics of the statistical process, are more difficult to maintain over time.

In any case, whether statistics laws are concise or expansive, they should cover the following points and define clearly the sphere of action of each different component of the system:

**a) Definition and characteristics of official statistics**

Statistics laws should clearly set out the essential characteristics of all official statistics and those features that distinguish them from any other type of statistical information. This will ensure high quality, adequate coverage, timeliness and appropriateness of official statistics.

**b) Institutions making up the statistical system, and relationships among the different types of institutions**

The law should list the different institutions that, together with the Statistics Bureau, constitute the statistical system.

It should define the sphere of action for each one and explain how they relate to one another. It also creates vehicles for close cooperation among institutions, such as committees, commissions, and workgroups, where members can discuss statistical methods and any problems affecting system operation.

**c) Duty of informants to supply information**

In order for official statistics to be of an acceptable quality, it is absolutely necessary for information supplied by informants, whether persons or institutions, to be accurate, reliable and timely. The law must therefore address this issue and state clearly when informants are under obligation to supply information, and when they are not. In cases where information could compromise privacy, cooperation should be voluntary.

**d) Duty to protect statistical confidentiality**

The law must specify obligations of the Statistics Bureau to safeguard the statistical confidentiality of data, whether of a personal or other nature, and protect the identity of informants.

**e) Sanctions**

The law should impose sanctions on informants who fail to supply accurate, reliable, and timely information, and on anyone who violates the principles of statistical confidentiality.

## 2. The Statistics Bureau

### 2.1 Basic Characteristics

All countries, regardless of their political system, have a federal or national Statistics Bureau with the following characteristics:

#### a) **Placement within the government system: administrative hierarchy and lines of authority**

Statistics Bureaux are generally located in a ministry within the public administrative structure, usually the ministry of the economy or the treasury. They hold Department rank, and the Bureau Chief usually reports directly to the minister to which the department is attached.

Although this is the most common system, there is no reason to think it is necessarily the best. Indeed, in many countries, the Statistics Bureau has been raised to a higher-ranking category with more independence, and the chief of the bureau is not a Director General, but a President.

Another common question is whether the Statistics Bureau, with the appropriate institutional rank, should instead be under the authority of the legislature. In theory, the advantages of such a placement would outweigh the disadvantages, but in fact this situation is quite uncommon.

In some countries, the Statistics Bureau actually holds ministerial rank, and the bureau chief is a Government Minister and a member of the Cabinet. In others, the Statistics Bureau has been assigned special status and is independent of any ministry or department. In such cases, the Bureau chief holds the status of deputy minister and works directly with the prime minister.

Although every different country has its own peculiar form of government, all have a Statistics Bureau that remains constantly alert to provide all the statistical information needed for making government decisions. The Bureau should have an administrative rank high enough to keep it as independent as possible, but unavoidably, it is the Administration that appoints the Chief, President or Director General of the Statistics Bureau and allocates financial resources through the general budget.

#### b) **Role of the Statistics Bureau within the institutional organization of statistics**

The federal or national Statistics Bureau needs clear guidance concerning its responsibilities, relationships with other institutions, and how decisions will be made on the official statistics to be produced in each period.

In **centralized statistical systems**, the most basic responsibility of the Statistics Bureau is to decide **what** statistics it will produce on its own, **what** statistics it will produce in collaboration with other institutions, and, if the specific nature of needed information so

merits, **what** statistics will be produced by other institutions such as the specialized statistics services of the various ministries and the Central Bank.

The Statistics Bureau also plays a very important role as general coordinator of the system. One of its most effective duties is to propose statistical methodologies and standards, including concepts, definitions, classifications, nomenclature, and statistical units, so that final results are always compatible and easy to analyse.

In **decentralized statistical systems**, the Statistics Bureau makes decisions concerning its own activities, while other institutions of the system decide what statistics they will produce. Even in these systems, the Statistics Bureau, for reasons described above, normally plays an important role as general coordinator of the system, part of whose job is to propose statistical standards.

#### **c) Guarantee of technical independence**

The most effective way for a bureau to protect its technical independence is by maintaining high standards of statistical methodology and apply them unflinchingly.

The statistical methodology needs to be published along with the results of every investigation. Early in the year, it is very important to announce in advance the release dates of various short-term economic and social indicators, the dates when the results of surveys during that period will be published, and obligations to review “sensitive” indicators. All projects are bound to respect forms and timetables that were announced early, warding off any suspicions of political interest in advancing or delaying the release of certain statistical data.

The Statistics Bureau builds its own professional reputation through the quality, relevance and timeliness of its data. This means it is very important to use of the latest statistical methodology for every investigation.

