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**PROPOSAL FOR A CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE IN STATISTICS IN LATIN AMERICA
AND THE CARIBBEAN AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR 2012-2013 ***

* This document was prepared by Colombia, the coordinating country of the Working Group on Institution-building.

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
INTRODUCTION	3
A. BACKGROUND	3
B. SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE DRAFT CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE IN STATISTICS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN	4
C. METHODOLOGY USED TO PREPARE THE DRAFT CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE IN STATISTICS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN.....	5
D. DRAFT CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN	6
1. Institutional environment and coordination.....	6
2. Statistical processes	9
3. Statistical production	11
E. PROPOSED PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE IN STATISTICS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN	12
1. Workshops, conferences and forums.....	13
2. Self-assessment	13
3. Overall assessments.....	14
4. Plans for improvement	15

INTRODUCTION

The production of official statistics calls for responsibility and commitment on the part of the competent agencies. Thus, credible statistics and reliable national statistical institutes and other members of the national statistical system are vital assets since they are essential to the design, formulation, monitoring and assessment of Government plans and programmes.

This credibility is a value that gains strength over time thanks to the generation of quality statistics that comply with standards, principles and norms relating to the production process and statistical activity as a whole.

International recommendations and guidelines have been drawn up in order to build more robust national statistical institutes within the national statistical system and apply fundamental principles and good practices which will result in qualitative improvements.

International guidelines have been adapted and compiled into a draft Code of Good Practice in Statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean, the aim being to improve the quality of statistical output and build trust in national statistical institutes and enhance the comparability of regional statistics.¹ The draft Code seeks to strengthen the institutional framework and the procedures and products necessary for obtaining quality statistics.

Once the Code of Good Practice has been adopted, the Working Group on Institution-building shall disseminate it and assist all the institutes in the region in implementing it, with a view to ensuring overall compliance with all the basic requirements for the production of reliable, quality regional statistics.

This report is divided into five sections. The first presents the background to the preparation of the Code of Good Practice in Statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean; the second describes the ambit, scope and objectives of the Code; the third examines the methodology used in the design and formulation process; the fourth lists the principles and criteria for compliance and the last section sets out the proposal for the strategic implementation plan.

A. BACKGROUND

At its Special Session in April 1994, the United Nations Statistical Commission adopted the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, bearing in mind: (i) that official statistical information is an essential basis for sustainable development in the economic, demographic, social and environmental fields and for mutual knowledge and trade among States and peoples of the world; (ii) that the essential trust of the public in official statistical information depends to a large extent on respect for the fundamental values and principles which are the basis of any society which seeks to understand itself and to respect the rights of its members; and (iii) that the quality of official statistics and thus the quality of information available to the Government, the economy and the public depends largely on cooperation of citizens, enterprises and other respondents in providing appropriate and reliable data needed for

¹ National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INDEC), “Desarrollo de las estadísticas en el ámbito del MERCOSUR” (DDR/2), Fifth meeting of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 4 August 2009.

necessary statistical compilations and on the cooperation between users and producers of statistics in order to meet users' needs.²

These considerations gave rise to a set of principles for statistical activity, agreed within the United Nations and reflecting values that apply across the board to the production of official statistics in the new international context.

Guided by these principles and mindful of the economic, political and social context, multilateral organizations, joined subsequently by national statistical institutes, undertook to establish norms, protocols and codes of good practice as instruments for applying the principles considered fundamental to the development of statistical activities.

Thus, in 2001, the Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT) issued the Quality Declaration of the European Statistical System, which consists of a set of principles based on the fundamental elements governing United Nations official statistics adapted to the European context. This Declaration served as a basis for the adoption of the European Statistics Code of Practice (2005) designed for use by national and community statistical authorities and comprising 15 principles and indicators that measure compliance with good practices.

In 2007, inspired by the above-mentioned international initiatives, the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC welcomed the proposal by various countries in the region to take note of the European Statistics Code of Practice and discuss the possibility of adapting it to the reality of each country; thus, the Conference requested EUROSTAT and ECLAC to prepare a programme of action for carrying out this task.

