

**Statistical achievements, burdens and challenges in Cyprus:**  
**Small Office obligations in E.U.<sup>1</sup>**

*“Our vision is to produce timely and good quality statistics to satisfy the widest range of users in Cyprus, in the E.U. and internationally”*

*P. Philippides*  
*Director*  
*Statistical Service of Cyprus*

**1. Cyprus, the southern border of E.U.**

A small island in the Mediterranean sea, suffering due to its geographic position not only in the distant past but also recently in 1974 when almost 40% of its territory was occupied by the Turkish army. It is still divided with the two communities, the Greek and Turkish Cypriots, living in the southern and northern part of the divided country.

The E.U. acquis is only applicable in the Government Controlled Area of the Republic of Cyprus and the statistics compiled by CYSTAT refer only to this part of the country. As a whole island its estimated population is about 0,9 million, whereas the non-occupied part has a population of 766.000 (end of 2005).

The capital Nicosia, is situated at the dividing line and is itself divided. CYSTAT is in the centre of Nicosia, in the first floor of the biggest perhaps building in Nicosia, the one where all services of the Ministry of Finance are found.

**2. History of CYSTAT**

Some statistics are traced as back as 1881, when a Census of Population was held by the British Administration, followed by regular censuses every 10 years.

The Dept of Statistics and Research was established in 1960, when the Republic of Cyprus was created as an independent state. In 2000 it was renamed to Statistical Service of Cyprus. It functions under the Ministry of Finance but with complete professional and scientific independence and autonomy in compiling and disseminating statistical data.

The basic legal framework is provided by the Statistics Law of 2000 which was prepared on the lines of E.U. statistical principles and practices (annual and 5-yearly programmes, Statistical Council, right of access to administrative data, confidentiality aspects, etc.).

The Statistical Service compiles almost all official statistics for Cyprus. The Central Bank as well as some other Departments (e.g. the Department of Agriculture) produce also some statistics.

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<sup>1</sup> (Paper prepared for the SIGMA magazine of Eurostat, 12 September 2006)

### **3. Management of CYSTAT, structure and staff**

The Director of CYSTAT is appointed by the Public Service Commission and reports to the Director General of the Ministry of Finance. The organizational structure comprises 7 subject matter divisions, each headed by a Senior Officer. CYSTAT is centralized in Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus, but it has also three small offices in the other main towns which co-ordinate field work for surveys.

The staff of CYSTAT comprises 145 permanent members and a number of casual staff mainly enumerators for the survey work. Of the 145 permanent staff, about 125 are statistical staff and 20 doing clerical, accounting, and data entry jobs. Of the statistical staff, about 75 are university graduates, 60% of all the staff are female and the average age is 41 years, with 34% being over 50 years old. The total budget is about €8,5 million.

The limited human resources is the major problem faced, particularly now that Cyprus has all the E.U. obligations. The work load which is performed by this number of staff can only be described as miracle (great achievement) taking into consideration the corresponding numbers in other member states, and the equal in quantity and quality obligations of all member states. And I would like to add also that it is not just the statistics and the surveys which should be done, we have in addition to participate in working groups, take part in projects, act as consultants to other Cyprus Offices, maintain relations with other member states and international bodies and generally each officer as well as the Director having also the responsibility of press releases, organization of meetings, keeping accounts and records, and generally acting for all jobs. There is no international affairs and relations office, no methodology unit, no press officer, and there is not even an assistant officer to the Director. This is our biggest problem, so these duties are accomplished by all.

The positive aspect of this problem, of lack of sufficient staff numbers, can someone claim is the wide experience that the Officers of CYSTAT are acquiring. Yes this is an advantage but there are a few people in this office who not only reached their limits but they have passed them already.

Hopefully this situation will improve with the recent approval of more permanent posts for CYSTAT.

### **4. IT in CYSTAT**

Nearly all staff are having personal computers, all connected with internet. A new strategy study for a complete reorganization of the IT System of CYSTAT will start in October 2006 aiming at updating and modernizing all practices, with the creation of databases, use of portable computers in data collection, on line connection with sources, better dissemination etc.

### **5. Major achievements in recent years**

- Upgrade the capacity of CYSTAT to produce timely and reliable data.
- Compliance largely to E.U. requirements and production of harmonized statistics.
- Apply modern practices for the collection and presentation of data.
- Establish and maintain a well functioning website.
- Create a wider statistical culture among the Cyprus society.
- Attract young statisticians and economists.

- Establish good relations with media.
- Expansion of training of staff and active participation with success in E.U. committees, working groups and projects.
- Co-ordination and more co-operation and contacts with other government offices, academia and private organizations.
- Promotion of good personal and professional relations among the staff.

## **6. Working in the E.U. environment**

- **A new momentum for Cyprus statistics was created well before joining the E.U.** This goes back to 1998 when we started negotiations to join E.U.. CYSTAT began to play a more important role and statistics gradually became a daily reference throughout society.