#### **d) Safeguarding statistical confidentiality**

As was mentioned above, the Statistics Bureau has an unequivocal obligation to guarantee that data received from informants will be protected under the standards of statistical confidentiality.

In order to safeguard confidentiality, the Statistics Bureau is pledged not to release individualized data under any circumstance. Statistics Bureau staff whose role in the statistical process makes them privy to data protected by statistical confidentiality are likewise under obligation to respect privacy.

Data collection questionnaires designed for different statistical projects or investigations often begin with a statement on the first page, in which the Statistics Bureau promises that all data received will be protected under the rules of statistical confidentiality.



### e) **The central office and field offices of the Statistics Bureau**

The federal or national Statistics Bureau may have a single **home office**, generally located in the capital city, where specialized staff carry out all stages of the statistical process, from writing the initial project proposal through publication and dissemination of results.

When a major interview survey is to be conducted, interviewers are sent out all over the country to collect data. This is the main reason why some countries supplement the central Statistics Bureau with a full network of regional and provincial field offices distributed throughout the country. The main task of these field offices is to collect information, and they are often little more than branches of the central Statistics Bureau, allocated staff and budget resources to carry out any tasks assigned to them by the Bureau. In a federal system, the state-level Bureaux of Statistics, in addition to any local responsibilities, may lend support to the federal Bureau by serving as data-collection offices or disseminating centrally-produced statistical information under the terms of cooperation agreements or contracts signed with the federal Bureau. Today, with the great strides that have been made in information systems and communications, some of these jobs can be performed by centralized information-gathering units located anywhere in the country or the regions.

On other occasions, field offices of specific government ministries are best qualified to support the Statistics Bureau in preparing sectoral statistics pertaining to their area of expertise. For the purposes of this project, they become part of the decentralized statistics network.

On the surface, it may appear far too costly, albeit highly useful, for a Statistics Bureau to maintain a permanent network of field offices. However, there are many advantages to having a data-collection office located physically near to the source of information. The process is more likely to move ahead without delays, and inconsistencies in data collection can be quickly remedied by paying another visit to the respondent.

Field offices have several other important tasks: they circulate information locally and receive concerns or requests for information from their region or location, forwarding them to the Central Statistics Bureau.

## 2.2 **Specific duties**

Federal or national Bureaux of Statistics are responsible for many tasks, as listed below. The scope of their work will depend essentially on how centralized their statistical organization is.

### a) **Data collection**

The Statistics Bureau may request data from individuals or organizations. Subjects can be required to respond truthfully within a set term, while the Bureau is under obligation to reveal how the data will be used, agree to respect statistical confidentiality, and where appropriate, explain whether or not the respondent's cooperation is voluntary.

To avoid unnecessary duplication in data collection, the Statistics Bureau may ask other agencies for information they may have in their administrative records.

**b) Data processing**

After information is collected and reviewed to eliminate any data that could identify the respondent, it can be processed and put to the desired use.

The information should be processed in such a way that it can be tabulated by different users in various ways, depending on their needs.

**c) Data preservation**

The Statistics Bureau is required to keep archives of collected information for a given period of time, even after statistical results have been released.

Some countries require the Bureau to preserve the original forms on which data were collected; others keep archives of media onto which it was transferred (machine-readable format, etc.).

When the pre-defined term expires, or it is considered no longer necessary to continue preserving data, the material can be destroyed.

**d) Dissemination of results**

The Statistics Bureau publishes and distributes statistical outcomes, and the results become official upon publication of the statistics.

In addition to traditional publications, data users may request and receive information in other formats, subject only to requirements to respect statistical confidentiality.

Every publication of statistical research findings must include a methodological description with an easily understood explanation of the statistical process used; definitions and concepts; error estimates; and other estimations.

This helps users understand better the scope and limitations of data.

**e) Quality of information**

The Statistics Bureau must be on the alert to see that the results of statistics they produce meet acceptable quality standards.

The entire statistical process should be closely monitored from within the bureau to ensure that, at every stage, standards set in advance with the consensus of various experts are met. It can be useful to produce in-house documents clearly outlining any problems that have arisen, or stating whether the process has unfolded normally.

The Statistics Bureau should also stay in contact with users of statistical information to verify whether data have met their demands, and to be aware of future needs.

Another important consideration is whether data produced by more than one research project within the Bureau are consistent with one another and with information produced by other institutions.

The Statistics Bureau builds its reputation on the quality of its information, and its good name is built day by day as it produces relevant, accurate and timely statistics.

### 2.3 Staffing the Statistics Bureau

Statistics Bureaux must have the right people to do the job.

Depending on whether the Bureau is federal or national, and how centralized the statistics organization is in each country, the number of Bureau employees and their degree of technical qualification may vary considerably.