Accordingly, at its fifth meeting, held in 2009, the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC instructed the Working Group on Institution-building, made up of representatives of Mexico, Panama and Paraguay and coordinated by Colombia, to draw up a draft Code of Good Practice in Statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean.

B. SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE DRAFT CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE IN STATISTICS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

The draft Code of Good Practice in Statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean is a technical instrument containing practical rules for ensuring the independence of the national statistical institutes and coordination of statistical production at the national level; it is intended to serve as a guide for improving the quality of statistics produced in the region and seeks to coordinate statistical activity, improve the quality of official statistics and build trust in users by encouraging the application of best international methods and practices in statistical production and dissemination.

² United Nations Statistical Commission, Report on the Special Session (11-15 April 1994); Economic and Social Council, Official Records, 1994, Supplement No. 9 (E/CN.3/1994/18), New York, 1994.

The draft Code lists 17 principles and 84 criteria for compliance, grouped in the following three sections:

Section	Principles
Institutional environment and coordination	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Professional independence 2. Coordination of the national statistical system 3. Mandate for data collection 4. Statistical confidentiality 5. Adequacy of resources 6. Quality commitment 7. Impartiality and objectivity 8. Cooperation and international participation
Statistical processes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Sound methodology 10. Appropriate statistical procedures 11. Non-excessive burden on respondents 12. Cost-effectiveness
Statistical output	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Relevance 14. Accuracy and reliability 15. Timeliness and punctuality 16. Coherence and comparability 17. Accessibility and clarity

The draft Code is designed for use by national statistical institutes in the Latin American and Caribbean region and by staff engaged in generating official statistics; it sets out best practices for the professional organization of statistical services, the allocation of resources for this activity and quality enhancement, the overriding concern being to guarantee independence, integrity and responsibility in these tasks.

The Code will be instructive for both users and providers of information. By ensuring the impartiality and objectivity of national institutes with respect to the official statistics they produce, it seeks to increase the trust of users in the work of these entities; in the case of the providers of information, its purpose is to demonstrate the statistical confidentiality of the institutes vis-à-vis the data they supply.

C. METHODOLOGY USED TO PREPARE THE DRAFT CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE IN STATISTICS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

The Code proposed for the national statistical offices in the region is based on the European Statistics Code of Practice of EUROSTAT, which, in turn, draws its inspiration from the fifteen (15) United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (adopted by United Nations Statistical Commission at its meeting of 11-15 April 1994) and the quality dimensions established by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). These three instruments embody the international standards used for the organization and production of official statistics.

This information was used to prepare a comparative matrix setting out the constituent elements of the principles and good practices against those of EUROSTAT. The latter proved to be more comprehensive; the principles for coordination and international participation proposed by the United Nations may, however, be shown to provide a broader vision and to have a wider thematic coverage.

In the second phase, the comparative structure produced in the first phase was used to establish the structure of the draft Code; this draft needed to contain the institutional and coordination factors that have a direct bearing on the development of this activity, as well as those that are directly related to the process and the production of statistics. The principles on which the Code will be based were defined during this phase.

The criteria for compliance used to check each of the previously defined principles were duly identified. To this end, a regional analysis of statistical activity was prepared. This consisted in correlating best practices with key aspects of each of the principles established for the region.

In the third phase, face-to-face workshops and video-conferencing events were held to validate the principles and criteria for compliance defined in the previous phase, resolve concerns and make the necessary adjustments. One of the concerns at these events was that the definition of the Code should embody the fundamental objective of the statistical activity depending on the situation existing in the countries of the region.

This was followed by a region-wide dissemination phase, in which the results of the activities carried out by the Working Group on Institution-building were made known to all the members of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC.

D. DRAFT CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

1. Institutional environment and coordination

The credibility and accuracy of official statistics depend on the institutional environment of the national statistical institute and of the other members of the national statistical system. The national statistical system must be regulated by a governing body which coordinates and directs the research, production and dissemination of quality statistics using appropriate policies, norms and standards.

