

Circular letter to heads of national and international statistical services

Dear ...,

Subject: Joint ECE/Eurostat Work Session on Statistical Data Confidentiality (8 - 10 March 1999, Thessaloniki, Greece)

As you may recall, the Conference of European Statisticians at its forty-fifth plenary session made a provision in its programme of work for the joint UNECE/Eurostat Work Session on Statistical Data Confidentiality to be held from 8 to 10 March 1999 in Thessaloniki, Greece. The meeting will be kindly hosted by the National Statistical Service of Greece.

The agenda comprises the following topics:

(i) New applications of disclosure control methods

There are a number of established and emerging disclosure control techniques. This item would include reports on the application of these techniques as a way of improving the degree of protection afforded to data and/or as a way of allowing new forms of output to be produced. Users of statistics are demanding more flexible types of outputs, with a growing interest in the use of microdata samples. Developments in the application of disclosure control methods must occur in parallel with developments in the types of statistical output offered. The presentations could consider, e.g. methods for the protection of microdata and tables, models to measure the level of safety of a data set, measures to quantify the effect of data modification techniques on the statistical quality of data, optimisation of the protection of the microdata and tables.

(ii) Software and computing developments

This section would include reports on the use of computing software and hardware to:

- maintain statistical confidentiality by preventing disclosure of identifiable information; and to
- prevent unauthorized access to computer systems holding such data.

There are increasing demands for statistical products to be available on-line, either as pre-prepared outputs on an Internet site, or as customized outputs to be ordered and received electronically. These developments expose the computing systems used by statistical institutes to threats of unauthorized access, which can lead to the release of confidential information or the corruption of data files.

Disclosure control software such as ARGUS or CONDID allows a rapid assessment of the disclosure risks of releasing a particular dataset, and simplifies disclosure control procedures. Increasingly too, other types of less specialised tabulation software incorporate facilities which allow users to pre-program rules such as minimum cell size.

Comparisons between different software systems would be of value here, indicating the relative strengths and weaknesses of the available software for different tasks.

(ii) **Administration and policy of statistical data confidentiality**

The session could examine aspects of both national and international policy. Statistical data protection is tackled in different ways by different countries. Papers should present either successful and original experiences at the national level, or administrative and legal problems faced when organizing the exchange of confidential statistical data at the international level.

This section should be of particular interest to Eastern European countries becoming more involved in supra-national organizations, such as those seeking membership of the European Union. Contributions proposing solutions to common problems and encouraging the wider adoption of best practices would be appreciated.

I would appreciate if you could inform me before 31 July 1998 whether your country/organization intends to submit a contribution on the topics mentioned above. I would be grateful if you could let me have the participant(s) name(s) at the same time. The meeting will be held in English only. Summaries of papers (1-2 pages in length) are expected by 30 September 1998 and the deadline for final papers is 30 November 1998. Final papers should not exceed 10 pages. Contributions in English should be sent to the ECE Secretariat either by mail together with a floppy disk (in Word or Word Perfect) or by e-mail (address: jana.meliskova@unece.org).

Should you have any queries concerning the meeting, please contact Mrs Jana Meliskova, UN/ECE Statistical Division, tel.: +41 22 917 41 50; fax +41 22 917 00 40, e-mail jana.meliskova@unece.org.

This invitation is also sent on behalf of Mr. Nanopoulos, Director, Directorate A, Eurostat, and on behalf of Mr. Karavitis, President of the National Statistical Service of Greece as a joint organiser of the Work Session.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely

Tom Griffin
Director
Statistical Division
UN Economic Commission for Europe