#### a) Recruitment and hiring

The relationship between staff and Bureau depends on many factors: the size and status of the public sector in each country, location of the Statistics Bureau within the government structure, and general budgetary rules. In some cases, personnel are members of the civil service, while in others, staff are under contract.

Civil servants may apply for positions through a fair and impartial selection process, although qualifying tests vary according to whether the position calls for an advanced degree, an intermediate degree, or an administrative diploma.

Career civil servants occupy managerial and mid-level positions and auxiliary jobs. The most important feature of this group is that they tend to remain in public service throughout their working lives, even if needs change or the political winds shift.

The public sector in some countries is organized administratively to permit the use of **employment contracts**, giving the Statistics Bureau tremendous flexibility to hire the people it needs when it needs them.

In general, both forms of recruitment tend to coexist in the Statistics Bureau. Temporary contracts are perfectly suited to polltakers, computer assistants, data input staff, etc.; but executive and mid-level positions are best filled with civil servants whose permanence lends stability to the Bureau and who are equipped to draw on the experience they have acquired and transmit it to others.

#### b) Personnel classification and job mobility

Personnel classification programmes in the Bureau need to be based on assigned responsibilities. The composition of the staff may change gradually over time, depending on the need to produce certain types of statistics.

Each team of professionals is put together in accordance with information needs at any given moment. People from different fields of specialization—mathematicians, economists, sociologists, computer scientists, analysts—may vary in terms of number and time commitment, depending on the types of investigation the bureau has undertaken. The professional profile of needed staff also varies, as does the type of work they perform at each stage of the statistical process.

With the advent of desktop computers, many auxiliary staffers have moved on to more highly skilled jobs. Computer centers concentrate on handling information from massive statistical projects such as the census or large-scale surveys. Even the collecting of information, once performed strictly through personal interviews, now takes place by computer, telephone, mail, support media, etc., and the skills level and profile of interviewing staff have changed accordingly.

### **c) Staff training and continuing education**

The people working in a Statistics Bureau should be encouraged to pursue a true civil-service career with prospects for advancement in professional skills and earning power. They should also receive opportunities to switch jobs within the statistics organization, work in other institutions that cooperate with the Bureau, and even apply for transfer to field offices.

Career growth, whether in-house or external, requires resources for continuing education so that staff members can study new statistical methods, information systems, project management skills, languages, and more.

Management teams often have excellent opportunities to train by attending international meetings on methodology, where they can expand their knowledge and compare notes with others.

The process of computerizing a Statistics Bureau calls for resource allocations not only to acquire new equipment, which will soon need to be replaced, but also to teach personnel how to get the best out of the new equipment.

## **2.4 Compensation for Statistics Bureau employees**

### **a) Level of compensation: matching other agencies**

People working in the Statistics Bureau should be compensated at levels that are competitive with those of other government agencies and with the salaries and benefits earned by people holding similar levels of responsibility in the private sector.

Anything less will inevitably draw the most qualified people away to other agencies or departments, or even to the private sector. The statistical process is highly complex and requires people skilled in quite diverse fields, including mathematics, economics, demography, sociology, and information systems. Moreover, staff need to undergo time-

consuming on-the-job technical preparation in order to perform optimally. Therefore it is very desirable to ensure a degree of stability on the staff.

The Statistics Bureau must never forget that salary levels must be comparable to those of other institutions. If compensation standards begin to deteriorate, the impact can be ruinous.

#### **b) Differential salary scales**

The staff in a Statistics Bureau can be divided into several different categories: management, mid-level professionals, auxiliary staff, temporary staff, etc. The salary scale should offer a wide band of options among groups and within groups.

Executive employees need to receive a clearly differentiated level of financial compensation if they are to accept willingly and develop fully their positions of high responsibility. Different sorts of in-kind benefits are also important, such as a more pleasant working environment, a larger office, a personal secretary, and opportunities to attend national or international meetings.

Mid-level professionals, especially those who are actually responsible for conducting the different projects, should also perceive a salary differential over those who do more routine tasks calling for less effort and, above all, fewer risks.

The computer group is unlike any other. In the overall statistical process, these employees are just one of many important links, not more or less important than any other. Their salary levels are part of the sub-set of public-sector professionals, that is, professionals of all kinds who work in the ministries, departments, and other institutions of the State and in private companies. In this particular field, however, the salary differences between public sector and the private sector are very great. These professionals can easily switch between sectors, and the public sector often becomes a sort of "training ground for computer scientists."

Very close attention should also be paid to wage differences between the lowest-level group of staff, that is, administrative assistants, and contract personnel, whether permanent or temporary.