Principles	Criteria for compliance
<p>1. Professional independence: In order to guarantee the credibility of official statistics, the national statistical institute and other members of the national statistical system must be professionally independent of political and administrative agencies and other external sources of interference.</p>	<p>1.1 The legislation in force specifies that the national statistical institute and other members of the national statistical system must compile and disseminate official statistics independently of political influence and other external interference.</p> <p>1.2 The director of the governing body of the national statistical system must be appointed at a sufficiently high rank to ensure that he has senior-level access to political authorities, Government agencies and national and international entities.</p> <p>1.3 The highest-ranking authorities of the national statistical institute and of each entity belonging to the national statistical system shall be professionally competent and have expert knowledge in the field of statistics.</p> <p>1.4 Official statistics disseminated by the members of the national statistical system are clearly distinguished from, and issued separately from, political statements.</p> <p>1.5 The national statistical system shall have a statistics committee, made up of a professionally competent group of experts who advise on the general policy and strategic plans of the system.</p> <p>1.6 The national statistical institute and other members of the national statistical system have sole responsibility for deciding on the use of statistical methods, standards and procedures and on the content and timing of statistical releases.</p> <p>1.7 When appropriate, the highest authorities of the national statistical institute and of each entity belonging to the national statistical system issue public statements on statistical matters, including criticisms, and address misuses of official statistics.</p>
<p>2. Coordination of the national statistical system: this will enable the statistics-producing entities to plan and implement national statistical activity in a participatory manner, maintain close contact and work jointly to improve the quality, comparability and consistency of official statistics.</p>	<p>2.1 The country's legislation provides for the establishment of the national statistical system and for the appointment of a coordinating body.</p> <p>2.2 The coordinating body of the national statistical system shall establish guidelines, plans and programmes for statistical production at the national level.</p> <p>2.3 The coordinating body of the national statistical system shall establish parameters for participation and responsibility for the entities that make up the system.</p> <p>2.4 The national statistical system shall appoint consultative committees of experts with rules of procedure to facilitate communication between the entities and the principal users of official statistics.</p> <p>2.5 The entities belonging to the national statistical system shall prioritize in a coordinated manner the generation of statistical information required for decision-making.</p>
<p>3. Statistical mandate for data collection: The collection of information for the preparation of official statistics must be supported by a clear legal mandate. At the request of the national statistical institutes and members of the national statistical system, the administrations, corporations, households and the public in general may be required by law to provide access to data for the preparation of official statistics or to submit such data, which will be treated as confidential.</p>	<p>3.1 The legislation in force grants the national statistical institute and the members of the national statistical system a mandate to collect information for the preparation and dissemination of official statistics.</p> <p>3.2 The legislation in force specifies that individuals and corporations are bound to provide information to the coordinating body of the national statistical system and provides for penalties for failure to comply with the law.</p> <p>3.3 Legislation grants the governing body of the national statistical system access to, and use of, administrative registers for the purpose of generating official statistics.</p>