Despite the stress experienced since then I can say without any reservation that the image and usefulness of statistics and CYSTAT have been greatly upgraded due to E.U. accession procedure and of course by joining E.U.

- As for the statistical data which we produce now, about 75% are based on new demands due to E.U. membership (incl. major adjustments of previous work).
- As a small country, the third from the end of the EU25 list (above Malta and Luxembourg) we face several challenges and difficulties. We have to do the same stats as all 25 member states, we have to attend the same meetings, we have to make comments and express opinions. For all obligations we feel that some distinction should be made in E.U. for smaller and bigger countries with regard to stats. In some areas the Europe First principle should be better exploited. The burden on small countries is much higher, first because resources are small (micro rather) and secondly the burden on businesses is continuous since there cannot be frequent resampling. So certain derogations, or simplification or less detailed data could be helpful for small countries.
- The various projects and grants of EU have on the other hand facilitated our compliance efforts as well as the capacity for more efficient work (pilot studies of Price Index for Housing, work on Social Protection, farm registers, environment stats, quarterly GDP, mapping through technology for censuses etc.)
- Sometimes also we feel that the voice of small countries is not taken with equality, but still we contribute with proposals and express our voice not only on statistical issues but also on procedures and practices.
- As for the co-operation with Eurostat and other member states we believe that there should be more dialogue and more solidarity. Best practices in some countries should be easily available to less advanced countries in certain fields. Eurostat also has a great role to play in better co-ordination and in taking all comments seriously when drawing all programmes and formulating the Regulations.

The particularities of some countries should receive attention when discussing technical issues.

The Press Office of Eurostat should also be in better contact with NSI's so that the data commented and published in press releases are co-ordinated with NSI's both in timing as well as in the content.

**7. Dissemination of stats** (timeliness, weekly calendar, website, contacts & meetings with press and policy makers) became perhaps the priority of our work recently, in the last 1-2 years. In the past we were more concerned with the coverage of surveys, the compilation of fine and final stats before publishing in paper volumes and subsequently releasing them to the public.

This caused a lot of delays and much emphasis is now given to the release of data immediately as they are computed.

E.U. played a major role towards this release practice since we have to meet deadlines of Eurostat.

We are proud about our website and the services provided (alert email to users whenever data are published, on line orders etc.) and we are receiving most favourable comments from all users in Cyprus.

The dissemination policy of CYSTAT is based on the principles of free of charge supply of data, quick release of stats, user oriented, comprehensiveness of information, simultaneous and easy access for all users, etc.

The website (besides 55 publications issued yearly) is the main source for all data incl. daily press releases, electronic reports, articles etc..

The website ([www.mof.gov.cy/cystat](http://www.mof.gov.cy/cystat)) is available in Greek and English and all data are free of charge.

Microdata (anonymous) are also provided for research purposes to academic institutions.

**8. Users' Satisfaction Survey:** Conducted in July-Aug. 2006 in the framework of the forthcoming "peer review" of the Cyprus Statistical System.

The main results, which I state with satisfaction from my side, are:

- (a) 90% of users stated that CYSTAT's website and publications are their main source for stats in Cyprus.
- (b) Wide demand i.e. for all field of stats was reported (i.e. for prices, national accounts, public finance, employment trade, etc. Only for environment the demand is relatively low. Perhaps the subject is not yet attractive for data).
- (c) Most users know about the weekly release calendar, and the majority (87,5%) stated easy access to official stats.
- (d) In almost all fields users rate the quality of data relatively high (more ratings in 4 & 5 in the scale 1-5).

## **9. Strengths & weaknesses of CYSTAT**

- Strengths: The quality and professionalism of staff, the devotion to duty and the co-operative spirit among staff. The very good image in the Cyprus society and the recognition by government officials, private sector organizations, academia and other users.
- Weaknesses: limited staff, dependence on budgetary issues (e.g. IT budget), and the subsequent constraints in functioning like a modern, 21st century Office with appropriate structures and openings widely to society with more events and better statistical marketing.

## **10. Challenges for future**

- Reorganisation of CYSTAT with the proper establishment of necessary structures i.e. methodology, IT, public and international relations,
- Strategy for more technological advancements, use of technology in surveys, link to administrative records and registers
- Educating users (press, politicians, other technocrats) on concepts of statistics
- Change the status, to more independent CYSTAT, not functioning under any Ministry
- More co-operation with academia and others for common research projects using statistics
- Enhance participation in European and International activities and more bilateral relations

## **11. Selected statistics for Cyprus (Govt Controlled Part)**

– Population	766.000	(2005)
– % over 65 yrs	12%	“
– Fertility rate	1,5	“
– Employment rate	68,5%	“
– Unemployment	5,4%	(June 2006)
– Per –Capita GDP	84%	(EU25=100)
– Inflation	2,5%	(Jan.-August 2006, HICP)
– Population (25-64) with tertiary education	29%	
– Internet users	30%	
– Housing ownership	80%	

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