Civil servants are normally covered by certain salary regulations that distinguish them from contract workers. These differences need to be preserved with the understanding that job stability is one of the compelling reasons for apparently distorted wage differentials.

#### **c) Flexibility in compensation**

Sometimes salary scales in the Statistics Bureau are narrow in scope, and compensation differentials within each group are too small; a good solution in such cases is to offer bonuses or specific awards for noteworthy achievements.

For example, upon completion of a complex project that demanded considerable extra work by many people, it is highly advisable to offer bonuses for the effort made. Individuals who took part independently of their work group should also receive extra compensation.

This type of flexibility in staff compensation encourages employees to press on even when the staff is insufficient for the project, time is short, or unexpected problems have delayed the work.

## **2.5 Budget of the Statistics Bureau**

### **a) Core and supplementary budgets**

All federal or national Statistics Bureaux need to have a budget if they are to meet all their obligations.

The core budget should be enough to cover all “regular” needs: staff, supplies, equipment, building maintenance, and the like. It contains line items for the “habitual” or “on-going” tasks of every office, and costs for these items have been clearly determined over the course of several years.

The Bureau requires the full amount of these resources if it is to meet all its regular commitments on time.

The Statistics Bureau may submit a supplementary budget request to carry out projects of a sporadic nature which, because of their scope, cannot be completed with core resources. Supplementary budgets may be in order for such operations as the population and housing census, economic survey, agricultural census, unusually large surveys, or any other type of project that calls for large quantities of human or financial resources and that take place from time to time.

Such exceptional projects need to be planned well in advance so that supplementary budgets can be prepared and resources can be obtained in time. Staff assignments to the various projects also need to be planned in advance.

It is incumbent on every Statistics Bureau to draw up an advance national or federal Statistical Programme, normally every four years, along with annual programs for the entire term. These should be approved by the government and any additional instructions given. This guarantees that the Statistics Bureau will have access to the resources it needs to carry out projects contained in the plan.

### **b) Sources of budget funds**

In most countries, the Statistics Bureau, regardless of its relative hierarchy within the ranks of Government, finances its budget with returns on its endowment, current transfers, and general budget allocations from state coffers. Many Bureaux also earn proceeds from their own activities and the sale of publications.

Statistics Bureaux in most of the advanced countries are earning ever-larger amounts of their own working resources by selling their publications and meeting user requests for “customized information.” Even this growing source of funds, however, still provides only a small share of the core budget.

Statistics work is very costly, entailing highly specialized labor, a large workforce, and sophisticated hardware and software. Even these high costs fail to account for the “value” of information supplied, usually under obligation, by informants.

If information is indeed considered a public service, if it is costly to produce, and if, moreover, informants offer their information free of charge, it seems only natural that the work should be financed publicly, through general government budget allocations.

### 3. Mechanisms for coordinating the National Statistical System (NSS)

The National Statistical System (NSS) is comprised of all the institutions and agencies in a given country that produce or contribute to the production of official statistical information.

Many different mechanisms can be used to coordinate the NSS; their relative advantages depend on whether the statistical system is centralized or decentralized.

#### 3.1 National Statistical Programme

The agency responsible for coordinating statistics, that is, the federal or national Statistics Bureau, develops the National Statistical Programme. Having formulated this Programme, it is able to compile statistics produced by different institutions of the NSS and sort them within the time limits indicated.

In **decentralized statistical** systems, the National Statistical Programme provides a means to learn in more depth about the methodological characteristics of statistics compiled by the different agencies or institutions. Information can thus be provided to users in a standardized format.

In **centralized statistical systems**, the Statistics Bureau draws up the National Statistical Programme, in cooperation with any sectoral statistical institutions and with the statistical service of the Central Bank. Because the information needs of each department are considered in the Programme, they are all able to perform their specific tasks while avoiding overlap.

**Federal Statistics Bureaux** need to know what statistical activities are being conducted by bureaux in the federated states so as to develop useful forms of cooperation. The National Statistical Programme assigns spheres of responsibility and specific areas of interest for bureaux at both levels, giving them access to one another’s activities.

### **3.2 Annual Plans of Action**

Every statistical system and every type of Statistics Bureau needs to prepare an annual plan of action, which is nothing more than a detailed one-year segment of the National Statistical Programme.

Because it needs to draft an annual plan of action, the Statistics Bureau must also submit an annual request for the financial resources it will require to carry out the plan. At the end of the fiscal year, the Bureau normally reviews its annual plan of action, determines whether or not it has been fulfilled, and if not, why not. If the National Statistical Programme and the annual plans of action have been given the status of official policy documents and have received approval at every level, there is a very great expectation that their tasks will be completed.