Principles	Criteria for compliance
<p>4. Statistical confidentiality: The national statistical institute and the other members of the national statistical system shall guarantee the protection and confidentiality of the information used to produce official statistics and shall refrain from identifying the sources.</p>	<p>4.1 The legislation specifies that data are confidential and prohibits their use for any purpose other than statistical ones (such as commercial purposes, taxation or judicial investigation).</p> <p>4.2 Persons with access to individual or confidential information must sign a declaration stating their respect for confidentiality and taking note of the penalties for non-compliance.</p> <p>4.3 Legal standards and commitments to confidentiality must be established for the staff involved in the generation of official statistics, together with the penalties that apply for non-compliance.</p> <p>4.4 There must be protocols establishing guidelines on the security and integrity of statistical databases.</p> <p>4.5 Respondents are informed of the main uses and limitations in terms of access to the information that they provide.</p> <p>4.6 Access to microdata is subject to confidentiality protocols for external users who access them for purposes of analysis and statistical research.</p> <p>4.7 Information must be stored in accordance with established security and confidentiality protocols and existing standards.</p>
<p>5. Adequacy of resources: The resources available for national statistical activity must be sufficient and appropriate for the generation of official statistics.</p>	<p>5.1 Sufficient human, financial, physical and technological resources are available in order to meet the need for statistical information.</p> <p>5.2 The coverage and detail of official statistics and the cost and time necessary for their generation are based on an analysis of information requirements.</p> <p>5.3 New requests for information must be assessed and justified with reference to their costs using control mechanisms.</p> <p>5.4 The exclusion, inclusion or continuity of official statistics must be evaluated periodically by those responsible for statistical production in order to optimize resources.</p>
<p>6. Quality commitment: The entities that produce statistics within the national statistical system must work and cooperate in accordance with rules, principles and standards</p>	<p>6.1 A quality model and policy must be clearly defined, documented and made known to the members of the national statistical system.</p> <p>6.2 The quality of the statistical output must be assessed periodically to ensure that it complies with internal guidelines and international standards.</p> <p>6.3 Systematic efforts must be made to promote and further a culture of continuous improvement in statistical production.</p> <p>6.4 Documented procedures for quality assessment and assurance must be applied at each phase of the statistical process.</p>
<p>7. Impartiality and objectivity: The national statistical institute and the other members of the national statistical system must produce and disseminate official statistics respecting scientific independence and in an objective, professional and transparent manner, so that all users are treated equally.</p>	<p>7.1 Official statistics must be prepared using methodologies and technical processes based on impartiality and transparency.</p> <p>7.2 The standards, classifications, methods and processes used to produce the statistics must be documented and made known to the public.</p> <p>7.3 The choice of information sources, methods, processes, concepts and data dissemination paths is a professional responsibility and is based on national and international principles and best practices.</p> <p>7.4 The approaches and guidelines used must guarantee all users simultaneous access to statistical reports, in an impartial and comprehensible manner.</p>

Principles	Criteria for compliance
	7.5 The timing of the release of official statistics must be announced beforehand.
	7.6 Statistical reports must be delivered in an objective and professional manner.
	7.7 A statement must be made on the conduct, standards and ethical values governing statistical practices.
8. Cooperation and international participation: The entities belonging to the national statistical system must cooperate in the exchange of experiences and information and work jointly on the preparation of international statistical standards and activities.	8.1 The national statistical institute must participate in international activities of statistical interest and in the joint establishment of standards supported by international bodies.
	8.2 The national statistical institute must participate in international cooperation activities in order to share with, and transfer knowledge to, international bodies and other national statistical institutes.
	8.3 International cooperation mechanisms must be developed for the transfer of knowledge.

2. Statistical processes

The guidelines, approaches, standards and good practices, both national and international, are the basis for the development of methodologies and processes for the production of quality statistics.

Principles	Criteria for compliance
9. Sound methodology: The production of official statistics by the national statistical institute and the other members of the national statistical system must be based on sound instruments, procedures and expertise.	9.1 Agreement must be reached on the implementation of methodologies, concepts, classifications and good practices that follow principles and guidelines for national and international acceptance.
	9.2 The survey methodology and the use of administrative registers must be assessed periodically and, where necessary, adjusted to guarantee a high quality product.
	9.3 There should be detailed concordance between the national and international benchmark classifications prepared by the competent bodies.
	9.4 At the design stage of the statistical operation, flexibility is permitted for the preparation of instruments for data capture and processing based on users' information needs.
	9.5 There are academic, inter-institutional and sectoral committees to assess and improve the methodology used in the statistical process.
	9.6 Better instruments and procedures based on sound knowledge must be promoted.
10. Appropriate statistical procedures: The quality of official statistics used by national statistical institute and the other members of the national statistical system must be underpinned by appropriate procedures and tools at every stage of the statistical process.	10.1 The methodologies, questionnaires, manuals, computer-based applications and other instruments must be checked and validated before starting the data-collection process.
	10.2 Computer systems must be used for data capture, codification, criticism and validation of information.
	10.3 The stages of the statistical process must be reviewed or updated as required by statistical operation and research.