### **3.3 Inter-sectoral and inter-territorial committees**

One very effective way to coordinate the work of the different statistics-producing agencies of the NSS is to set up two types of committees: an inter-sectoral committee and an inter-territorial committee. Even if statistical responsibilities are very clearly delineated for institutions producing sectoral data and those that produce territorial data (Statistics Bureaux in the federated states), there is still a need for meeting and discussion to define different types of mutual cooperation.

These committees provide an excellent forum for exchanging information on the different projects being conducted at every level and for discussing methodologies and difficulties encountered.

Careful thought should go into the selection of members for each committee. The people chosen should be those actually responsible for statistical services in their sectors or territories. The committees should have clear rules of procedure so that meetings can be called easily and regularly and so the different institutions represented will be committed to carry out the committee's decisions.

## **4. Mechanisms for processing the demand for statistical data**

It would seem natural that the Statistics Bureau, in cooperation with other institutions of the NSS, should receive requests and make decisions on what statistics should be produced. It is equally important to understand whether and how much the Bureau is really meeting user needs.

The general trend today is to give greater weight to the opinions and needs of information users. As new communications tools become available, the countries are using every channel available to ascertain what users need.

### **4.1 Senior Statistical Council**

National Statistical Systems often have a high-level advisory body, generally known as the National or Senior Statistical Council. Its most important job is to advise the



Statistics Bureau on the timing and methodology of statistical projects. It also serves as a useful vehicle to convey demands for national economic and social information.

The Senior Statistical Council is usually made up of representatives of different social sectors: business leaders, trade unions, government ministries, academic authorities, and territorial organizations. In addition to stating their views on the scope of statistical projects, they transmit the information needs of their constituents, and thus serve as an excellent source of information for the future.

#### **4.2 Relationships with information units and requests for customized information**

Information units provide timely information and serve as one of the most effective groupings for indicating what type of information they would like to receive. They are often difficult to contact, but their opinions are extremely valuable and should be kept in mind when statistical information is being produced. The Statistics Bureau often adheres to long-standing traditions when it prepares and presents statistics. These can be very difficult to change, especially because of the common belief that the Bureau's image would be tarnished by any discontinuity in the dissemination of information, which would furthermore lead users into problems with misinformation. Nevertheless, when information units are contacted in advance and listened to, it is much easier than it would appear to please them and meet their needs. Opinions on the presentation of data should rightfully come from the users, who may have clear views on whether speed is more important than accuracy or other characteristics. Such contact allows the Bureau to be aware of user needs and attempt to satisfy them gradually.

Requests for customized information also serve as important signposts of how to produce and present statistical information in ways that are most appropriate, and point to information gaps in each sector.

#### **4.3 Cooperative research agreements with the academic sector**

Cooperation between the Statistics Bureau and the university should be encouraged at many levels. This could include providing data in its crudest form to be used in a variety of ways, always safeguarding statistical confidentiality; or bringing people from the two institutions to form working groups for conducting statistical research projects.

Statistics Bureaux, overwhelmed with day-to-day work that absorbs all their time and dedication, are usually unable to allocate human resources for experimental projects. While it is true that cooperation agreements with universities require them to dedicate at least part-time resources, the Bureau enjoys the certainty that responsibilities and support for methodological experiments will be shared.

Cooperation between the Statistics Bureau and academia frequently germinates within the Senior Statistical Council. It is a highly effective mechanism for developing statistical methods and applying them in a country.

## **5. Instruments for integrating and analysing statistical data**

### **5.1 Integrating data at the national level**

Every national statistical system requires methodological standards for identifying clearly the names of different phenomena of economic and social life, using uniform statistical terminology. In order to integrate data within a territory, it is essential for the Statistics Bureau and other institutions or agencies that produce data to use the same territorial units in their products. These territorial units, whether regions, provinces, municipal districts, or others, need to be defined, delimited and identified with great precision and labelled with specific codes for territorial identification.

When various institutions conduct different statistical studies, the resulting economic and social data can be more easily integrated if all the studies use the same statistical infrastructure, including: concepts, definitions, statistical units, classifications, nomenclature, codes, and records. This statistical infrastructure is the result of lengthy efforts and close cooperation by everyone involved in the process, to prepare and approve statistical standards. The Statistics Bureau and other information-producing institutions should refrain from adopting their own concepts and statistical terminology, which would tremendously handicap any attempt by users to compare results and put them to use.

When a new nomenclature is developed, or an existing classification system is revised, all affected groups should take part, express their points of agreement or disagreement, and help find compromise solutions. The Senior or National Statistical Council could be a very good venue for such consensus-building.

It is also very helpful for integrating and analysing data if every country adheres to standards and criteria developed internationally and officially adopted in international forums by all participating countries. This includes the System of National Accounts, statistical nomenclatures and classifications, and statistical methodologies approved at the world level.

### **5.2 Integrating data at the international level**

Data can be compared and analysed internationally only if each country, in producing its statistical studies, applies statistical standards developed and approved at the international level.

It would be impossible to perform aggregate macroeconomic comparisons among countries if the figures or estimates did not comply with the standards of the United Nations System of National Accounts or the European System of Accounts of the European Union.

The same can be said of economic and social indicators. The definitions of variables, concepts and methodologies for calculating each indicator must be standardized if results are to be comparable.

Many countries stand to benefit when these statistical standards are developed internationally. All the international organizations, in integrating information coming from the countries, need standardized statistical instruments. Each one, within its sphere of interest, is developing systems to integrate statistical information. Examples include: the System of National Accounts, the Integrated System of Demographic and Social Statistics, nomenclature for economic activities and products, handbooks and recommendations for conducting statistical projects such as the Population and Housing Census, economic surveys, and the agricultural census. Specific software packs are also being developed for tabulating survey results and processing certain statistics, such as foreign trade figures.

The countries can realize great savings of time and effort by avoiding the temptation to create their own statistical instruments. Once the relevant international organizations have approved certain instruments as valid at the international level, the countries merely adopt them and fit them to their own socio-economic conditions so that information produced locally will be comparable internationally.

## **6. Institutional organization of official statistics in Spain**

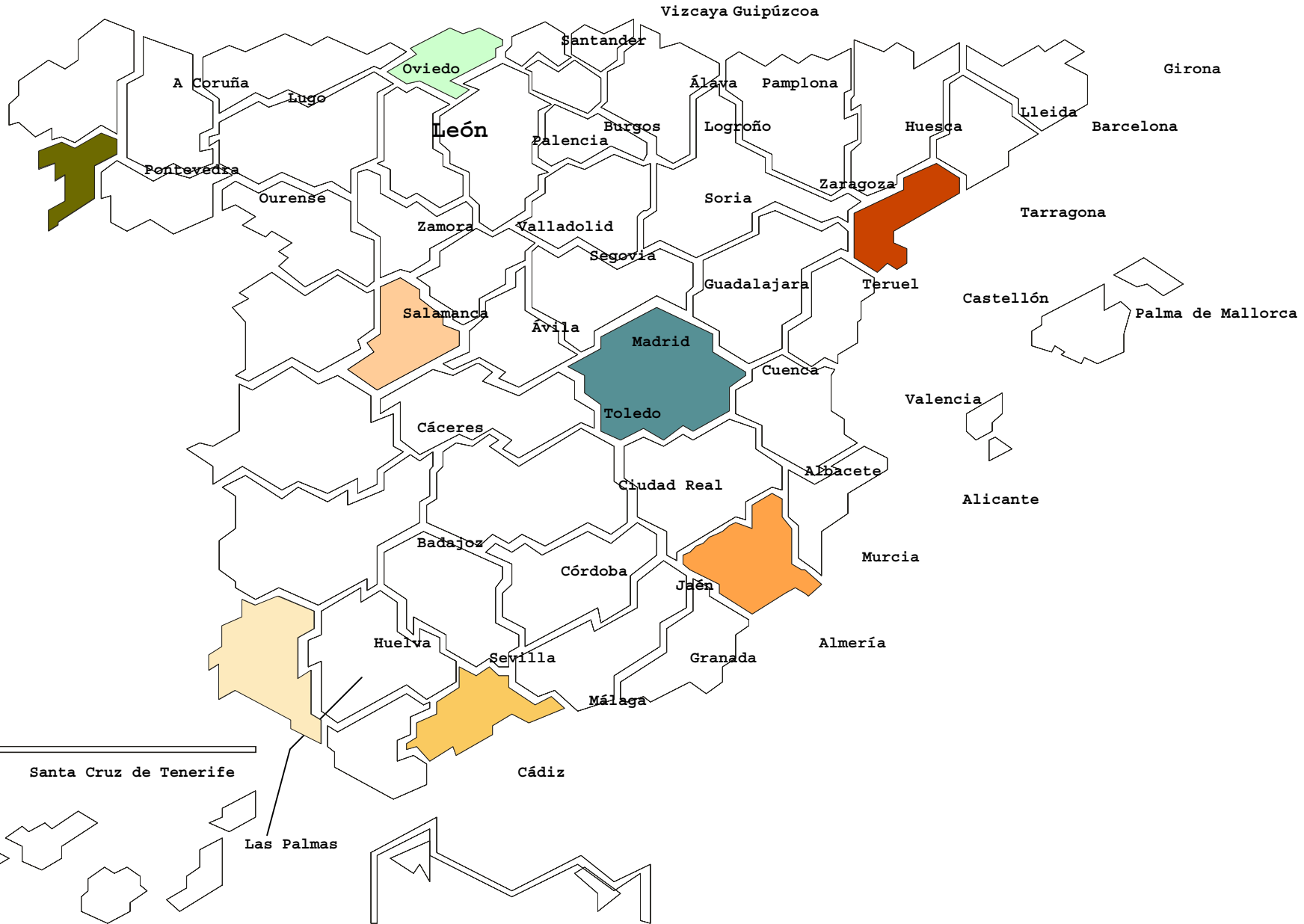
Spain regulates statistical activities for State purposes under the terms of **Law 12/1989**, adopted on **9 May 1989**, which governs public statistical activities. According to Spain's 1978 Constitution, article 149, clause 31, the State has exclusive authority over statistics for State purposes, as defined by the State itself.