Principles	Criteria for compliance
<p>11. Non-excessive burden on respondents: The national statistical institute and the other members of the national statistical system must set their targets so as to gradually reduce the burden on respondents. The request for information must be in keeping with the needs of users and must not be excessive for the respondents.</p>	<p>10.4 Appropriate technological resources must be used to carry out estimates and imputations and to review them or update them periodically as provided for by the design of the statistical operation.</p> <p>10.5 Revisions follow well-established standard procedures in accordance with the established time-table. Studies and analysis of revisions are made known to the public.</p> <p>10.6 The concepts and definitions used when administrative registers are used for statistical purposes must comply with the parameters required in a quality statistical process.</p> <p>10.7 Editing and validation processes must be conducted in accordance with the rules of consistency and imputation.</p> <p>11.1 The national statistical institute must use coordinated and systematic procedures for obtaining information relating to corporate accounts (financial information).</p> <p>11.2 The coverage and detail of the request for information from respondents must be limited to information that is strictly necessary.</p> <p>11.3 A constant effort must be made, or techniques developed, in order to reduce the burden on respondents.</p> <p>11.4 Sharing data between producers of statistics must be promoted in order to avoid duplication of statistical output.</p>
<p>12. Cost-effectiveness: The national statistical institute and the other members of the national statistical system must use resources efficiently and effectively.</p>	<p>12.1 The use of resources by the statistics-producing entities must be controlled.</p> <p>12.2 Proactive efforts must be made to improve the statistical potential of the administrative registers and avoid costly direct surveys.</p> <p>12.3 National regulations must enable members of the national statistical system to share data on corporations and persons in order to reduce collection costs without prejudice to statistical confidentiality or any reservations that may exist under the law.</p> <p>12.4 Information and communications technologies must be used in order to optimize processes for the generation and dissemination of official statistics.</p>

3. Statistical production

Official statistics must satisfy users' needs and comply with the quality standards established for statistical outputs.

Principles	Criteria for compliance
<p>13. Relevance: The national statistical institute and other members of the national statistical system must satisfy users' information needs on the basis of their requirements.</p>	<p>13.1 The supply of statistics nationally must be based on mechanisms and strategies for identifying the priority information needs of the Government, the business sector and the community as a whole.</p> <p>13.2 The entity must follow procedures for advising, training and reporting to users on the statistical outputs and for consulting them periodically on the practical use of statistical data.</p> <p>13.3 Users and producers of official statistics must participate in the processes of identification, analysis and evaluation of information requirements through academic, inter-institutional and sectoral committees.</p> <p>13.4 Surveys must be conducted periodically to determine whether the official statistics are satisfactory to users.</p>
<p>14. Accuracy and reliability: The official statistics produced by the national statistical institute and the other members of the national statistical system must be an accurate and reliable reflection of the actual situation.</p>	<p>14.1 The original data, intermediate results and statistical output must be assessed and validated by comparing them, where appropriate, with other statistical information.</p> <p>14.2 Sampling and non-sampling errors must be analysed and documented.</p> <p>14.3 The data must be collected in accordance with the methodology and designs published to guarantee reliability.</p> <p>14.4 Regular reviews of the statistical process are undertaken to introduce improvements at the different phases.</p> <p>14.5 Methodologies are updated periodically to comply with the quality criteria for producing official statistics and to bring them in line with international standards.</p>
<p>15. Timeliness and punctuality: The national statistical institute and the other members of the national statistical system must produce and disseminate official statistics in a timely, punctual and transparent manner.</p>	<p>15.1 In order to be relevant, the statistics must be produced on a timely basis, that is, within a reasonable period after the completion of the reference period.</p> <p>15.2 The periodicity with which the official statistics are to be made available must be determined bearing in mind users' requirements as well as international standards and commitments in this regard.</p> <p>15.3 A date and time must be set for the dissemination of all official statistics. If the deadline is not going to be met, notification must be given in advance together with the relevant explanation and an indication of a new date for publication.</p> <p>15.4 Any significant error identified in the official statistics disseminated must be corrected and the correct figures published promptly.</p> <p>15.5 Any substantial update in the statistical methodology, procedures or techniques must be announced prior to the final publication of the results.</p>