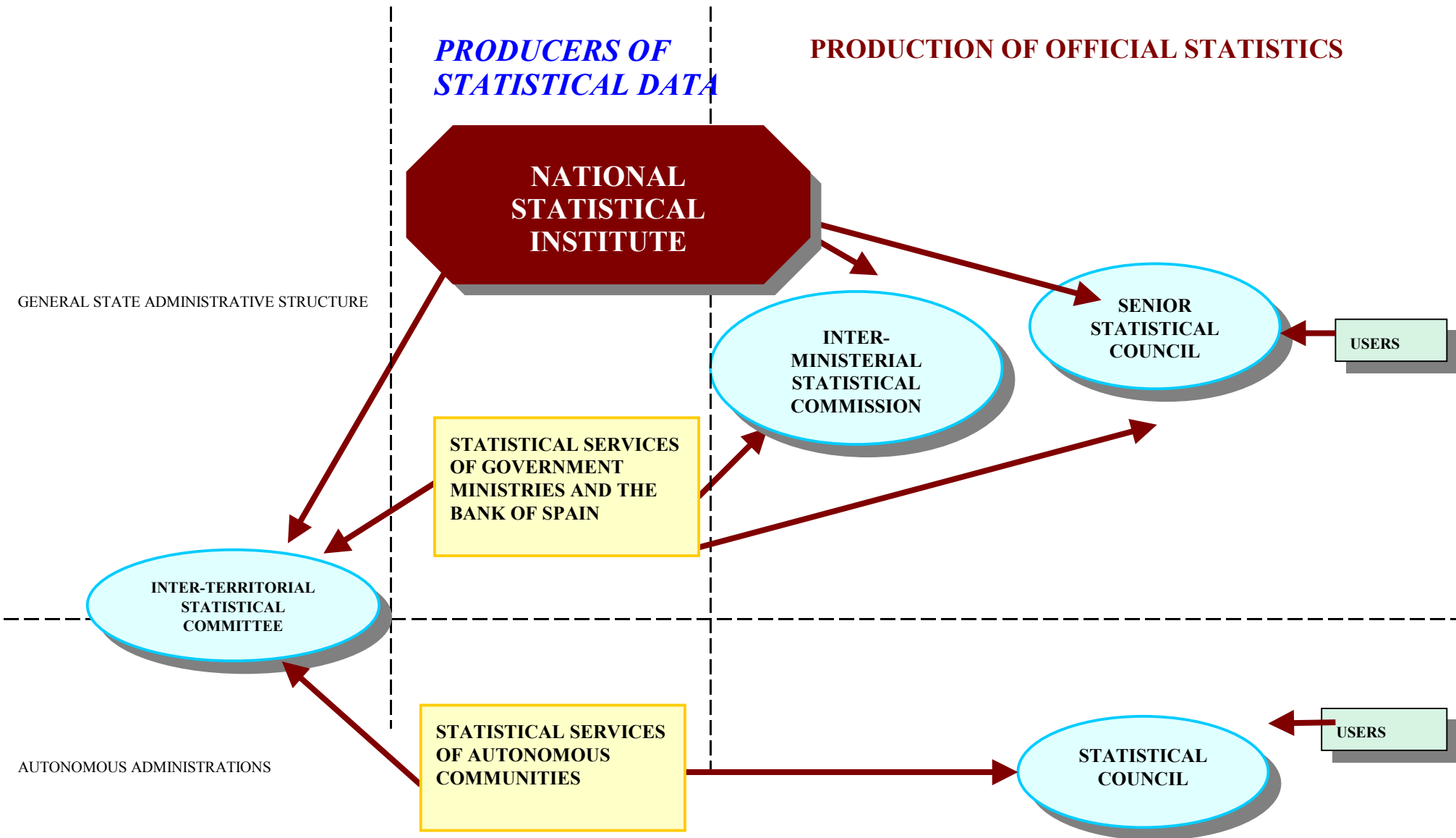
The **Autonomous Communities** (17 in all) are free to produce whatever statistics they feel are of local or regional interest. Statistical activities in the Autonomous Communities are regulated under laws enacted by the local parliament.