Principles	Criteria for compliance
<p>16. Coherence and comparability: The official statistics produced by the national statistical institute and the other members of the national statistical system must be coherent internally and over time and must be comparable across regions and countries.</p>	<p>16.1 Official statistics must be coherent internally and reconcilable over time.</p> <p>16.2 Statistics based on administrative registers must be coherent in the use of classifications and concepts required for a quality statistical process.</p> <p>16.3 The use of statistical frameworks, classifications, procedures, indicators, concepts and good practices must be promoted in the production of official statistics in order to enhance their comparability over time and with other data sets.</p> <p>16.4 Steps must be taken to promote the national and international comparability of the statistics produced.</p>
<p>17. Accessibility and clarity: The official statistics generated by the national statistical institute and the other members of the national statistical system must be presented clearly and comprehensibly and disseminated appropriately, thereby enabling equitable access by all users.</p>	<p>17.1 All users must be guaranteed free and equal access to official statistics on the basis of clearly established and well-known procedures.</p> <p>17.2 Official statistics and the relevant metadata must be made available to users clearly and precisely to enable users to interpret them correctly and make meaningful comparisons.</p> <p>17.3 Different media and technologies that meet requirements and ensure full coverage must be used for the dissemination of official statistics.</p> <p>17.4 In order to promote the use of official statistics, relevant instructions must be prepared and made available to the press and the public as a whole.</p> <p>17.5 As far as possible, technical support for data analysis must be provided at the request of users, and, depending on the agreement, the results should be made public.</p> <p>17.6 Information must be provided to users on projects, working documents and methodologies.</p>

E. PROPOSED PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE IN STATISTICS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

In its capacity as coordinator of the Working Group on Institution-building, and pursuant to the agreement adopted in 2009 at the fifth meeting of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC, the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) of Colombia has prepared a draft plan of implementation in order to improve compliance with the good practices established in the draft Code and the region's commitment vis-à-vis the minimum requirements necessary for the production of quality official statistics.

By implementing the Code, national statistical institutes will be in a position to improve the quality of processes and the production of official statistics. Indeed, the Code will be instrumental in enhancing statistical credibility and trust throughout the region.

It should be noted that the responsibility for implementing the Code will fall not just to the high-level authorities of the national statistical institutes but to all staff engaged in statistical activity. Compliance with the Code will therefore be a task to be fulfilled at every level of the hierarchy.

With a view to facilitating the proper implementation of the Code of Good Practice in Statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Working Group on Institution-building therefore recommends that the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC consider using the following mechanisms:

1. Workshops, conferences, seminars and forums that promote the use and update of good practices.
2. Self-assessments by the national statistical institutes of their status in terms of implementation of the Code of Good Practice in Statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean.
3. Overall assessments of compliance with the principles of the Code by a group of experts.
4. Recommendations and plans for improvement.

1. Workshops, conferences and forums

The activities for dissemination of the Code of Good Practice include the design of a strategy to facilitate interaction among the national statistical institutes and the international organizations that support statistical activities in the region, including those led by the Working Group on Institution-building. This type of activity seeks to explain the scope of the Code, define concepts, dispel doubts and facilitate implementation of the Code by the national institutes within the national statistical systems.

The workshops, conferences and forums will be organized by the coordinating country of the working group responsible for activities of dissemination and implementation of the Code. Participating in these activities will be the directors and managerial staff of the national statistical institutes, who are expected to transmit the Code to each entity and assist in its implementation.