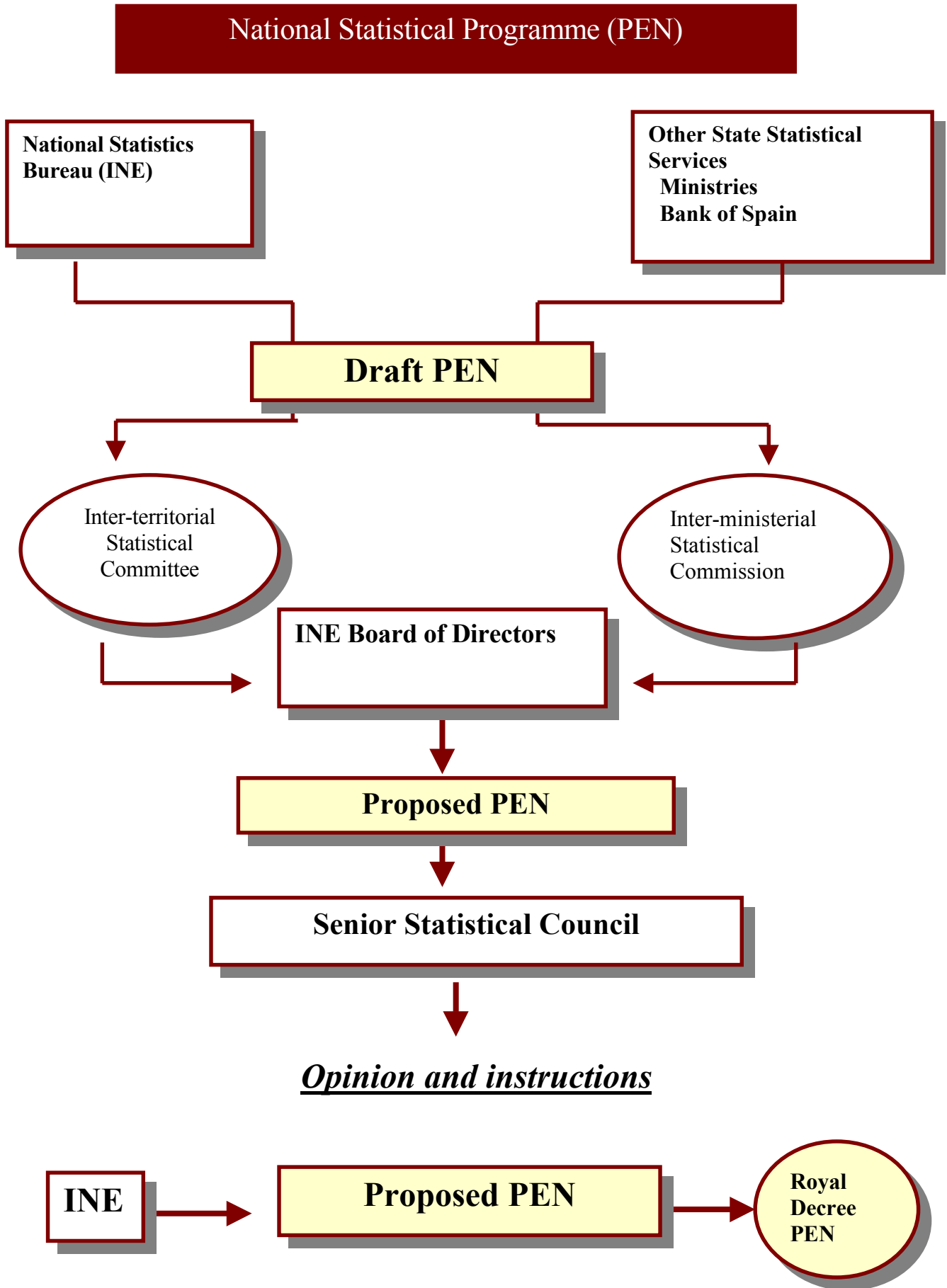
# 17 Autonomous Communities



# 50 Provinces







# TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION

**17 AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITIES**

**50 PROVINCES**

**8000 MUNICIPALITIES**

**DISTRICTS/SECTIONS**

**STATISTICAL UNITS**

**CENSUS TRACTS**

- Clearly defined limits
- Approx. 2500 inhabitants
- Approx. 500 housing units

**Legislative  
Elections**

**Household  
Survey**