These dissemination activities will serve to enhance comprehension of the issues, fulfil requirements and bring about improvements. They will also serve as a forum where countries can share experiences, document procedures and facilitate the implementation of internal processes. These activities could be conducted by videoconference and, where possible, by face-to-face meetings, in order to achieve full coverage and attendance by all the countries in the region.

2. Self-assessment

Self-assessment is an instrument designed to compile information concerning the current state of compliance by the national statistical institutes with the Code of Good Practice in Statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean, highlight any weaknesses and strengths and identify activities for improvement.

This exercise consists in a systematic assessment by the national statistical institute of its own compliance with the principles and criteria set forth in the Code. To this end, the institute shall fill out a questionnaire containing general and specific questions relating to fulfilment of each of the criteria established for each principle of the Code.

The questionnaire is based on the structure established in the draft Code of Good Practice in Statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean. A set of questions is posed for each of the components to ascertain whether the criteria in the process of statistical activity are being met. In another section, the main strengths and weaknesses relating to the application of the criteria for compliance with each principle are identified, followed by a list of activities aimed at achieving improvements.

To conduct this exercise, an online questionnaire with specific exit tables will be used. This questionnaire will contain open and closed questions and allow the respondent to provide as much detail as possible. For the closed questions, the respondent of the relevant area must opt for one or several multiple choice alternatives; for the open questions, the respondent is expected to give as precise a response as possible on the subject being researched. The questionnaire seeks to understand procedures, identify problems and strengths and discover facts.

The self-assessment becomes an instrument of research which contextualizes the existing situation of the institute, thus identifying the principles common to the region. This type of assessment also serves as an input for evaluating and comparing the advances made by the different institutes.

In the light of the individual requirements identified in the self-assessment process, the results of the questionnaire can be used by international experts, with support from the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC, as a basis for proposing activities for strengthening the national statistical institutes in the region.

3. Overall assessments

The purpose of the overall assessments is to review the responses of the self-assessment questionnaire and the necessary evidence to check compliance with the criteria and, consequently, with the principles set out in the Code. An external element is thus introduced which constitutes an impartial and transparent value added for evaluating the existing status of national statistical institutes in terms of compliance with the Code. The report will record in greater detail the needs and the issues that arise, so that activities for improvement can be carried out within a given timeframe.

The report enables the committee of experts to transfer knowledge and the best practice to be implemented in line with the need identified. Thus, the assessment focuses on the different phases of statistical activity and includes recommendations for making significant improvements.

The evaluators' reports provide more detailed and specialized information for prioritization of the areas requiring improvement with a view to their inclusion in future plans and programmes.

In preparation for the committee's visit, it is crucial that the information relevant to the assessment (for example, the report of the self-assessment of compliance with the Code of Good Practice in Statistics in Latin America and the Caribbean, the proof of development of statistical procedure and the statistical regulations) be made available along with clear objectives and expectations relating to the programme of evaluation and the methodology used in the reports. In this way, these data can be compared immediately and retained for comparisons with future activity reports.

Initially, the assessment exercise will include the countries of the Working Group on Institution-building and will be conducted by a team of experts from international agencies working in conjunction with members of the institute issuing the official statistics. These reviews are intended for the national statistical institutes in their capacity as the entities responsible for coordination of the national statistical system.

The proposal is that one week in the year be set aside for carrying out the assessment programme with the committee of experts. It will consist in reviewing documentary evidence, identifying problems and making recommendations for improving the institute's performance in complying with the Code. The final document that national statistical institutes receive should contribute as much content as possible to the implementation process.

4. Plans for improvement

Once the results of the systematic self-assessment and report of experts have been obtained, priorities should be established on the common areas in the region in which work will be pursued. Each institute shall formulate a list of activities for improvement covering all the issues relating to compliance with each of the principles of the Code and will identify specific problems that can be solved through best practices established by the experts and proposed mechanisms.

The plans for improvement, supported by the mechanism for reporting on global assessment, shall contain specific activities relating to the application of manuals of procedures, protocols, budget timetables and activities, together with general recommendations for improving statistical work.